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Framing "The Gypsy Problem": Populist Electoral Use of Romaphobia in Italy (2014–2019)

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Abstract: Xenophobic arguments have long been at the center of the political discourse of the Lega party in Italy, nonetheless Matteo Salvini, the new leader, capitalizing on diffused Romaphobia, placed Roma people at the center of his political discourse, institutionalizing the "Camp visit" as an electoral event. Through the analysis of eight consecutive electoral campaigns, in a six year period, mixing computer-based quantitative and qualitative content analysis and framing analysis, this study aims to display how Roma communities are portrayed in Matteo Salvini's discourse. The study describes how "Gypsies" are framed as a threat to society and how the proposed solution—a bulldozer to raze all of the camps to the ground—is presented as the only option. The paper concludes that representing Roma as an "enemy" that "lives among us", proves to be the ideal tool to strengthen the "us versus them" tension, characteristic of populist discourse.

Keywords: populism; Romaphobia; far right parties; political discourse

1. Introduction

Defining Roma is challenging. A variety of understandings and definitions, and multiple societal and political representations, exist about "who the Roma are" (Magazzini and Piemontese 2019).

The Council of Europe, in an effort to harmonize the terminology used in its political documents, apply "Roma"—first chosen at the inaugural World Romani Congress held in London in 1971—as an umbrella term that includes "Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Ashkali, Manush, Jenische, Kaldaresh and Kalé" and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, "including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies" (2012).

Acknowledging that the term is used as a homogenizing category for highly heterogeneous populations (Tremlett et al. 2017), there is a wide consensus on the fact that Roma are one of the most marginalized groups in Europe, facing deep social problems and wide-ranging discrimination, all of which are interrelated and create a vicious circle of social exclusion (McGarry 2017).

During the last decade, Roma inclusion has become the flagship of inclusion policies at the European level (Brüggemann and Friedman 2017). After promoting the "Roma Decade 2005–2015"—a cooperative international effort to change the lives of Roma in Europe, adopted by twelve European governments, supported by the European Commission, Open Society Institute, the World Bank, Council of Europe, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR and European Roma organizations, the EC developed the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (2011), as a response to the controversial evictions and expulsions by France and Italy in 2010, together with a wide range of initiatives against discrimination, such as, for example, the Roma Inclusion Task Force and the CAHROM (Ad Hoc Committee Of Experts On Roma Issues).

Notwithstanding, Anti-Roma sentiment is still persistent in many countries (ECRI 2012) and Romaphobia has been on the increase across Europe, specifically within the growing anti-immigration discourse (McGarry 2017).

An important and heterogeneous stream of literature analyzes Romaphobia in political discourse: Van Baar (2011) detects a generalized securization trend, in which Roma are often framed as a "European problem" rather than a "European minority" by political authorities; Kóczé and Márton (2017) identify a "double discourse" geared towards inclusion, but denying recognition; Loveland and Popescu (2016) single out what they define as the "Gypsy Threat Narrative".

In specific countries, McGarry (2017); Garner (2019); Wemyss and Cassidy (2017), focusing on the UK case, stress how both political actors and the media contribute to racialize Roma; in France, Mayer et al. (2019) analyze the patterns of Romaphobia, and Ciulinaru (2018) isolates the discourses of exclusion related to the eviction and repatriation of Roma migrants.

As for Italy, Vitale (2019) looks at the state's active role in promoting the racial exclusion of Roma within the conflicts about Roma settlements; in the same vein, Picker and Roccheggiani (2014) focus on the relationships between state practices, policies and expert knowledge addressing "abnormalising" Roma; Giorgi and Vitale (2017) stress how Roma are stigmatized as an "undesirable minority"; Castelli Gattinara (2016) discuss how political actors engage with the issue of migration in electoral campaigning, highlighting how complex policy issues are addressed selectively by political entrepreneurs and how the responses of political actors are influenced by strategic incentives and ongoing events.

Most of these works, while illuminating on the use of Romaphobia in political discourse, do not specifically focus on right wing populist movements. On the other side, despite the extensive literature on how right wing populist movements have succeeded in mobilizing and focusing popular resentments towards immigrants (Poynting and Briskman 2020; Grande et al. 2018; Meyer and Rosenberger 2015, amongst many others), very few studies have specifically focused on the use of Romaphobia by far right-wing populists (Stewart 2012) and most of them focus on Eastern European countries (Crețan and O'Brien 2019; Kluknavská and Hruška 2019).

This paper, through the analysis of eight electoral campaigns, in a four year period (2014–2019), aims at filling this gap by displaying (1) how Roma communities are portrayed in Matteo Salvini's discourse, showing (2) how scapegoating these communities proves to be the ideal tool for the creation of the "us vs them" dichotomy, characteristic of populist discourse.

1.1. Roma in Italy

If defining Roma is challenging, data collection about Roma is even more so: significant differences between "official" population estimates and estimates provided by non-governmental organizations active in this field exist; for this, most organizations' figures have minimum and maximum estimates, and these vary widely (Matras and Leggio 2017).

The Council of Europe estimates that there are approximately 140,000 Roma living in Italy (Council of Europe 2012); according to the most recent local data (ISTAT 2017), in Italy there are between 110,000 and 170,000 people who identify themselves as Roma, Sinti or Camminanti, representing a share of 0.25 per cent of the total Italian population.

The estimates also say that about 43 per cent of Roma are Italian citizens, mostly descendants of families who arrived in Italy in the Middle Ages (Asséo et al. 2017); almost all the others come from Eastern Europe. According to Associazione 21 Luglio (2016, a non-profit organization dealing with children and human rights, about 3000 Roma come from the former Yugoslavia and risk statelessness (since the country they come from no longer exists or does not want to recognize them as its citizens).

Italy is often defined as "the country of the camps" (European Roma Rights Centre 2000), being one of the few countries in Europe whose official policy is to institutionalize the segregation of Roma in urban "ghettos" (Clough Marinaro 2015), the so-called "nomad camps", where up to a quarter of the entire Roma population lives (Associazione 21 Luglio 2016). Camps are spaces in which "the state of

exception begins to become the rule" (Agamben 1998, pp. 30–41), a "total institution that dehumanizes Roma" (Nicola 2011), leaving them with no real opportunity to be included within Italian society, contributing to reification and crystallization of their condition (Armillei and Lobo 2017; Armillei 2017).

In May 2008, Italy declared a "State of Emergency", extended annually until December 2011. The State of Emergency defined the presence of Roma in Italy as a threat to public security and appointed Prefects as Special Commissioners in the regions of Lombardy, Lazio and Campania in 2008 and Veneto and Piedmont in 2009.

At the end of 2011, the Emergency Decree was declared unlawful by the Council of State (No. 6050 as of 11 November 2011) and a few months later, at the insistence of the European Commission, the new Italian Government adopted a National Inclusion Strategy which detailed the concrete policies and measures to be taken. Regrettably, the Inclusion Strategy remains almost unapplied (Pasta 2019).

Both the camps and the political discourse of the "state of exception" make Roma communities visible in mass media mostly within the narration of the difficulties shown by public administrations in managing their presence on the territory and/or related to crime (Pasta and Vitale 2017; Giorgi and Vitale 2017; Maestri 2017; Tremlett et al. 2017).

Moreover, as pointed out by Sigona and Nidhi (2009, pp. 119–20), for ages Roma have been presented as "Gypsies", a "race of criminals", genetically inclined to crime: their lifestyle has been perceived as a threat to public order and safety and their presence often defined as "invasion" and "tidal wave" (Catalano 2018; Arrigoni and Vitale 2008; Sigona 2010).

The 2017 Final Report of the Jo Cox Committee on hate, intolerance, xenophobia and racism, which was set up in 2016 by the Italian Chamber of Deputies, states that "anti-gypsyism is ahistorical topic in the Italian society and it has strengthened over the past decade" (2017).

Accordingly, the most recent research conducted by Istituto Carlo Cattaneo (2018) shows how 85% of Italians have negative feelings towards Roma people, confirming that, although Italy is one of the countries with the lowest percentage of Roma and Sinti population, antigypsyism is higher than the European average (Pasta 2019).

As noted by Caruso (2015) and discussed by Vitale (2015) and Aguilera (2015), the current structural system of isomorphic ambivalences that regards politics, economics and the media has brought about the constitution of a political field where social antagonisms are played out more in the fields of politics and symbolic representations rather than within social and economic processes themselves. Under these premises, therefore, the salience, visibility and consequent politicization (Green-Pedersen 2012) and problematization of the Roma "issue", become a discursive opportunity (Koopmans and Olzak 2004) for the party/candidate able to better symbolically articulate (and emotionally charge) the "issue", presenting himself/herself as the best option to solve the "problem" (Petrocik et al. 2003; Koopmans and Statham 2010).

1.2. Lega and the Politicization of Romaphobia

The Lega Nord party (currently only Lega) is widely recognized as a prototypical PRR, populist right wing party (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Cervi 2019, 2020).

Anti-immigrant political arguments have long been at the centre of the campaigning of the Lega Nord party (currently only Lega), that has been defined as the first populist "political entrepreneur" of xenophobia in Italy, for its role in focusing the political debate on the dangers of immigration and profiting from it (Bobba and McDonnell 2016).

Romaphobia has always been present in the party's discourse (Catalano 2018), nevertheless, it is the new leader, Matteo Salvini, who places Roma at the center of his political discourse, framing them as a threat to cultural values and disrupting community cohesion (Cento Bull 2010).

Lega Nord, whose full name is "Lega Nord per l'Indipendenza della Padania" (League of the North for the Independence of Padania), founded in 1991 by Umberto Bossi and originally born as a ethno-regionalist party, defending the secession of the Northern region, has been one of the most successful regionalist parties in Europe (Albertazzi et al. 2018; Bobba and Legnante 2016).

After an internal crisis, in 2013, Matteo Salvini became the leader. Under the new leadership, the party embraced Italian nationalism eliminating the suffix "Nord", to become only Lega, and took a turn to the right, adopting the classic themes of the European far right—opposition to immigration and nativist nationalism—and allying with the French National Front, the Freedom Party of the Netherlands and the Freedom Party of Austria, at the European level (Chiaramonte et al. 2018).

The nationalist change of course implies a change in the identification of the "other", against which social insecurities are directed: the great enemy to be opposed is no longer the southerners, but immigrants, foreigners, including Roma, framed through increasingly explicitly xenophobic and racist positions (Bobba 2018).

As mentioned, the politician is not new to anti-Roma statements. Already in 2008, when he was councilor of the city of Milan, he declared, "rats are easier to fight than gypsies" (Radio Padania 2008).

However, becoming the leader, he placed what he calls the "Gypsy problem" at the center of his agenda, "inventing" the "camp visit" as a new form of campaigning event: during every electoral campaign, he visits a Roma camp, with the purpose of "documenting" the situation.

In 2015, during the European election campaign, for the first time he proposed his "final solution" for the "Gypsy problem": "using bulldozers to destroy all the slums" (Ruccia 2015). The word *ruspa*, bulldozer, will become his trademark, the iconic image that he uses as a metaphor for "cleaning up" problems.

In the 2018 general elections, the two main populist parties, Lega and Movimento 5 Stelle, achieved historic success, with a combined vote representing the absolute majority (D'Alimonte 2019), and formed a coalition government, in which Matteo Salvini is appointed Minister of the Interior and Deputy Prime Minister.

On the 18th of June, 2018, only eighteen days after being appointed Interior Minister, he announced that the government would conduct a census of Roma people in Italy for the purpose of deporting all who are not in the country legally, stating that, if some of them are legally Italians "unluckily we will be obliged to keep them" (Custodero 2018).

In August 2019, in response to a news report showing a Roma woman saying that he deserved "a bullet in the head", he tweeted "Stay calm, *zingaraccia* (dirty gypsy), stay calm, the bulldozers will soon be there" (Kennedy 2019).

2. Populism and Populist Discourse

In order to understand how populist movements are able to mobilize popular resentments towards minorities, it necessary to highlight the main characteristics of populism and populist discourse.

Due to the diversity of phenomena (Canovan 1981), defining populism is not an easy task. Probably the most accepted definition of populism is a "thin" ideology (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Specifically, populism can be understood, and thus studied, as the discursive manifestation of a thin-centered ideology that is not only focused on the underlying "set of basic assumptions about the world", but on "the language that unwittingly expresses them" (Hawkins et al. 2012; De Vreese et al. 2018).

In general, scholars agree that populist discourse focuses on the juxtaposition of: (1) "the People", (2) the "corrupt" élite, and (3) the identification of an out-group (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Kriesi 2014; Mudde 2004).

The idea of "People" is at the center of populism: people form a community, a place where they feel safe and where there is mutual trust, a place where it is clear who is "one of us and who is not" (Bauman 2001, p. 12).

The definition of the élite can also vary—although it usually includes politics, media, financial, judicial and intellectual élites accused of being incompetent and selfish—yet the central claim that a group of élites is oppressing the people and seeking to undermine their rights and voice, does not change.

Far-right populists generally propose a nativist conception of the people or "the nation". Holding that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that

nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state (Mudde 2007, p. 19), this "excluding populism" (Jagers and Walgrave 2007, p. 334) necessarily needs an enemy figure on whom insecurities can be projected.

The composition of the "others" differs from one case to another (Campion 2019), nonetheless, they are commonly portrayed as not sharing the identity or values of the people (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Kriesi 2014; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Canovan 2005), accusing them of conspiring—normally together with or with the direct or indirect help of the élite—against the people (Panizza 2005, pp. 16–17).

While, in terms of the social hierarchy, the elites are perceived as residing "above" the people, these "others" are either located "beside' (Jagers and Walgrave 2007, p. 324) or "below" the people (Abts and Rummens 2007, p. 418). In recent decades, the "others" have been the immigrants (especially Muslims after the attacks of the 11th of September, 2001), but they can also be members of the Roma community or any "ethnic, religious, sexual, minorities" (Reinemann et al. 2017, p. 21), whose identity or behavior can be placed outside the "people" category (Pasquino 2008).

3. Othering and Romaphobia

As mentioned, nativism necessarily needs an in-group and out-group definition, that perfectly matches with the populist "us vs them" Manichean perspective (Poblete 2015). In other words, by excluding "others" from the people, populist ideology capitalizes on the human inclination towards in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Reinemann et al. 2017, p. 20).

As Thurlow (2010) explains, "we make sense of ourselves by defining ourselves in relation to different people" (p. 227), by rhetorically constructing cultural binaries and framing Others as inferior.

That brings us to the concept of "othering", coined by Spivak (1985), an interdisciplinary notion that refers to differentiating discourses that lead to moral and political judgments of superiority and inferiority between in-groups and out-groups (Virkama 2010).

"Othering", racism, nativism and discrimination are inherently related concepts that intersect and overlap and will therefore build upon or incorporate assumptions from one another.

In order to gain a working understanding of social othering, a general yet concise description of this concept is needed. Essentially, "othering" can be understood as a social method of identifying individuals thought to be different from one's self or culture, most specifically, the majority culture, that creates or emphasizes dominance and subordination (Dervin 2015). The concept can be further defined as a personal, social and cultural experience involving cultural and racial ambiguity, categorization and labeling, and hierarchical power dynamics (Brons 2014). Besides a multitude of diverse theories and applications, Ajzenstadt and Shapira (2012) summarize that the "other", in regards to immigration policy, is composed of two mutual facets. First, the labeling of certain individuals as "others" is derived from a social need on the interpersonal and cultural level inherent to human interaction. Second, the role administered to the "othered" group sets meaningful boundaries normalized throughout each society or culture.

For these reasons, the term not only encompasses the many expressions of prejudice on the basis of group identities, but also provides a clarifying frame that reveals a set of common processes and conditions that propagate group-based inequality and marginality (Dervin 2015).

Pérez et al. (2001), in their studies on the social representations of 'Gypsies', found that the typical traits assigned to Roma see them as antisocial nomads with a questionable morality and a preference for isolation within a self-enclosed universe beyond the realm of the human species. In this sense, Roma people represent not only an outgroup, but an outsider in the social map of human identity, that is to say they become de-humanized (Haslam 2006).

Accordingly, Mc Garry, in his seminal book "Romaphobia: The Last Acceptable Form of Racism" (2017), sees how the construction of Roma as not belonging to our society reinforces the typically colonial opposition between an "us"—western and modern—and a "them"—others and backwards.

Focusing on the Italian case, Picker and Roccheggiani (2014) argue that the abnormalisation of Roma in Italy stays upon a historically rooted representation of Roma oscillating between the poles of potential re-educability and potential dangerousness centered on their "nomadness".

A significant amount of studies about Roma discrimination in Italy (Albarello et al. 2019; Albarello et al. 2017; Albarello and Rubini 2018; Villano et al. 2017) point in the same direction: diminishing individuality and reducing heterogeneous group identity to unflattering homogeneous characteristics, which function as a common marker, allowing people to explain and rationalize social arrangements by making them appear legitimate and, somehow, natural (Villano et al. 2017).

4. Materials and Methods

Understanding that the process of othering is primarily a discursive phenomenon (Thurlow 2010), in order to understand how the "Roma problem" is framed and how "solutions" are presented, we chose eight consecutive electoral campaigns in a five year period (2014 European and Municipal elections; 2015 Municipal and Regional elections; 2016 Municipal elections; 2017 Municipal elections; 2018 General election; 2019 European election), selecting two campaign speeches, two TV interviews and two visits to "Nomad Camps" for each election (n = 48 speeches for a total of 65,654 words).

The discourses have been selected in an attempt to compare different contexts and different targets, and analyzed with a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Verbatim transcriptions of the selected discourses have been analyzed; using computer-based quantitative content analysis, carried out with the textual statistics software ALCESTE. This method of textual analysis, also known as French-style statistical analysis, analyzes the distribution of the vocabulary, in terms of occurrence and co-occurrence of words, identifying the characteristics of a discourse, in terms of "lexical universes", understood as the networks of relationships that a concept maintains with the words that qualify it. In other words, this type of analysis consists in studying the laws of the distribution of vocabulary in a *corpus* (Reinert 1990), revealing the fundamental subjects of a discourse and understanding the relationships between them.

Once the fundamental subjects representing the "us" and the "them" and their lexical universes have been quantitatively identified, they have been categorized in semantic triplets, adapting Franzosi's clause-based semantic text analysis approach (2010).

CBSTA, the unit of analysis, is reorganized in semantic triplets (Franzosi 2010), comprising the elementary syntactic components of language: subject, verb, and object. In our case, the unit of analyis, the recurrent lexical universes pertaining to the "Us" and the "Them" categories, have been broken down into the following analytical categories: 'subject/actor', 'Verb/action' and 'object actor'.

Displaying the grammar of a history makes it possible to identify concepts, preserving the centrality of agency (actors and their actions) in the social scientific explanation of social reality, but also disclosing relations among the concepts, by coding both the words and their position combinations of actions and objects (Franzosi 2010).

As suggested and tested by Aslanidis (2018), semantic triplets are particularly fitting instruments for studying populism, due to their structural commensurability with the formal features of populist discourse.

Through this method, in fact, not only it is possible to identify general themes emerging in the clauses, it also allows the devoting of strong attention to qualitative variables (i.e., adjectification and linguistic qualifiers), in order to grasp the meaning and understanding of the key elements and the context of their production.

Furthermore, acknowledging that qualitative methods provide "the proximity to the data and flexibility in operationalization necessary for studying highly complex concepts" such as populism (Mudde 2007, p. 39), inspired by Caiani and Porta (2011), frames have been re-aggregated, following Kuypers' model (Kuypers 2010).

Results, therefore, are presented in a qualitative form displaying the linguistic construction of the frames. The "Defining frame" presents the situation, in terms of ontological definitions, the "Diagnostic

frame", based on the previous frame, analyzes and problematizes, and the "Solution frame" proposes solutions to fix the problem.

5. Results

Table 1 shows the results for the lexico-grammatical items and phrases marking the "us" and the "them" values.

Table 1. Elements marking the "us" and the "them" values.

Variable	US	THEM
Subject	ITALIANS	ROMA PEOPLE
Definition	Us; Italians; families; fathers and mothers; citizens; workers; tax-payers; normal people; proper nouns.	Zingari; Rom, occupiers, foreigners, problem, issue
Positive Adjectives	Honest; working; good; first; generous; solidarity; dignity; common sense	
Negative Adjectives	Tired, suffering; in trouble; angry	Not normal; emergency; illegal; rabble; criminals; slies; dirty, infra-human; animals
Positive Actions	Work, pay taxes; know; have common sense;	
Object	Italy; the homeland; our home	
Negative Actions	cannot bear the cost; fed up with; have enough; are afraid	Don't work; steal; commit crime; pickpocket; invade; damage; (they) make fun of (us), arrive (all in Italy); live like animals; drive super-cars; don't pay taxes, exploit.
Object	Them; these; parasites; criminals, abusers	Italians, us, families, normal people; citizens, good people

Source: elaborated by the author.

5.1. The Defining Frame

The "Us"

The "us" values are represented by Italians, openly defined as "us", "normal people", "home", "families", and mainly "workers".

The words "work "or "workers", present in all the analyzed discourses, provide a sort of institutional notion of supposed "Italianness". Besides the obvious positive connotations of the semantic field of "work", Article 1 of the *Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana* (1948) states that "Italy is a democratic republic, founded on work", implying, somehow, that work is a key characteristic of Italian identity.

> *"Io sto coi lavoratori e contro le Rom"*
> (I am pro workers and against Roma
> Source: Salvini's interview, La7 Attualitá. (27 February, 2017)

Moreover, when talking about Italians, Salvini often personifies them by using proper nouns of people or geographical names of inhabitants.

As Jagers and Walgrave (2007) point out, the populist communication style stresses the sovereignty of the people and the popular will by speaking about the people all of the time.

This use of proper nouns as synecdoche (*pars pro totum*) attributes authenticity to the speaker's statement: instead of using the cold data that élite politicians would use, he uses the "real", personal life experiences of someone who actually exist, that he has (supposedly) personally met. This continuous reference to existing people create closeness between the leader who is "one of us" (Pasquino 2008), pays attention and understands people's problems (in contrast with a far away elite), and the people themselves.

On the other hand, referring to real people instead of statistics makes the message emotionally charged, enhancing the audience's emotional reaction, opening the door to effective blame attribution (Hameleers et al. 2017).

> *"Andateglielo a dire agli abitanti onesti di via Germagnano che il campo non puó essre sgomberato"*
> (Go and say to the honest Germagnano Street inhabitans that the camp cannot be evicted)
> Source: Turin Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (20 May, 2015)

The "Them": The Others

In order to define Roma communities, Salvini mainly uses the word "*zingari*", gypsies, (present in all the discourses) which is per se a derogatory expression.

This expression, of doubtful etymology (Asséo et al. 2017), appears in the Italian language in various expressions that are hostile to the Roma. For example, it is common to say, "You are a gypsy" to accuse someone of being impolite or disloyal, or, in many dialects, claiming that someone "goes around like a gypsy" is a way of saying that he/she is dirty or badly dressed.

> *"Facebook mi ha bloccato per 24 ore. Non si puó usare zingari . . . Radere al suolo è razzista e non si puó dire zingari . . . "*
> (Facebook blocked me for using the word "Gypsy". Razing to the ground is racist, we are not allowed to say gypsy)
> Source: Salvini's interview, Omnibus, La 7. (9 April, 2015)

Roma are never personalized with names, rather they are openly reified, being the second most used expression after "problem" or "issue". This dynamic of reification (Giorgi and Vitale 2017), which puts aside and ignores the complexity and subjectivity of the individual, allows, on the one hand, a general attribution of characteristics to the generalized "them" group, neglecting possible (cultural, linguistic, behavioral) difference and heterogeneity, establishing, thus, an emotional distance from the one who speaks (belonging to the "us") and the reified "them".

Observing the most used verbs, we find "they do no work" (present multiple times in all the analyzed discourses). If Italians are inherently defined as workers, not (willing to) working seems to be the defining trait of "Gypsies".

> *"Probabilmente ci sono 2 o 3 o 4 Rom che lavorano. Forse 5 . . . "*
> (Probably there are 2 or 3 Roma that work. Maybe 5 . . .)
> Source: Rome Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (24 February, 2016)
>
> *"É gente che campa alle spalle del prossimo"*
> (These are people who live off scrounging)
> Source: Turin Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (20 May, 2015)

In order to strengthen this clear difference between citizens and abject "non-citizens" (Kóczé 2018), that denies any possible similarities between "them" and "us" (Villano et al. 2017), most adjectives used are actually geared towards a dehumanization of Roma.

Dehumanization involves the denial of full humanness to others. Nature is considered the primitive condition before human society, and culture begins at the point at which human beings surpass their natural inheritance and where the wild is domesticated (Haslam 2006). Therefore,

dehumanization is characterized by a perception that the dehumanized lack secondary emotions and/or "prosocial" values such as civility, morality, self-control (Pérez et al. 2001). Lacking self-control, they are somehow "naturally" immoral, thus must be subject to regulation and control (Ajzenstadt and Shapira 2012).

Roma culture, in fact, is represented as inherently unable to be civilised.

"Non dipende dai politici, dipende dalla volontá di chi sta qua"
(It does not depend on politicians; it depends on the will of people living here)
Source: Turin Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (1 February, 2018)

"Son scelte di vita fai sei figli devi sapere come dargli da mangiare"
(It's a life choice, but if you make six kids, you must know how to feed them)
Source: Salvini's interview, Piazza Pulita, La7. (2 December, 2015)

Going further with the dehumanization strategy, Roma are openly portrayed as animals.

"Queste sono condizioni infra-umane"
(These are infrahuman conditions)
Source: Milan Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (24 October, 2017)

"Vivono come animali"
(They live like animals)
Source: Turin Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (20 May, 2015)

"Vivono nella giunla"
(They live in the jungle)
Source: Milan Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (20 February, 2015)

Dehumanization often intersects with another othering strategy: criminalization. Roma are not only placed in a social category outside of the norm, they are openly positioned outside the law, generating a perception of potential danger, the greatest catalyst to requiring their removal or containment (Ajzenstadt and Shapira 2012).

"Non occore uno scienziato per sapere che i Rom piu che roba usata vende roba rubata"
(You don't need to be a scientist to know that Roma, more than selling second-hand clothes, they sell stolen things)
Source: Rome Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (24 February, 2016)

"Quando io vado nei campi trovo i Mercedes e le Audi. I Rom come comprano le Audi da 80mila euro?!'"
(When I go to visit camps, I find Mercedes and Audi. How do Roma buy 80,000 Euro Audi cars?)
Source: Salvini's interview, Piazza Pulita, LA7. (2 April, 2015)

5.2. Diagnostic Framework: Normality vs. Abnormality

The diagnostic framework is mainly summed up by the lexical universe of "normality". On the one hand, we find Italians who, working and earning their living, constitute normality, on the other, "Gypsies", that, as previously mentioned, are out of control, living in a situation that stands out from normality, from the accepted social norms, creating a threat.

> "*Ditemi voi se é normale*"
> (You tell if this is normal)
> Source: Salvini's interview. Coffee Break, La7. (30 May, 2016)
>
> "*È una cosa che non sta né in cielo né in terra*"
> (It's a situation of another planet)
> Source: Salvini's Milan campaign meeting. (18 October, 2015)
>
> "*Non esiste vivere di furti e di accattonaggio quando intorno c'è gente che vive normalmente*"
> (You cannot live off stealing and scrounging while people around are living normally)
> Source: Turin Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (1 February, 2018)

Therefore, normal Italians are, on the one hand, scared of these people who live in an "abnormal" situation.

> "*I residenti del quartiere la sera non escono*"
> (Neighbors don't go out at night)
> Source: Salvini's Rome political rally. (28 February, 2015)

On the other, they are tired of this unfair treatment: Italians must cope with duties and obligations, while Roma live in anarchy, exploiting a system that unfairly tolerates them.

> "*Se un Milanese va al Parco Sempione e tira su una casa gliela tirano giu in dieci minuti*"
> (If a citizen of Milan goes to Sempione park and builds an (illegal) house, the State would destroy it within ten minutes)
> Source: Salvini's campaign speech, Milan. (24 February 2018)
>
> "*Non hai mai pagato le tasse? Di che c.. stiamo a parlare?*"
> (Talking to a Roma camp resident: "You never payed taxes. W.t.f. are we talking about?")
> Source: Rome Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (24 February 2016)

This is another prerogative of populism: the corrupted/ inept élites that somehow privilege the "other" against the sovereign people.

The diagnosis is, thus, clear.

> "*Tutti gli Italiani la casa la comprano. Chi non vuole, non puó o non è cittadino italiano non sta a Roma e non sta in Italia*" (2016)
> All the Italians buy their houses. Anyone who is not willing, can not (buy a hourse) or is not an Italian citizen, won't stay in Rome or in Italy
> Source: Salvini's Milan campaign speech. (12 Dicember 2016)
>
> "*È un area che va restituita alla cittá*"
> This area should be returned to the city
> Source: Rome Camp visit, Salvini's YouTube channel. (24 February 2016)

5.3. The Solution Framework: Salvini and the Ruspa (Bulldozer)

The construction of this pure distance, made of irreconcilable differences, allows calling for an extreme solution: the razing to the ground of the "problem", namely nomad camps, and expelling all of the illegals.

This solution is discursively framed by the constant use of one word, that, as previously mentioned, will become a mantra: *ruspa*, bulldozer.

The bulldozer (tool used to raze to the ground) becomes the metaphor for solving any problem.

> "*Io preannuncio la ruspa entro 6 mesi e rado al suolo tutti i campi Rom*"
> (I announce the use of bulldozers to raze to the ground all nomad camps)
> Source: Salvini's interview, Omnibus, LA7. 9 April 2015
>
> "*La ruspa per abbattere quella che è una vergogna*"
> (A bulldozer to eradicate the shame)
> Source: Salvini's interview, Tagadá, LA7. 27 February 2017

There is no need to mention that razing to the ground all of the nomad camps without a feasible reallocation strategy would be—besides any ethical consideration—useless and would actually make the situation worse. Nonetheless, within the populist rhetoric of oversimplification (Hameleers et al. 2017), the bulldozer becomes the instrument to achieve the only effective solution: since living together is impossible (because they are not compatible with civilization), the only way to solve the problem is erasing it, getting rid of them and taking back what is ours.

Of note is that a bulldozer is a machine normally used to flatten a surface that needs to be asphalted: both the verbs *spianare*, "to flatten", and *asfaltare*, "to asphalt", are used in the Italian language as colloquial—and very powerful—metaphors for winning/destroying an enemy.

In order to understand the role of the leader within the solution framework, we applied the same analysis to Salvini's self-definition, and, as shown by Table 2, we can observe how the leader shares all of the characteristics of Italian people.

Table 2. Elements marking the "Salvini" value.

Variable	Description
Subject	SALVINI
Definition	Us; Italian; father citizen; tax-payer
Positive Adjectives	Honest; hard worker; good; common sense
Negative Adjectives	Tired; angry
Positive Actions	Work, pay taxes; know; have common sense; do
Object	*Ruspa* (bulldozer)
Negative Actions	Angry, have enough; fed up with; raze to the ground, close
Object	Them; these; parasites; criminals, abusers; camps

Source: elaborated by the author.

Specifically, as for the description of Italians, there is a massive use of the word "work", "worker" or hard worker, the same linguistic qualifiers defining Italians. Moreover, in every discourse analyzed, he presents himself as a father.

He actually is a father, but this insistence in presenting himself as a father, on the one hand helps the creation of the image of the politician as "one of us", having the same worries, the same problems and the same "common sense", as everyday people (Cervi 2020), contraposed to the senseless élites. On the one hand, this sort of analogy, in which the leader shares the same characteristics of the people, is another crucial characteristic of populist discourse: populist leaders do not represent the people, but consider themselves (and they succeed in being considered) an integral part of the people. They are the people (Pasquino 2008). On the other, the fatherly figures can also be strict, able to make tough decisions for the family (Norocel 2010).

These constructions allow the presentation of the leader, who is both "one of us" and the "strict father" able to take the right decision for the "family", as the solution.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

The study has shown how, in Salvini's discursive construction, "Gypsies" make the perfect "other", who live among us, but in an "abnormal" situation, that threatens our culture, lifestyle and economy. In Bauman's words, they are "neighborly aliens", morally distant yet physically close (Bauman 2001, p. 24).

This discursive strategy, based on what Poynting and Briskman (2020) call the "blame-the-victim" strategy, provides the perfect tool for the dramatization of the typical populist "us" versus "them" dichotomy, necessary for "excluding populism" (Jagers and Walgrave 2007, p. 334). The psychological construction of the Self is, in fact, relational (Göl 2005), and so is the social construction of the consequential "us". Indeed, if the meaning of self depends on a dialectical opposition to another identity, dehumanizing and scapegoating (Wodak 2011) a minority makes the perfect tool for populists to create an idealized image of a virtuous and hardworking people, framed in opposition to the "pervert" others (Abts and Rummens 2007, p. 418).

Roma, in this case, are reified, neglecting subjectivity and heterogeneity, and dehumanized, openly portraying them as "animals", lacking human characteristics and naturally inclined towards criminal activities, therefore represented as not only unable to adapt to live in a civil society, but an actual "threat" for citizens.

As Haslam (2006) puts it, dehumanization allows the justification of extreme measures. Separating the "other" from the rest of humanity enables temporarily acting outside of humanity, because we are dealing with those who are acting inhumanely.

Because of the incompatibility between "normal" humans and abnormal "non-humans", Italy is in a situation of chaos and emergency. Italians, the sovereign people, suffer because of these "aliens" and need to regain control, take back "what is ours": the only, inevitable solution, therefore, is solving the problem for good, "razing it to the ground" with a bulldozer.

This discursive construction is propaedeutic to another crucial aspect of populist communication, namely the presence of a charismatic leader (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). The storytelling of the emergency, in fact, allows the leader, who is "one of us", but has the power to use bulldozers, to present himself as the only one who can restore order and normality. Presenting himself as "the" solution, the savior, allows him to strengthen his charismatic appeal and his emotional trust ties with followers. In this specific case, an object, the bulldozer, acquires a strong metaphorical meaning. As Valerio Renzi (2015, p. 66) points out, "Salvini is able to store social resentment in the tank of his bulldozer, using it as gasoline that fuels the bulldozer itself, which exhaust pipe emit the toxic gases of hatred".

Although the data stem from the Italian case, the results of this study advances the understanding of the scapegoating of Roma in political discourse (Kóczé 2018; Loveland and Popescu 2016) and how it connects with right wing populist communication (Crețan and O'Brien 2019; Kluknavská and Hruška 2019). This makes the research interesting for all who are concerned with the relationship between populism, xenophobia, ethnic discrimination and racism and, in particular, with the role exerted by symbolic élites in the production and reproduction of anti-Roma discourse.

However, since data are limited to only one party and one country, future research should aim at pointing out similarities and differences among different cases and different countries, and be based on a comparative sample to provide more generalizable results. Particularly, as suggested by Donatella Della Porta in the recent book "Discursive Turns and Critical Junctures" (Della Porta et al. 2020), future studies should be geared towards understanding how, and under which circumstances, Romaphobia (and other forms of discrimination) becomes a discursive opportunity for right wing populist movements.

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