Journeys Beyond: Navigating Through Land, Movement and the Dead in the Italian Eastern Alps – Perspectives From Elsewhere

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Abstract

Focusing on Sinti concepts of time, space, memory and respect, this paper explores the overlooked presence of Sinti in the Alps and their relationship to Alpine landscapes, which is closely linked to their relationship to their dead. Their way of making the world calls for a rethinking of concepts concerning the relationship between humans and land and opens up a different possibility for thinking about societies in the Alps. Since silence is a practice linked to Sinti memory and land, the question arises of how to write about these people. Drawing on the discussion of the concept of silence in the work of Patrick Williams, the paper interweaves ethnographic data from twenty-five years ago with more recent ethnographic archival research.

In memory of Patrick Williams

> To show that the Roma, the Gypsies, the Sinti, the Travellers, the Mānuš etc. help us to come to a definition of society, presupposes that we have first shown that they belong to that society. The value of studying "Gypsies" can only be recognised once it has been admitted that they belong to our society (Williams, 2021, p. 624).

In the autumn of 1997, Gianni was buried in a cemetery in South Tyrol. However, it was still not easy for *his Sinti*[1] to get a burial place there. During

1 *His Sinti* refers to the concept of *my Sinti* or people of the *familia*, to whom the living and the recently deceased have a direct connection, going back one, two or, at the most, three generations. The order of inclusion in the unity of *my/our own Sinti* is according to the presence of the recently deceased. This affects the plus first (+1), plus second (+2) or at most

Part of
Schneider, A. & Tauber, E. (Eds.). (2024). *New Horizons for the Alps – Ethnographies, Reshaping Challenges and Emerging More-Than-Alpine Relations*. bu,press. https://doi.org/10.13124/9788860461988

negotiations with the cemetery administration, the head administrator considered the following possibility: "It would be much better for you Gypsies if you had your own cemetery, then there wouldn't be the constant quarrels with other people (the non-Gypsies)" (Tauber, 2014, p. 46). This suggestion was met with irritation by the Sinti present and one of the older men explained why such an idea could only come from a *Gağo*[2] (non-"Gypsy"), one who must be really stupid if he could not appreciate what a common cemetery would mean for Sinti:

> What a stupid *Gağo*. What would we do with a cemetery? How do you manage to reach your Sinti when the whole cemetery is full of Sinti. You would just bounce around: I don't want to see him, I don't want to see him either … It won't work. It takes you the whole day to get to your Sinti, and by the time you get there, you're completely exhausted. (ibid.)

In this contribution, I will look at ethnographic data from twenty-five years ago and link it to more recent ethnographic-archival research, bringing it into the anthropological discussion of the Alps and the question of what societies are in the first place. As for Alpine contexts, the Sinti making of society introduces a further possibility and, coincidentally or not, this has not yet entered the canon of Alpine anthropology.

The presence of Sinti, who manifest themselves in a specific region through their relationships with each other, with non-Sinti (*Gağe*) and with the places where these relationships are expressed, is completely absent in discussions of societies in the Alps. We know that Sinti and other groups of Roma people exist, but they do not represent the problems, situations and issues generally associated with discourses concerning the Alps. Their fleet-

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the plus third (+3) generation: If a member of the +1 generation dies, then the dead of the +2 generation no longer necessarily belong to the recently deceased. This means that above all, but not only, the dead closest to the next generation belong to *my/own Sinti*. Horizontally, siblings and spouses are included in the group of the recently deceased. This memory of descent (called *respect* by Sinti), which spans one or at the most two generations, is very short. The consequence of the short generational memory and the relationship of respect for their own deceased is that each unit of *my/our own Sinti* endeavours not to jeopardise this *respect* through any relationship with *other Sinti*. Another consequence is the strong bond within the unit of their *own Sinti*, which is particularly evident in the relationship with their own children.

2 On the question of what a *Gağo* is, see Poueyto (2014).

ing presence can perhaps be explained by the fact that their existence in the world is inscribed subtly on landscapes: a hundred years ago on foot, or, if they were wealthy, with a horse-drawn cart, fifty years ago with the first caravans, and for about twenty-five years now also by living in flats. Their movements did not leave any material traces: Once they moved away from their campsites, there was still perhaps a cold fireplace and sometimes rubbish or a piece of clothing that they had left behind because it was no longer needed.

However, the attempt to explain their absence in the discussion on how society or community is made simultaneously risks, in a paradoxical way, not recognising them as part of these societies. Although it is remarkable that they are virtually absent from the discussion of the Alps as a whole, or from specific considerations of people who are more likely to be mobile, such as "new highlanders" (Löffler et al., 2014), amenity migrants (see Cretton and Boscoboinik in this volume) or others, their socio-cultural invisibility reveals blind spots in anthropological thought on the Alps.

Sinti are mobile and only visible in very small groups, and their networks of relationships extend over large areas of the Eastern Alps and beyond to the plains of the Po and all the way to central Italy, Southern Germany and Austria. Over the centuries (Iori, 2015), these people have maintained relations with local populations, helped shape micro-economies and left traces that have led to names such as the *Zigeunerwaldele* or *la via degli zingari*, as well as being probably the only population in the Alps that has produced a minimal ecological footprint during their presence. Their practices of remembering and supporting family members do not fit into any of the models described for the Alps, and yet they have kept up with developments in the *Gağe* world. They have moved from horse to car to flat, they use the internet and social media, and yet they elude the linear time specifications of industrialised and capitalist production and the associated production-oriented rhythms of life (cf. Tauber, 2018). Although they could not escape the violent dynamics of nation building (Piasere, 1999), in not considering the possibility of nation building for themselves they represent a European example of "perspectives from elsewhere" (Platenkamp and Schneider, 2019).

Therefore, integrating them in this volume is significant for several reasons: Their kinship networks extend beyond the Alps, their relationships to places exist both in the Alps and in pre-Alpine space. They are on the move, in most cases do not own land, do not inherit material goods and speak a language – Romani – that is the only language of a minority group not recognised in Italy.[3]

However, approaching this form of living within Alpine society (as well as elsewhere) demands caution and respect. Caution is an attitude that Sinti adopt towards other Sinti, but above all towards *Gağe*: caution in their language, in speaking to and about others, and in their nomadic movements. Respect is shown in their relationship with their deceased and is understood as a pendulum for measuring equal social relationships between the living. Caution and respect are elements that are of great importance for their creation of the world, not for the sake of respect and caution, nor for movement, itself, but not to disturb social relationships with other Sinti and with the dead. I will come back to this below.

But there is another reason to be cautious. Experience has shown – I remain vague for reasons of discretion – that ethnographic descriptions and attempts to understand these societies can lead to misunderstandings and to a different reading than that intended by the ethnographer. The decision to concentrate on ethnographies in the Alps in this volume, with a contribution on the Sinti in the Alps, means that I largely omit concrete ethnographic details, while at the same time appeal to the reader to consider the epistemological context – anthropological debate on Roma, Sinti, Manouche, Gitanos, Kale etc. (cf. Ferrari and Fotta, 2017; Piasere, 1999) – in order to avoid supposed certainties about "Gypsies".

To get closer to the enigma of their absence in the discussions on the European Alps, my contribution also draws on archival material and historical analyses of the presence of the Sinti in the Italian Eastern Alps at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. And placing the discussion on perspectives from elsewhere in a wider context also requires an examination of the relationship between nation states and "Gypsies", something dis-

3 Legge n. 482, 1999.

cussed below through a comparison between the Sinti and the linguistically and culturally related Manouche in France.

Movement and Presence

Looking at the European Alps over a time span of 120–150 years – with the ethnographic caution and respect discussed above – from a bird's-eye view we can make out small groups of people who, unlike other people who were mobile, servants and craftsmen, for example (cf. Cole & Wolf, 1974), consisting of adults, children, old people, men and women travelling on foot or, if they could afford it, by horse and cart. This form of association in small, almost invisible, groups has been described above all for the linguistically related Sinti, Sinte and Manouche in Central Europe and France (Wittich, 1911, 1919; Yoors, 1967; Williams, 1993; Tauber, 2014).

If we look again a few decades later, some differences will be discernible between the Alps in the 1950s and 1960s of the western states and those of Yugoslav Slovenia (Štrukelj 1980). In the Alps of Western Europe, Sinti, Sinte and Manouche are still on the move, now with their first cars, if they can afford them, and the first caravans produced in *Gağe* factories. They are visible as small clusters that settle on the outskirts of villages and forests, sometimes on the outskirts of towns for a short time. In Slovenia, however, they are gradually forced to settle and stay put (ibid.).

We then arrive at the 1990s, the time when I got to know the Sinti in South Tyrol. From a bird's-eye view we see strange clusters of caravans and wooden huts, often on the outskirts of larger towns, which will enter *Gağe* vernacular as *"campi nomadi"*. In terms of urban planning, the *"campi nomadi"* (Piasere 2006) are visibly inscribed in the landscape, and the density of people coming together in them has often multiplied. From the *Gağe* point of view, *campi nomadi* are problem zones, places of conflict between Sinti families, places of social decay and explicit exclusion. My Sinti interlocutors and confidants from that time always rejected these places and tried to avoid settling in them. This was only partially successful, however, because the municipal administrations, in the same way as the cemetery administration mentioned above, showed no understanding of the necessity to separate places of residence ac-

cording to family. From the 1990s to the 2010s, this led to conflicts in housing conditions which were completely unnatural for the Sinti, and which were repeatedly and voyeuristically rehashed by the media. The often overcrowded *campi nomadi* were gradually abandoned by the families in order to move into flats.

If we maintain our bird's-eye view, the movements of the Sinti have changed, in winter they live in flats, some stay with their caravans on *campi nomadi*, in summer they move around and settle – where it is still possible – on the outskirts of forests and villages, just like their ancestors did in the decades before (Tauber, 2014).

In 2023, as I write this article, the small groups of people on the outskirts of the forests and villages have practically disappeared. Looking down on the Alps from above, one sees large clusters of campervans and caravans, most belonging to the streams of tourists who frequent new modern campsites where Sinti, should they be recognisable as such, are not always welcome. The small groups of people who had adapted to the changes in the *Gağe* world during the last century are no longer recognisable.

"Letting the Dead Rest" – Genovefa and Lodovico

I first came across Genovefa with her three or more different surnames in the State Archives of Bolzano during 2017 while I was looking through the files of the Austro-Hungarian police documenting her arrest in a South-Tyrol side valley (Tauber, 2019). In the meticulous records of the police, I get to know a Sinta who moved on foot with her four small children (the youngest is 2 years old) and her husband from mountain village to mountain farm, from valley to valley, and back again. They were given board and lodging by the farmers in the crown land of Tyrol, and, when necessary, they also spent the night in the forest. After these first finds in the archives, which confirmed what the Sinti told me in the 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, namely that they have always been present in Tyrol, further archival finds confirmed their presence (Brunet, forthcoming; Brunet and Tauber, submitted for review; Jori, 2015; Trevisan, 2020).

What is striking is that, firstly, these sources have not previously been used by historians nor the language and attitudes of the police and the state analysed to shed light on the relationship between the state and "Gypsies". However, "Gypsy" is a broad category covering all the family networks of, for example, Sinti, Roma and Manouche, and one in which they do not find their cultural individuality. For these family networks, the term "Gypsy" is a label that says nothing about the uniqueness of their relationship with a particular region. And it is even less suitable for recognising their individual cultural expressions, which differ greatly from each other (cf. Williams, 2011, Tauber and Trevisan, 2019).

Secondly, for my contribution here, however, it is even more important to understand how the Sinti themselves deal with the traces of their ancestors in the archives. When I tell them that I have come across archival material as well as photos of Sinti from the time before the First World War, they take note of this with the remark, "it is best to leave the dead alone". To mention concrete names and stories is socially risky for them. On the other hand, they are always busy telling anecdotes about their dead, going back as far as their great-grandparents (Tauber, 2014, pp. 46–79). So how can we understand the relationships of the Sinti to what we call "the past" or "history" (Piasere, 2000)? How do they insert themselves into Alpine landscapes, how do they articulate their memories, their speaking and remembering? How can we write about the Sinti in the Alps, make them visible as a community – or better, as family networks – when they evade and escape this very definition and categorisation, and show themselves to be unreconcilable to any definition?

"Leaving the dead alone" has a number of implications for anthropological and historical research (cf. Williams, 1993, Foisineau, 2021), touching on the presence of the Sinti in the Alps as well as questions of where the Alps end (Grasseni in this volume) or to whom the Alps belong (Varotto and Castiglioni, 2012). Can the Alps belong to the Sinti? Can the Sinti belong to the Alps? What sense can the Sinti make of such questions? Of course these are their lands: In their Alpine places they know every old tree, every farm, every well, old inns, and all the former meadows where they were allowed to camp decades ago, which have now given way to industrial and commercial zones. They know the small and main roads from South Tyrol to Belluno, to Friuli, to Udine, Gorizia, Trieste, and to the northwest on from Bolzano. They can

imitate local Italian dialects and like cooking some of the local dishes of the Italian Eastern Alps. They know about their ancestors who – in the Habsburg Empire – came together from Lower Austria, Carinthia, Slovenia and Veneto for elopement marriages or to bury a deceased relative in one of the local cemeteries (Tauber, 2014).

In bringing together police files and their narratives with care, it is possible to reconstruct these networks of relationships in the context of the regional history of the crown land of Tyrol at the beginning of the 20th century. Although I use to the police documentation with the greatest suspicion, it enables us to (re)construct both a historical confirmation of the Sinti's memory and their movements from village to village (Tauber, 2019). This approach, bringing together police records, memories and contemporary practices, makes it possible to trace how Sinti live in specific places, move between and relate to them, in part, up to the present day (for similar methodologies see also About and Bordigoni, 2018; Aresu, 2019; Asséo and Aresu, 2014; Bartash, 2017, 2019, 2023; Sutre, 2017; Trevisan, 2010, 2017, 2019, 2020).

Here, however, it is important to understand that this approach is not considered essential by the Sinti themselves for the affirmation of their presence in the Italian Eastern Alps, it is rather their *respectful* relationships with their dead that give meaning to their presence and their movements. For this reason, they are recognised by other Sinti as Sinti of the mountains (*Bergaria*), because, just like their ancestors, they have adapted in some ways to the Alpine *Gağe*. They do not lay claim to land or the privilege of a political voice because of their long presence in the region, but this does not mean that it does not hurt them if their presence is not recognised as being "people from here".

The example of Genovefa is interesting for us because the testimonies of Tyrolean peasants show how much Sinti were part of Tyrolean society on the brink of the First World War: Genovefa regularly spent the night with her children on mountain farms, and at some she could use the kitchen, and they were usually assured of a place to sleep in the stables or hay barns. Even minor thefts of food were accepted (Tauber, 2019, p. 69).

Borders and "Gypsies" – Contradictions in Terms and Different Criminalisations

But, as always, things are far more complicated when we leave the micro-level and look at state policy towards "Gypsies". Historians (Asseo, 1989) and anthropologists (Piasere, 2016) have demonstrated many times that in the eyes of European states, the possibility that "Gypsies" could fully belong to a nation – any nation – was a contradiction in terms, while the criminalisation of their movements treated them differently within each state (Trevisan, 2024). The Sinti's often good relations with the Tyrolean peasants were, therefore, not always mirrored by those with the police or judges, either within Austria or on the borders with Italy. The period when Genovefa was detained in a side valley in South Tyrol coincided with both Austria-Hungary and Italy enacting a series of laws that increasingly criminalised 'wandering' without reason. Paola Trevisan (2020) shows how, after unification, Italy issued a series of administrative circulars calling "foreign Gypsies" "true vagrants". They were to be sent back across the border or expelled if they had already crossed it. Even with valid travel documents, "foreign Gypsies" were assigned to the category of "undesirable foreigners": in other words "vagrants" (Trevisan, 2017, pp. 345–347). The latter carried with them negative connotations, subject to double repression, both from the police and by being essentialised as criminals (Trevisan, 2020). Not even the possession of a passport would allow "Gypsies" to escape being classified as "undesirable aliens" (ibid.). Genovefa and her family possessed neither a passport nor a licence to play music on the streets (Tauber, 2019), and according to the current state of research, they moved primarily on Austrian or, after 1919 (the southern part of Tyrol was awarded to Italy after the Treaty of Saint Germain), South Tyrolean terrain (Brunet and Tauber, forthcoming).

The history of the Austrian Sinti families surrounding Lodovico Adelsburg is different. These family networks repeatedly crossed the Italian-Austrian border in the Eastern Alps and stayed in Italy for long periods of time, although this was put a stop to by increasing levels of regulation (Trevisan, 2020). If they were persecuted in the Austrian Empire because they were poor families moving without documents between the districts of Habsburg Austria, they became an administrative point of contention between the two

states at the Austrian-Italian border (ibid., p. 64). Paola Trevisan has reconstructed both the travails of the Lodovico family in the borderlands of historical Tyrol, and also their ability to overcome obstacles, she writes:

> So, when he (Lodovico); his wife, Maria Gabrielli; and their four children, traveling in two carts pulled by four mares, were stopped at Monteforte d'Alpone (in the border province of Verona), they were all taken to the border post at Ala and given over to the Austro-Hungarian authorities on 27 April 1912. It was only under the protests and insistence of the Italian chief of the security police that they were accepted, even though Lodovico had a passport. The documents do not disclose which problems were raised by the Austrian border guards, but it is clear from what emerges afterward that the guards were doing everything in their power not to accept "their own Gypsies" back into Austrian territory, with or without documents. However, on 30 April 1912, the Italian police station at Ala received a postcard sent by Maria Gabrielli thanking the Austrian guards for their kindness and indicating where to send the cart they had been travelling in (i.e. at Domegliara—a village just over the Italian border—in the province of Verona). From later investigations made by Italian police, it emerged that Maria Gabrielli, with four children, crossed the rail border less than 24 hours after being accepted into Austria, going in the direction of Domegliara, while Lodovico left on 30 April, reaching the family, who had already joined up with another "company of Gypsies". Even if orders were immediately sent to find them, they had disappeared without trace. (Trevisan, 2020, p. 66)

On the one hand, this example shows the vehemence with which the states reject(ed) "Gypsies" and did not want them on their "own national territory", but on the other hand it also shows the sophistication and elegance with which the family networks move(d) in this hostile environment.

But why do we only learn about the existence of the Sinti 100 years ago from police files in the archives, and why are these details only sometimes mentioned in fleeting narratives by the Sinti? What makes their presence in these regions so suggestive, and how can we let the dead rest and yet show that the Sinti have probably been inhabitants of the Italian Eastern Alps for several centuries? Here it can be helpful to take a step back and look at the whole thing from a comparative distance.

Historical Localisation and Silence

In her examination of one of the most significant ethnographies of Romani people in Europe, "*Nous on ne parle pas*": *Les vivants et les morts chez les Manouches* by Patrick Williams (1993), Lise Foisneau (2021) emphasises the importance of historical location as well as the specificity of ethnographic detail in this work on the Manouche in the French Massif Central. The Manouche who Williams met in the 1950s and 1960s apparently did not speak of their dead. The silent veneration of their dead is part of a general art of silence and absence that holds the Manouche together as a community. The Manouche conceal the names and destroy the possessions of the deceased and leave former settlement sites alone as places of the dead where they no longer go. This silence about the dead is singular and restricted to the French Manouche in the Massif Central. And while Williams mentions the historical context somewhat casually at the end of his book, Foisenau addresses the historical context of this silence explicitly: The Manouche encountered by Patrick Williams as a child in the 1960s were victims of persecution by the Vichy regime during the Second World War, by the German occupiers and also by the French resistance fighters during the liberation (Foisenau, 2021, p.654). Williams notes at the end of his book that his observations took place a few years after the *Gağe* had decided to put an end to the "Gypsies" once and for all. Although Williams only mentions this in passing, Foisenau wonders whether it was for precisely this reason that the Manouche, whose relatives, including children and young people, were arbitrarily shot, decided to remain silent out of respect for these dead.

Certainly, we will never know which social practices are a consequence of historical experiences or how historical experiences inscribe themselves on knowledge about the world, but we should definitely consider the possibility of practising silence about oneself as being a "response" to historical experiences. For Williams, the societies of, among others, the Manouche, Roma and Sinti – neither marginal nor dominated – never ceased to constitute themselves differently in Western societies. The ethnographic description of the Manouche's gesture of manifesting their being in this world in *Nous on ne parle pas* (we do not talk) has been noted with great admiration by anthropol-

ogists, for Williams succeeded in writing in depth, in counterpoint, quietly[4] about the silence of the Manouche. *Nous on ne parle pas* became an essential ethnographic guide during my encounters with the Sinti in the Italian Eastern Alps, even though the Sinti are quite different, and yet at the same time similar to the Manouche in Auvergne and Limousin described by Patrick Williams. While thinking about and marvelling at the non-speaking, the silencing, the silent remembering, the meticulousness in the selection of details that are recounted, as well as the disappearance of entire episodes from the Sinti's repertoire of memory, it is helpful to consider the meaning of time among the Sinti: And this brings us back to the Sinti in the Alps.

"The Time, That Is the Others"[5]

Here it is useful to adopt Foisenau's (2021) suggestion for how to understand how or if historical context shapes the Sinti's relationship with the dead. How is it that the Sinti are still not considered by the other Italian Alpine inhabitants also to belong? How is it that the Sinti think of themselves very much as inhabitants of the regions in which they live, as Sinti of South Tyrol, Sinti of Piedmont, Sinti of Veneto, but have little use for proving, as the *Gağe* do, their identity and claim to territory through "historical evidence"? In order to understand these phenomena, it is necessary to leave behind our cognitive straitjackets (Oliviera, 2021), which in a European context are certainly shaped by national and sub-national realities and which also rely on historical evidence, in favour of bespoke tools.

Let us look again at the events on the border between the Habsburg Empire and the Kingdom of Italy during the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. Paola Trevisan reports (following the sources) that after her illegal but successful crossing of the border in April 1912, Maria Gabrielli wrote a polite postcard to the border authorities thanking the Austrian guards for their kindness and indicating where to send the cart she had been travelling in. I have never seen Sinti making fun of the police, on the contrary, the police are explicitly not provoked, the aim is not to attract atten-

4 Book jacket text, Williams (1993).

5 The full quote from Patrick Williams is below.

tion. Therefore, Maria Gabrielli did not tease the police here, but made use of her ability to relate to certain *Gağe*, in a similar way to the much poorer Genovefa in 1905. For both the women we meet in the archive, it seems to have been possible to rely on *Gağe* support. These forms of relationships that we can reconstruct historically – in the example of Genovefa this is very explicit (cf. Tauber, 2019, p. 69ff) – certainly have a quality of informal obligation.

But how do the Sinti locate these relationships in their social universe? We can get close to an answer to this question by looking at their relationships with their dead, which make their understanding of both time and space intelligible. In their interactions with their children, adult Sinti often test whether they remain present in the social universe of the living: "When I am dead, will you do this and that (as I did)?".[6] When the Sinti show their children how to do this or that, it is often accompanied by the demand: "Will you do it like me?". What the living check in preparation for their death is their presence post-mortem in the everyday lives of their relatives. That is, their children will do certain things in the same way as their deceased parents or other relatives. This is because in the social life of the Sinti, in the shaping of their common language (which also includes silence), the close deceased carry more weight: They provide the concrete traces that are nothing more than the respectful continuation of the traces of the temporally more distant dead, who are no longer present as individuals in the memories of the living. Thus, their traces are followed, and they differ from the anonymous deceased of the entire cohesive network in which they were known. But "their dead" did the same as those now living and respected the traces of their own dead. For the Sinti, it is therefore not necessary to know the stories of Genovefa, Maria or Lodovico in historical detail, because their experiences have been passed down through the generations through respect: through careful speech, acts and silence.[7]

6 In the following paragraph I refer to the analysis of the conception of time in Tauber (2014, pp.28–42).

7 Williams writes, "that it is noteworthy that some Manouche [use] the French word '*pays*' (country)…where the dead and the living live together peacefully" (Williams, 2021, p. 654). "This good understanding requires that both sides abide by a set of rules. The living must take care that they do not unjustly invoke the dead, that they do not forget to visit them, and that they continue to take care of what was dear to them. For their part, the dead are asked not to impose themselves too much on the living and not to bring them misfor-

For the Sinti, the choice – the interpretation, the shaping of things in a Sinti manner (*romano kova*) – of their own life plan, is an individual decision. This is a decision, however, that is never made without reference to their dead and thus turns, in the structural sense of Robert Hertz and Lévi-Strauss, the individual decision into a collective one. If the reference to, and relationship with, the dead falls away, or in the words of the Sinti, if the deceased are not respected, then they become restless. And this restlessness of the dead becomes a threat to the living, which can express itself through failures or other fates. Ultimately, the Sinti are required to think of the modalities shaping the individual and thus coherent (Sinti) life (cf. Tauber, 2014, pp. 113ff.).

All individuals who, in the eyes of the Sinti, have a similar relationship with their anonymous dead are considered to be Sinti. "The linguistic nuances, styles of dress, forms of economic activity, musical styles etc., play a role in mutual observation insofar as all these characteristics are ultimately tracks that the living follow out of respect for particular dead" (Tauber, 2014, p. 41). But why, then, is it so difficult to bury all these Sinti in a common graveyard, as suggested by the cemetery administrator above? The practices of remembering are egalitarian, the Sinti community recognises the fact that each individual decides for themselves how to remember, and what should be remembered (cf. ibid.). At the same time, this leads to tensions when observing others; rarely or never do the practices of respect for the close deceased produce conditions of ease between the various families. Respect between the living who are always understood as equals – there are no social hierarchies, respect is given among equals – is at the same time subject to constant social control. In the older literature on *romani* people (e.g. Nicolini, 1969), reference is often made to the family as being the most important unit. This view is based on the Central European nuclear family from a Christian perspective and excludes the dimension of the connection with the dead – individually

tune" (ibid.). "It seems that this works in the departments of Creuse, Puy-de-Dôme and Allier where some inhabitants of the Massif Central, the Manouche, travel. In these regions, places are divided between the living and the dead: the places where one lives, the places where one no longer goes (*mūlengre placi*, 'the places of the dead'), and the places where one meets again (*u grābli*, 'the graves'). When asked how to go on living when someone is missing, the Manouche in Auvergne answer that the dead are always present. Their concern is neither forgetting nor remembering but maintaining life together in a world surrounded by Gadje" (ibid.).

and collectively – for whose respect daily care and attention is required. Only within the small unit of the family is respect for the close deceased possible. This is articulated differently from the respect for anonymous dead people, whom the Sinti connect as a group, as a cohesive network. Any disruption of this respect leads to tension and conflict, which is why the Sinti spend more time avoiding other Sinti than seeking out their company, as Patrick Williams summarises in his preface to my monograph:

> Are they at least aware, one wonders, that the cultural proximity that allows them to immediately share a secret understanding and familiarity has to do with the fact that they have common ancestors, and thus a partly identical historical experience? Admittedly, their attitude, that of one as well as the other, is precisely not to cultivate the memory of the past. The "tradition" is not an object of knowledge for them. Other Sinti exist a little everywhere: This statement is enough to ensure the serenity that lies in the affirmation of the identity of every Sinto or Sinta. The fraternisation of all Sinti in no way leads to the asking of questions about other Sinti: If they are Sinti, then they live like us; unnecessarily asking questions, unnecessarily examining it. (Williams, 2014, p. II)

Referencing the Sinti dead as a whole is not only a cohesive moment, but also shows the timelessness and immutability of their Sinti existence. Neither change nor movement occurs where these dead are. Their own dead will join them without displacing the others. The dead are in no fixed place. In the understanding of the Sinti, they are always there: "the dead are with you, always" (Tauber, 2014, p. 42). In their relationship with their deceased (their own and anonymous dead) there is no place and no time: That is all – that is always – that is the Sinti.

> The establishing of the immutable and the setting in motion of time (one could suggest paraphrasing Jean-Paul Sartre's famous saying, that for the Sinti: "Time, that is the others" are linked to romane events: Immutable or in motion, it is the Sinti time, and not the history constructed by the Gağe. (Williams, 2014, p. III)

The *Gağe* and their history stand outside of these relationships with deceased Sinti. At the same time, they are always part of the Sinti's lives. The Sinti al-

ways live in the midst of the *Gağe*; they say of themselves that without the *Gağe* there would be no Sinti. For the Sinti, the *Gağe* are wild and uncultivated, and the Sinti separate themselves from them through the high culture of *respect*. At the same time, the Sinti and their relationship with the dead will, in a sense, only exist as long as the *Gağe* exist. What the dead demand of the living in terms of respect and reciprocity is a guarantee for the living remaining Sinti in the midst of the *Gağe*.

Ethnographic and Historical Facticity

Returning to the people we met from the State Archives in a town in the Italian Eastern Alps, we cannot know whether Genovefa, Lodovico and his wife Maria had a similar relationship with their dead as the Sinti I met 90 years later or the Manouche in France with whom Patrick Williams lived as a youth. In the narratives of the Sinti, Lodovico appeared more often (cf. Tauber, 2014, pp. 69ff), Genovefa was never mentioned as a concrete person, but her experiences and the shades of her memories with the peasants and the police were omnipresent as a narrative topos.

So let us return to the question of the strange absence of the Sinti in the discourses of belonging in the Alps. In order to address the tension between absence on the one hand and presence on the other, it seems important to take up the argument of Lise Foisneau. She notes that the legend surrounding *Nous on ne parle pas* undoubtedly stems from the "freedom of writing" (ibid.) that Williams claimed for and demanded of himself. Thus, he describes meticulously how the Manouche talk about the dead and talk about them constantly. But, according to Foisneau, the anthropologist has taken the liberty of using an antiphrasis in the title that can easily deceive a less attentive reader. The non-speaking of the title has led non-French-speaking readers and French historians to portray the "Gypsies" as groups who do not speak about their past, or as those who would not give the same space to material traces of memory as the *Gağe* (ibid., p. 655). The problem here is that an ethnographic facticity (Jean-Luc Poueyto, in ibid., footnote 7) – the Manouche in the French Massif Central – is used to imply "Gypsies" in general. This form of superficial generalisation, which anthropology cannot agree with per se, which Pat-

rick Williams himself has refuted through his two monographs on the Rom Kalderash (1984) and the Manouche (1993), carries a considerable risk in a contemporary context as well: In pursuing the question of why the Sinti are virtually absent from the historical, sociological, geographical and political literature on the Alps, in this case the Italian Eastern Alps, it is necessary to link ethnographic description to the larger context.

On the one hand, therefore, it is necessary to address the Sinti's respect for their dead and to ask whether their mnemonic practices require a certain restraint when dealing with their deceased, who are anonymous to them, in archival research. On the other hand, we must ask ourselves whether their position in the societies surrounding them contributes to their narratives and memories being given less credence than others. When I brought together the narratives of the Sinti with the archival material, which at the time was under-researched, it was not a question of verifying the accuracy of their narratives and memories. Rather, I followed the practice of the Sinti themselves of referring to the writing (of the *Gağe*) in order to use it for their own truth. When I began this process, it became clear how certain events in the world of the *Gağe*, although parallel, are not there in the stories of the Sinti and thus, in a sense, cancel out the events in the world of the *Gağe*, while others have a specific meaning. From the point of view of historians, this approach may be unsafe – historical inaccuracies and misinterpretations are a given – but that is the *truth* of the *Gağe* (Tauber, 2014, p.52).

For the Sinti, the truth is different, they do not oppose this hegemonic historiography with their own histories. Their meticulous and detailed remembering and commemoration, which moves along with their Sinti, places and events and expresses their *respect* for their dead, enables them to remain in contact with their deceased, to honour them, to ask them for help and advice when they are at a loss and, yes, also to remain true Sinti amid the *Gağe*. Here we come to the core of the reconstruction of their movements and their process of memory. The silence, the stillness, stands in the middle of their speaking, not as a rhetorical pause, but as an essential part of memory and remembering, an essential part of this speaking. It is also part of their memory, which from the outside looks like a fragmentary narrative, but from the inside forms a whole, because the living people enact their relationship to the dead in both speaking and silence (cf. Tauber, 2014, p. 53). In some ways their

relationship with their dead makes them unreceptive to hegemonic discourse and its practice, which tends to exclude them. But scholarly attentiveness is called for because, as Foisneau notes with some indignation (Foisneau, 2021, p. 655), Patrick Williams' masterpiece – which has provided several generations of anthropologists with ethnographic inspiration, food for thought, melancholy but also a knowledge culture which does not allow for clear definitions – has been used as a justification for not including the Manouche and other Roma groups in historical (oral history) research. And again, their practice of memory does not mean that forgetting their victims in historical world events and forgetting their presence in the present does not injure them. And here we are going in circles because the accuracy of the details is not always able to preserve *respect* for the dead, while generalisation makes it impossible to identify the specificity of a certain family network of Sinti in the Eastern Alps.

Concluding Remarks

We have seen that the question of speaking and writing about the presence of the Sinti in the Italian Eastern Alps is not a trivial matter. Rather, it raises ethical, epistemological and political questions, because the stories of the families of Genovefa, Maria and Lodovico cannot be told without taking into account the desire of the living to *let the dead rest*. Are the Sinti here concerned that we – the *Gağe* – are unable to treat their anonymous dead with respect? Because Sinti do speak about episodes and anecdotes from the past, over and over again they show how precisely they remember, how carefully they store things, how mindfully they are able to speak. Or is it rather a practice that for once has nothing to do with the *Gağe*? The recognition of their presence and their suffering is of great concern to the Sinti, such as when the victims of the Holocaust are commemorated. They are also by no means indifferent to the fact that they are repeatedly "forgotten" in the list of victims.

But writing about their presence without passing over their concern to let the dead rest remains an epistemological challenge. And that is not in itself only a potential conflict between *Gağe* and Sinti, but among the Sinti themselves: about whom can one speak without disrespecting others, the other

living Sinti and so their deceased. They settle this among themselves by scattering amidst the *Gağe*; the example of the cemetery at the beginning of this contribution could not make this clearer.

For the Sinti in the Italian Eastern Alps, Genovefa, Maria and Lodovico are in a place where all the deceased Sinti are, a place that accompanies them, a place where all their dead can be found, and which guarantees the cohesion of the Sinti. They are the dead whose traces are remembered without knowing the exact details of their individual stories. And if it is not possible to be precise, if it is not possible to refer to the accuracy of memory and the specific places of what happened, then the Sinti do not speak about it. This is because as soon as speaking becomes imprecise, it threatens to become disrespectful, and the Sinti's speaking – in its volume, fullness and passionate verve – is always and first and foremost respectful of their deceased. They do not limit themselves to a single space, and chronological time is irrelevant for their dead are always with them.

As Cristina Grasseni's contribution to this volume shows, Sinti are not the only mobile or nomadic groups in the Alps: Transhumance and movement are inscribed in the logic of the land and the self-image of the Alps. However, the Sinti, their relationship to the land and their deceased have been concealed; and if they are secretive and silent about themselves, they have also been silenced by others, the *Gağe*. For ethnographic research in the Italian Eastern Alps, this means confronting two elements of their ephemeral presence, because the reasons for the Sinti not speaking and the *Gağe*'s concealment of the Sinti's presence could not be more opposed. Patrick Williams rightly reminds us that writing about and trying to define their presence in society first requires establishing that they do belong to our society. Only when we admit that they belong to our society can the interest of their presence in the Alps be appreciated. And to return to the idea laid out at the beginning, we know that there are Sinti and other groups of Roma dwelling in the Alps, but so far, their social practices have not been connected with the problems, situations and questions that we associate with this mountainous European region. And since Sinti do not have to own land to be involved with it, their practices may force a change of perspective which would be a way for us, and anthropologists in particular, to see the Alps in a new way.

Acknowledgement

My thanks are due to the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback and to Maria Lord for her proof-reading of the English version.

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