

M7 Worksheet “Attacks in Italy”

Since 2008, Italy has repeatedly seen antigypsyist incidents involving attacks on Roma people. Some of these incidents took place in Naples.

In the Neapolitan district of Ponticelli, a makeshift settlement populated by the Roma ethnic minority was subjected to violent attacks. The organised nature of the violence led media reports to refer to ‘pogrom-like riots’. Stones were thrown, and youths on mopeds were captured on film by television reporting teams as they launched Molotov cocktails at the huts. The mob that had gathered directed verbal abuse at firefighters attempting to put out the flames. Hundreds of Roma people fled in their vehicles, and 500 were escorted out of the city under police protection. A group of 56 Roma, including 30 children, has been missing since the incident. There were no reports of arrests among the rioters and arsonists.

Around 160,000 Roma people live in Italy, primarily on the fringes of cities. About half of them hold Italian citizenship. Together with the Sinti in the country, they make up a population which official figures put at approximately 342,000. The charitable organisation Caritas believes the true figure to be considerably higher, amounting to a total of 556,000.

An incident in Naples which spoke to the familiar prejudice of ‘child-stealing gypsies’ fuelled popular outrage in the city to boiling point. A 16-year-old Romani girl, who had been arrested since the reported incident, had allegedly, on the weekend before the violent attacks, attempted to abduct a six-month-old baby. Claims such as these surface at regular intervals in the Italian media. Journalists devote considerable column inches to reporting on these purported incidents, thus contributing to a climate of hostility and animosity towards Roma.

As well as the stone-throwing and attacks with incendiary bombs, physical aggression towards individual Roma people occurred; one example was an incident in which two Roma women going shopping were chased from a supermarket. As noted above, no arrests of arsonists or stone-throwers were recorded; the contemporary political class would not have welcomed them, if the ‘partial understanding’ for the mob’s behaviour professed by Rosa Russo Iervolino, Naples’ mayor and a member of the left-wing Democratic Party, is anything to go by.

A few days after the events, the Italian office of the human rights organisation EveryOneGroup published a report which indicated that the account of the incident given by the police and the media could not be accurate. The EveryOneGroup staff believe that Angelica V., the arrested 16-year-old, had been lured into a trap, and that Flora M, the child’s mother, and her father, the child’s grandfather, were part of a group of local residents which had met several times to discuss ways of getting rid of the Romani dwellings in their area. The allegation of child abduction could have served as a catalyst for the subsequent attacks on the Romani residences, which in turn led to their evacuation.

An Italian court sentenced Angelica V. to almost four years in prison on the basis of Flora M.’s statements and without any further reliable evidence. Now released from prison after serving her sentence, Angelica V. continues to assert that she was unjustly accused and convicted and never so much as set eyes on Flora M.’s daughter.

Sources:

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EveryOneGroup (2008): Anti-gypsy sentiments out of control in Italy. The truth about the kidnapping in Naples. http://everyonegroup.com/EveryOne/MainPage/Entries/2008/5/18_Anti-gypsy_sentiments_out_of_control_in_Italy._The_truth_about_the_kidnapping_in_Naples.html

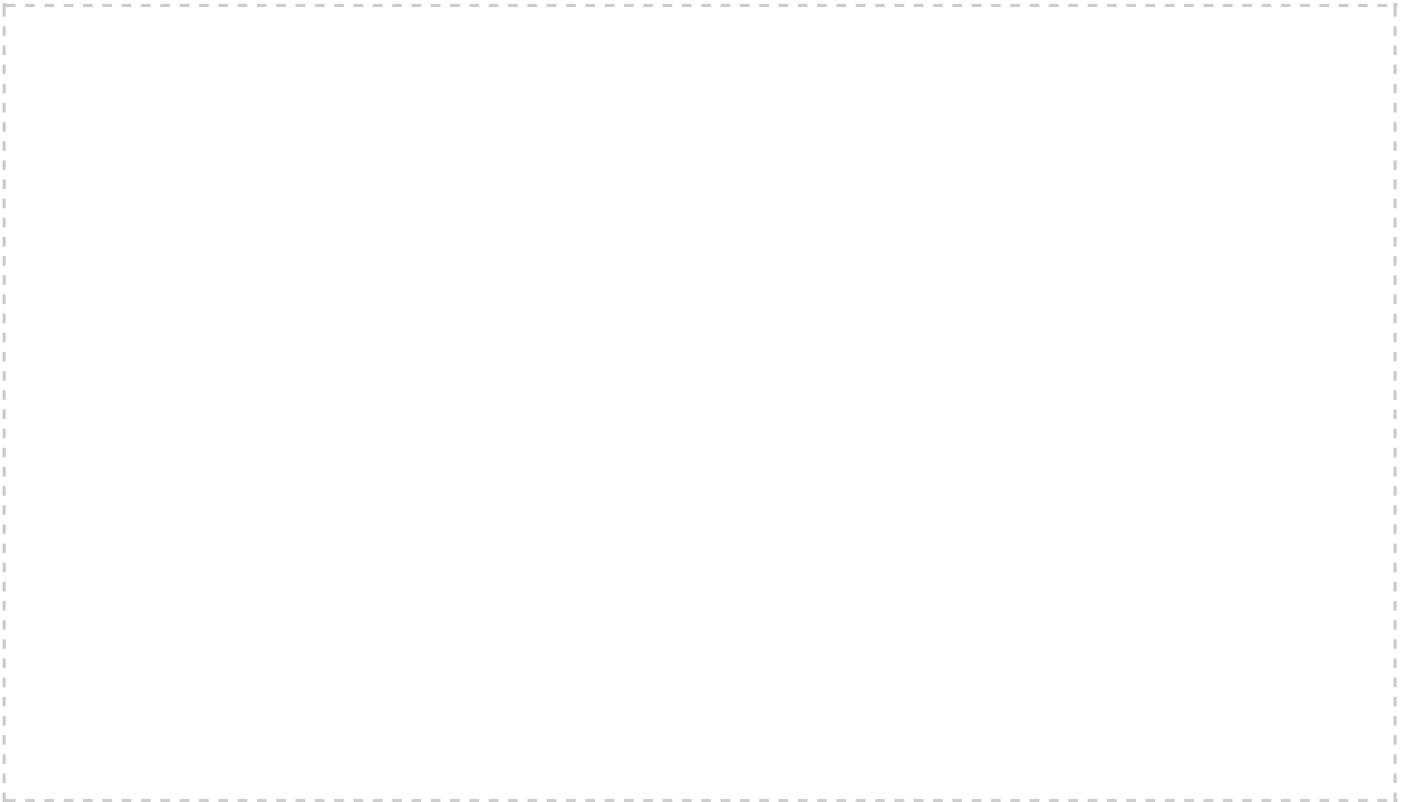
Manzo, Guisepppe/Viscardi, Alessio (2012): Interview with Angelica Varga: Angelica torna a Ponticelli e racconta la sua verità. <http://www.fanpage.it/angelica-torna-a-ponticelli-e-racconta-la-sua-verita-reportage/>

Tasks

1. Describe the events in Naples.



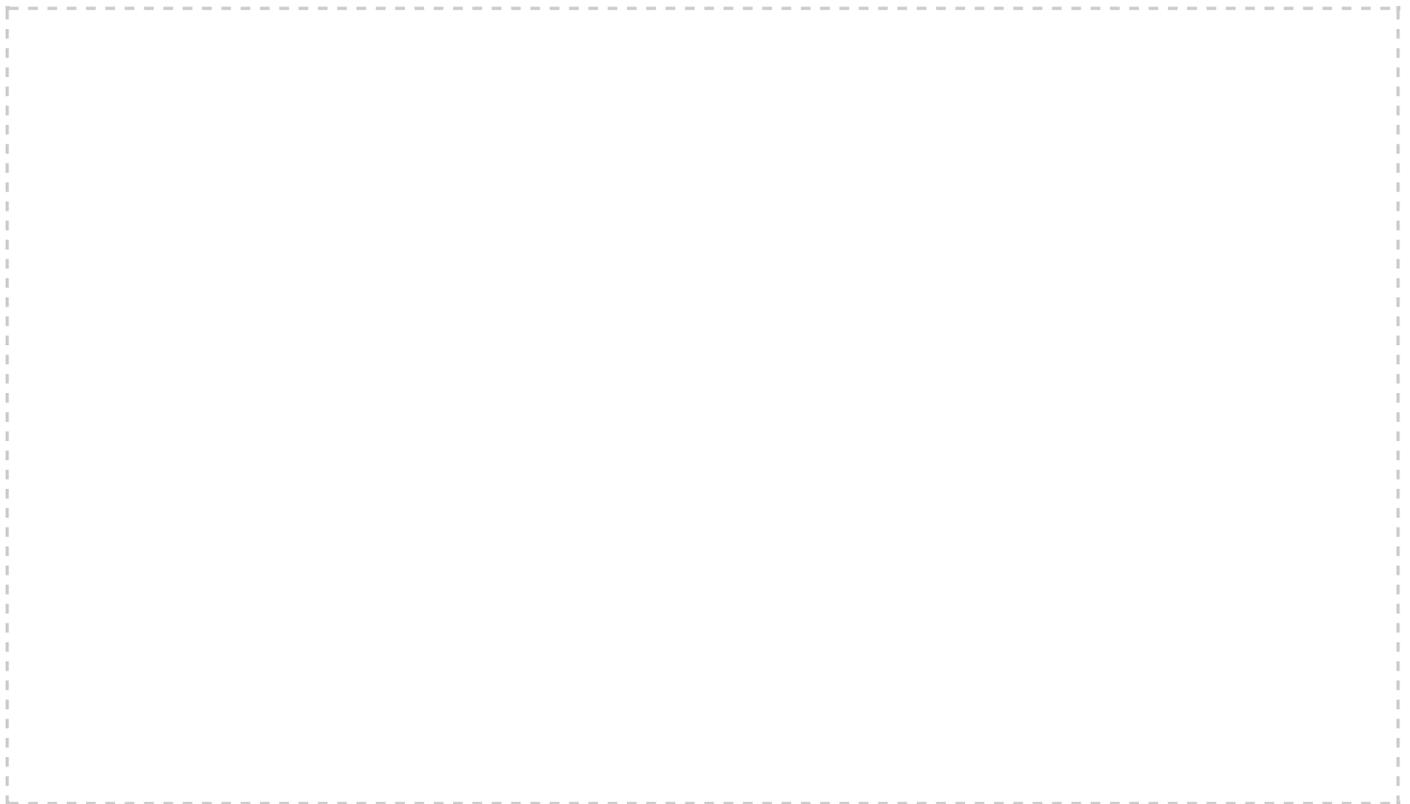
2. Explain the role played in the events by the assumption that a Roma girl had attempted to abduct a child.



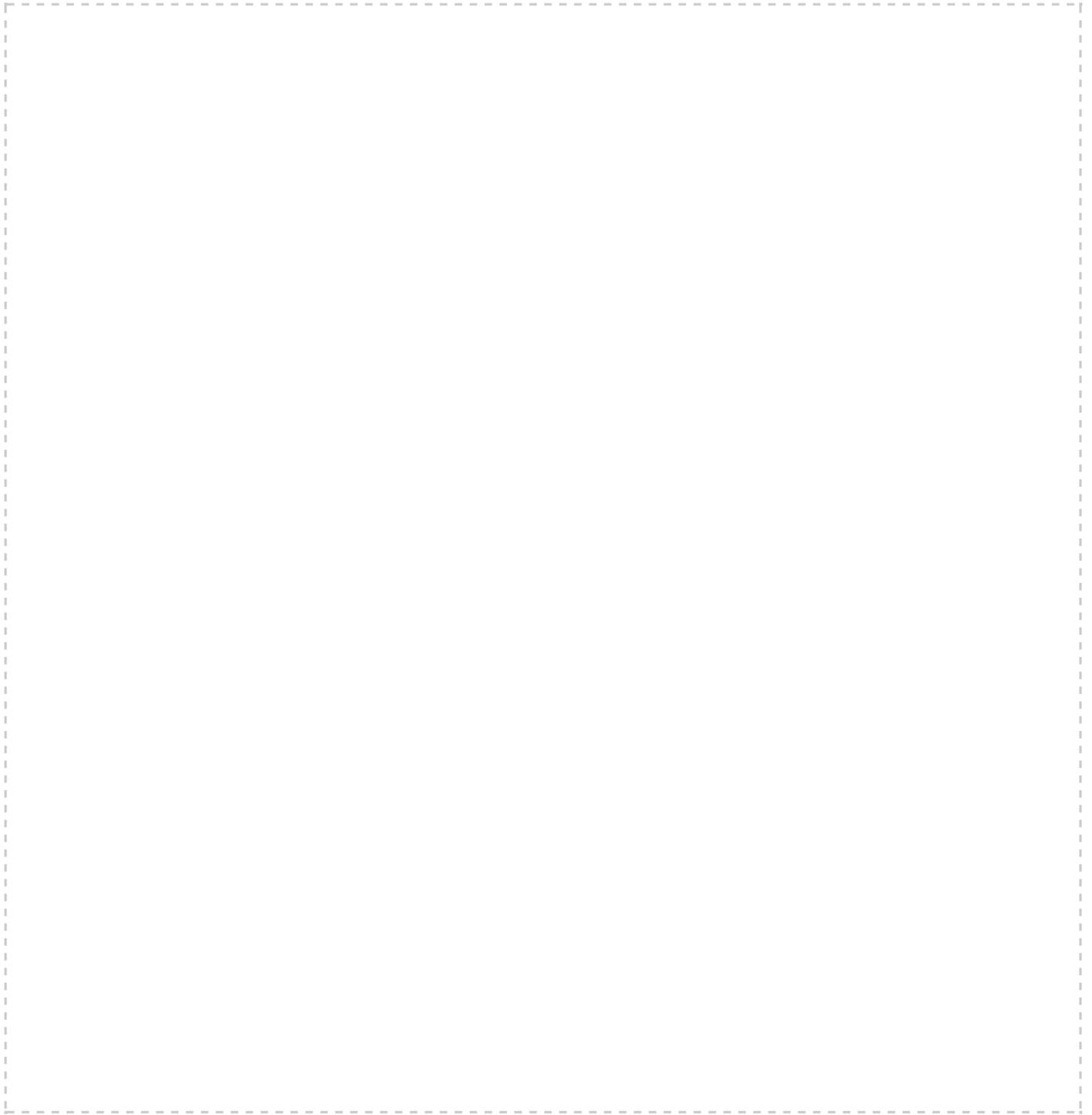
3. Assuming that Angelica V. really did intend to abduct the child, explain why the local residents of the area attacked other Romani and non-Romani Romanians and destroyed their homes.



4. Do you think there is a connection between the Italian events and the fake news around 'Maria'?



5. Give and explain your view on the following statement: 'The prejudice about "gypsies" abducting children is dangerous because it can act as a justification for violence against Romani people.'





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