

Erreffe

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allo studio
della cultura
delle classi
popolari

Archive and Ethnography: the case of Europe's Sinti and Roma (19th-21st centuries)

a cura di Elisabeth Tauber
e Paola Trevisan

Archive and Ethnography
– the case of Europe's
Roma and Sinti (19th-20th
centuries): An introduction
*Elisabeth Tauber,
Paola Trevisan*

Towards ethnography of
archival silence: Romani
memory of Nazi genocide
confronts the Soviet records
Vohla Bartash

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Roma from Southeast
Romania from the 1920s to
1980 through a historical-
anthropological lens.
The case of *Ursari* (Bear-
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non bastano poche pagine». Il
diario di Jucki tra ricerca e
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Schede libri
a cura di Dario Di Rosa

Schede riviste

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ELISABETH TAUBER
PAOLA TREVISAN¹

Archive and Ethnography – the case of Europe’s Roma and Sinti (19th-20st centuries): An introduction

¹ The conference «On categories and boundaries: Intersections in the history and ethnography of Europe’s Sinti and Roma (19th-21st centuries)» was the first output of the current group of scholars. We would like to thank all participants of the conference for their input and discussions: Ilse About (also co-responsible for the scientific committee), Volha Bartash, Grégoire Cousin, Jennifer Illuzzi, Petre Matei, Gül Özateşler, Petre Petcuț, Maria Rosvoll, Carolina García Sanz, Cătălina Teșar, Carl Emil Voigt and Marius Weigl whom we would like to thank particularly. For this special issue Marius Weigl provided us with archival hints and data. A very special thank you goes to Siglinde Clementi, who not only participated in the discussion during the research project and the conference but also during the follow-up discussion on archival research, ethnography, history and anthropology and to Maria Lord for her careful language revision. Bianca Pastori and Chiara Tribulato joined in at a later moment, contributing with an analysis of a diary written by a Sinto in the second half of the 20th century. Conceived in close collaboration, the first two paragraphs of this introductory essay were put down in writing by Elisabeth Tauber, while the last two by Paola Trevisan.

² «Denn es ist ein unwieder-

ABSTRACT

The introduction to the special issue discusses epistemological and methodological questions with regard to ethnographic approaches in archival research. Inspired by anthropological debate on the ethnographic approach to and with colonial archives, the authors tackle the question of Roma and Sinti’s presence in European archives. They display how a methodological and theoretical de-construction of the archive allows shedding light on marginalized and often silenced voices within Europe’s history. It is shown how the reduction of the history of the presence of the «Gypsies» in Europe to a succession of repressive acts and negative topos means, in fact, not taking into account the capacity for civilisation on the part of the Romanì people, their being part of contexts that are not only, and not always, marginal. It introduces into how the archival material that contains the category of «Gypsy» unfolds and develops when it is approached through an ethnographic lens. Opening up for the specific combination of European archival sources, and Romanì ethnographies with their inherently diverging understandings of time and history, the authors propose a twofold approach on how to engage with the archival sources: by ethnographically denaturalizing the archive and by basing its research on present ethnographic experiences with Romani people.

Keywords: Europe, archive, ethnography, memory, conceptions of time, «Gypsies», Roma and Sinti.

It is an irretrievable image of the past that threatens to disappear with every present that does not recognize itself in it (BENJAMIN 1940)².

Historians and anthropologists have a common subject matter, “otherness”; one field constructs and studies “otherness” in space, the other in time. Both fields have a concern with text and context. Both aim, whatever else they do, at explicating the meaning of actions of people rooted in one time and place, to persons in another. Both forms of knowledge entail the act of translation (COHN 1987: 19).

Within a more global rethinking of the discipline, since the 1980s several anthropologists have felt the need to put the results of field work into a wider context, especially to connect them with textual sources from archives (NEAPLES 2010). In many regions of the world anthropologists and historians encounter and look at archival sources as a rich basis to be studied ethnographically and reflected upon anthropolog-

ically (ROSALDO 1980; COHN 1987; COMAROFF & COMAROFF 1992; RAPPAPORT 1994; STOLER 2002). In particular, systematic exploration of colonial archives began in the 1990s, involving both anthropologists and historians (BURTON 2005; STOLER 2013).

Following the suggestions of Jean & John Comaroff (1992: 3-48), with this special issue we want to open up the archives to cast greater light on that part of the European population identified as «Gypsy». The Comaroffs have claimed that it is possible to work in a complementary manner with both ethnographic and historical material, with the aim of finding relationships between fragments of life, daily practices and complex themes, as in, for example, the building of a nation, the outbreak of a revolt or new forms of the expansion of capitalism. Of particular interest for our approach is the work of the historian Antoinette Burton (2005: 6, 20-21), who highlights the need to investigate the traces

of political, economic and social pressures under which a certain archival source was born and took shape, the way in which events are presented within narratives already included in the archiving system and, finally, the effects that these have on those who do research in archives today. It is therefore a matter of «denaturalizing» archival sources by subjecting them to an analysis that Burton herself calls «ethnographic», giving space to telling how researchers try to identify, and get in contact with, the documentary material:

In pursuing this ethnographic re-orientation, we move resolutely if experimentally beyond naïve positivism and utopian deconstruction, beyond secrecy and revelation, toward a robust, imaginative and interpretively responsible method of critical engagement with the past (BURTON 2005: 21).

1. Roma and Sinti within European histories

However, for Romani family networks, it is important to bear in mind that the relationship between «Gypsies» and the power of the state cannot be read in colonial or subaltern terms, something which becomes clear from anthropological-ethnographic research (OKELY 1983; PIASERE 1995; STEWART 1997; WILLIAMS 1984; WILLIAMS 1993; PASQUALINO 1998; GAY y BLASCO 1999; FOSZTÓ 2009, FOTTA 2018). Some of these anthropologists also kept an eye open for the historical presence of Roma and Sinti (PIASERE 1985; LEMON 2000; BARONTINI & PIASERE 2001; TAUBER 2014 [2006]; TREVISAN 2008; OLIVERA 2012). Piasere focused in his later work on practices and the sense of history among Roma groups (2000) and the ethnographic reading of chronicles, philosophical and literary texts (2011; 2006). But then again Patrick Williams (2011) maintained a skeptical view of the use of archival sources without including anthropological research with Romani people. Most historians, Williams asserts, are writing books about «Gypsies» that focus on the relationship between the category «Gypsy» and the state. In his skepticism Williams not only raises a methodological issue but also highlights the attitude of his main interlocutors, the French Manuš and the Kalderash

Roma who among themselves understand their uniqueness and particularity as not compatible with a historical account of «the Gypsies».

Hence, this special issue makes a clear statement about how the archival material that contains the category of «Gypsy» unfolds and develops when it is approached through an ethnographic lens. It is only very recently that historians and a few anthropologists have started to think about the need to intersect the socio-historical and the anthropological perspective when researching on and with Roma and Sinti in Europe and beyond (PONTRANDOLFO 2013; ASSÉO & ARESU 2014; ABOUT & BORDIGONI 2018). While Trevisan (2005; 2008) was the first anthropologist to work in this field, guided by her Sinti community to the archive, this special issue presents for the first time an assemblage of articles whose first task is to bring ethnographic insights together with archival sources. We realize how it lies in the hands of the ethnographer or the ethnographically informed historian to read between the lines, to de- and re-construct, to link details with the whole and reconnect relational networks. The authors question the possibility and necessity of linking the archival documentation on the «Gypsies» with ethnographic knowledge of the Roma and Sinti, and their memories and, more generally, with the questions arising from field research.

In this sense, this special issue is also part of the approach taken by the historian Henriette Asséo (2019: 111-130), who warns against a deconstruction of the term «Gypsy» interpreted as a mere discursive production to which specific social realities do not correspond, but which are knowable and reconstructible through rigorous historical and anthropological analysis. Reducing the history of the presence of the «Gypsies» in Europe to a succession of repressive acts and negative topos – reactivated at every new political juncture – would mean, in fact, not taking into account the capacity for civilisation on the part of the Romani people, the relationships they forge with the rest of society and their being part of socio-economic contexts that are not only, and not always, marginal. Above all, the six contributions to this special issue show how an ethnographic approach to working with archival

bringliches Bild der Vergangenheit, das mit jeder Gegenwart zu verschwinden droht, die sich nicht als in ihm gemeint erkannte» (Walter Benjamin, [1940] 2010).

sources is able to bring to light complex, local relational networks, in which those who are defined as «Gypsies» had manifold social positions within different European societies.

To understand the contributions in this special issue, it is vital to keep in mind that we are located in Europe, looking into European archives with an ethnographically informed perspective that is not necessarily in line with dominant European understandings of time and history. In many European societies, archives embody the cultural, political and historical self-awareness of regions and states. We are working in a context where archives naturally belong to local, regional, national and supra-national identity making, and are central for the exercising of political power as well as for defining community identities (YALE 2015). However, archives and archiving have long been at the centre of a complex debate that has highlighted their multiple meanings (repositories, sources, act of conserving versus deleting traces), their pervasiveness (as a sign and product of the functioning of the modern state), but also their becoming a place and way of staking a claim for those groups and communities that have been placed on the margins of, and whose voices have been excluded from, archiving (CARTER 2006). Within this it is important to not forget «the conscious or unconscious choice (determined by social and cultural factors) to consider something worth archiving» (KETELAAR 2001: 133). In this sense, archival sources are overloaded with cultural and political meanings and consequences. Indeed, we are dealing with an institution and a practice – the archives and archiving – which are experiencing a deconstruction by archivists themselves. Inspired by anthropologists, sociologists and philosophers, they have started to consider «looking beyond – and questioning – its boundaries, in new perspectives seeing with the archive... trying to read its tacit narratives of power and knowledge» (*ibid.*: 132).

The peculiarity of our work has to be seen in this specific combination of European archival sources, and Romanì ethnographies with their inherently diverging understandings of time and history. Roma and Sinti as part of European societies today are not included in dominant Eu-

ropean temporal frameworks (RAPPAPORT 1994), neither with their own temporal frameworks nor with their own histories. Since at least the 19th century – it is not clear if this was true earlier – Romanì conceptions of time and history have become marginal and, as such, have been suppressed. Anthropological research on Romanì temporal frameworks, practices of remembering and aide-mémoires shows how these differ from dominant European temporal frameworks and understandings of history. However, within Romanì experiences it is important to distinguish, as with regional histories in time and space (CLEMENTI 2019), between different conceptions of time, practices of remembering, and meanings of present, past and history. One reason for the delayed anthropological interest in archival sources might be found in anthropological descriptions of Romanì indifference about their own past (STEWART 1997; GAY Y BLASCO 2001). Michael Stewart describes the indifference to the past of the Roma in Harangos, and Paloma Gay y Blasco (2001) entitles an article «we don't know our descent», reporting the Gitano's claim that they are people who do not know their historical background.

While Alaina Lemon worked with the archival record of a Lovari Rom's trial and the interpretation of it by his descendants, to whom she read the material (LEMON 2000) in a later work, Michael Stewart (2004) analyses Hungarian-Roma «remembering without commemoration», advocating a culturally attuned psychology, calling for the greater integration of psychological and anthropological work. This contribution is an important step forward. The author believes that seeing memory as a socially distributed function in which the role of «implicit» memories, embedded in dealings with others, is significant. Yet even if we agree with Carter that «archival silences, however they occur, have a potentially disastrous impact on the marginalized groups» (CARTER 2006: 220), as anthropologists we can also put forward the ethnographic experience that silence as a cultural practice can become a form of renitence, refusing to grant the archive the power it pretends to wield.

2. Romanì presence in archival and written sources

The two authors of this introduction have worked on practices of memory and archival sources with two different Sinti family networks in Italy. Elisabeth Tauber (2014 [2006]) has followed Sinti memories of movement and staying, tracing their narratives in the archives and reconnecting them to a broader discussion on how Sinti refer to and simultaneously relativize archival sources and the power of the written word, thus retaining control of their memory and mnemonic practices. Paola Trevisan (2005; 2008; 2009) has observed the multiple uses of writing among the Sinti of Emilia and was directly involved in the decision to write a book that would collect their life stories. The book was aimed at both a *gaḡe*³ and Sinto audience, and maintained a sense of respect – in the preservation of the memory of their dead – even in the transition to the written form.

The debate on the use of writing within Romanì communities (WILLIAMS 1998; TREVISAN 2008; POUYETO 2011) is extended here, displaying multiple ways to look at archival sources about «Gypsies» ethnographically. The connection between Romanì peoples, memory and forms of writing (institutional writing, documents in which Roma and Sinti turn to institutions and autobiographical texts) emerges in a more or less explicit manner in all the articles, as well as the «asymmetry of writing» (ASSÉO, 2019: 112) that even today characterizes their relationship with the majority of society (the world of the *gaḡe*).

This special issue, as a whole, follows a research path that tries to connect the presence of the Roma and Sinti with their experience of the world, within specific socio-economic contexts that were continuously modified by often dramatic geopolitical events that took place during the last part of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. The relationships between the part of the population identified as «Gypsy», institutions and the multiple components of European societies are reconstructed by interweaving archival documents, stories, family memories and testimonies collected by ethnog-

raphers and, more rarely, the autobiographical writings of Roma and Sinti (one of which we publish here for the first time). Linking such different sources does not mean merely reporting significant matches, disconnections, gaps or inconsistencies, but also aiming for an account based on a detailed analysis which identifies the conditions and regimes under which they were produced (HARTOG 2003; ASSÉO 2019).

Many of the essays collected in this special issue show how doing archival research on «Gypsies» means having to approach one's research object gradually, using approximation, often having to question their absence. In European archives, the category of «Gypsy» is by no means self-evident and varies not only over time but also in the same context according to the institutions under consideration. Taking into account the production and transformation of categories in local contexts in order to relate them to wider issues, both nationally and supra-nationally, is undoubtedly the first step towards an ethnography of archival sources. The role of conventions in, and of, archives assumes what must be considered secret, concerns the security of the state and what it means to be a «Gypsy» for a specific state institution. It is the functioning of the archive itself that allows the state to exercise power and it is in this sense that we can talk of ethnography of the archives (STOLER 2002). If starting an archive search using the category «Gypsy» is one possibility, the other is to start with the names of Roma and Sinti families whom we want to find traces of in the archives. Above all, it is by linking the results of the two research paths that we have a good chance of understanding both the process of categorization itself and the effects of institutional action on individual family networks.

Researchers taking this approach to the life experience of the Roma and Sinti are guided through the archive documents by both their fieldwork and familiarity with theoretical and research questions typical of the ethnographic literature on the Romanì worlds. Most of the contributions in this special issue deal with data documented and archived by the police and other state institutions. Once traces have been

³ *Gaḡo* (masc.), *gaḡi* (fem.), *gaḡe* (plur.) refers to non-gypsies.

found, sources defined and historical contexts analyzed, ethnographic reading between and through the lines lets us break through the reproduction of categories. As such, archives are a fascinating entities which potentially bear as many diverse ethnographic anecdotes and thick descriptions as long-term fieldwork. All the contributions here have a strong ethnographic-anthropological stance on how Roma and Sinti created local relationships and networks at a specific time and place.

The ethnographic analysis of the archival data amends, corrects and resists what Derrida had diagnosed as the archival production of an event (DERRIDA 1995). The archives of a family, a diary or police documentation are shown to be sources of ethnographic research and the anthropological analysis of present and past practices and relationships. This new historical anthropological approach to the Romani presence in Europe allows us to break through the silence of war crimes, to examine local economies and networks of which Roma and Sinti were integral members, to illuminate the dynamics of elite discourses and the practices of local neighborhoods, and to contextualize the writing of a diary.

We might also say that the scholars who have contributed to this special issue are likewise – and perhaps above all – engaged with the present, in that they try to look at the archival sources as a place where they can develop their thinking on the way in which Roma and Sinti are, to all intents and purposes, part of European history. Thus, delineating a historical anthropology of the Roma and the Sinti means analyzing the images that Europe has produced of «Gypsies» and, taking an anthropological perspective, relating them to the lives of the individual women and men whose traces are present in the archives of institutions. The ethnographic perspective adopted by the authors does not always mean that they have carried out research in the field, but rather that they have made their own «epistemological break», as described by Oliver de Sardan: this occurs when researchers distrust their own «common sense» and have access to that of the groups under study (DE SARDAN 2009: 59).

3. Concluding remarks

For the second time, *La Ricerca Folklorica* has published a special issue dedicated to the Roma and Sinti of Europe, comprising six essays with an afterword by Eve Rosenhaft. Here, anthropology and history are intertwined, along with institutional archives, ego documents and ethnography. We believe that this is one of the points that has validated our work as curators ever since we organized the conference «On Categories and Boundaries: Intersections in the History and Ethnography of Europe's Sinti and Rome (19th-21st Centuries)» at the Free University of Bolzano in June 2017. Since then, our intention has been to enable comparison of the research paths that have allowed each of us to meet Roma and Sinti both in the archive sources and in everyday life, to open new avenues of research that give Roma and Sinti back to the history of Europe, and vice versa.

About eighteen years have passed since Leonardo Piasere (1991: 7-16) presented the special issue he edited for *La Ricerca Folklorica* entitled «Europa zingara», analysing the reasons why Roma and Sinti had not aroused the interest of many professional anthropologists⁴. «Gypsies» were considered a dislocated presence in a Europe where they were often represented as «sauvage at home» and whose geographical and genealogical position presented them as «a perfect taxonomic anomaly» (*ibid.*).

In the following decade, the seminars conducted by Henriette Asséo⁵ and Leonardo Piasere⁶ were attended by anthropologists and historians who used them to discuss their research questions from different disciplinary approaches. The possibility of reconstructing the presence of the «Gypsies» in specific geopolitical contexts, with the aim of documenting both their territorial ties and their forms of circulation, marks an important change in the historiography of Romani groups (FASSANELLI 2011; ASSÉO & ARESU 2014; SUTRE 2014; ABOUT & BORDIGONI, 2018; ARESU 2019). This, in turn, has stimulated an ethnography of and in the archives of which the first results are presented here.

This change of perspective has allowed us to not only focus on the contrast between Ro-

⁴ As Piasere points out, it was only in the 1980s that research conducted using the participatory observation method with Roma and Sinti was published, in particular Judith Okeley (1983) on English Gypsies, Leonardo Piasere (1985) on Slovenian-Croatian Roma in Italy, Patrick Williams on the Kalderash in Paris (1984) and then on the Manuš of the Massif Central (1993); Michael Stewart on a group of Hungarian Roma (1997).

⁵ Between 2003 and 2012 the seminar was titled: «Histoire des minorités migrantes en Europe de l'ancien régime a nos jours: histoire des tsiganes d'Europe»; from 2013 it was led by Il-sen About with the title: «Approches interdisciplinaires des sociétés romani/tsiganes», both of them were held at the École de Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris.

⁶ Starting in 2002, the «Seminaro avanzato di Studi Rom» was held at the University of Florence and – after 2004 – at the University of Verona (Italy).

manì people and *gaḡe*, but also to understand their differing ways of seeing the world and the social and economic interconnections that have characterised their coexistence in different historical periods. A historical anthropology of the worlds of the Roma and Sinti allows us to look in another way at a «diversity» – often made absolute (Asséo 2019; 2016) – which has the effect of making their “otherness” manifest within a European context.

This theme also occurs in the work of Eve Rosenhaft on the relationship between a German photographer and the German Sinti families he met during the 1930s:

In the absence of memoir literature, and in a situation in which the oral tradition has been interrupted by the experience of the Holocaust... it is difficult to reconstruct how Sinti and Roma lived their lives in the stretches of normality between major persecutions and policy initiatives. Similarly, it is difficult to access the forms and structures of interaction between non-Romanies and Romanies, although we know that these must have been sustained and complex (2004: 182)⁷.

With this special issue, we want to help overcoming the methodological challenge described by Rosenhaft by navigating the archival documentation ethnographically, giving a reconstruction of the history of the presence of the Roma and Sinti, focusing on their life experiences and memories even in the presence of a limited number of ego documents.

The relationship between archive sources, memories and ethnographies is present in all the essays that make up this special issue. In particular in the works of Volha Bartash, Cătălina Tesăr and Petre Matei, and Elisabeth Tauber, the resonances, divergences and silences between the memories of the Roma and Sinti and the archival documentation are interpreted on the basis of prolonged experience in the field.

Volha Bartash clearly understands her Romanì informants' encouragement to go to archives as being based on deep-rooted personal and community motivations. As an ethnographer, she brings together Soviet sources, which silenced the Roma memory of the Nazi gen-

ocide in the Belarusian-Lithuanian border region, with Roma memory of the genocide. While first- and second-generation genocide survivors identify twenty mass killing sites, Soviet sources only give information on a third of them. Her contribution provides evidence of how an ethnographic method has the potential to recognize, read and even fill archival silences.

Cătălina Tesăr and Petre Matei combine autobiographical memory with archival material (mainly police documentation) from a span of seventy years (1920 to 1990) in south-eastern Romania, tracking 'old Puiu's' memory as recorded by Cătălina Tesăr. This permits them to bring to light historical mobility and settlement, participation in and refraining from the mainstream economy, and the relationship between the Roma with the state. The authors' methodological interplay between oral history and archival material allows them to highlight the articulation of the routes of mobility and modalities of work in south-eastern Romania among a network of Roma families and their experience of deportation to Transnistria.

The inclusion in this special issue of the diary of the Sinto Juki Herzembergher has, instead, allowed Bianca Pastori and Chiara Tribulato to analyze autobiographical writing both with regard to the relationship between ego documents and history, and to a supposed disinterest of Romanì groups in the detailed and written reconstruction of their family memories. The work of the two authors also shows how, in Juki's case, the choice to write down one's own family memories is closely related to the appropriation of writing outside the school environment.

Elisabeth Tauber works with archival data written by the Austro-Hungarian police in the crownland of Tyrol, combining them with Sinti memories of their close relationship with mountain farmers. The detailed police account of the arrest of a Sinti woman allows her to trace the conflictual relationship between the state and «Gypsy» communities in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, as well as the memory of present-day Sinti families of their intimate relationships between their ancestors and local farmers. The documents of the Austro-Hungarian police

⁷ In her historical work on photography and «Gypsies» Eve Rosenhaft (2004; 2008) has kept the focus on Romanì subjectivity and Romanì agency, avoiding victimizing Romanì people, instead preferring to look into the complex relationship between Sinti and Germans.

present evidence, via the testimonies of farmers, of the Sinti presence in, and belonging to, the local rural context as being something given.

In Tauber's case, it was the police documents that brought forth the links between Sinti and Tyrolean farmers; in Jennifer Illuzzi's work, however, the judicial archives allow her to link with the working class in post-unification Piedmont. Based on extensive archival documentation, the author shows how Roma and Sinti were part of the world of ordinary people with whom they shared, more or less harmoniously, economic niches and survival strategies. The socio-economic changes at the beginning of the twentieth century and the publication of texts describing «Gypsies» in «primitivist» terms, had a significant weight in substantiating their position as outsiders, which, largely supported by the press of the time, has gradually become predominant.

The image of «Gypsies» as foreign to Italian society took on new meanings just after the First World War, which saw the geography of Europe redefined on the basis of new national borders. Paola Trevisan tackles the construction of the estrangement of the «Gypsies» between the two world wars by linking the archival collections on citizenship in Venezia Giulia with the ethnographic literature on the Roma and Sinti who lived in that area. The way in which they were denied access to Italian citizenship was analysed by showing how the imagery of «Gypsies» helped the Italian authorities justify positions and decisions that made their nationality indeterminate.

If the extent to which the presence of the «Gypsies» is fully inscribed within the histories and societies of some of the most diverse territories of Europe emerges with clarity from all the articles, it is because the researchers have reconstructed names, places and families within a complex and polyphonic narrative of synchronic ethnographic research, the oral memories of the Roma and Sinti and archival sources. Whether they were administrative, police, special-investigation-commission or judicial archives, the researchers interrogated them to look for traces of Romani family networks, thinking of them as producers of meaning within specif-

ic contexts. It seems to us, therefore, that it is possible to claim that an ethnographic approach to archival documentation creates space for lives and memories of subjects often not recognized as part of those events that Europe considers its history.

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SOMMARIO

Archivio ed etnografia: l'esempio dei Rom e dei Sinti d'Europa (XIX-XX sec.): un'introduzione, di Elisabeth Tauber e Paola Trevisan

Con questa introduzione abbiamo voluto proporre alcune riflessioni teoriche e metodologiche in grado di accompagnare la lettura dei sei saggi e della postfazione di cui si compone questo numero speciale de *La Ricerca Folklorica*. I lavori che qui presentiamo si interrogano sulla complessa relazione fra ricerca etnografica e archivi, che rende possibile far emergere la presenza dei Rom e dei Sinti nella storia d'Europa in modo innovativo rispetto alla letteratura preesistente, richiamando l'attenzione sulle potenzialità di questo nuovo approccio metodologico. Tutte le autrici e gli autori di questa raccolta si sono confrontati con nodi

tematici che hanno nella scrittura – con la molteplicità delle sue funzioni e dei suoi contesti d'uso – uno degli aspetti fondanti della storia europea.

Per quanto riguarda l'archivio e l'archiviazione, essi sono già da tempo al centro di un complesso dibattito che ne ha messo in evidenza i molteplici significati (deposito, fonte scritta, atto del conservare *versus* cancellare tracce) e la pervasività (in quanto segno e prodotto del funzionamento dello Stato moderno), ma anche il diventare strumento di rivendicazione per quei gruppi e comunità che sono stati posti ai margini – e le cui voci sono state escluse – dall'archiviazione. Proprio partendo dalle riflessioni sull'etnografia degli e negli archivi discusse, in particolare, da autori come Comaroff & Comaroff (1992), Stoler (2002) e Burton (2005), è stato possibile ripercorrere le tracce di vicende che riguardavano Rom e Sinti anche al di là delle intenzioni dell'istituzione archiviante e in stretta relazione con la letteratura etnografica; in questo modo la stessa interpretazione della documentazione d'archivio ha permesso di riaprire alcuni nodi fondamentali della ricerca antropologica e storica sui gruppi Romani.

Tanto l'analisi dei processi di categorizzazione e di archiviazione, quanto la possibilità di usare le fonti archivistiche per far emergere eventi, gesti e parole in grado di farci comprendere come i Rom e i Sinti abbiano dato senso al loro essere nel mondo, hanno continuamente messo in relazione le intenzioni dell'istituzione archiviante con lo sguardo etnografico. In questo modo gli articoli sono in grado di proporre un quadro molto più complesso delle reti familiari Romani presenti in Europa e aprono alla possibilità di un'antropologia storica che superi tanto visioni dicotomiche ed essenzializzanti, quanto decostruzioni artificiose che non tengono conto delle condizioni di produzione delle fonti stesse (ASSÉO 2019).

Questa scelta metodologica mette a fuoco la relazione fra il processo di categorizzazione nel suo divenire e la vita delle persone coinvolte, riflettendo, infine, sui modi in cui il processo di archiviazione renda possibile ricostruire la presenza dei Rom e dei Sinti nei singoli contesti nazionali o regionali o, al contrario, ne abbia cancellato le tracce. In entrambi i casi l'etnografia – come metodo di ricerca e come prodotto del lavoro sul campo – fornisce gli strumenti per comprendere i meccanismi di produzione di un immaginario sugli «zingari» che ha fortemente determinato lo spazio in cui essi sono stati relegati tra il XIX e il XX secolo. In molti casi le fonti archivistiche mostrano la complessità delle relazioni tra reti familiari Romani e mondo popolare che, in determinati momenti storici, si trovarono a condividere spazi di vita

e attività economiche. Nello stesso tempo emergono anche i processi di distanziamento dei Rom e dei Sinti dalla restante popolazione, proprio grazie alla messa in opera di categorizzazioni che producono quella «diversità» che intendono dimostrare.

Lo spazio occupato dalla scrittura e dall'archiviazione è uno degli aspetti della storia europea che ha permesso la messa a distanza dei Rom e dei Sinti i quali, d'altro canto, hanno continuamente cercato di rinegoziare la loro presenza all'interno degli Stati nazione in modi differenti, recentemente anche utilizzando la scrittura autobiografica. Il rapporto fra memorie, usi della scrittura, etnografie e archivi è l'altro nodo tematico affrontato in molti dei saggi che qui presentiamo. Sempre più spesso gli etnologi si rivolgono alle fonti archivistiche dopo aver raccolto le memorie dei

Rom e dei Sinti, con l'intento di indagarne discordanze e risposdenze, e lo stesso viene fatto con i pochi ego documenti da essi prodotti. Le riflessioni sui punti di contatto, i vuoti o le incongruenze fra memorie e fonti scritte hanno permesso di evidenziare sia i meccanismi di potere che sottendono l'archiviazione e il funzionamento stesso dell'archivio, sia la capacità dei Rom e dei Sinti di mantenere un legame con il proprio passato non mediato e non dipendente dalla scrittura istituzionale.

Infine, nonostante la grande diversità di fonti scritte, gruppi Romani e realtà nazionali prese in considerazione, emerge chiaramente come l'interconnessione fra etnografia e fonti archivistiche permetta di restituire i Rom e i Sinti alla storia d'Europa e viceversa.

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