



## Torre Maura: racism in East Rome

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Rome, Torre Maura, eastern outskirts of the capital.

On the afternoon of April 2, 2019, in the neighborhood inside the ring road, where 20,000 inhabitants live, 70 Roma citizens arrived (33 children and 22 women, three of whom are in an advanced state of pregnancy) to be housed in the reception centre in Via dei Codirossoni, a building of the 90s in poor condition<sup>1</sup>.

The arrival of the new guests triggers the protest of some inhabitants, supported by a group of militants of CasaPound and Forza Nuova.

In the late afternoon, the situation degenerates. Some residents move garbage bins in the middle of the street and set them on fire. Some Forza Nuova militants throw some sandwiches addressed to Roma on the ground and trample them on the floor, shouting racist slogans: "Gypsies, you must starve to death"<sup>2</sup>. "Roma steal", "must die of hunger" and so on<sup>3</sup>. That tremendous gesture of wickedness and contempt outrages Simone, a 15-year-old boy passing by, who finds the courage to say: "Stay and use the anger of the people to gather votes. This is always going against minorities, and I don't like it"<sup>4</sup>. That free act is so unusual in these times of anger and rage that the media machine turns him into a hero for a few hours.

The protest ends only around 1:30 a.m., when Stefano Castiglione, head of Cabinet of the Mayor, arrives on the scene and speaks with the demonstrators. The municipal administration yields to pressure and decides to transfer the Roma group elsewhere. The alternative solution proposed is to accommodate mothers and children in foster homes. This

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<sup>1</sup> The center, until a few weeks before, housed asylum seekers, while the new guests came from another center in Torre Angela, closed by decision of the municipality. See "Cosa è successo a Torre Maura e perché Roma esclude i rom", *Internazionale*, 4 aprile 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See "Roma, proteste a Torre Maura contro l'arrivo dei rom: incendiata un'auto", *la Repubblica*, 3 aprile 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ds3nY86vSHw>.

<sup>3</sup> See: "Roma, Torre Maura non vuole i rom", *La7*, 7 aprile 2019, here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNKYv\\_Dqb9E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNKYv_Dqb9E).

<sup>4</sup> See: [https://www.ansta.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2019/04/04/simone-il-quindicenne-di-torre-maura-contro-casapound-state-a-fa-leva-sulla-rabbia-della-gente.-plauso-raggivideo\\_7a4bc495-bb4d-4c21-a1f7-2ecbc8422ea5.html](https://www.ansta.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2019/04/04/simone-il-quindicenne-di-torre-maura-contro-casapound-state-a-fa-leva-sulla-rabbia-della-gente.-plauso-raggivideo_7a4bc495-bb4d-4c21-a1f7-2ecbc8422ea5.html).



involves the dismemberment of the families: for this reason, some families refuse the transfer.

Certainly, that of Torre Maura, is not an isolated episode. Just a month later, something similar happens in Casal Bruciato<sup>5</sup>, also in the eastern suburbs of Rome, where some residents take to the streets against the assignment of a popular housing to a Roma family from the La Barbuta camp.

A story of racism that is intertwined with social unease and that testifies to an intolerant climate already rooted in the city.

On the Torre Maura affair, even the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) intervenes, which feels the need to write to the Italian Government to receive updates on the consequences of the demonstrations that took place in the Roman quarter<sup>6</sup>. As OHCHR points out, "these violent demonstrations took place against the background of a significant increase in the number of recorded episodes of hate crimes and incitement to hatred and discrimination against individuals on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, color, descent or national origin. In particular, there has been an increase in hate speech and forced evictions against the Roma minority"<sup>7</sup>.

In response to OHCHR's letter, the Italian government explains that, due to the obstructionist activity of the demonstrators, the municipal administration has provided for a further transfer of Roma to other centers located in different areas of the city<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See: "Roma: le case mancano ma il "problema sono i rom", *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo*, 7 maggio 2019, here: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/roma-le-case-mancano-ma-il-problema-sono-i-rom/>.

<sup>6</sup> The objective of the UN communication was, on the one hand, to request official information regarding the situation of the transferred persons and their effective possibility to access local services and national protection mechanisms to deal with situations of discrimination and hatred. On the other hand, the UN requested updated information about the investigation opened by the Prosecutor's Office for damages and threats aggravated "by racial hatred", in particular regarding the identification and prosecution of the perpetrators of acts of hatred and the sanctions adopted against them. See: "Gli esperti ONU dei diritti umani hanno interrogato il Governo sui fatti di Torre Maura", *Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo*, 4 luglio 2019, disponibile qui: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/gli-experti-onu-dei-diritti-umani-hanno-interrogato-il-governo-sui-fatti-di-torre-maura/>.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24552>.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadFile?gId=34762>.



In the following days, a file was opened for “incitement to racial hatred and apology of fascism” for the riots that occurred in Via dei Codirosoni. Following the investigations carried out by Digos of Rome, the investigators have filed an informative report with which 41 people, including residents and members of the extreme right, have been reported to the Judicial Authority.

So here is how, especially thanks to political propaganda aimed at exploiting at media level the social and economic hardship of working-class neighborhoods like this, an ordinary action of housing allocation can trigger acts of xenophobia and racism. And the propaganda flies, by now, especially on the social networks.

On April 3, 2019, for example, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini writes: “Roma Chaos in the Capital. No to all forms of violence, no to dump all problems on the peripheries. I repeat the objective I am working for: ZERO Roma camps by the end of my mandate. Those who integrate themselves are welcome, those who prefer to steal will be sent elsewhere”<sup>9</sup>.

Also the tweet of Simone Di Stefano, national vice-president of CasaPound, is emblematic: “Dear Mayor the suburbs are abandoned! They wait for answers and solutions, but only evictions and Roma people arrive at the expense of the State. Did you want a rainbow banner with the words "welcome"? You live in the Palaces, outside of the world, and you even allow yourself to judge”.

The rhetoric of “First the Italians” shows itself, therefore, also in this case in all its instrumentality. The sandwiches thrown and trampled on the ground are at the same time a symbol of inhumanity and contempt, of rejection as an end in itself: if the problem is the Italians dying of hunger, that food has been lost, certainly not redistributed<sup>10</sup>. And, of course, TV news and talk shows have not missed an opportunity to reproduce the images of the protest, full of racist slogans<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1113393862649708544>.

<sup>10</sup> See “Il bullismo di Stato di Salvini, la risposta di Murgia: se il problema è come si dissente e non le ragioni del dissenso”, *Valigia blu.it*, 20 aprile 2019.

<sup>11</sup> See “Chiara Proietti D’Ambra racconta la protesta degli abitanti di Torre Maura, periferia est di Roma, per l’arrivo improvviso di un gruppo di famiglie rom”, *La7*, 7 aprile 2019, here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ee9X9acY6BQ>.



With the Torre Maura affair, words that hadn't been read for a long time, "gypsies", "nomads" or "anti-nomad protests" recur in the headlines of various newspapers.

On the other hand, as recalled by Carlo Stasolla<sup>12</sup>, president of the association 21luglio<sup>13</sup>, the return of some words used in the common language "recalls all the ghosts of the past, from the 'nomadic emergency' to the 'kidnapping gypsy'". Stasolla points out that "talking about nomads and nomad camps is improper and misleading, as it has discriminatory outcomes in the common perception and confirms a series of prejudices widespread in particular in Italian society"<sup>14</sup>.

### The Roman suburbs and the social question

There is also the mismanagement of the Roma presence in the city that is treated as a constant emergency. The revolt against the Roma in Torre Maura is placed in a difficult social context. The district, according to Maproma data<sup>15</sup>, records worse indicators of education, income, health and culture than the average in the city.

Several suburban districts of Rome emerge, now periodically, to the honors of the news, which are crossed by real urban revolts against the most vulnerable population groups: revolts that are often fomented by local right-wing politicians and neo-fascist movements. In a few years, first Tor Sapienza, then Tiburtino III and finally Torre Maura. It is clear how the extreme right is blowing on the fire to gain consensus, using instrumentally the city's discontent and the abandonment of the suburbs by left-wing parties and institutions.

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<sup>12</sup> See: "Torre Maura e il ritorno del termine "nomadi" per indicare i rom", *Redattore Sociale*, 10 aprile 2019.

<sup>13</sup> See 21 Luglio, <https://www.21luglio.org>.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> Of the 15 municipalities of Rome, the VI, which includes Torre Maura, has the worst human development index, with a particularly negative performance since it is the only one with a value below 0.5 below the threshold of "low human development", and the worst values for all its components of income, education and health. In particular, in Torre Maura, which corresponds to urban planning area 8B, the most worrying indicators compared to the Roman average, as highlighted by the analysis of #mapparoma, are both education, with few graduates (8.6% against 20.2%) and many residents with elementary or no qualifications (28.2% against 20.3%), and cultural offer (zero cinemas, theaters or libraries). See "#notedimapparoma4 – Torre Maura tra disagio sociale, case popolari e welfare emergenziale", aprile 2019, disponibile qui: <https://www.mapparoma.info/notedimapparoma4-torre-maura-tra-disagio-sociale-case-popolari-e-welfare-emergenziale/>.



On the part of the Capitoline administration, we have seen only evictions without alternative solutions. The Raggi plan, which foresaw the overcoming of the Roma camps, was absolutely inadequate and unsuccessful<sup>16</sup>.

For the management of public order in Torre Maura, the military intervened in place of the traffic police, just to reiterate that the Roma is an emergency. But this is a social issue that needs to be addressed with a medium and long-term strategy, shared with Roma communities<sup>17</sup>.

As it has been recalled, "in Rome, situations of tension on this issue are frequent, because policies of ghettoisation and Roma exclusion have always been implemented in the city"<sup>18</sup>. Rome therefore remains the "city of camps"<sup>19</sup>. About five thousand people live in the institutional camps. In addition to those recognized, there are also many informal settlements: there are about 1,800 Roma in the capital living in an emergency housing situation and the various administrations that have governed the city have not been able to define together with the Roma alternative housing solutions.

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<sup>16</sup> Si veda: "Roma. «Piano rom, il fallimento della giunta Raggi»", *Avvenire*, 14 gennaio 2020.

<sup>17</sup> See: "Torre Maura, i Rom e l'emergenza infinita", *Cronache di ordinario razzismo*, 3 aprile 2019, disponibile qui: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/torre-maura-i-rom-e-l'emergenza-infinita/>.

<sup>18</sup> See: "Cosa è successo a Torre Maura e perché Roma esclude i rom", *Internazionale*, 4 aprile 2019.

<sup>19</sup> As reported by 21 Luglio association in its annual report. See: <http://www.romatoday.it/politica/campi-rom-rapporto-annuale-2017-associazione-21-luglio.html>.