

FABIAN JACOBS & JOHANNES RIES (eds.)

unter Mitwirkung von  
THERESA LORENZ & NINA STOFFERS

Roma-/Zigeunerkulturen in neuen Perspektiven  
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## Inhalt / Content

Einleitung	9
Introduction	15
<b>BERNHARD STRECK</b> Kultur der Zwischenräume – Grundfragen der Tsiganologie	21
<b>JUDITH OKELY</b> Gypsy Justice versus Gorgio Law – Interrelations of Difference	49
<b>OLAF GÜNTHER</b> Praktizierte Relationen – Das „Zigeunerische“ in Ordnungsvorstellungen bei Zigeunergruppen und der Mehrheitsbevölkerung Mittelasiens	71
<b>THERESA LORENZ</b> Musikkulturen der Zigeuner – Regionale Vielfalt im transnationalen Diskurs	97
<b>LÁSZLÓ FOSZTÓ</b> Taking the Oath – Religious Aspects of the Moral Personhood among the Romungre	119
<b>MARIA ELISABETH THIELE</b> Geschichte und Mystifizierung der Zigeuner in Brasilien	135
<b>ELISABETH TAUBER</b> “Do you remember the time we went begging and selling” – The Ethnography of Transformations in Female Economic Activities and Its Narrative in the Context of Memory and <i>Respect</i> among the Sinti in North Italy	155
<b>UDO MISCHEK</b> Die Straße der Handwerker – Roma in Istanbul	177
<b>MAREK JAKOUBEK &amp; LENKA BUDILOVÁ</b> Verwandtschaft, soziale Organisation und genealogische Manipulationen in <i>cigánské osady</i> in der Ostslowakei	193

HUUB VAN BAAR

Scaling the Romani Grassroots – Europeanization and Transnational  
Networking 217

FABIAN JACOBS

„Reich, aber ohne Rang“ – Mittel und Wege sozialen Aufstiegs bei den  
Gábor in Siebenbürgen 243

JOHANNES RIES

Writing (Different) Roma/Gypsies – Romani/Gypsy Studies and the  
Scientific Construction of Roma/Gypsies 267

Autoren / Authors 293

Dank / Acknowledgements 297

ELISABETH TAUBER

“Do you remember the time we went begging and selling”  
The Ethnography of Transformations in Female Economic Activities and Its Narrative in the Context of Memory and *Respect* among the Sinti in North Italy

“*Manghel* is work, it demands high concentration, you always have to think about where to go, where the best places are going to be, who might buy, who could be in a good mood. People think you just open your hands and receive money. It is not like that at all. When I get back in the afternoon, I am dog-tired because I have driven around concentrating and thinking continuously. If don't go for a few days, I lose the thread of my concentration.” (Sinta, 50 years, 2007)

Before I met the Sinti I already had contact with Gypsy women coming to beg and sell in the village where I grew up. I remember how the news spread in the village when farmers or housewives saw the Gypsy women coming alone or in pairs, moving from house to house. From 1997 to 2000 I went to *beg and sell* (*manghel*) with Sinti women in the South Tyrol. I entered into a cultural context which today I like to define as a key experience in being able to understand the female world of this north Italian Sinti group. I shared my first experiences with a 72-year old woman. She wore long skirts and for an outsider was the very picture of a “real Gypsy woman”. Ten years later, I am sitting with one of her granddaughters in front of the computer, giving her advice and moral support on how to write a project that would be financed by the European Social Fund. She is 22-years old

and she also goes out to *manghel*. This article will examine the ethnographic data of an article originally published in Italian in 1999 (Tauber 1999)<sup>1</sup>, reproducing some parts of it. Then I will examine what has happened in the past ten years to the practice of *manghel*, an understanding of which is crucial to an understanding of Sinti logic and philosophy. I will suggest that in these ten years a transformation has taken place with regard to some lifestyle features among Sinti families, but I will also say that this transformation has not affected the concept of begging and selling as this reaches far beyond mere economic activity. Therefore in observing begging and selling we have to see how the Sinti conceptualise *memory* and *respect*, concepts which, for them, are strongly linked to the relation between the living and the dead. These ideas will help to amplify the anthropological discourse, in particular Piasere's analysis of Gypsy mendicancy (2000), and it will help us to understand why young Sinti women in 2007 decide to go begging and selling rather than accept other forms of employment.

### *Respect* and the Cohesive Structure of Family Networks

The Sinti families this article is concerned with consider themselves to be the first to have discovered the mountainous north Italian region called South Tyrol, *Alto Adige* (Italian) or *Südtirol* (German). The great-grandparents of the oldest had always lived in Vienna and in the Carinthian region of Austria. Their ancestors moved to the Tyrol before the First World War and later, after 1919, to South Tyrol. Families that are called "Italian Sinti" are considered to have only moved to this region after the Second World War. The data on the graves of family members and some archival data confirm this narrative, but we know that there have been Gypsies in this alpine region at least since 1600 (Zani 1990). If my interpretation of the cohesive structure of this North Italian Sinti community is correct, the term "family networks" may be helpful in understanding how Sinti cohesiveness works within these different family groups.

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1 The following text reproduces in part a rewritten and revised version of the text originally published in 1999 in *Italia Romani* II edited by Leonardo Piasere, CISU, Roma. The 1999 version was translated also into Hungarian in: 2002 Prónai Csaba: *Olaszország. Cigányok Európában 2*. Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó. It is interesting to see that 10 years ago I decided not to translate the sentence in the title "Tenkreh tut kau molo ke giam manghel" (Do you remember the time we went begging), as if I myself would like to refer to an exclusively Sinti audience. From 1997 until 2000 I lived on a *campo nomadi*. I wrote the article while I was still living in a caravan and participating in the everyday lives of these Sinti families. I am grateful to the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung and the Stiftung Südtiroler Sparkasse for the research funding in 2007, furthermore to Fabian Jacobs and Johannes Ries for comments and suggestions on this version of the article and to Chris Fisher for the language revision.

There are at present several different Sinti family networks in South Tyrol. Among them, there are the so-called Italian Sinti including the Sinti Lombardi, the Sinti Mucini, and the Sinti Piemontesi; and the so-called German Sinti (*Sinti taitisch*) including the Sinti Extraixaria and the Sinti Eftavagaria. There are at present also some Roma families of Sloveno-Croat provenance as well as Roma from the ex-Yugoslav regions of Macedonia and Bosnia in South Tyrol who arrived at the beginning of the nineties. The ex-Yugoslav Roma are engaged in wage labour and live mainly in social housing. They are not Italian citizens, see themselves as part of the Roma Diaspora, speak Romany and have strong connections to their home countries (Golino 2005). Since 2004 we find also Rumanian, Slovak and Hungarian Roma in South Tyrol. These Roma follow a migratory pattern of staying a few months, returning to their countries for a few months and then coming back again. Many of them have no caravans or lodging and sleep in their cars, beg on the streets, make music or are involved in minor commercial activities. Little is known about the Rumanian, Slovak and Hungarian Roma who have been coming to South Tyrol regularly since 2004. Some Sinti musicians feel strong sympathy for those virtuoso Roma musicians arriving from the new EU member states playing “music like we play” on the streets, i.e. so-called Hungarian czardas and popular Italian songs. The South Tyrol Sinti consider all these Roma simply as “Slavi”.

Certain specific characteristics which differentiate these Sinti are worth pointing out. The Italian and German Sinti practice an economy which is essentially based on doing business with the Gage without getting involved in wage labour or hierarchical labour structures. Many of them would prefer to live on small plots of land equipped with bath/showers and wooden houses or sleep in their caravans. As this is only possible for a few families in small municipalities, many families have moved into social housing. These Sinti families are Italian citizens, speak both Romany and Italian, and consider themselves to be *the* Gypsies of the region.

They would also claim to be the *true* Sinti, the ones who *still respect the tradition* which, as will be explained, means their ancestors. This is even truer when they reflect upon the lifestyle of their cousins south of the South Tyrol. A feature that is maybe slightly irritating to these Sinti is the fact that they speak Romany and Italian but most of them do not speak German even though the region where they live is mainly a German-speaking region, and the Gage with whom these men and women are in economic contact are mainly German. It is great fun when men and women tell stories about their daily verbal interaction with German-speaking Gage, stories of misunderstandings, unintended offences and comic German pronunciation. It seems as if German is a language they do not want to know despite the facts of their historical migration and present situation. Elsewhere (Tauber 2006) I have given some explanations for this disinterest in the German language

which I will only touch upon briefly here: Sinti use the term “Hitlari” for German-speaking people and they are used to saying that Italians are better, kinder people who do not discriminate against the Sinti. This observation, on a political and historical level at least, is inexact, but it seems that, on the basis of day-to-day interaction, the Sinti get along better with Italians.

Anyhow these Sinti families not only speak the same Romany dialect, undertake similar economic activities and follow the same marriage customs, they also say about themselves that they *respect their dead*. The concept of *respect* among the linguistically related Manus in France has been described and analysed extensively by Patrick Williams (1993), Jean Luc Poyeto (2000) and for the Sinti in Italy by Tauber (2006). It is *respect (rispetto, era)* which regulates, structures and gives sense to Sinti lives on this territory. *Respect* means to move on different levels. There are the *own dead Sinti* (relatives) and there are the anonymous, *collective dead Sinti* (relatives) who are respected. Further, there is the respectful relationship and speech among the living Sinti (Tauber 2006). Sinti invest a lot of discussion and reflection on how they should go about their lives and on how certain Sinti individuals are respectful and others are not. Of interest and central to our understanding of Sinti cohesion is the fact that the whole group of family networks only becomes apparent if *non-respect* reaches critical limits. Then the cohesion of the normally invisible network moves into action among those Sinti who are related through kinship and/or marriage. Again kinship among Sinti means the recognition of each others' practice and logic of *respect* for the dead. Both kinship and marriage are negotiable, and *respect* plays a key role in this negotiation, but to the Sinti *non-respect* is non-negotiable. I have suggested that we should consider this logic of *respect* as a cohesive structure that allows Sinti families to live quite isolated lives dispersed across regional territories (Tauber 2006). To outsiders, they are not acting as “a group”. Gage working with Sinti continue to complain about the missing sense of solidarity among Sinti, the absence of any sense of group or community and the absence of any recognizable political authority or leadership. Even though similar patterns are found on every caravan site, social housing complex or *campi nomadi* (nomad camp)<sup>2</sup>, this absence of recognizable definitions and features is often described. These patterns – Patrick Williams (1993) speaks of atmospheres – say nothing about how these different families are interconnected. Elsewhere, I have discussed at great length this logic of *respect* and the need to see it as a total social fact able to explain not only Sinti interaction, rhetoric, discourse and narration but also Sinti marriage, gender conceptions, nomadic movements, politics, conflicts and even economic activities

2 *Campi nomadi* are a specific Italian solution, introduced in the 1980s, to limit places where Gypsies can stop with their caravans. These *campi nomadi* are today regarded as being places of exclusion *par excellence* (see Piasere 1992, Sigona 2005).

(Tauber 2006). In our analysis of the economic activity of begging and selling it will be helpful to distinguish between two levels: On the one hand we are speaking about the economic activity which guarantees financial income; on the other, we are referring to the narrative dimension which includes the respectful memory of the dead and the respectful interaction between the living.

### *Manghel* – Going to Beg and Sell

I had known the Sinti for a year and had lived with them for just a few weeks when Napoli, a 72-year old Sinti said to me: “Come, we are going to *manghel*.” It was a sentence I was often to hear in the future. From then on, I started an activity which would occupy a major part of my attention for quite a long time.

*Manghel* for Sinti has several meanings:

- to ask one’s help (*mangau tut, ker mange kau kova*),
- “to ask down” – after elopement and marriage, young couples coming back and excusing themselves in front of their parents (*ti manghes tele*) (see Tauber 2006),
- to go selling and begging (*ti manghes*). Some Sinti translate the word as “selling” or even “working”. In fact, *manghel* is a combination of both selling and begging. If Sinti are only “selling”, there is another word for it: *ti bikues* (to sell).

*Manghel* leads Sinti women to the houses and shops of the Gage. These women move onto a territory which is completely occupied by a non-Gypsy presence, leaving no blank spaces on the map to be filled in. Women move on this territory selling and begging, but they also remember and describe their experiences. While begging and selling refers to the Gage, remembering and narrating is concerned exclusively with the Sinti. *Manghel* is strongly gender-defined as an everyday economic activity, but Sinti use it also as a philosophical concept which explains their relations with their surroundings: the world, nature or the Gage. So women going out to *manghel* are not only practicing a gender-defined activity but also a Sinti-defined philosophy.

When I started to accompany Napoli to the surrounding villages, cities and valleys, the “external world” disappeared from my view and I started to practice a profession which in the eyes of non-Gypsies is marked by a certain medieval fascination, but also with many prejudices, stereotypes, fears and shame.

After my first experiences, other women would also invite me to come with them. These different women’s personalities of course had an influence on how they addressed



and traded with a Gagio or a Gagi, but they all kept the necessary distance from them. Ever since I have known these women, to *manghel* has been the subject of lively discussion. The subject becomes particularly important when their daughters are about to be married as women reflect on how their daughters will manage to *manghel* in their new family. When one meets these young women, one might ask why they still go out to *manghel* when they have a proper school education. Why do these young and modern women continue to practice an activity which exposes them to mainstream arrogance, racism and discrimination? In this article I would like to provide an answer specific to the Sinti context in the South Tyrol, taking the concept of *respect* as the basis for explaining the young women's decisions. First I would like to describe my experience of going out to *manghel* with the Sinti women of the South Tyrol ten years ago.

### To *Manghel* in 1997

I quote from my diary from 15<sup>th</sup> February 1997, in which I described my first experience of going out to *manghel*:

“It is the first time that I go out to *manghel* with Napoli. We are going to a village not far from our town, we park our car (which I am driving) and we start to walk. Napoli moves from one house to the next with great assurance; she knows precisely where good people (*kamle gage*) and bad people (*cilace gage*) are living. We arrive at the first farmhouse, the farmer's wife greets Napoli. They have known each other for a long time. The farmer comes out of the house and asks us if we have come from Hungary or Rumania and Napoli answers: ‘Yes, exactly at the borders there. We left this region when I was still a little child.’ The farmer starts to talk about his Second World War experiences, how they had to retreat on foot and how rich Hungarian Gypsies had helped him with food and had given him something to eat... The farmers give us some potatoes, 1.000 lire (ca. 0,50 Euro) and a bag of apples.

We go on walking. On the street we meet a Gagi and Napoli asks if she wants to buy something, but the Gagi shows no interest and Napoli says in her old fashioned rudimentary German dialect: ‘Goddamned witch.’

The butcher's wife doesn't want to buy anything, and Napoli says: ‘So give me something.’ The butcher's wife gives us a big bag with leftovers.

In the local pub we sell another ‘centrino’<sup>3</sup> and after two hours we return home.”

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3 Knitting handicraft.

After going out to *manghel* several times, Napoli insisted on the importance of the language and told me: “We cannot speak Gagio in front of the Gage. You must learn our language!” When I was demoralised by my lack of success, she said: “Don’t give up, or you won’t be able to get any money!” Only when I was able to sell knitting handicrafts in her presence, and even though the farmer women didn’t show much interest, she was satisfied and stated that it could work like this.

The Sinti women used their own language when talking among themselves, thereby excluding the Gage. Napoli used to speak to me in a loud voice in the presence of Gage but about minor, even really unimportant things. Her own voice, loud and strong, marked her presence both among the Sinti and the Gage. She was not the only woman I met among the Sinti with a loud, strong, deep, sometimes smoky voice. Most of these women have such a voice. The Sinti themselves say that they have these strong voices because they live outside and not in houses.

When confronted with racist or discriminatory reactions, Napoli would behave in an offensive manner. You can imagine her as an old woman who directly addresses a shopkeeper who refuses to speak to her, asking if she is scared of her, stating that she is not ill, and protesting that she is not stealing! Again, her voice is loud, strong, and without fear. Then without giving the shopkeeper time to react, she opens her bag and demands to be given something.

In my sorties with her, I never observed any kind of subordination in her relation with the Gage. She asks and begs while she talks to them about the weather, the children or other important or less important things of life. She doesn’t like the word “begging” but she actually “begs” while she speaks with the Gage. Her voice remains powerful, while asking: “Give me something, my children and grandchildren are hungry, you are helping a poor person.”

When Sinti women talk about *manghel* they insist on the fact that they all have their own style, their own method, preferences, strategies and techniques. But all these women I went out to *manghel* with addressed the Gage in a similar manner. The pose of subordination in describing poverty, hunger and desperation was a surface attitude while at the same time they spoke to the Gage fearlessly and proudly, interacting strongly. Their voice impressed me the most, but also the nonchalant way they wore their shoes/slippers, of knowing where to drive their car, their knowledge of the territory, and their ability to memorize places and people. But the most astonishing thing was that these women ran no risk of subordination when they uttered the sentence “Give me something!”

Napoli’s way of doing *manghel*, her old-fashioned Austrian dialect, her lack of precision in response to numerous questions, her precise inexactness, were all reflected in the way she gave and took goods, money or told stories, each act characteristic of her strategy. She

chats, tells, listens and through this guarantees a flow of stories, information, money and goods. The exchange of information and stories is not the main motivation for going out to *manghel*, since when Gage do not give either money or goods, she cannot stay. She has no time for chatting, she would say. Over the following months I would see how she was welcomed in many *kamle kher* (good houses). She needs these *good houses*, and will come back to see these Gage every two to five months. She has established her own way of working this circumscribed territory, and she is keen on counting on “her Gage”. She speaks of “my Gagi” or “my Gagio” who will be recommended according to her/his generosity.

Each of the Gage with whom the women are going to *manghel* are considered to be different to one another. When *good* (*kamle*), the Sinti would use expressions like *little, good girl, beautiful and little good woman, good woman, big lady but good* etc. I should point out that the word for *girl* is differentiated: the Gage girl is called *rakli* and the Sinti girl *ciai*. The same is true for a woman: the Gagi woman is called *gagi* while the Sinti woman is a *giual, romni, sinta* or *ciai* (for an analysis see Tauber 2006). It is important for us to realise that although Napoli may label some Gage as good and nice, this doesn't mean they start to become like Sinti or get closer to Sinti. The individually good Gage are differentiated from the anonymous Gage who fundamentally are not good. When Napoli talks about a young Gagi whose fortune she tells regularly, she mentions that she feels compassion for the “*tini rakli*” (little Gage woman): “*Oh, how poor this little Gage woman is!*” *Zinda* means compassion, sympathy for someone or something towards whom or which an affective relation exists. It can be a thing or an animal; it can be a comment on poor people, or even for a person who has died. *Zinda* expresses regret: *the poor, little, nice cup, the poor little cat, the poor little girl, the poor (zinda), poor (cioro) dead person*.

Napoli calls some women her friends: women she regularly visits to *manghel*, women who buy or who seek assistance through fortune telling. Gage are good because they give money. These friends rarely know her Sinto name (*romano lap*). She has several names among the Sinti, and she has several other names for the Gage. Indications she gives regarding her origin, her name, her address remain vague. It doesn't mean though that her Sinti names are kept secret from the Gage, but sympathy and compassion, although sometimes expressed, in no way create a closer relation with the Gage.

As we walk through the different villages she tells me about *manghel* and about the Gage. She knows the Gage and their houses well. She knocks on their doors almost every day:

“Do you see the house up there? This Gagi has always given me something; in this house lives a widow; there lives a young woman, she always gives me 10 000 or 20 000 Lire (5 to 10 Euro); this Gagi has lost two children. There lives one who used to be good, now she doesn't buy anymore, the bastard! You should try! You see the houses

up there? I know them all. How many years since I haven't gone up there anymore? My legs aren't so strong. You can try if you want.”

The Gage and their houses are “*good, bad, gentle, how many stories I could tell you... oh je!*” Napoli knows about their needs, their dreams and wishes, their life stories and their destinies. At each house she asks if someone wants her to tell fortunene. She takes out her cards with acrobatic elegance. She always carries her old, worn out cards with her. Holding the cards in her left hand, she takes out one card at a time, making comments and talking about life and love. She speaks with betrayed women, with women who want to marry, with women who want to have children, but she also speaks with young men who have economic troubles or are lovesick. She promises that her magical powers will bring improvements and transformations.

#### The Sinti Narration of *Manghel*

Once, before the Sinti had access to cars, they had to walk for kilometres on foot with all their belongings wrapped in a linen sheet (*pingla*). They walked from village to village, crossed valleys and slept in farmers' barns or stables. When they couldn't find a place to sleep among the farmhouses, they withdrew to the woods. When they could afford horses, they slept in their wooden caravans. Today, many farmers among whom these men and women used to sleep have transformed their farmhouses into hotels. The Sinti are not allowed to stop and camp in the woods anymore and when these families pass by the old places in the towns or valleys where they used to stop, they find signs that say “Camping Forbidden” or industrial areas or new petrol stations.

Napoli's life has changed too. By 1997<sup>4</sup> she is living on a *campo nomadi*. She receives a pension and during the winter she gets additional economic assistance for heating; her caravan is immobilised on the *campo nomadi* with a wooden shelter in front of it where she does the cooking. Her grandchildren go to school.

Up until the 1960s Napoli was always looking for a good barn or stable where her family could stay the night and every day she explored a new village. In 1997 she pays water and electricity bills and she goes out to *manghel* every day in a well circumscribed region.

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4 By 2003 she has moved into social housing. In 1997 two of her children were living in social housing with their families. In 2007 all her children except for one daughter, who in 1997 had lived in a flat and now is living in a caravan, are living in social housing. Similar patterns of moving from free sites to *campi nomadi* to social housing and than again moving out of social housing can be observed among many of the Sinti families in this region.

She goes from house to house in search of new *good Gage*, telling fortunes, selling knitted handicrafts, and asking for money, clothes and food.

But what happens on those days when going from house to house to beg, sell and tell fortunes, all her chatting and joking with the Gage is not met with success because the Gage manifest *badness (cilaciapen)*:

I again quote from my diary for 30<sup>th</sup> March 1997:

“We want to try at a farmer woman Napoli has known for a long time. Today we didn’t earn anything. Napoli is cursing: ‘Gage are moody. What is this all about? They continuously lament that they have no money, but if they are without money then what shall we do? All Gage are rich. Millionaires, no, billionaires!’ We reach the farm and meet the Gagi. We ask her to buy something, she declines but Napoli insists: she keeps the knitting handicrafts under the Gagi’s nose, asks and insists, but suddenly gives up: ‘What a lousy bitch. Let’s go home.’ After two arduous hours of driving around by car, moving from house to house, we turn back home. While driving back Napoli comes to the conclusion that the other Sinti are talking about her and this brings bad luck.”<sup>5</sup>

Diary entry for 14th July 1997:

“It is July and very cold. Our caravans are parked in the valley. The men are sitting around the fire. But the doors of this mountain village remain closed with old women looking suspiciously out of the windows from behind the curtains. Some women advise us to go and get a proper job. We come back with 20 000 lire (10 Euro). The women say that one has to take this village as it is. There are days one can earn much more, and there are days one earns nothing. The Gage in this village are moody. Gage are always moody. In every village you have to take them as they are.”

As we drive and walk around, I get an idea of what Napoli is doing. Beside her daily activity, there are moments of talking and remembering, moments of narration through which these women transform their everyday lives and their close relation with the Gage into story-telling.

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5 The concept of Sinti “talking” is extensively described and analysed in Tauber 2006. For reasons of clarity, I should mention that “talking” and “eating” are concepts which are interlinked and which can hurt and cause great damage to Sinti social life. The extreme form of other Sinti “talking/eating” can lead to misfortune, illness and even the death of an individual. “Talking/eating” is also strongly connected to the respect for the dead. Through disrespectful “talking/eating” respect for the dead is endangered and this can provoke violent reactions by male representatives of the different Sinti families.

Fundamentally we can distinguish between two categories of story: those which recall the dead and their actions and those which speak about their everyday and sometimes adventurous lives in the midst of the Gage. My argument is that this narration does not have the function of talking about matters of earning money even though earning money is, of course, important. I say that the narration places women's daily activity at the centre of social attention so that it confirms female's economic capabilities which are strictly connected to female *respect*, the way of being a woman and her *respect* for the dead.

It is Berga, a 35-year old Sinta, mother of four children, whom we quote now:

“Do you remember, Napoli, the time Ruma and I went to *manghel* in this village? I am speaking of 25 years ago. Do you remember? I bought a yellow skirt and a blouse that was also yellow. Ruma bought a dress in a Spanish style, made of silk. Ask Ruma. How beautiful this dress was! I liked it so much. I remember it well. It was easier to make money then, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred thousand lire (100, 150, 200 euro), right Napoli? Today Gage are not good anymore like they were 25 years ago. We went to *manghel* all the time, all the time. I and Ruma and my cousins. Alone, together, always *manghel*, when I was still at home (not married). I was ten years old when I went to *manghel* for the first time. Dora and Ruma went on their own, they were maybe eight or ten years old, they went on their own and came back with a big amount of money.”

The opportunity to talk about their remarkable abilities often arises when there are only women present, without men. In contrast to men, who meet in the middle of the place where their caravans are, who one can see, who speak loudly, who gamble around the site, who possess the whole world and time ... women meet in a more discreet and marginal manner in their caravans or shelters, surrounded by their children for narrating their memories and experiences.

The narration begins by reviewing the past, remembering yesterday and starts to interweave with an event of today. The connection and interlinkage of past and present stories turn them into a continuous event. The contents seem to become immobile. The narration transforms the past and present into a non-time or, better, it transforms it into today: *Once, a time, then, I tell you, do you remember? I remember well, I tell you a story which we remember well.*

The vivid memory confirms the presence of the past. The story is happening in the past and in the present – yesterday, many years ago, today – it is related to a place and expresses Sinti lives among the Gage, or better, the very existence of these Sinti in this world. An example of this is the amount of money the women mention in their stories.

These are amounts of present earnings on good days. Two hundred thousand lire in the sixties was the monthly wage of a worker. The sum Berga indicates is not showing-off or an exaggeration, it rather shows the *trueness* (cacapen) of her narration, because women speak of now, today and remembering leads us to the authenticity of the present.

Who would remember a day like this so precisely, a day like so many others? It is not exactly this day which Napoli and Berga remember, it is their common experience which becomes the narrative.

The activity, which covers three or four generations, testifies to the uninterrupted existence of *manghel*. It also means that all Sinti women go out to *manghel*. They have gone out to *manghel* since they were little girls, with their sisters, friends, mothers, aunts and grandmothers. *Manghel* connects young married women with older women. Old women remember the experience for their whole lives. *Manghel* becomes their link to their childhood, their youth, their leaving home for marriage, their being a married woman; young women are called to go to *manghel* even though one or the other would like to do something else; but even a non-Sinta marrying a Sinto goes out to *manghel*. All non-Sinti women married with Sinti have learned to *manghel*.

To *manghel* is more than surviving. A woman confirms her Sinta-ness through *manghel*, her ability to control the Gage, and her capacity to be different to the Gage. It is this which Napoli's anger expressed one day:

“Gage are destroying everything! Look at these little trees. They destroy the little trees and flowers only to make money. I have earned 4 000 lire (2 Euro) today. It is nothing. Who would be able to cook with this money?”

While the Gage destroy nature, the Sinti leave nature as it is<sup>6</sup>, while the Gage think about work and money, they forget their families. Sinti women go to *manghel* so as to ensure the material and social welfare of their families but also for narrating:

“Our lives are hard; it is not like you might think. When I was in Verona – how many years ago? – I went to *manghel*. It was so difficult to make money. The children were continuously hungry, and we had to steal bread, chicken and sometimes peaches. The children were always hungry, oh je, I tell you, I couldn't even put food in a pot and nobody helped me. Once we found some money in a house, me and Patria. Tula was

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6 And in fact, they are doing nothing on behalf of or against nature as environmental philosophy and green politics would expect. Nature is something which they live in, not something which they look after and try to maintain.

waiting in the car without petrol. We divided the money between Tula who waited in the car, Patria who found the money and me. We didn't say anything to our husbands because we needed the money for cooking.”

Such a precise narrative marked by repetition, the exact description of each person's role and finally the stolen peaches confirms the absolute truth of the story. The hungry children represent not only material misery. Children go hungry when social life – everyday exchange, communal dishes and talking together – is disturbed. Napoli is talking about the fundamental components of these Sinti's social culture. The need for food is compared to the need for social exchange; the social intimacy of the Sinti is expressed through common dishes, the sharing of food. A lot of food is *romanes*, which calls for it to be eaten together as a group. An empty pot contains nothing which can be shared, so the empty pot becomes a symbol of disturbed social relations<sup>7</sup>. This means that women going out to *manghel* play a key role in providing the substance for the material and social livelihood of Sinti families<sup>8</sup>.

All women love talking about *manghel*, their stories vary a lot, but they all focus on the experience of walking/driving around, being seen as Gypsy women, exploring or improving their skills in getting enough money and food for their families, their *own Sinti*<sup>9</sup>. While in everyday life remembering each Gage or house exactly with their characteristics and weaknesses is of enormous importance for survival, such precise indications regarding villages and the Gage lose their importance when narrating and remembering. When they tell their stories, the Gage only exist as absent witnesses attesting to the material and symbolic presence of these Sinti in a world which seems to be completely investigated and mapped. The female presence in direct contact with the Gage becomes a natural thing; talking and narrating to their *own Sinti* demonstrates the presence of being Sinti.

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7 I have analysed at great length the symbolic significance of sharing food and the concept of eating. Eating, as in many other cultural contexts, goes far beyond the physical act. In the Sinti context eating can be transformed into a dangerous threat to the relation between the living and the dead. (See footnote above and Tauber 2006).

8 Women are more than proud of the fact that their husbands are not obliged to work. In many families they are the only ones to earn the family income. Prestigious objects like new cars, caravans and gold jewellery are an expression of their abilities as women. A Sinta who is under house arrest tells me with tears in her eyes that her husband never ever needed to go out to look for money, that it was always her who had brought in the *beautiful little money (sukar tine love)*. Men in general are proud of their wives who obtain money, food and clothes from the Gage (see Tauber 1999).

9 The concept of *own Sinti* is very important as it refers to one's own living family and one's own dead family members who are respected actively (see Tauber 2006).



### To *Manghel* in 2007

In 2007 many of the girls of 1997 are married and have their own children. The daughters of Berga for example go out to *manghel* and it seems quite natural. These young women did not continue school; they wanted to go out to *manghel* like their mother and grandmother. Take the example of two other young Sinti women who are 22 and 26 years old. Both are children of mixed marriages (a Sinto father and a Gagi mother). Both, after compulsory school, attended a vocational school. Both women took up *manghel* definitely after their *fuga* (elopement and marriage). It seemed to be an almost logical consequence to quit their jobs and go out to *manghel*. What is going on here?

Napoli's granddaughter, the one we met at the beginning of this article, took up *manghel* after school when she was 21 years old; her young Gagio husband quit his job and started to collect scrap metal.<sup>10</sup> Maybe, in a few years time, this young couple will make other decisions, but for now they are living in the Sinti tradition which is a manifestation of *respect* for the elders and deceased Sinti. When the granddaughter is going to *manghel* she will not always say the same things Napoli said to the Gage. She presents herself as a young student or as a single parent or as a young Gypsy. While amongst the Gage, she recalls her memories of when Napoli went to *manghel*. When she gets back, she talks about her own experiences and those of her grandmother. Women adopt modern strategies when they go out to *manghel*, they go by car, no longer on foot, they wear trousers, not visibly long skirts, they do not always reveal their Gypsy identity as their grandmothers did, but when out to *manghel* they think about how their grandmothers, aunts and mothers went before them. Their thinking is also their remembering and these memories are their *respect*.

Writing about *manghel* in 2007 it is important to examine the phenomenon of how the Sinti remember and how they practice *respect* by also analysing the concept of relations between the generations. Napoli used to call her granddaughter *mami* (grandmother) when she was little. *Respect* between generations is also guaranteed through terms of address which I have called reciprocal. I have described reciprocal address terms at great length elsewhere (Tauber 2006) but let me mention the most important here. Grandpar-

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10 In 1997 I was quite sure that the expression to *manghel* could be used for male activities and wrote that to *manghel* is not an exclusively female activity, as men do business with the Gage as well. Today I would say that male business is less strongly defined as *manghel*. Male *manghel* is a shifting category as, for example, when men play music for money (*bassues*), one could also say that they get their money by *manghel*. When men collect scrap metal they use a specific term for it (*ti gas sastrenge*), but the concept behind it could be *manghel*. I write *could*, as I am more convinced now that *manghel* as a clearly defined category is a female occupation.

ents address their grandchildren with the words for grandparents, i.e. grandparents call their grandchildren grandparents, just as grandchildren call their grandparents grandparents. If my interpretation is correct, this unidirectional reciprocal address term between generation +2 and generation 0 allows the establishment of a relation of *respect* between grandchildren and grandparents. *Respect* among Sinti is expressed between equals: male *respect* among Sinti men (young and old) expresses their equality; female *respect* expresses the equality among women. This is true even though age is considered to be particularly respected. It means that young Sinti behave in a respectful manner in front of elder respected Sinti. But it doesn't mean that the younger is not equal to the elder. The combination of age and *respect* is a challenging combination of how to establish relations of equality and the value of *respect* for the elders. With this reciprocal term of address Sinti are introducing, asking and provoking reciprocity of *respect*. My argument is that the introduction of equality-based terms of address between the generations allows the Sinti elders to claim the “right” of being respected so of being remembered in death (see Tauber 2006).

In Patrick Williams' analysis (1993), Manus remember silently without ever explaining things. In my analysis of Sinti memory I say that memory is not only silent and invisible but also an ongoing process of talking respectfully for and about those people they want to remember. The process of talking-about-respectfully involves both the living and the dead including those persons an individual respects. For Sinti remembering means to make a point of dressing like the mother liked to dress or of not dressing like this anymore, of cooking the food the loved person liked particularly or of refraining from eating it, of using the mother's or father's dishes or of destroying them after death or of keeping them in a respectful manner without using them. *Respect* and memory means to recall the person's way of talking, his or her favourite songs, of conserving their pictures in a way that shows they have to be respected (Williams 1993, Tauber 2006). In the economic sphere, I have seen young Sinti men who have decided to take up collecting scrap metal like their fathers used to do 30 years ago. Circumstances have changed, but as they drive around in their small pick-up truck, the men remember how their fathers collected scrap metal, recalling stories, adventures and characteristics of the person remembered.

Patrick Williams (1993) is right in saying that remembering and thinking in the Manus context mean the same thing: the Romany verb *tenkres* (remembering) indicates an active controlled action. Remembering/thinking means to recall in a perfect and exact manner the dead person's characteristics. Remembering is an act of thinking and a conscious act of *respect* which can take place silently or in conversation. For the Sinti context, I have described how men are frequently remembering collectively, when going to play music, when drinking together, when meeting in a bar or on the *campo nomadi* (Tau-

ber 2006). Female remembering and thinking is often a more individual and lonely act. Women remember and think when going out to *manghel*, when cleaning up the caravan or the house, when cooking or when sitting with other women. Women out for *manghel* are moving among the Gage, selling, begging, fortune-telling and remembering respectfully.<sup>11</sup>

### Perspectives for the Anthropological Narrative of Begging

Before and after my own experience of *manghel* with Sinti women, Judith Okely published her account of Traveller Gypsy women going “calling” (1983, 1996) and Patrick Williams his analysis of economic strategies used by Kalderash women in Paris (1982). Orsetta Bechelloni writes about Travellers who are moving between being Travellers and the dream of social recognition (2006:186). Some young scholars have started to write about similar phenomena in India (e.g. Robertson 1998).<sup>12</sup> As far as I know, Leonardo Piasere is the only anthropologist who has proposed a first theoretical analysis of Gypsy mendicancy, conceptualising begging in the context of pre-modern, modern and post-modern market models. In analysing the phenomenon, Piasere (2000) proposes a challenging explanation of which I will give a short summary before going into my own interpretation of the phenomenon in the Sinti context. Piasere starts with a historical review criticising historians for using only the external perspective on the phenomenon, which is how the

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11 I said that this quite lonely activity outside a spoken social context allows women to become the main actors in the highly conflictual context of the elopement/marriage (*fuga*). When their daughters run away, mothers use words of immediate, sometimes dangerous non-respect which calls into relation the family of the eloping man. While doing this she is accepting the other Sinti family’s form of respect and opening a dialogue for a new marriage alliance (Tauber 2006). The more individual female respect plays a key role when Sinti have to deal with marriage affairs, as it will be the mothers of the daughters who are establishing the discourse of possible new affinal relations which because of different family traditions of respect are not easily accepted.

12 I would like to mention studies of other phenomena of begging unrelated to the Gypsy community which deal with different ethnographic and historical issues. In 1929 Gillin reflects on the social conditions of mendicancy as a consequence of changes in the economic order or in a political system (1929); Gilmore analyses social patterns and the philosophy, technical knowledge and status of a family of beggars, saying that “the measuring of intelligence quotients” (1932:768) did not explain their situation; Hershkoff and Cohen (1991) speak of the democratic right to beg; in Durham’s analysis of asking in Botswana, the important aspect of asking is how the individual becomes created. “Individuality is recognized not in the spirit of Weberian calculation but in the spirit of asking” (1995:126). Hanchao’s (1999) research can be seen as an interpretation of how the Chinese state and Chinese philosophy has tried to confront mendicancy in history up to the present. Hanchao shows that mendicancy in China is connected to migration from the land to the cities, making mendicancy a phenomenon of urban realities.

different states and the Catholic Church regard it. He agrees with Geremek's assumption (1992) of initial “assistance” and subsequent “repression” but the historical phase of state and church assistance, according to Piasere, can be compared to, from the Gypsy point of view, *the great trick* (Fraser 1993:60-83), meaning that Gypsies arriving to Europe told the story of the great Christian Egyptian pilgrimage. Saying that they were pilgrims allowed Gypsies to ask, beg and get goods from the non-Gypsies. “They say they are pilgrims but they behave like conquerors.” (Piasere 2000:411) The great trick is to conquer a continent without an army, leaving the ones who are giving goods and money with the conviction that they are superior. By 1430 Piasere starts to find the first documents of chroniclers who begin to write about these pilgrims as *mala gentes*. In as much as the campaign against Gypsies is part of the more extended campaign against vagabonds, Gypsies are always also seen as a category apart. This is the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism and of the first primitive processes of capital accumulation (Geremek 1980). Gypsies are a marginal people set apart from other marginal peoples. Piasere tries to demonstrate this by the absence of any Romany linguistic influence on other dialects. He further says that Gypsies were thought of as abnormally marginal, just as in the 15<sup>th</sup> century they were thought of as abnormal pilgrims. “They pretended to be pilgrims even though they went on pilgrimages (in the 15<sup>th</sup> century). In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, they pretended to be marginal even though they behaved like marginals.” (Piasere 2000:413) Gypsies made a practice of marginality, trying both to escape proletarianisation and to maintain, from their point of view, world dominance (see also Asseo 1988 who speaks of “professional” marginality).

According to Piasere the activity of begging represents a category that has “bizarre” characteristics that he defines as “fuzzy” (2000:414). Piasere introduces this *fuzzy* category as resulting from an interpretative transcultural process, which includes many opposite positions.<sup>13</sup> I would like to mention these many positions briefly: Marcel Mauss (1923-24) in his *Essaies sur le don* touches on the implications of relations in the context of begging. Georg Simmel (1908) writes of the gift as something which engenders a rich scale of reciprocal relations. The gift in relation to begging can be found on this scale. Starobinski (1994) elaborates on the compassionate gift. But begging does not reflect the triadic aspect of the gift: the receiver does not give in return. Godbout (1992) speaks of the constellation in begging as a “bizarre” one since it is a unilateral action made to an unknown who is unable to give back. Godbout, following an anti-utilitarian approach, has paid more attention to this “bizarre”, abnormal situation. He suggests that in a market system things possess a value in relation to other things while in a gift system things have

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13 For the category of *fuzzy* see also Piasere (1998).

a value that reflect the value of the relation (Godbout 1992:17). In other words it is the value of the relation which blocks or hinders the *exit* in a relation between people. Gifts create a relationship between people that the market exchange does not. The modern era, uniquely, has introduced shame as a fundamental attribute connected with asking and begging. What can be said is that we are dealing with a distinction between the inside and the outside. Shame is a fundamental construct among many Gypsy groups. Ideologically, asking/begging outside is seen as a business transaction. "One merely makes a request of the Gage; no reciprocation is expected." (Piasere 2000:424)

Piasere's suggestion of how to understand Gypsy asking/begging follows this interpretation. Asking/begging always represents danger since it is intrinsically an act of relating. In his essay Piasere concentrates mainly on those Gypsies who practice begging by asking for only small amounts from a large number of Gage, and it is here that he draws his main conclusions: not all the Gage give; those Gage who do, give leftovers. Leftovers are like nothing. And receiving nothing does not require establishing a relation. In contrast to the gift which establishes a one-on-one relationship, asking/begging creates a one-to-many relation. One person is asking a little or nothing from many. So the Gypsy mendicant is exercising an activity which is not so much "asking/begging" but rather "asking/begging-a-little-from-many". The mendicant feels no shame towards the Gage *en masse*. It is an ability of thinking of the Gage's giving as if it did not exist. Piasere's thesis is that Gypsies have been able to maintain a *habitus* for more than 500 years which has allowed them to enter modernity earlier than others but has also meant that they outlived it earlier than many others. It is this *habitus* which has allowed them to avoid the market mechanisms of dominance and subordination (Piasere 2000:425).

## Conclusion

Piasere (2000) reasserts the proposition that different Gypsy groups can pass through the increasingly rigid system of economic pressures and hierarchies to establish non-reciprocal relations with the Gage, maintaining a *habitus* of asking a little from many. We need to review this analysis in the Sinti context, as women going out to *manghel* also practice this asking-for-a-little, for leftovers, for things the Gage have enough of, and here I agree with Piasere. The female Sinti economy is also based on the rhetoric of begging for a little from many. I am not quite convinced though that women when going out to *manghel* are not giving Gage anything: stories, comfort and entertainment, the feeling of being charitable or of worthiness? Maybe the Sinti practice of *manghel* could be thought of as the

exchange of words for goods and money (see also Okely 1996)? But in any case we have to amplify our analysis taking into account the internal dimension of the external *habitus*.

A person (man or woman) who is able to evaluate territory for its economic potential is appreciated by the community. But Sinti will recognise those people who lead *respectful* (*romano*) lives in Sinti terms as the authentic, respectful Sinti. To *manghel*, even if economically unsuccessful, is part of this authenticity. To *manghel* is to demonstrate, among other practices of Sinti life, the concept of being Sinti in relation to or in the presence of the Gage. They say if there were no Gage, the Sinti would not exist, and we can be certain that the female practice of *manghel* assures their existence both materially and symbolically.

Napoli's granddaughters are taking up *manghel* not only for economic reasons or because of having no other employment opportunities but because they are performing a narrative and *respect* towards their *own Sinti*. To *manghel* lets Sinti women retain *respect*, as women who are performing gender-based activities or using female forms of speech when remembering and narrating. I am convinced though that remembering and memory, respecting and respect are those aspects which establish relations among Sinti. Therefore Sinti women interact with the Gage but maintain an *exit* by remembering/thinking a continuously respectful relation with their deceased Sinti.

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