Austrian “Gypsies” in the Italian archives Historical ethnography on multiple border crossings at the beginning of the twentieth century

Paola Trevisan

Abstract: The archival documents I work with concern Sinti (“Gypsy”) families belonging to the Austrian Empire, stopped by the Italian authorities between 1908 and 1912. By following Anna Laura Stoler’s proposition, I read the police records through an ethnographic lens, connecting the anti-Gypsy policy of both states with the strategies adopted by the Sinti families to inhabit and/or cross borders. Thus, the border becomes the space where the sovereignty of the state came into play and where the categories of “citizen” and “foreigner” become explicit through the daily controls on those who attempt to cross. Intertwining research in the archives with anthropological literature and fieldwork, this article presents a historical ethnography of those Sinti families who experienced the borders as “Gypsies,” a category that calls for critical analysis because it goes beyond the foreigner/citizen dichotomy.

Keywords: anti-Gypsy policies, archives, Austrian-Italian border, historical ethnography, Sinti and Roma

Despite the fact that Sinti and Roma are firmly rooted into the European environment (Asséo 1994; Piasere 2004), only recently has a new historiographic approach demonstrated the possibility of documenting both territorial ties and forms of circulation in specific geopolitical contexts (About 2018; About and Bordigoni 2018; Aresu 2019; Asséo and Aresu 2014; Sutre 2017). It has, therefore, been possible to go beyond generic reconstructions of the history of “Gypsies,”¹ who were assumed to have an internal homogeneity and, at the same time, had an innate “otherness” within European society (Asséo

2019). This changing of the paradigm (About and Bordigoni 2018: 19) proceeded in parallel with an increasing interest of anthropologists in archival sources—interrogated from an ethnographic perspective—which have shown themselves to be indispensable for the historical anthropology of the Romani worlds (Tauber and Trevisan, 2019: 3–12). The current work is part of this methodological and epistemological renewal, putting questions of how to analyze the persistence of Romani families through time in the foreground. Based on this premise, it is necessary to ask ourselves what traces have been

left in the archives by people who are identified as “Gypsies” by state institutions and how to interpret them from an ethnographic perspective.

My proposal intends to verify whether and how it is possible to read archival documents regarding “Gypsies” giving substance to a historical anthropology of Sinti² networks starting from a specific territory, such as the Austrian-Italian border at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a border space *par excellence*, located between Italian- and German-speaking areas, crossed—from the end of the sixteenth century—by groups of “Gypsies” who traveled along a north-south axis (Iori 2015). As we learn from the ethnographic research of anthropologist Elisabeth Tauber (2014), the last arrival of Sinti families in South Tyrol dates from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their descendants still live in the same region. The current research aims to observe the border between the Kingdom of Italy and the Habsburg Tyrol from the Sinti families’ point of view, connecting a normative condition that calls for critical interrogation with the experiences they had with the state apparatus (such as bureaucracy and police control systems).

My hypothesis is that an historical anthropology of Romani networks must be one that correlates questions arising from field work with archival documentation, as proposed by anthropologists John and Jean Comaroff (1992: 3–48). One aim of this work is to understand how categorization, social practices, and daily interaction have given rise to one of the constructions of otherness that have accompanied the history of Europe until now: that of the “Gypsies.” An ethnographic approach to archival documents regarding Sinti and Roma can show how individuals or groups—in specific local contexts and at particular historical moments—had to deal with the category of “Gypsy” and which dynamic of resistance or adaption emerged. A second aim is to investigate how events at a local level can force institutions to reveal strategies, or bring forth contradictions, that otherwise remain hidden. Recently, more attention has been paid to this aspect of the actions of institutions,

through research into migration and the policies of control of the nation-state (Fassin 2011; Kalir and Schendel 2017).

Following the methodology proposed by Ann Laura Stoler (2002), archives can become a place of ethnographic investigation into the state, and into the taxonomies of which it makes use. As we will see, the Sinti families who lived between Austria and the Kingdom of Italy often found themselves caught in a paradox, in which both states tried to avoid considering them as part of a nation, stating that, as they were itinerant, it was impossible to prove to what nation they belonged. For this reason, the lives of borderland Sinti networks can be reconstructed only with a comprehensive reading of the relation between “Gypsies” and the nation-state by means of an understanding of their negotiation strategies and mobility. The third aim is, therefore, to propose an ethnographic reading of the archival documentation that is able to leave space for the ways in which Sinti families give a meaning to their daily actions in a borderland.

From ethnography to archives and vice versa: The case of Sinti and Roma in Europe

The relationship between “Gypsies” and the state is a complex phenomenon, the salient characteristics of which have been highlighted by historian Henriette Asséo:

There are peoples that reveal the state in its essence, not because they are at the margin of the state but because they ensure transparent relationships between those who are at the center and those at the periphery. Such peoples or groups do not have a hegemonic vocation, without being a subaltern group. They are not passive elements of a history of the state that passes through them. They give impulse to a process through their own existence, and by enduring. The state remembers their presence at particular historical mo-

ments, and makes use of them in ways that go beyond the passing of laws. On the other hand, these people who resist³ [...] are those, according to whom, the historical conscience consist in the capacity to permanently reformulate all the elements of contact between themselves and others to devise a policy of survival. (1989: 124)⁴

It is interesting to note that a correspondence can be found in ethnographic evidence with the heuristic approach of Asséo. Without going into detail, I would like to outline some common aspects of different Romani groups within Europe. Leonardo Piasere (1985: 157–184, 2004: 69–73) stresses the fact that they have always inhabited territories already occupied by non-Gypsies (*gagé*)⁵; they live literally immersed in the *gagé* world from whom it is necessary to distance themselves, both physically and symbolically by constantly reinterpreting the traits that distinguish them from others. Very closely tied to immersion is dispersion,⁶ which places before the family networks of Sinti and Roma the perennial problem of having to maintain family ties even when it is not possible to share the same territory. Finally, Patrick Williams (2011: 9–31) stresses the perception of the “Gypsies” within most European states takes the form of the “illegitimacy” of their presence: “Gypsies” are “intruders” when compared to the supposedly “legitimate” inhabitants of the territory in question. It is a complex phenomenon that, with the enlargement to the east of the EU, has drawn the attention of many researchers (Stewart 2012; Van Baar 2014). However, if this is today the common perception of European society regarding Sinti and Roma, then ethnographic research highlights the sense of belonging of Romani groups to the territory in which they live (Becchelloni 2009; Oliveira 2012; Tauber 2014; Trevisan 2008), while archival research has allowed us to rebuild their network of relationships in the *ancien régime* (Aresu 2019; Fassanelli 2011) and during the course of the twentieth century (Illuzzi, 2019: 75–88; Pontandolfo 2013; Tauber 2014, 2019: 61–74).

The history of Romani groups in Europe should not, therefore, be limited to the analysis of anti-Gypsy policies and the recent forms taken by anti-Gypsy sentiment but, rather, should ask new research questions that are able to reinsert Sinti and Roma back into the history of Europe, and vice versa. As shown by Piasere (1985: 20–25), Sinti and Roma have often lived along borders, places that could offer better chances to resist anti-Gypsy policies and, at the same time, provided diverse economic opportunities. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the border areas between the Kingdom of Italy and the Habsburg Monarchy had a series of characteristics that made them an ideal place from which to observe how the state and “Gypsies” confronted each other. It seems to be a space of discontinuity between different state entities, where categories of citizens and foreigners become explicit through the daily controls on those who attempt to cross. The crossing of borders becomes, from our perspective, the observation point for the rhetorical and practical policies used by institutions concerning the “Gypsies” and, at the same time, the strategies adopted by Sinti and Roma to inhabit or cross these borders. Still, we need to ask ourselves if these dynamics can be discerned in the archival documents. Having seen the Sinti’s difficult relationship with writing or its limited use (Trevisan 2008; Williams 1998), how can we understand the reactions, choices, and dynamics of resistance adopted by the family networks over time? When and how is it possible to reconstruct the agency of the Sinti by intertwining the archival documents with the ethnographic knowledge coming from the fieldwork?

An ethnographic reading of archives means correlating the attempts (or failure) of the administration to make the presence of the Sinti in a border region “legible” (Scott 1998), with everything that the latter could do to resist the pressures of both states. The first step must be an attempt to reconstruct the everyday face-to-face meetings between the Sinti and those within the territory who represented institutions (frontier guards, carabinieri, mayors, chiefs of police and

their Austrian counterparts). The second is to use ethnographic knowledge in a more complex way bearing in mind what Comaroff and Comaroff write: “Ethnography is a historically situated mode of understanding historically situated contexts, each with its own perhaps radically different kind of subjects and subjectivism, objects and objectives” (1992: 9–10). These questions have a resonance with the discussion of Brian Axel on what historical anthropology is today, starting from the different attempts at dialogue that have been an integral part of the relationship between anthropology and history since the 1950s. According to Axel (2002: 1–44), historical anthropology should open up new routes for research by exploring the epistemological limits of both disciplines and through critical reflection on the role of archives and ethnography.

Caravans of Austrian “Gypsies” in the Kingdom of Italy (1907–1912)

Starting from Foucault’s (1972 [2002]: 79–134) analysis, Stoler (2002) investigates the archive as a collection of technologies that reinforce and support the state, creating diverse channels of communication that allow the traceability of documents according to complex, codified systems. The role of conventions in, and of, archives presupposes what must be considered secret, and concerns the security of the state and what it means to be an “undesirable alien” who is dangerous to public order. 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 an ethnography of the archives. In the Central Archive of the State in Rome, few collections indicate the category of “Gypsy” on the file. However, going through the inventory of the Administration of Public Security, nine boxes labeled “Gypsies”⁷ jump out at you. They are large, with folders ordered by year and surname: this was an unexpected stroke of luck for a researcher who normally must confront the invisibility of “Gypsies” in the post-unification Italian archives.

The boxes in question form part of the series of the Judicial Police division and deal exclusively with “foreign Gypsies,” a category whose distinguishing characteristics were analyzed by Jennifer Illuzzi (2014) and Paola Trevisan (2017). That category was created in 1907 as a section of the category “Foreigners, Extraditions, Expulsions.” But why, during this period, did the Ministry of the Interior consider it necessary to establish a new category that would distinguish foreign “Gypsies” from other foreigners?

It is interesting to note that from the beginning of the twentieth century, the process of categorizing “Gypsies” was carried out not only by Italy but by almost all European states (About 2009, 2014; Cottaar et al. 1992). The application of legislative, administrative and policing measures to control, identify and register “Gypsies” reveals a preoccupation of nation-states that cannot be explained by the sheer numbers of Sinti and Roma, or by any claims of nationality on their part. In the eyes of the European states, the possibility that “Gypsies” could fully belong to a nation—any nation—was an oxymoron, while the criminalizing of itinerancy was used to treat them differently within each state. Some states thought it necessary to discuss the “Gypsy” problem in international conferences organized on an ad hoc basis, something that has been reconstructed by Ilse About (2009, 2017) and Illuzzi (2014). Beginning with unification, Italy issued a series of administrative circulars exclusively concerned with “foreign Gypsies,” described as “true vagrants” to be sent back over the border, or to be expelled if they had already crossed the frontier. Even if they owned valid travel documents, the category of “foreign Gypsy” would fall into that of “undesirable aliens”—in other words, vagrants (Trevisan 2017: 345–347). The latter was a figure loaded with negative meaning who faced a double level of repression, both penal and on the part of the police. Not even the possession of a passport would allow “Gypsies” to escape being considered “undesirable aliens.”

The establishing of this new category was closely linked to the exponential increase in cir-

culars about the same subject (“foreign Gypsies”) at beginning of the twentieth century, because of a series of contributory causes, among which was the spread of a cholera epidemic in Italy (Illuzzi 2014). If the fear of the “Gypsy” who spread disease was well attested in the Italian press of that time, then it loses its coherence the more one reads the dozens of documents that deal with this topic. In what are extensive files, the information about the health conditions of the people who were stopped covers only a few pages, if not only a few lines. In effect, none of the dozens of caravans that were stopped and underwent sanitary controls were found to be carrying any contagious diseases. A thorough reading of the files makes it evident that the fundamental preoccupation of the Italian authorities was, more than the spread of an epidemic, to discover how so many “foreign Gypsies” had entered the kingdom despite the continuous reiteration of circulars. During the interviews, information was compiled on the “Gypsies” entry and stay in the kingdom, on previous expulsions, on means of support and their willingness to be repatriated.

The statements were then sent to the head of the police in Rome, who—in the period under consideration here—was Francesco Leonardi.⁸ What is apparent from the archival documents is that Leonardi himself was the one to weigh the possible “options” for removing the “Gypsies” from the kingdom. The first step was always to verify the nationality of the “Gypsies” who were stopped, in order to receive confirmation of this from the country they claimed to belong to. If the Sinti and Roma did not have valid documents, then the verification of their alleged nationality could become a thorny issue. For the Ministry of the Interior, this identification was essential to decide how to remove them from the kingdom. Among the dozens of caravans of “foreign Gypsies” for which there is evidence in the Central Archive of the State, I chose to work on those that referred to Habsburg South Tyrol and Trentino, opening a window onto the lives of the Adelsburg, Herzemberg, Helt, and Gabrielli families. The circumstances of these Aus-

trian Sinti families are of particular interest for our research. They were family networks that repeatedly crossed the Italian-Austrian border, and were able to remain in Italy for prolonged periods, even if the increasing number of regulations sought to impede this. If, in the Austrian sources, they appear to have been persecuted for being poor families moving between districts of Habsburg Austria without documents (Tauber, 2019: 61–74), then in the Italian ones, they become a matter of dispute between the two states.

Their presumed nationality would be the hub around which different strategies and tactics took shape and that developed on the border between the Kingdom of Italy and the Habsburg Monarchy. Borders that these Sinti families could, and would like to have, cross(ed) gave rise to discussions and deceptions between the Italian and Austrian authorities. At certain points, it seems as though you are witnessing a chess game in which the victor is the one who does not admit the “Gypsies” into their own territory. On the other hand, the Sinti knew how to present their personal identities in order to continue to cross borders despite various administrative measures that embodied the anti-Gypsy policies of both states. The crossing of borders had differing outcomes depending on the ability of the Sinti families to negotiate their position and/or presence in the Italian kingdom as “undesirable aliens.”

How the Adelsburgs continued to cross the border

In the archival material labeled “foreign Gypsies,” there are two files that collect documentation on Austrian Sinti. One deals with the Adelsburg-Gabrielli family, while the other mentions several members of the Herzembergs family network. Even though they refer to a limited number of families, the archival data allow us to reconstruct in detail the micro-interactions that took place on the border between Italy and Austria. The first family whose life we will follow through the Italian archives is that of the Adelsburgs.⁹ The

file centers on the figure of Lodovico Adelsburg, son of Barbara Adelsburg, an Austrian subject born in 1876 in Kremsmünster (Upper Austria). His grandchildren and great grandchildren still live in Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol,¹⁰ where Lodovico is buried in a cemetery in the province of Bolzano. The same family networks we encounter in the Italian archives at the beginning of the twentieth century have been described in the ethnography of Tauber (2014). The death register of Lana (Bolzano) tells us Lodovico Adelsburg was killed on 25 September 1925 by a guardian of the vineyards (*Saltner*) in self-defense. In contrast, family members say he was killed because he, after drinking in a tavern, fell asleep under the vines, and this was considered sufficient reason to kill a “Gypsy” (Tauber 2014: 60–71).

The first documents that mention him in the Central Archive of the State date from September 1908, when he was expelled by the Prefect of Vicenza (Italy) and handed over to the Austrian authorities on the border at Ala. He reentered the kingdom many times and was stopped, sometimes on his own and sometimes with his caravan.¹¹ For Lodovico, going back and forth over the border, surreptitiously evading the legislation of the kingdom, was not difficult, as he knew how to judge the individual circumstances of the crossings. The fact that he owned a passport—a rarity among the Austrian Sinti in Italy—allowed him more freedom of movement and gave him the ability to negotiate with both state’s authorities.

So, when he, 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 traveling 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.

The misdelivery of the postcard to the Italian rather than Austrian border post allows us to investigate, in a somewhat unique way, issues important for the research being carried out here. This incident illuminates how, first, the “Gypsies” were a matter of contention between the Italian and Austrian border guards, and therefore between the two states. In addition, it highlights the ability of the Adelsburgs to use this tension to their own advantage—coming to an agreement first with one and then the other side—in order to continue to travel despite the restriction of the border. Lodovico, although under the jurisdiction of Kremsmünster, had been living for many years between South Tyrol, Trentino, and northern Italy. The events in which he was the main actor show that he knew the territory very well, undoubtedly spoke Italian, and could rely on the connivance of the Austrian border guards when seeking entry to Italy, but knew how to ally himself with the Italian authorities when his caravan had to re-enter Austria without documents, as happened just two months later. Possession of an Austrian passport did not actually allow Lodovico to stay regularly in Italy, but permitted the Italian authorities to return him to Austria without too much difficulty. The same passport, therefore, functioned in situations that were seemingly

contradictory: it enabled the holder to leave and reenter the Austrian Empire, but not to enter and stay in Italy.

In this way, a virtual space was created between the two borders, where the Adelsburgs were and, at the same time, were not allowed to stay. It seems possible that they, on several occasions, could interpret to their own advantage a complex situation born out of a growing anti-Gypsy policy on the part of both states.¹² Moreover, the story of Lodovico Adelsburg allows us to add an important element to the reconstruction of the presence of Sinti in Austria and Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century. From the moment he leaves Kremsmünster, he moves within a territory, in Gais (a little village near Brüneck, in South Tyrol), in Cles and Mattarello (in Trentino), where other Sinti families, whom he and his family join sporadically, are already present and who possess *Heimatrecht*.¹³ In addition, he can rely on the support of other Sinti in Italy, something that emerges from the investigations that followed the entire family's clandestine reentering in the kingdom. His capacity to live across the borders is therefore due to not only his ability to negotiate with the police of both states but also the Sinti networks that were already present in those territories.

Expelling foreigners without documents and resources: The Herzembergs

During the same period, three different caravans of Austrian Sinti named Herzemberg were stopped in the kingdom of Italy and declared themselves to be Austrian. Some of them claimed to have been born in South Tyrol, among whom were the brothers Giacomo and Giuseppe.¹⁴ Both were stopped several times in Italy between 1909 and 1910, were imprisoned because they broke the terms of previous expulsions, and were released on condition that they were to be escorted to the Austrian border "at their own risk."¹⁵ In fact, as they did not possess any documents certifying their nationality, they could not be taken directly to the border post at Ala.

We have no idea how such a method of border crossing allowed Giacomo to pass from Italy to the Austrian Empire on other occasions: although, on 29 December 1910, Giuseppe was made to embark at Genoa on a steamer bound for Rio de Janeiro, somewhere that was not exactly on the Italian border. That the treatment reserved for Giacomo Herzemberg, an "undesirable Gypsy without documents and resources," was not an isolated case, as emerges from an overall reading of the documents of the Judicial Police. Other Sinti and Roma for whom it was not possible, or for whom there was no will, to ascertain their nationality, were deported to alien destinations and were obliged to sell all they had—including carriages and horses—in order to pay for the journey (Illuzzi 2014, 2019: 75–88).

The caravan led by the elder Genoveffa Herzemberg and Giovanna Elt (*sic*) was stopped on 24 November 1910 at Quinzano sull'Oglio, on the border between the provinces of Brescia and Cremona, in Lombardy.¹⁶ All the members of the caravan were immediately sent for sanitary controls, the results of which showed they were in a perfect state of health (this occupies very few lines in one of the many exchanges between the prefect in Brescia and the head of the police at the Ministry of Interior, Leonardi). The entire file seems to be full of other preoccupations such as the incredibly long stay in Italy of this caravan of Austrian "Gypsies" (around 10 years) and the search for a "solution" that would allow for their removal from the kingdom. Many members of the caravan claimed to have been born in Gais (Brüneck, South Tyrol), or in Carinthia, but their declarations were not corroborated by subsequent investigations carried out by the Austrian authorities, or, at least, this is what was reported to the Italians.

The only documents they possessed were permits, issued in Italy, to practice their profession as itinerant musicians playing zither and violin. These families easily obtained these permits from mayors; in fact, they spoke Italian and were not easily recognized as being foreign. As this permission should not have been granted to

foreigners, the prefect in Brescia, under pressure from Leonardi, decided to conduct an in-depth investigation to discover who had contravened the ministerial orders to prohibit the entry and stay of “foreign Gypsies.” The reconstruction of how the caravan was able to move undisturbed, carrying out their profession in public, brings to the fore the precise responsibilities of both the carabinieri of Rovato and Adro¹⁷ (who had not thoroughly overseen their territory) and the mayors of the same cities (who had issued the permits for them to practice their profession, thinking the family were Italian). At the same time, they tried to find a way to remove the caravan from Italian territory: this meant they had to examine all the alternatives, choosing the one that would have allowed them to achieve the double result of making them cross the border and, at the same time, not to cause friction with the Austrian authorities. The prefect of Brescia, Giuseppe Sorge, backed into a corner, arranged for them to be sent toward the pass of Tonale¹⁸ so that they could cross the border without being noticed (after interrogation, it seems the women of the caravan preferred to reenter Austria precisely at that point).

The women arrived there on 7 June 1910, but this attempt ended in failure because the Italian postman (who worked back and forth across the border) was on very good terms with the Austrian guards and informed them a “Gypsy” caravan was at the Italian guard post and would shortly be trying to cross. The Austrian guards moved immediately to the border, and the caravan had to retreat. The possibility of “solving” the presence of the Austrian “Gypsies” by letting them cross the border without being too conspicuous failed, due to the tip-off given by the pro-Austrian postman (who was subsequently removed from his post). The head of police then went for a second option, that of asking the Austrian authorities in Innsbruck, Klagenfurt, and Trieste to verify the identity of the Sinti. As he received no replies to his requests, Leonardi ordered they be sent to Genoa by train, put under the jurisdiction of the local chief of police there, and then placed on a steamer. On 5 February

1911, they left Ponte di Legno (in Brescia) for the port of Genoa, from where, on 26 February, they sailed for Santos (Brazil).

The files created by the Judicial Police division during the same years show that many caravans of “foreign Gypsies” were forced to embark on steamers to a variety of destinations (Turkey, Egypt, Senegal, and Brazil). Such extrajudicial practice was aimed not only at “Gypsies”: Paola Tessitori (2015) has reconstructed similar histories of Swiss, English, and Spanish citizens forced to sail for Piraeus or Alexandria because they were present in the kingdom with no means of support and documents. Once they arrived, they approached their own embassies, and protests were sent to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, if “Gypsies” were the ones removed from the Kingdom of Italy, no protests were sent to the Italian government. On 13 March 1911, a few days after the forced embarkation of the Herzemberg caravan, the Innsbruck authorities asked for further information on the members of the caravan, which would have required new interrogations. The prefect Sorge then asked Leonardi if it would be politic to inform the Austrian authorities the “Gypsies” had been sent to Brazil.

The indecision about the answer to be sent shows that how much this practice, even if organized and supported by the Ministry of Interior, was, strictly speaking, on the wrong side of the law and therefore not to be communicated to a foreign state. In effect, it was a case of the forced and unauthorized deportation of people without documents on the part of the Italian authorities, which should have been untraceable even to those directly concerned. In fact, the decree to leave the kingdom was not to be handed over as was normally done but only to be passed on vocally. The first response of the Ministry of Interior—signed by Leonardi on 23 March 1911—suggested a generic formulation that did not require further explanation: “The group is no longer in the Kingdom and therefore there is no possibility to interrogate them to clarify their identities.” The Innsbruck authorities insisted, and on 7 April, they asked for the date of exit

from the kingdom and the destination of the Herzemberg-Elt caravan. This time, Leonardi authorized the prefect to inform Innsbruck of these details. There are no documents to give an account of the reaction of the Austrians, but no further attempts were made to find out the reason for such an unusual destination for the Austrian “Gypsies.”

Why did Leonardi authorize such different answers within two weeks? Perhaps he interpreted the insistence of the Innsbruck authorities as a fear on the part of the Austrians that they had been sent back via a minor border post, without Austrian authorization (as often reported in the same file). The fact that Leonardi considered it appropriate to inform the Austrians of the direction taken by the caravan means he knew this would have reassured them. At the same time, this answer confirms something that emerges, in a less explicit manner, from other files: that the Italian authorities knew bordering countries (not only Austria) would not protest or make their consulates ask for further explanations. We do not know the fate of the Sinti women once they arrived in Brazil, but it is possible to imagine they did everything they could to return and be reunited with their families. In fact, it is quite unusual for a caravan made up of only two women with children and grandchildren, all minors, not to travel with other families. Although the Sinti parental network to which they belonged was not present at the time of the arrest, we can imagine they would soon go in search of them. Illuzzi (2014) has reconstructed the complex story of another family forcibly deported to Brazil, who managed to return to Italy: that of the Roma Levacovich. In the autobiography of Coucou Doerr (1982), the story is told of the forced deportation of his family to Brazil from the port of Genoa. We find out this family of French Sinti a few years later decided to embark on the return journey for fear that an elder, who fell ill, would be buried so far away.

The anthropological literature shows the fundamental ties between the living and the dead in these communities (Piasere 1985; Tauber 2014;

Williams [1993] 1997), links that become evident in a precise place, the cemetery, where the dead of one family rest and are looked after by the living. Even though the archival documents do not reveal anything about this, we can, thanks to ethnography, speculate as to the suffering caused by the loss of contact with both the family and with the burial place of their dead. The memories of the lives of past generations—of their ties with rural Tyrol—are still alive among Sinti families who live today in Trentino and Alto Adige/South Tyrol (Tauber 2014), and evidence of these has been found in the documents of Austrian police from the beginning of twentieth century (Tauber, 2019: 61–74). If with the Adelsburg-Gabrielli family it is possible to connect documents from the archives with the ethnographic research of Tauber, then using the same approach with the Herzembergs leads to different results, as present-day Sinti who live in Alto Adige do not remember that deportation. It is a case in which archival documents are the only evidence to retain traces of the fracturing of a group of people over a distance that could not be bridged. In the case of Romani population to explore the connections, distance, or gaps between remembered events and events archived by institutions is part of what has been defined as the ethnographic reading of archival documents (Tauber and Trevisan, 2019: 3–12).

Conclusion

In our research, the archive has become a space of ethnographic investigation into the state, into the taxonomies of which it makes use, and the foundations of its authority and exercising of this implicit power. In the case of the Italian administration at the beginning of the twentieth century, the creation of a series of documents that separated the “foreign Gypsies” from foreigners in general reveals both explicit and “hidden” intentions. Among the explicit intentions there was, of course, the classification, or making available to various levels of state administration, of documents that were produced

on “foreign Gypsies.” An ad hoc category was created outside legislative measures applicable to all other foreigners and its consequences were felt well beyond the period that came immediately before World War I. Furthermore, there was the need for the top brass of the police at the Ministry of Interior to have at their disposal a “reserved space” in which to discuss extrajudicial measures that should be treated with caution—a “caution” that reveals, more than anything else, the place occupied by “Gypsies” in the construction of the Italian nation.

As far as the attempt to reconstruct the actions of the Sinti based on archival documentation, we have used an ethnographic approach at several different levels. This attempt made possible, and indispensable, the use of the anthropological literature and ethnographic experiences to unveil the plurality of meaning of the actions described from the point of view of those who stopped and interrogated these “Gypsies.” The choice was based not on an a priori selection of archival material but on the chance to use the preoccupations and strategies of the Italian Ministry of the Interior and Austrian authorities in order to give space to the agency of the Sinti. This means the Sinti’s voices can be heard between and through the lines of the written documents, balancing what Asséo (2019: 11) calls the “scriptural asymmetry,” which, until now, has kept most anthropologists away from archival sources concerning “Gypsies.”

In addition, an ethnographic approach has been used in the structuring of the research itself, to bring together the archival documents and the question of cultural and material reproduction of these families and their forms of resistance. In his introduction to *From the Margin: Historical Anthropology and Its Future*, Axel writes: “Rather than the study of a people in a particular place and at certain time, what is at stake in historical anthropology is explaining the production of a people and the production of space and time” (2002: iii). Thus, the stories told in the police archives acquire their significance in relation to the ethnography of, and in,

the archives and to the historical anthropology connected to it.

The fact, for example, that Lodovico Adelsburg had a valid passport does not change in any way the perceptions the Italian and Austrian institutions had of him. The passport that John Torpey (2000) describes as a means to distinguish those who belong or not to a nation, but also an instrument to control the movement of people, acquires here a different meaning. In the hands of Lodovico, it is transformed into the possibility to live between the borders of two states, taking advantage of the confusion created by the imposition of a category—that of “foreign Gypsies”—that went beyond the dichotomy of citizen/foreigner that lies at the foundations of the modern state (Trevisan, 2019: 89–104). The other key point of this story is how the two administrations exchanged information about the forced embarkation of the Herzembergs from Genoa to Brazil. The silence on the part of the authorities in Innsbruck concerning the fate of the Herzembergs demonstrates that what the archives do not reveal becomes essential if the researcher works on the effects of the “illegitimacy” of the presence of the “Gypsies” and their relationship with the state. Therefore, an ethnographic approach to the archival collection of “foreign Gypsies” allowed us, in turn, to delineate an historical anthropology of the Sinti family networks in this border region, giving space to the vicissitudes of both those who have remained in the same territory and those who were sent away with very little possibility of coming back.

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Paola Trevisan is Postdoctoral Research at the EHESS in Paris. She earned her PhD in Anthropology and Gender Studies from Jaume I University (Spain). In the summer of 2016, she received a three-month fellowship at the Mandel Center-US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. Her main publications include the articles “Gypsies’ in Fascist Italy: From Expelled Foreigners to Dangerous Italians” (2017) and “The Internment of Italian Sinti in the Province of Modena during Fascism: From Ethnographic to Archival Research” (2013); and the books *Etnografia di un libro* (2008); and *Storie e vite di Sinti dell’Emilia* (2005).

Email: paola.trevisan15@gmail.com

Notes

1. The term Gypsy is used in relation to archival sources, reflecting the perspective of the state institutions. The terms Sinti and Roma—as the adjective Romani—are used to refer to the self-definition of each of group. In Europe, the multiplicity of names, by both the groups themselves and external actors, have been analyzed by, among others, Piasere (1995, 2004) and Williams (2011: 9–10). As far as the overlapping categories of migrant people, itinerant traders, vagrants, and people the authorities called “Gypsies” have been analyzed by Lucas-sen (1993).
2. Sinti are families networks historically tied to German-speaking territories, from where, over the centuries, they have moved into France, Belgium, and Italy. We will use the Italian spelling: Sinto (m.s.), Sinta (f.s.), Sinte (f.p.), and Sinti (m.p.).
3. Asséo coined the expression *peuple résistance*.
4. All translations of non-English sources are my own, unless otherwise indicated.
5. *Gagé* and other similar words (*payo, gagio, gorgio*, etc.) are used by Sinti and Roma to name people who do not belong to their world: the non-Gypsies.
6. This has different characteristics in western Europe, where the percentage of “Gypsies” is normally around 0.2–0.5 percent (in Spain, 1.6 percent), but in the East can rise to 11 percent, particularly in the Balkan-Carpathian region (Piasere 2004: 4–10).
7. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma (henceforth ACS), Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Giudiziaria, cat.12.100.14, boxes 93 and 94 (1907–1909), boxes 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309 (1910–1912), and cat. 12.100.13.20, box 734 (1913–15).
8. Head of the Police Division at the Ministry of Interior from 1898 to 1911, who, in close collaboration with Ottolenghi, reformed the Italian police (About 2005:178–180).
9. ACS, Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Giudiziaria, box 305, folder “Adelsburg.”
10. Trentino and South Tyrol passed to the Italian kingdom at the end of World War I with the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye (1919).
11. The term caravan is used by both the police and the Sinti as a synonym for a family traveling with a cart.
12. As for the Habsburg Austria, see Zahra (2017); Weigl (2018); Tauber (2019: 61–74).
13. In prewar Austrian legislation, *Heimatrecht* (translated in Italian as *pertinenza* or *indigenato*) was the link between a person and a definite territory (Capuzzo 1992). Marius Weigl (2018) kindly provided me with the names of the districts of South Tyrol in which Sinti had *Heimatrecht* and on several occasions has shared the results of his research into anti-Gypsy policies in Habsburg Austria.
14. ACS, Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Giudiziaria, box 308, folder “Zingari austriaci.”
15. I.e., an extralegal expulsion of undocumented foreigners (Trevisan 2017: 349).
16. ACS, Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Giudiziaria, box 308, folder “Carovana condotta da Herzemberg ed Elt.”
17. Both localities are in Brescia (Lombardy).

18. This is a high mountain pass (elevation 1883 meters /6178 feet) across the Rhaetian Alps, between Lombardy and Habsburg Trentino.

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