

Italy. The first Fascist regulations in Italy

During the Third Reich, persecution or, subsequently, mass murder was generally, if not exclusively, motivated by pseudo-scientific formulations based on theories of race. However in Italy, discrimination and violence against Gypsy communities practised by the Fascist regime can be ascribed to the more widespread logic that was concerned with the prevention of **crime** and the **repression of deviant behaviours**.

Initially (and because he was targeting the Middle Classes), the entire issue was based on the premise that it was necessary to preserve and guarantee public order as this corresponded to the more general ideas of uniformity, predictability and conformity that Mussolini's regime identified as the cornerstones of his political policy. Within the framework of this rationale which applied – as it did in other European countries – to that concept of middle class respectability, the Fascist debate against Gypsies came to the forefront. This meant that that any element of disturbance which was considered unseemly because it denoted a lack of “morality” and respect for natural hierarchies, had to be removed from public events.

The laws issued by the **Ministry of the Interior in 1926** not only established the premises for subsequent legislation but also for the more general attitude of the regime towards this minority. These stated the need to subject national territory to careful surveillance to prevent the presence of “**caravans of gypsies**”, and the permanence of non-Italian itinerant **groups** that might cause a problem. Added to this was the requirement to proceed with the **expulsion of “foreigners” from national territory**, even those holding legal passports.

In general, the ability to turn to prefectural regulations on the subject of public order gave officials - not only those belonging to the party but also employed by the public administration - a wide margin of discretion.

Although it took twelve years for a **new onslaught discriminating against the Roma and the Sinti** to begin, i.e. when the anti-Jewish racial laws of 1938 were

implemented, as time went by, the creation of legislation against the problem of the presence of Romani communities was never opposed, being translated into repressive or oppressive activities: the former against what was documented as criminal behaviour and the latter particularly against the freedom of camping and of movement.

Although the laws of 1938 indirectly referred to Gypsies, they did not actually affect them. For **theorists of Fascist racial policy**, like Guido Landra and Renato Semizzi, who believed in the **need for Italian racism**, a reasonable and consequential rationale regarding the matter existed. **Landra**, head of the Office of Racial Studies at the Ministry of Popular Culture as well as one of the leading architects of the “Manifesto of Racial Scientists” believed that it was necessary to follow the example of the criteria adopted in Germany. In particular, he believed that it was necessary to round up all Gypsies in one or more circumscribed areas to prevent their “vagrancy” contaminating society through interaction or intermarriage.

Semizzi, who held the Chair of Social Medicine at the University of Trieste, went even further, by formulating a truly negative stereotype based on racial ideology which, indicated that separation was the only way forward. **“Gypsies”, on account of their behaviour, showed a regressive moral and public behaviour which proved their noticeable hereditary inferiority.** From this point of view, **Italian Fascism**, by transcending the ambiguities and dilemmas of the German stance, revealed, in several of its components, an even more pronounced **radical judgement** than the Germans manifested during the same years. Basically speaking, it was a question of an intellectual interpretation which, however, if necessary, would be translated into concrete action.

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