

**Luca Bravi, Maria José Casa-Nova,  
Maria Alfredo Moreira,  
Maria Teresa Tagliaventi (Eds.)**

# **Leaving a Trace**

**Action-research with Roma  
and non-Roma young people  
between history, memory and present**

**Itinerari e dialoghi di Storia dell'educazione**



# **Itinerari e dialoghi di storie dell'educazione**

Collana diretta da Gianfranco Bandini, Tiziana Pironi, Gabriella Seveso

La collana si rivolge a un pubblico nazionale e internazionale interessato ai problemi della storia dell'educazione, sia quelli di consolidata tradizione accademica sia quelli più innovativi e di frontiera. Accoglie e riflette le più recenti riflessioni storiografiche, che hanno visto una vera e propria rivoluzione delle metodologie, degli strumenti, delle tematiche oggetto di indagine, anche con una sensibilità cresciuta in senso interdisciplinare: i testi saranno sia di carattere teoretico sia relativi a studi e ricerche nell'ambito della storia dell'educazione, delle istituzioni educative, dell'educazione formale e informale, delle politiche scolastiche ed educative.

I volumi sono disposti lungo un ampio arco cronologico che rende ragione dell'attualità e importanza dell'approccio storico a partire dagli studi di storia antica fino alla storia contemporanea e del tempo presente.

La collana accoglie testi originali, traduzioni e pubblicazioni di fonti. Si rivolge agli specialisti del settore, agli studenti universitari ma anche un più ampio pubblico interessato a approfondire i profondi legami tra il passato e il presente dei processi formativi, nella consapevolezza che la dimensione storica costituisce uno strumento ermeneutico imprescindibile per comprendere e progettare le sfide educative e pedagogiche dell'attualità.

## **Comitato Scientifico**

María Esther Aguirre, UNAM Messico

Anna Ascenzi, Università di Macerata

Annemarie Augscholl, Università di Bolzano

Valter Balducci, École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Normandie

Alberto Barausse, Università del Molise

Carmen Betti, Università di Firenze

Paolo Bianchini, Università di Torino

Francesca Borruso, Università di Roma Tre

Antonella Cagnolati, Università di Foggia

Luciano Caimi, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano

Lorenzo Cantatore, Università di Roma Tre

Carlo Cappa, Università di Roma Tor Vergata



Il presente volume è pubblicato in open access, ossia il file dell'intero lavoro è liberamente scaricabile dalla piattaforma **FrancoAngeli Open Access** (<http://bit.ly/francoangeli-oa>).

**FrancoAngeli Open Access** è la piattaforma per pubblicare articoli e monografie, rispettando gli standard etici e qualitativi e la messa a disposizione dei contenuti ad accesso aperto. Oltre a garantire il deposito nei maggiori archivi e repository internazionali OA, la sua integrazione con tutto il ricco catalogo di riviste e collane FrancoAngeli massimizza la visibilità, favorisce facilità di ricerca per l'utente e possibilità di impatto per l'autore.

Per saperne di più: [Pubblica con noi](#)

I lettori che desiderano informarsi sui libri e le riviste da noi pubblicati possono consultare il nostro sito Internet: [www.francoangeli.it](http://www.francoangeli.it) e iscriversi nella home page al servizio "[Informatemi](#)" per ricevere via e-mail le segnalazioni delle novità.

**Luca Bravi, Maria José Casa-Nova,  
Maria Alfredo Moreira,  
Maria Teresa Tagliaventi (Eds.)**

# **Leaving a Trace**

**Action-research with Roma  
and non-Roma young people  
between history, memory and present**

**FrancoAngeli** 

The volume *Leaving a Trace. Action-research with Roma and non-Roma young people between history, memory and present* is a publication produced within the Project “Transformative Roma Art and Culture for European Remembrance” (TRACER), funded by Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme of the European Commission.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

### *The TRACER project*

Partners:

- University of Bologna – Department of Education “Giovanni Maria Bertin”, Italy.
- University of Florence – Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology, Italy.
- C.A.T. – Social Cooperative, Florence, Italy
- Chi Rom e...chi no – Association, Naples, Italy.
- Opengroup – Social Cooperative, Bologna, Italy.
- Stowarzyszenie Romow w Polsce – Association, Oświęcim, Poland.
- Ribaltambição – Associação para a Igualdade de Género nas Comunidades Ciganas, Figueira da Foz, Portugal.
- Alto Comissariado para as Migrações (ACM) / Agência para a Integração, Migrações e Asilo (AIMA), Portugal.
- Research Center on Education (CIEd) – Institute of Education of the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal.
- Organization coordinator: Lisa Cerantola (University of Bologna)

Web: <https://tracerproject.eu/it>



Copyright © 2024 by FrancoAngeli s.r.l., Milano, Italy.

This work, and each part thereof, is protected by copyright law and is published in this digital version under the license *Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International* (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

*By downloading this work, the User accepts all the conditions of the license agreement for the work as stated and set out on the website*

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

# Index

<b>Stories, memories and lives. Building a multicultural Public History of Education in an action-research project</b> by <i>Luca Bravi</i> and <i>Maria Teresa Tagliaventi</i>	pag. 7
--	--------

## FIRST PART Memory and history for inclusion in the educational context

<b>1. Historical memory, identity and minorities. An action-research project with Roma and Sinti young people</b> by <i>Maria Teresa Tagliaventi</i>	» 15
<b>2. Looking back at history to understand the present</b> by <i>Luca Bravi</i>	» 30
<b>3. Breaking the prejudice through places of Memory</b> by <i>Silvia Bencini</i> and <i>Luca Bravi</i>	» 38
<b>4. Representation of Roma persecution in school curriculum development in Europe</b> by <i>Ivana Bolognesi</i> , <i>Maria Alfredo Moreira</i> and <i>Luca Bravi</i>	» 65

## SECOND PART Transforming the present through history and memory

<b>5. Transforming and training through action-research on the history of Sinti and Roma</b> by <i>Maria José Casa-Nova</i> and <i>Daniela Silva</i>	» 85
<b>6. Knowing the history in the educational context</b> by <i>Luca Bravi</i>	» 100

<b>7. Visiting history. “Crossing” the camp of Auschwitz</b> by <i>Silvia Bencini</i>	pag.	111
<b>8. Reporting the history and transforming the present</b> by <i>Emma Ferulano</i>	»	121
<b>9. Presenting the history. Building memory through art</b> by <i>Inês Aydin</i> and <i>Liliana Moreira</i>	»	131
<b>10. Leaving a trace in the present</b> by <i>Maria José Casa-Nova</i> , <i>Maria Alfredo Moreira</i> and <i>Maria Teresa Tagliaventi</i>	»	145
<b>Authors’ biographies</b>	»	153
<b>Groups of young leaders involved in the TRACER project</b>	»	156

# Stories, memories and lives. Building a multicultural Public History of Education in an action-research project

by Luca Bravi\* and Maria Teresa Tagliaventi\*\*

This book seeks to reflect theoretically and empirically on the process and results of an international project that lasted two and a half years (TRACER - Transformative Roma Art and Culture for European Remembrance), financed with European funds under the CERV (Citizen, Equality, Rights and Value) programme. The main protagonists are young people, mainly Roma and Sinti, living in different places and countries, with their own history that anchors them to different communities, but joined by belonging to discriminated minorities and to a transnational people who recognise themselves as a community albeit characterised by diaspora. The project's goal combines historical knowledge of the genocide that occurred during World War II with an analysis of the construction of prejudice and the role that racism has had on the collective consciousness of a modern society. The methodology used is participatory action-research in public history educational context<sup>1</sup>, a process able to make the protagonists aware of a path of knowledge, promoting training actions towards other people and leaving traces of memory in the present through artistic events.

The project therefore addresses fundamental dimensions for cultural recognition and, consequently, for respect and empowerment, including:

- build a collective memory that involves different populations and different cultures and that acts as a mesh that binds European society together;

\* Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology (FOR-LILPSI), University of Florence.

\*\* Department of Education "Giovanna Maria Bertin", University of Bologna.

<sup>1</sup> Bandini, *Public History of Education*.

- include more vulnerable populations and communities still discriminated against in the knowledge process;
- involve young people and adolescents (Roma and non-Roma, male and female) in an active and not passive learning process;
- promote a different historical identity of Roma and Sinti in the majority society;
- create impactful events, imagining alternative processes to promote memory, through forms of artistic expression.

Roma and Sinti have often narrated their history, which has not been appreciated by the collective public memory, through art: “*Djelem, Djelem*”<sup>2</sup> (“Walking, Walking” in Romanés - the Roma language), composed by the musician Žarko Jovanović in 1949 and chosen in 1971, at the first International Congress of the Romani Union, as the anthem of the Roma and Sinti people, reminds us to extermination in one sentence of the refrain: “I too had a family, but the Black Legion murdered it”.

In the 1970s, when the international community had not yet officially recognised the racial extermination of the Roma, music became a medium for the transmission of the pain and persecution suffered. The same goal that Ceija Stojka<sup>3</sup>, deported to Auschwitz with her family at a very young age, produced through her paintings<sup>4</sup>, in which she described life and suffering outside and inside the camp; his brother Karl (he too was a painter and dedicated his works to the memory and the story of the persecution)<sup>5</sup> committed a vivid memory through poetry<sup>6</sup>: «We, Roma and Sinti, are like the flowers of this earth. They can trample us, they can eradicate us, they can gas us, they can burn us, they can murder us, but like flowers we still always come back».

The history of the Second World War, with the Holocaust, was being used in the present as a means of analysing the terrible events that took place and as an explanation of the current discrimination against the Roma and Sinti people.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oocities.org/~patrin/gelem.htm> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Stojka, *Wir leben im Verborgenen*.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/ceija-stojka> (Last access: 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Stojka (Ed.), *Gas*.

<sup>6</sup> <https://perspectives.ushmm.org/item/oral-history-with-karl-stojka> (last access: August 2024).

We would never have imagined how the project could also provide reflections to interpret the current war situations that, directly or indirectly, are affecting Europe, nor how the reconstruction of a collective memory is indispensable to decode the massacres, destruction and indiscriminate bombings that newspapers and television propose to us every day. Nor to reflect on where all this destruction and violence between peoples will lead...

The Auschwitz-Birkenau state museum in Poland, visited by the project leaders, is full of phrases that issue warnings, e.g. «Those who don't remember the past are condemned to repeat it» (George Santayana), «It happened, therefore it can happen again: this is the core of what we have to say» (Primo Levi). These are messages that underline how memory should be used to ensure not to be unprepared to catch those warning signs that can lead to new mass murders.

Yet, most young people today have grown up in a kind of permanent present, in which the relationship with the past is missing. We could assume that post-modern society has over time promoted a kind of destruction of the mechanisms of social knowledge and awareness that connect the experience of contemporaries to that of previous generations.

Assuming the task of remembering and transmitting the memory of the genocide is therefore an imperative commitment in a society immersed in the present and dominated by the speed of the succession of events. Direct witnesses of what happened in Europe in the concentration camps are inevitably few and part of public opinion regards the Holocaust as a distant event, with limited references to current issues and casting no shadows on the future.

Nevertheless, memory is indispensable for orientation in the world and implies decisive choices for today and the way forward for tomorrow. For this reason, this project is particularly important and becomes even more important because it deals with the Porrajmos<sup>7</sup>, the holocaust of the Roma people, which has long been ignored.

The text consists of two sections:

<sup>7</sup> In this volume the terms “Porrajmos” and “Samudaripen” will be both used. For the history and meaning of these terms, please refer to the following link: <https://www.porrajmos.it/en/porrajmos-a-disputed-word/> (Last access: August 2024). In the text, they will both be considered as words of common use (as happened for Shoah) therefore they will not be reproduced in italics.

- a first section contains a more theoretical reflection on the role of memory and history in educational contexts and opens with an explanation of the project's steps and methodological choices; this first part affirms the need to transform Auschwitz from a “monument to visit” into a tool for education and training, through a knowledge of the past that can interrogate the present;
- a second, more empirical part, provides some insights into the project's actions, with a interpretation by the direct protagonists; in this second part, young people from Roma communities build their own awareness by going through the history of their own people, but in a shared context of knowledge with non-Roma young people, in order to be an active part in the construction of public memory; it is this process of collective narration that stands out as the most powerful antidote against denialism.

The book is accompanied by another output of the project, which can be viewed on the project's own web pages<sup>8</sup>: the docu-film “*Memorijako drom*” (“Traces of Memory” in Romanés), which captures the main steps, but above all documents the “leading groups” visit to the Auschwitz Museum and in particular to Block 13, dedicated to a permanent exhibition on the extermination of the European Roma, and to the “*Zigeunerlager*”, the “Camp of the Gypsy” inside Birkenau<sup>9</sup>. What may in fact not stand out in a written text is the empathy that connects the young people involved in this project with the “re-discovery” of the past, a link that is evident in the images taken in the extermination camps visited and that has helped to consolidate relations between groups of young Roma and non-Roma living in different European countries. The places become a formative landscape and tell stories of women and men, marking the traces of a path that returns to confront the present.

Like every project, this one too would not have been possible without the active protagonists who participated, believed in it, were passionate about it and shared their experience and reflections with others.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tracerproject.eu/> (Last access: 2024).

<sup>9</sup> State Museum Auschwitz Birkenau (Ed.), *Memorial book: the Gypsies at Auschwitz*; Hancock, *We are the Romani people*; Fings, *Sinti und Roma*.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all the extraordinary young people, adolescents, pre-adolescents, students, teachers, trainers school, directors, municipal councils, and artists who participated in the TRACER project. Their contribution actively helps to keep alive the historical memory of the genocide of the Roma and Sinti communities, to not conform to indifference and violence, to make our society a better place of plural worlds.

## Bibliography

Bandini, Gianfranco. *Public History of Education*. Firenze: FUP, 2024.

Fings, Karola. *Sinti und Roma: Geschichte einer Minderheit*. München: C.H. Beck, 2019.

Hancock, Ian. *We are the Romani people*. Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2002.

State Museum Auschwitz Birkenau (Ed.), *Memorial book: the Gypsies at Auschwitz*. Oświęcim: State Museum Auschwitz Birkenau.

Stojka, Ceija. *Wir leben im Verborgenen. Aufzeichnungen einer Romni zwischen den Welten*. Wien: Picus, 2013.

Stojka, Karl. *Gas* (paperback). Unknown editor, 1998.



## **First Part**

# **Memory and history for inclusion in the educational context**



# 1. Historical memory, identity and minorities. An action-research project with Roma and Sinti young people

*by Maria Teresa Tagliaventi\**

## 1. Through TRACER...

TRACER<sup>1</sup>, Transformative Roma Art and Culture for European Remembrance, is an international project funded under the European Commission's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme. The name is an acronym that evokes the main components of the project but is also significative of its purpose, which is to leave a trace.

The aim of the project is to involve groups of Roma and non-Roma youths and teenagers, mainly in Italy, Portugal and Poland, in the construction of a shared memory of the Sinti and Roma holocaust in Europe during World War II and to promote a shared reflection, in a diversified public, on the history and origin of racial discrimination through different types of artistic performance (graffiti, music, theatre, video, etc.). The project is complex, involving various consequential steps and ethical and methodological choices, which will be analyzed below. In TRACER, the process becomes as important as the actions, and outputs also relate to a personal change of the people involved. The ingredients of the project are history and memory, education, young people (mainly Roma and Sinti young people), action research, workshops and social art, as a way of remembering and denouncing.

The project contributes to the promotion of Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union by supporting related

\* Department of Education “Giovanna Maria Bertin”, University of Bologna.

<sup>1</sup> <https://tracerproject.eu/node> (Last access: September 2024).

social policies and national strategies through innovative actions focused on the participative construction of the memory of the holocaust of Sinti and Roma minorities in Europe. In parallel, the initiative aims to support both the enactment of the EU Roma Framework for equality, inclusion and participation 2020-2030 and the adoption of the Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion, so as to provide a framework for the successful design and implementation of actions for fostering the inclusion of Roma populations in the life of local communities.

## **2. Memory and identity**

In 1985, Francesco De Gregori, an Italian singer-songwriter, launched a song with an emblematic title and contents: «La storia siamo noi» («We Are the History»). With the phrase «History does not stop at a door», the author emphasises how history is unstoppable, constituting a force that cannot be closed or contained, and that continues to live beyond physical and symbolic barriers. The song is also an appeal to responsibility, memory and civic awareness, and for this reason its contents recall the ingredients of TRACER. De Gregori emphasises how “no one should feel excluded”, reiterating that history is not just a narrative of a few (especially the powerful, the majority groups, the dominant ones), but belongs to everyone, since everyone, through their actions, every day, consciously or unconsciously, contributes to writing history. The concept is not to be taken for granted. Indeed, the historical documentation we have today is affected by the dominant political power during the course of events and also by the power relationships in place at the time of studying history.

What we call history is hardly ever a disinterested effort to narrate events, but it is a narrative based on conscious choices so that later generations can read past events with a specific point of view.

The construction of knowledge therefore is not neutral, but political, based on values. Often the official, better-known history is flanked by a silent, sometimes unwritten history of men, women and children who do not belong to the majority groups and who have not had the power to narrate their own story and that of the community they belong

to, except within their own community. This history not only remains hidden, but also risks succumbing before a more shared collective narrative, because it is the majority culture that defines and uses the tools of meaning-making.

In recent years, historical documentation has also been opened up to different and multiple sources in an attempt to capture, albeit in a fragmented and sporadic manner, the other and minority views. This sometimes allows distorted narratives to be corrected, sometimes to fill historical gaps, other times to broaden views of the same event. History, however, has not only the function of storytelling but also that of supporting collective memory. Remembering, for any individual, means “re-actualising the memory of a social group to which he or she belongs or has belonged in the past”<sup>2</sup>, and constructing, over time, a group identity that is the result of a temporal construction in which the dimensions of the past, present and future are combined<sup>3</sup>. In our historical period, which is essentially focused on the present, the past helps to read the everyday experienced reality and to give a new orientation to future perspectives. This is even more important if the past concerns minority communities, such as those of Roma and Sinti, whose history is the fruit of a denied narrative, since it is based on relations of hostility, exclusion, marginalisation and ghettoisation from majority societies and cultures. The history of the Roma and Sinti communities shows, more than any other history of minorities, the paradoxes of the links with the societies with which these communities relate. One of these paradoxes is the habit of describing minority history as another history, often disconnected from the narrative of the majority culture<sup>4</sup>. History, on the other hand, if it is inclusive, sustains and reweaves social ties, reconstructs and puts together a collective memory that is a collection of memories, events and narratives shared by the various communities that experienced that event. It also offers the possibility of reconstructing an identity based on the narrative of the community of belonging and the narratives of the majority communities. So, the history of the Roma community, which the TRACER

<sup>2</sup> Jedlowski, *Introduzione*, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Halbwachs, *La memoria collettiva*.

<sup>4</sup> Bravi, *Percorsi storico educativi*.

project deals with, cannot be distinguished from European history and the history of other European peoples.

### 3. Which history?

The TRACER project investigated a precise historical period, characterised by the mass violence that generated the Holocaust during World War II. The reasons behind this choice are several. The holocaust, the terrible event that saw the systematic persecution and extermination by the Nazis of millions of people, including Jews, Roma and Sinti, political dissidents and the disabled, is still an event that is difficult to understand. As Bauman<sup>5</sup> emphasises, it was not the result of a momentary madness, but was conceived and enacted within a rational modern society, in the advanced stage of development of a civilisation.

That is why it is a problem of this society and this culture, and it is a problem for everyone. Dealing with the subject of the Holocaust means reasoning about the way institutions and members of contemporary society act, in which “evil”, according to Arendt<sup>6</sup>, takes the ordinary form of everyday life.

The Shoah and the Porrajmos (genocide of the Roma people) were made possible by a network of complicity and *omertà* that covered much of Europe. There were millions of German, Italian, French, Dutch, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, etc., citizens who actively contributed to the process of isolation, identification and segregation of Jews, Roma, Sinti, homosexuals, political opponents and millions of other citizens. Through their indifference, unconditionally accepted that, step by step, racial laws were ratified, ending up considering them right and fair.

According to Bauman<sup>7</sup>, the holocaust did not result from «an infraction of order but from an impeccable, perfect and unchallengeable domination of order» in which one group, fighting for the acquisition of power, prestige and wealth (using Weber's thought...), used a

<sup>5</sup> Bauman, *Modernità e Olocausto*.

<sup>6</sup> Arendt, *La banalità del male. Eichmann a Gerusalemme*.

<sup>7</sup> Bauman, *Modernità e Olocausto*, 211.

powerful educational and communication system to rationalise racism, and define those who are “different” as pathological, dangerous and worthy of elimination.

The racial doctrine formulated by the Nazi ideology advocated the stigmatisation of “foreign races”, considered genetically subordinate, and marginalised specific groups as “inferior” by genetic heritage within that same race<sup>8</sup>.

And also fitting into this idea of the “different” as being “pathological” is the history of the Roma and Sinti people, who have always embodied the symbol of diversity and for this reason have been subject to a process of stigmatisation. The Roma and Sinti people suffered discrimination long before the Nazi persecutions of the last century.

According to Bravi<sup>9</sup>, the history of the Roma people is a history of institutionalised segregation, as it is based on laws in Europe that have always attempted to limit the freedom of movement of this people and to lead them, through assimilationist policies and educational systems created ad hoc, to be socialised into majority societies. One of the reasons why the Roma were interned in concentration camps is their asociality.

According to Taguieff<sup>10</sup>, the idea that certain categories of human beings are not civilisable, i.e. are unable to recognise the founding values of a society, is a historical embodiment of the tendency towards “barbarianisation”. This is the highest degree of distancing and exclusion: the barbarian is not only different, inferior, but also dangerous as he is uncivilised.

The Nazi regime, as it was structured before and during World War II, finished long ago, but its heritage is not dead.

What took place in the concentration camps was the result of a process on which indifference, intolerance, hatred, prejudice and discrimination acted, all of which are still very much present in our society, evident even in the never exhausted anti-gypsyism.

For this reason, with the TRACER project, tackling the topic of Porrajmos, i.e. the genocide of the Roma and Sinti people, adds a piece to the knowledge and memory of those events, but not only. This

<sup>8</sup> Bortone and Pistecchia, *Tre passi per attraversare Auschwitz*.

<sup>9</sup> Bravi, *Tra inclusione ed esclusione*.

<sup>10</sup> Taguieff, *Il razzismo*.

project becomes a tool for analysing the cultural process that led to the concentration camps and for decoding current discrimination, particularly that affecting certain minorities. In Italy, the most evident discriminations are linked to the presence of Roma camps, real ghettos where Roma and Sinti populations reside, made institutional since the war in the former Yugoslavia.

The persecution of Roma is one of the most neglected chapters in the history of the Nazi regime. It was recognised very late in all European countries, so this caused a delay in acknowledging these communities as part of European history, resulting in serious damage. The damage affects both the Roma community, which is not always aware of the history that binds it to Europe, and the non-Roma communities, who wrongly consider Roma as foreigners and therefore as people who cannot have the same rights as all citizens of the states in which they live.

The history of the Roma people is often not included in school curricula, and the Roma Holocaust, also known as the Porrajmos, is a topic that receives little attention. Consequently, many Roma young people are unaware of this tragic chapter in history. Even the Roma community is not aware of what happened during World War II, and non-Roma people also lack knowledge of the Porrajmos.

Reconstructing this moment in history means retrieving part of unknown events about the persecution of these populations in Europe and to transpose a population, which is still subject to prejudice and to policies of marginalisation, to the centre of European History.

#### **4. Roma and Sinti communities and history**

The Roma is the largest minority in the European Union (between 12 and 15 million people) and the status of transnational people makes it difficult to understand and appreciate the history of the communities in the various countries of which they are citizens. Roma are among the people who are most vulnerable to human rights violations in the European Union (EU). The EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) has consistently demonstrated this using robust statistical data since

2008. As evidenced in various research<sup>11</sup>, despite efforts at the national, European and international level to improve the social and economic integration of Roma in the European Union (EU), many still face deep poverty, profound social exclusion and discrimination. This often means limited access to quality education, jobs and services, low-income levels, sub-standard housing conditions, poor health and lower life expectancy. These problems often present insurmountable barriers to exercising the fundamental rights guaranteed in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The scourge of anti-Gypsyism has proven to be a formidable barrier to efforts to improve the life chances and living standards for Roma, with many facing discrimination, harassment and hate crimes because of their ethnic origin.

TRACER worked mainly with Roma and Sinti communities living in Italy, Poland and Portugal. The young Roma and Sinti who participated in the project are representatives of different groups, living conditions, cultures, histories and school levels. Their reality is extremely heterogeneous and varied and the greater or lesser inclusion status of the different communities also depends on the social policies implemented in the different countries of residence.

The Roma community in Poland is one of the oldest in the European area. According to the 2011 census<sup>12</sup>, there were 12,560 people who registered Roma as their primary identification, and 17,049 registering Roma as either their primary or secondary nationality. The actual figure is thought to be considerably larger, perhaps reaching as high as 50,000 and even more because of the Roma refugees who have left the Ukrainian territory due to the current war situation. The National and Ethnic Minority and Regional Language Law approved in 2005 defines Roma as a minority ethnic community in Poland. The Polish Roma community suffered the Nazi genocide very violently. The invasion of Poland (1939) not only marked the beginning of World War II, but also the policy of racial extermination aimed at Jews and Roma. For this reason, the Polish communities were among the most affected. Auschwitz I (1940) immediately registered Roma people

<sup>11</sup> FRA 2018, 2021, 2022: <https://fra.europa.eu/it/themes/roma> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>12</sup> National Census of Population and Housing 2011 <https://stat.gov.pl/en/national-census/national-census-of-population-and-housing-2011/> (Last access: August 2024).

among its prisoners, but, above all, the construction of Auschwitz-Birkenau (1942) marked the fate of the physical elimination of the Polish Roma.

Roma currently living in Italy are characterised by the heterogeneity of groups, dialects and specific linguistic varieties and cultures. According to the Council of Europe's data and the main Italian Roma associations, about 170-180,000 RGT people are actually living in Italy. A majority of them (about 60 %) are Italian citizens. Of the foreigners, 50% come from the former Yugoslavia and the rest from Romania, with smaller presences from Bulgaria and Poland. Not being recognised in Italy as an ethnic minority, the Roma community has different rights according to their nationality status: as Italian citizens, citizens of EU member states, non-EU citizens and stateless persons and refugees.

Italy is a nation where two stories of the Roma communities come together. In Prato and Bologna, two of the cities where the project was implemented, there are mainly Italian citizens (Sinti) who have been in the area since the 15th century. The community of Bologna and Prato preserves the memory of a racial persecution which began in 1920 and continued until the deportations to the Nazi concentration camps between 1943 and 1945. In Naples, the Roma communities arrived in Italy in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 2000s. They are mainly Roma from the territories of Eastern Europe. In their history there is the deportation to the concentration camps in Croatia controlled by the Italian and Croatian fascists. One important symbolic element is the Jasenovac camp where thousands of Roma were killed.

As regards Portugal, Roma have been part of Portuguese society since the end of the 15th century. The first written document in which Roma people are mentioned dates from the beginning of the 16th century. The way in which the document refers to Roma people evidences a knowledge of their culture that clearly points to a permanence in Portuguese society.

They were recognised as Portuguese citizens by the Constitutional Charter of 1826.

According to data collected by the Observatory of Roma Communities, there are about 37,000 people, although this number is below the existing population, as the data were collected from estimates carried out by each municipality in the country between 2014 and 2016.

They are mostly sedentary, with some roaming in the south of the country.

Portugal did not participate directly in World War II, as it maintained a position of neutrality, but hosted thousands of refugees, mainly Jews. The subject of the genocide of the Roma people is unknown to most young Roma.

## **5. A participatory action research: goals and actions**

It is the choice of methodology that distinguishes TRACER from other projects. TRACER is action research and as such promotes a process that combines research (in this case historical) and action; in other words, it brings together knowledge and planning for change.

According to Besozzi and Colombo<sup>13</sup>, the aim of action research is «to promote an action of change on/for the subjects involved, subjected to a judgement of validity by the group itself: in practice, it is a matter of leading the participants, through a series of stimulations and self-reflections, to change something in their own definition of the situation, to increase their own competences regarding the topic examined, to mature a new phase of growth».

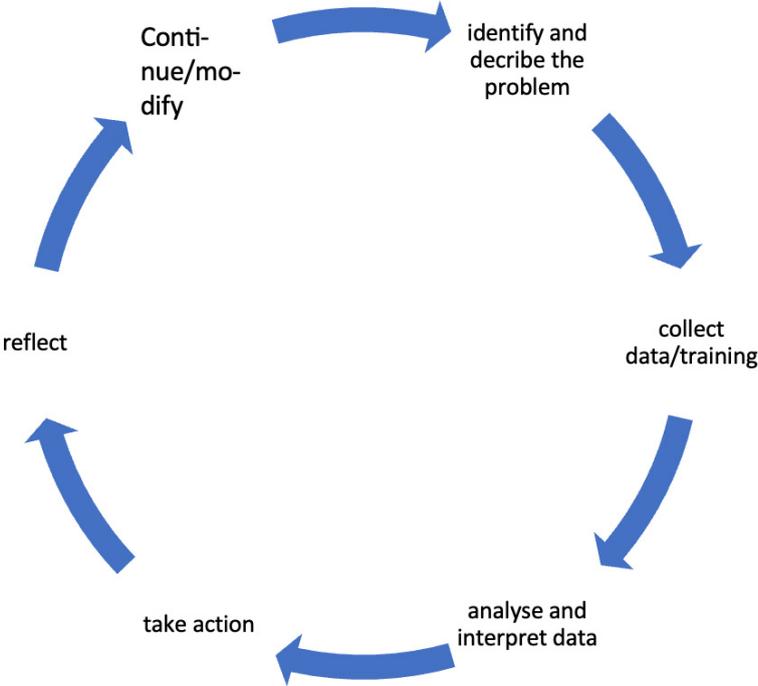
The key actors of this process in TRACER are Roma and non-Roma youths and adolescents (mostly Roma and Sinti) from Bologna/Modena, Florence/Prato and Naples (Italy), Figueira da Foz and Braga (Portugal), Oświęcim and Kraków (Poland). They were involved through a sequence of actions in a process of co-construction of knowledge and implementation of change.

The target of the project is also the subject of the research. The knowledge produced collectively by young people and adolescents deconstructs the role of “specialist”, normally assigned to the scientist, and is shared with other peers, younger students, teachers and a diversified public. A fundamental principle of action research is the promotion of autonomy and empowerment of social actors. This principle becomes more important when the protagonists are young people who live in situations of marginalisation and who, due to stereotypes and

<sup>13</sup> Besozzi and Colombo, *Metodologia della ricerca sociale nei contesti socioeducativi*, 112.

prejudices, do not have the opportunity to be considered social actors by the majority society. The Roma communities are still marked by the choice of being invisible from the outside, in order not to be recognised as Roma, as a result of the prejudices they suffer daily.

Action research is based on a structured process involving investigation (in this case historical), action (training or activity), reflexivity, and (trans)formation in a continuous cycle that reproduces itself.



*Pic. 1. The action research cycle*

Like any action research, the objectives of the project are several. The project aims to:

- mobilise groups of Roma and non-Roma young adults/ adolescents (male and female) to collect information and narratives in Italy, Portugal and Poland about the Holocaust and the Roma genocide;
- reconstruct history of the Holocaust through multiple sources, giving space to unpublished narratives such as those belonging to the Roma and Sinti communities;
- make young people (Roma and non-Roma) aware of a history that links the Roma communities to Europe and re-evaluate Roma membership in the EU;
- increase young people's awareness of peace and universal human rights;
- activate teenagers (Roma and non-Roma) to be trainers/representatives through the construction of an artistic event on genocide aimed at a broad audience (graffiti, music, theatre, film/documentary, etc.);
- produce knowledge through training and educational workshops on genocide in schools with Roma preadolescents students and multi-ethnic classes;
- disseminate knowledge about the Porrajmos and promote reflection on the construction of prejudice and discrimination.

The TRACER action research process was developed through a series of consequential and fundamental actions that show the complexity of the project:

- the *establishment of groups of young people and adolescents*, both Roma and non-Roma, male and female, who act as leader groups. The members of the leader groups are the main actors of the project. After being trained in the action research methodology, they promote the various actions, involving other targets in the process of knowledge creation and change. The decision to set up groups of Roma and non-Roma young people was a challenge aimed at promoting mutual knowledge, breaking down each other's prejudices and demonstrating that European History must be founded on a common ground made up of values that are shared by different populations;

- *the search for memories and the collection of informal historical documentation*, the unifying element of the project, present at various stages. History is a tool for inclusion because doing historical research means building a listening space capable of enhancing cultural specificities. An important part of the historical research was the interviews with elderly members of the Roma community (grandparents, relatives, significant leaders) or with important expert witnesses on the subject of genocide. The former had the task of highlighting unpublished accounts of the war, points of view, and collecting an oral memory in danger of being lost. The history of the Roma and Sinti peoples has often been constructed indirectly, not on the testimonies of the members of the communities, but on the documentation of their deeds and presence over time;
- the *training* provided to different subjects during the action research process: training for the leader groups on both the methodology of action research and historical documentation, on Holocaust, History and Remembrance and preparation for the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau; training for teachers, also carried out through the active participation of the leader groups, on the Holocaust, history and teaching methodologies aimed at designing workshops for students in schools of various levels; training for secondary school students promoted by the leader groups and also aimed at involving boys and girls in the creation of an artistic performance. The training was always accompanied by moments of collective reflection;
- the visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum for leader groups from different cities and countries and the workshops in situ on discrimination and construction of prejudice.

Auschwitz and Birkenau offer a detailed historical context, providing testimonies, documents and artefacts illustrating the horror of persecution and genocide. The young people visited the specific and most important exhibition on the Roma genocide in Europe set up in Block 13 of Auschwitz I that contains the names of the 23,000 Roma and Sinti killed in the extermination camp, some of whom were possibly relatives of young Roma, and in Birkenau, the “Gypsy sub-camp” (*Zigeunerlager*). The joint visit also allowed the young people to feel part of a common international project, the building of networks of sociability between young people from

different countries and backgrounds, and the awareness of belonging to a common European history. The workshops following the visit had the goal of allowing the participants to share their reflections, making Roma and non-Roma aware of the processes that lead to social exclusion, dehumanisation and normalisation of brutal behaviour and violence towards others;

- the *educational workshops* with students in schools of different levels on the history and culture of the Roma communities. Some of the educational workshops gave rise to interesting teaching materials;
- *performance and artistic events*, a tool chosen to disseminate a message on history, genocide, racism and prejudice throughout the territory. The leader group together with teenagers and students became part of the artistic narrative. The various artistic expressions used by the young people (murals, video clips, theatrical performances, a book) aimed to communicate social messages to stimulate reflection and promote greater collective awareness against discrimination. They also represented Roma community identities and strengths. Through its evocative and symbolic power, art succeeds in involving and reaching a wider audience and permanence over time;
- the *multiple dissemination* of the project's outputs through conferences, meetings, whether formal or informal, in public places or in camps, within the Roma communities.

## 6. The sustainability of a project

Due to its object and the minority group stakeholders involved, the TRACER project could not have been implemented without close cooperation between the academia and the civil society.

This project was possible thanks to an exceptional partnership:

- Public institutional partners in charge of higher education (Academies): universities of Bologna and of Florence in Italy; University of Minho in Portugal;
- the High Commissioner for Migrations, a public institution directly dependent on the Presidency of the Ministers Council of Portugal,

which works for the integration of immigrants and ethnic groups, and, in particular, the Roma communities (now transformed into an agency: AIMA);

- two social cooperatives of the third sector (OpenGroup and CAT in Italy) that have been working for years on the integration of the Roma population in educational projects in cooperation with the municipalities of Bologna and Florence (Prato), especially in Italian Roma settlements;
- two Roma associations (Stowarzyszenie Romów W Polsce in Poland and Ribaltambição Associação para a Igualdade de Género nas Comunidades Ciganas in Portugal) working on the rights of Roma people;
- an association, “Chi rom e...chi no” (Italy), working to support the active participation of Roma people through the constitution of committees open to Roma and non-Roma people, making alliances with national and international organisations advocating for inclusive policies which overcome the “camp approach”/nomadic settlements.

The construction of the partnership is also not neutral but political. The active participation of the Roma population is one of the cardinal principles invoked by the European Union. The new ten-year plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030 of the EU Commission contains a specific recommendation from the EU Council on the inclusion of Roma<sup>14</sup> and identifies participation as one of the seven key elements on which to take action over the next decade.

Achieving equity and inclusion calls for the involvement and partnership of Roma communities, in all sectors. Roma communities need to be involved from the design to the implementation of projects aimed at them because for a long time, in all societies, they have been subjected to policies and actions without being considered actors able to define their needs, decide what action to take and activate themselves to solve problems.

The presence in the project of Roma associations and NGOs that have been working for years in the implementation of the rights of the

<sup>14</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_1813](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1813) (Last access: August 2024).

Roma population made it possible to actively involve the Roma and Sinti community from the very beginning. Through constant dialogue, a synergy was created between the academia and the civil society, which ensured that all partners were able to expand their knowledge and points of view. The sustainability of the project beyond its closure is ensured precisely by the active participation of members of the Roma community and the debate that has been created within the communities themselves or in schools.

The strength of TRACER lies in the fact that it was immediately configured as a combination of discovery, knowledge, creation and civic engagement.

## Bibliography

- Arendt, Hannah. *La banalità del male. Eichmann a Gerusalemme*. Milano: Universale Economica Feltrinelli, 2023.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernità e olocausto*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992.
- Besozzi, Elena and Maddalena Colombo. *Metodologia della ricerca sociale nei contesti socioeducativi*. Milano: Guerini Studio, 2002.
- Bravi, Luca. *Tra inclusione ed esclusione. Una storia sociale dell'educazione dei rom e dei sinti in Italia*. Milano: Unicopli, 2009.
- Bravi, Luca. *Percorsi storico-educativi della memoria europea. La Shoah nella società italiana*. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2014.
- Bortone, Roberto and Pistecchia Alessandro. *Tre passi per attraversare Auschwitz*. In Rizzin Eva (ed.). *Attraversare Auschwitz. Storie di rom e sinti: identità, memorie, antiziganismo*. Roma: Gangemi editore international, 2020.
- Jedlowski, Paolo. *Introduzione*. In Maurice Halbwachs. *La memoria collettiva*. Milano: Unicopli, 1987.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *La memoria collettiva*. Milano: Unicopli, 1987.
- Taguieff, Pierre André. *Il razzismo*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2002.

## 2. Looking back at the history to understand the present

by Luca Bravi\*

### 1. A Pedagogy of Recognition

The construction of memories in a collective context can represent one of the fundamental objectives of educational processes aimed at equal participation and active citizenship<sup>1</sup>. This element is decisive especially when the educational action concerns multicultural contexts within minorities who have lived experiences of devaluation of their community history that produced silent memories: a general effect is that minorities are not considered and recognized in the public sphere. In such situations, the Pedagogy of Recognition becomes a tool capable of developing formative processes, starting from the recovery of past events. To clarify the approach linked to the concept of recognition, it is useful to refer to the experiences of historian Elke Gryglewski, managing director of the Lower Saxony Memorial Foundation and head of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial today, in her training activities carried out at the «Gedenk und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz» (Education and Memorial Centre of the Wannsee Conference)<sup>2</sup>. Gryglewski organized some educational experiences aimed at young Berliners: among the users of the educational projects there were also

\* Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology (FOR-LILPSI), University of Florence.

<sup>1</sup> Cauvin, *A textbook of practice*; Bandini, Bianchini et al. (Eds.), *La Public History tra scuola, università e territorio*; Bertella Farnetti, Bertucelli, Botti (Eds.), *Public History*.

<sup>2</sup> *Gedenk und Bildungsstätte Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz* is located in the Wannsee villa where the Wannsee conference (January 1942) took place. During the Conference, the Nazis counted the Jews of Europe, defining their physical extermination for racial reasons. On that same site today stands a center for education on the themes of history and memory of the twentieth century. URL: <https://www.ghwk.de/de/> (Last access: August 2024).

girls and boys of Arab-Palestinian and Turkish origin for whom the consequences of some historical events (that are far from their own cultural experience) are not immediately obvious, like for example the symbolic value linked to the knowledge of the Jewish Holocaust in the German context, as a founding element in the construction of post-war democracies<sup>3</sup>. For minorities, the approach to the public memory elaborated by the majority can assume an imposition that erases and marginalizes their own story of the past and can risk producing conflict. Building active citizenship for everyone requires recognizing the centrality of the memories belonging to each community that constitutes the society of a country: opening a space in which to narrate the past corresponds to creating a place where different people can express themselves; it means building an educational environment in which everyone can have the right to speak and to be recognized. First of all, the Pedagogy of Recognition means the construction of this common area of narration in which the listening of past events that minorities consider central to their group can take place, but which are often neglected by public memory.

The relationship between collective memory and history is linked to the possibility of telling, disseminating and sharing a narrative: societies select what to remember and what to forget by virtue of the social and political context they live in the present, as well as in relation to the possibilities and control they have over the communication tools that characterize the different social classes<sup>4</sup>. The Pedagogy of Recognition is structured on the possibility of recovering minority narratives, with the main intent of making stories a topic of critical and collective debate, that is an educational process.

The reflection about the social connections in the construction of memories has a fundamental origin in the book *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (*The Social Frameworks of Memory*) by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs<sup>5</sup>. It was the first text to investigate the roots of community identity that are formed on the basis of selection and removal

<sup>3</sup> Gryglewski, *Anerkennung und Erinnerung*.

<sup>4</sup> Foster, Pearce, Pettygrew, *Holocaust education*; L. Bravi, *Percorsi storico educative*.

<sup>5</sup> Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Halbwachs died on March 16, 1945 in the Buchenwald concentration camp. He was arrested and deported in the summer of 1944 by the Gestapo, because he tried to protect the escape of his wife of Jewish origin (Yvonne Basch) and their son.

of past events. The historian Yuval Noah Harari has reflected on the construction and diffusion of collective narratives as the identity glue that characterizes the *Homo Sapiens* species, compared to other living beings. In a TED talk (Technology Entertainment Design) entitled “What explains the rise of humans?” (London, June 2015)<sup>6</sup>, Harari addressed the theme of human narratives as an element of sharing and construction of collective roots in constant evolution, because it allows collaboration between individuals. Such collaboration/sharing, described as a specific condition of human beings, is characterized by abstract thought: if animals are able to collaborate in small groups to respond to concrete and immediate needs, according to Harari, *Sapiens* have acquired the ability to build extensive collaborative contexts, also in reference to ideal goals and immaterial values<sup>7</sup>.

Narration represents an important tool for the dissemination of history: the transition from orality to writing has produced an increasingly wide-ranging dissemination and the ability to preserve narratives for a longer time. Collective storytelling does not necessarily or naturally direct itself towards positive objectives (human rights and democracy, for example) but it has the characteristic of building prevalent majority narrations. The criticality of narrating the past according to a majority point of view has been a topic of historiographical reflection at least since the post-war period, when greater attention was paid to the issue of minorities<sup>8</sup> and restorative justice by international laws<sup>9</sup>. The analysis of “dominant narratives” has recently been reactivated, starting from the debate that arose on the “Cancel culture”<sup>10</sup>, as the practice of erasing, revising or inventing aspects of the past to support the dominant opinions in the present. The communication of the past (the action of telling about history) is not sufficient to activate educational processes aimed at peace and democratic values, nor the

<sup>6</sup>Y.N. Harari in TED talks «*What explains the rise of humans?*»: [https://www.ted.com/talks/yuval\\_noah\\_harari\\_what\\_explains\\_the\\_rise\\_of\\_humans?subtitle=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/yuval_noah_harari_what_explains_the_rise_of_humans?subtitle=en) (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Harari, *Sapiens*.

<sup>8</sup> The period after the two world wars has marked a constant reflection on this issue, although international law has not yet reached a definitive definition of "minorities".

<sup>9</sup> Van Ness, Heeterdks Strong, Derby, Parker, *Restoring justice*; Zagrebelski, C. M. Martini, *La domanda di giustizia*; Patrizi, *La giustizia riparativa*.

<sup>10</sup> Gordon, *Education in a Cultural War Era*; Owens, *The case of cancel culture*; Rizzacasa d'Orsogna, *Scorrettissimi*; Dei, “Cancel culture”.

participation of minorities who are often excluded from such a story, especially if they live in a context of marginalization or stereotyping in the present<sup>11</sup>.

What we can define as educational paths of memory must necessarily be composed of the following elements:

- historical narration (historicization);
- a methodology made of pedagogically connoted tools that can direct the story of the past, towards the objectives of fighting against prejudice and racism and strengthening the direct participation of minorities alongside the majorities.

## 2. History and the permanence of prejudice

To understand the process of permanence of prejudices about Roma and Sinti in the present, it is useful to remember that Nazi racial research on “Gypsies” defined them as a dangerous group in reference to two factors considered hereditary: «asociality» and the «instinct for nomadism». After the Second World War, the description of Roma nomadism was exactly the same as the Nazi and fascist one: it remained linked to the idea of a people defined folkloristically as «son of the wind», without roots in the past, capable of living only in the present. Stereotypes remain prejudices and do not really describe the Roma, but positive and negative folkloric characteristics were unfortunately conveyed by researchers and scholars in the post-war period.

The idea of a primordial nomadism was still linked to asociality and Roma continued to be described as people not capable of living in peace with other communities. This denigrating description was the result of a social context that described «Gypsies» as dangerous people. Hermann Arnold was one of the most important international expert on “Gypsies” during Seventies; he wrote the two books *Vaganten, Komödianten, Fieranten und Briganten*<sup>12</sup> and *Die Zigeuner*<sup>13</sup>. During the Second World War period, Arnold was in contact with Robert Ritter and Eva Justin, the two main Nazi scholars who had developed the

<sup>11</sup> De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore*.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold, *Vaganten*.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold, *Die Zigeuner*.

concepts of racial inferiority of the “Gypsies” and who had condemned Roma to extermination in Auschwitz. Between the 1960s and 1970s, Arnold continued to propose the need to sterilize Sinti and Roma in his books.

In 1972, historian Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon published the volume *The destiny of Europe's Gypsies*<sup>14</sup> and described the central role played by Ritter and Justin in defining the policies of elimination of the Sinti and Roma during Nazism; Ian Hancock, a professor of Roma origins at the University of Austin (Texas), proposed further documentation in the volume *The pariah Syndrome. An account of slavery and the persecution of the Gypsies*<sup>15</sup>. Finally, historians Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann pointed out the connivance and fraternal friendship of Hermann Arnold with Eva Justin and Robert Ritter in the volume *The Racial State. Germany 1933-1945*, recalling some articles by Arnold himself in neo-Nazi newspapers<sup>16</sup>.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Hermann Arnold and Walter Haessler were the European experts of Roma studies. Walter Haessler is the author of the text *Enfants de la Grand-Route*<sup>17</sup>, which was his doctoral thesis in psychology. The volume collects the genealogies of nomadic families in Switzerland that correspond to a group that should be correctly named “Yenische”, but they were labeled according to the concept of «nomadic and dangerous Gypsies». The volume positively describes a social state program of welfare that was coordinated by the Swiss association «Pro Juventute», which had as objective the elimination of the nomadism of the “Yenische”. In 1926, Dr. Alfred Siegfried was the director of the “Pro Juventute project”; he had collaborated closely with Robert Ritter. The Swiss project described nomadism as a defect to be eradicated through re-education and identified “Yenish children” as its target, considering adults irrecoverable subjects. The actions were based on the intervention of the police to take children away from their parents, changing their surnames so that it was impossible to establish new contacts with relatives. “Yenische” were entrusted to

<sup>14</sup> Kenrick, Puxon, *The destiny of Europe's Gypsies*.

<sup>15</sup> Hancock, *The pariah Syndrome*.

<sup>16</sup> Burleigh, Wippermann, *The racial State*, 316-317.

<sup>17</sup> Haessler, *Enfants de la Grand-Route*.

orphanages, peasant families or religious institutions. Children often suffered violence and abuse<sup>18</sup>.

Mariella Mehr was one of those children legally kidnapped and taken away from her parents. She was also a particularly resistant child and her indomitable character led to the decision, as happened in many other cases, to commit her to psychiatric institutions, where she was subjected to electroshock several times. Sterilization of boys and girls had also become common practice so that successive generations of Yenishes could no longer exist in Switzerland. In 1972, the Swiss press denounced the scandal about the project of re-education of Yenish children: it had been going on since the 1920s. The role of two direct testimonies was important: Teresa Wjss, from whom five children had been taken away and Mariella Mehr who had herself suffered the violent practices of the project. In 1987, Pro Juventute presented its official apologies to the Yenische community in Switzerland and delivered medical documents to the victims: these documents reported the use of electroshock and sterilization practiced on very young boys and girls. Mariella Mehr finally told the story of her specific persecution through her books and poems<sup>19</sup>. The story of the Pro-Juventute project shows how prejudices remained both before and after Second World War: during the Nazi period, Roma nomadism was defined as an element of racial inferiority and after the Second World War, the same nomadism was described as a massifying and negative cultural element that generated policies of marginalization, based on the same Nazi stereotypes.

### **3. Memory as a process for democratic citizenship**

History represents a useful tool for starting processes of inclusion and participation of minorities, provided that the narrative can be used to reflect on the processes of prejudice construction<sup>20</sup>. The European

<sup>18</sup> Galle, *Kindswegnahmen*.

<sup>19</sup> Mehr, *Daskind*; Mehr, *Ognuno incatenato alla sua ora*.

<sup>20</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials-

project TRACER, funded through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) program, was developed starting from these reference concepts aimed at the direct participation of the Roma and Sinti communities in the European context. The history of the persecution and extermination of Roma and Sinti during fascism and Nazism is still little known and disseminated. This condition of lack of consciousness is the origin of the current stereotypes directed towards this people: for this reason, knowledge of history identifies the process of prejudice construction and allows their destruction.

The process of deconstructing stereotypes about Roma that is activated by TRACER project provides the fundamental participation of Roma and non-Roma people. Knowing history is the tool to relate the past with the present of Roma young people living in Europe.

The Pedagogy of Recognition allowed TRACER project to focus its action on training and developing an educational process through history. Pedagogy of Recognition corresponds to building places of equal and democratic participation in educational and training contexts. History has become an instrument of active citizenship, through its public and collective narration; in this context, history and its narration return to concretely represent a possibility of education and training in a European perspective.

## Bibliography

- Arnold, Hermann. *Die Zigeuner*. Olten und Freiburg: Walter Verlag, 1965.
- Arnold, Hermann. *Vaganten, Komödianten, Fieranten und Briganten*. Stuttgart: Georg Thieme Verlag, 1958.
- Bandini, Gianfranco, Paolo Bianchini, Francesca Borruso, Marta Brunelli and Stefano Oliviero (eds.). *La Public History tra scuola, università e territorio*. Firenze: FUP, 2022.
- Bertella Farnetti, Paolo, Lorenzo Bertucelli and Alfonso Botti (Eds.). *Public History. Discussioni e Pratiche*. Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2017.
- Bravi, Luca. *Percorsi storico educativi della memoria europea*. Milano: Franco Angeli, 2014.

[https://search.coe.int/cm/#{%22CoEIdentifier%22:\[%2209000016809ee48c%22\],%22sort%22:\[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22\]}](https://search.coe.int/cm/#{%22CoEIdentifier%22:[%2209000016809ee48c%22],%22sort%22:[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22]}) (Last access: August 2024).

- Burleigh, Michael and Wolfgang Wippermann. *The racial State. Germany 1933-1945*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 316-317.
- Cauvin, Thomas. *A textbook of practice*. London: Routledge, 2022.
- De Luna, Giovanni. *La Repubblica del dolore*. Milano: Feltrinelli, 2011.
- Dei, Fabio. "Cancel culture: strategie della memoria e politiche identitarie". In *Cambio. Rivista sulle trasformazioni sociali* 13 (2023), n. 25: 59-71.
- Foster, Stuart, Andy Pearce and Alice Pettygrew, *Holocaust education. Contemporary Challenges and controversies*. London: UCL Press, 2020.
- Galle, Sara. *Kindswenahmen*. Zürich: Chronos, 2016.
- Gordon, Mordechai. *Education in a Cultural War Era. Thinking Philosophically about the Practice of Cancelling*. London: Routledge, 2022.
- Gryglewski, Elke. *Anerkennung und Erinnerung: Zugänge arabisch-palästinensischer und türkischer Berliner J gendlicher zum Holocaust*. Berlin: Metropol, 2013.
- Haessler, Walter. *Enfants de la Grand-Route (Hilfswerk für die Kinder der Landstrasse)*. Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1955.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Paris: Alcan, 1925.
- Hancock, Ian. *The pariah Syndrome. An account of gypsy slavery and persecution*, Ann Arbor: Karoma publisher, 1987.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. New York: Vintage, 2015.
- Kenrick, Donald and Grattan Puxon. *The destiny of Europe's Gypsies*. London: Chatto Heinemann for Sussex University, 1972.
- Mehr, Mariella. *Daskind*. Zürich: Limmat, 2017.
- Mehr, Mariella. *Ognuno incatenato alla sua ora*. Torino: Einaudi, 2014.
- Owens, Ernst. *The case of cancel culture*. London: Macmillan, 2023.
- Patrizi, Patrizia. *La giustizia riparativa*. Roma: Carocci, 2009.
- Rizzacasa d'Orsogna, Costanza. *Scorrettissimi. La cancel culture nella cultura americana*. Torino: Einaudi, 2023
- Van Ness, Daniel W., Karen Heetderks Strong, Jonathan Derby and Lynette Parker. *Restoring justice*. London: Routledge, 2022.
- Zagrebelski, Gustavo and Carlo Maria Martini. *La domanda di giustizia*. Torino: Einaudi, 2003.

### **3. Breaking the prejudice through places of Memory**

by *Silvia Bencini\** and *Luca Bravi\**

#### **1. History walks in the places of the past and present<sup>1</sup>**

The places are an element from which to start a historical reconstruction of the public policies of Remembrance and the Auschwitz State Museum is one of the sites that was first intended for this objective (at least in the immediate intentions of the survivors), which later became an international symbol, to the point of iconically implying the entire path of persecution and extermination implemented by Nazism and European fascism. Auschwitz, which has become a world symbol, has undergone a crystallization: known on a public level for its past (the events between 1940 and 1945), it sees its post-war period and its present constantly put in the background; it seems to exist only for the historical time of Nazism. A fundamental phase of the TRACER project was the visit to the Auschwitz State Museum as an element of connection between past and present, as a tool for reflection in relation to the discriminatory categories of the past which are still used at a social level in the preservation of stereotypes: the category “gypsies” is one of those that has been most preserved over time, carrying stereotypes about Roma almost unchanged into the present. The proposed contribution aims to reflect on the need to build a passage between the past and the present that is linked to the activation of training and educational processes. But just visiting the Museum is not enough to produce this process; after the visit of the Museum which

\* Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology (FOR-LILPSI), University of Florence.

<sup>1</sup> Luca Bravi is author of paragraphs 1; Silvia Bencini is author of paragraphs 2 and 4; Luca Bravi and Silvia Bencini are both authors of paragraph 3.

represents the story of Nazi persecution and extermination, it is necessary to find channels of relationship with people living in the present.

The attempt to escape from this crystallization of Auschwitz also means describing the variation of meanings that have been linked to this same place. It is a geographical area that speaks of the past of death and destruction, in such an all-encompassing way that it influences the vision one has of the town of Oświęcim (Auschwitz, in the historical Nazi translation)<sup>2</sup>, even today. Over time, the international public narrative of death has focused on this town, so much so that any sign of life expressed in the present risks appearing out of place and being described as an offense to the memory of those who suffered the fate of death in the *lager* between 1940 and 1945. Yet the activities to build contexts of peace and the fight against racism are active right in the town of Oświęcim, but paradoxically not perceived by those who are visiting the Auschwitz Museum, who leave the city immediately after the visit and return to the main nearby Polish metropolises before going home.

The burning current debate can be summarized in these terms: does Oświęcim remain a place of death, or can it be a symbol of the strength of Memory, from a proactive perspective of the present? And if the invitation of Memory policies is always to translate awareness of the past into present commitment, how to manage the return to life? Is it ethical that life continues to flow around the fence of the Auschwitz camp, or should we leave the entire place, including the town, as a memorial to those fallen under the hand of the Nazi death machine?

The debate is decidedly intricate and presents an innumerable series of problematic issues, but the reflection around these questions is essential precisely when one intends to give full meaning to processes of participation and deconstruction of stereotypes: if the Auschwitz Museum is not made to dialogue with the present, any visit risks

<sup>2</sup> Under the Nazi occupation, the town of Oświęcim was renamed Auschwitz (name taken from the Habsburg translation). The Polish name of the city will be reported here, whenever the analysis focuses on contexts outside the concentration camp, while "Auschwitz" will be used only when referring to the historical time and the events of the concentration and extermination camp. This distinction is also necessary because the citizens who live in Oświęcim today perceive the full weight of the stigma of history in the German translation. This approach will naturally also open the reflection to the subsequent theme of the removal and/or construction of Memory.

exhausting itself in a sort of excavation into past events which end up being perceived as distant from the current context: the evil of the past in opposition to the present considered immune from similar drifts. Reflecting on the relationship between Auschwitz (symbol of the past and a warning for the democracies of the future) and Oświęcim (the city of the present that works on the fight against racism and xenophobia) is essential when approaching these places and these stories, people belonging to young generations in training who are part of a minority that is still affected by racism throughout Europe. The young Roma and Sinti who come to Oświęcim to learn about the phase of Auschwitz which directly affected them through extermination policies must be able to relate historical notions with the perception of themselves and with a European narrative which continues to perceive them as “different” in the social context.

To build a process that is not ethnicizing and that does not risk proposing historicization paths segmented into a single minority, it is useful to first consider the place of Oświęcim (the present) in its entirety and complexity, in order to perceive how the practices of deconstruction of stereotypes through history do not only concern the specific theme of a minority, but also the global approach to history that finds a form of formative expression in the multicultural present. Here we will attempt to describe Oświęcim proactive face of the present, with its dense network of people and associations who inhabit and experience the town and who connect the commitment to active citizenship with constant reference to the history preserved and narrated by the Museum.

Carrying out this revolution means being aware that Memory is *made* (and not just studied) and that this path can only be accomplished where life exists. Life alongside death, without one prevailing over the other: from death to life, in a reciprocal movement that leads to the preservation of Memory as a training tool in which Roma and Sinti participate together with all the other people who make up the humanity. It is an effort that will also allow us to reflect on the methods of access to certain places, on the role of “memory tourism”, on what is right or wrong to do and on how each of the reflections takes on a different depth when observed as a citizen and not as an impromptu passer-by in these places who then quickly returns to his home.

## 2. Auschwitz, “dark tourism” and emotions

The town of Oświęcim is now adapting its shape to a continuously growing tourist flow. In 2019, there were 2,320,000 visitors to the Museum, with a physiological decrease during the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic to 502,600 people in 2020 and 563,000 in 2021 (in any case very high numbers, considering the period); in 2023, there were 1,676,000 visitors. To respond to these very high flows, in Oświęcim supermarkets are being built in every corner of the city and a hostel is being built in front of the camp, in which the Museum volunteers will be able to stay. Yet, alongside places to host students and scholars, there exists the problematic reality of Memory tourism, which takes the form of a superficial approach to certain areas linked to the Nazi extermination. “Dark tourism”<sup>3</sup>, or horror tourism, is a form of macabre tourism that is based on a thanatological<sup>4</sup> motif, i.e. linked to an interest in death and the biological, anthropological, psychological and philosophical effects connected to it. The places affected by this type of tourism therefore end up being experienced as forms of macabre entertainment and not as an educational tool. For this reason, before any training process aimed at deconstructing stereotypes in the present, it is necessary to create awareness regarding the risks that the approach to similar areas can produce.

<sup>3</sup> “Dark tourism” is an expression used for the first time by M. Foley and J.J. Lennon in 1996 (Lennon, Foley, *Dark tourism*). There are five categories of “dark” places that constitute an attraction in dark tourism: places that witness public death (despite public executions nowadays taking place in relatively few countries); places of individual or mass death, covering an enormous variety of locations, from battlefields (e.g. Gallipoli), to extermination camps (e.g. Auschwitz-Birkenau) and genocide sites (e.g. the “Killing Fields” in Cambodia), places where famous people have died (such as the site of the car accident in which James Dean died), places where crimes known to the public have occurred (for example Soham in Great Britain, where they were murdered in 2002 the young Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman) or places where famous murderers lived (for example 25 Cromwell Street, Gloucester in Great Britain, where Fred West and his wife committed serial murder crimes and sexual crimes); burial places or monuments, including cemeteries, cenotaphs, crypts and war monuments; places that are not directly connected to the event but which show evidence of death or its symbolic representations, such as the museums they contain weapons (e.g. the Royal Armouries in Leeds, Great Britain) or exhibitions depicting specific events or activities; places where death is staged or simulated, in the form of theatrical shows or religious-themed parties or re-enactments of famous battles; Stone, “A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions”.

<sup>4</sup> [www.turystykakulturowa.org](http://www.turystykakulturowa.org) (Last access: August 2024).

We present here an extreme example of the very problematic reality around this theme: in a kiosk near the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum it is possible to purchase magnets which reproduce in photos various interiors of the former *lager* (the main entrance with the writing “*Arbeit macht frei*”, the blocks of the camp where the deportees lived, the public gallows, the crematorium). Evidently, a thriving market of horror souvenirs is born and is growing, which brings us back to the pressing issue of mass tourism in places of Memory and the meaning that these visits can take on.

The question to ask, in the context of a project that wants to use the past to take action in the present (particularly together with minorities), is the following: where a perception of Auschwitz is growing as an emotional symbol and not as a historical event to be explained and known, is it possible to develop that awareness that can produce multicultural paths of inclusion and participation? The risk is finding ourselves participating in a collective and social process that refers to the emotions that the place arouses, but not to the historicization which would instead be able to explain how stereotypes and hatred have been built and continue to be fueled.

It is that emotional channel that Giovanni De Luna talks about in his volume *La Repubblica del dolore* (“The Republic of Pain”):

And then again, the suffocating presence of emotions: hatred, revenge, forgiveness, pity, compassion. And then finally, the mammoth competition between the various victims, almost as if each of them, in order to have their pain recognised, must surpass that of the others. A competition made deafening by the media coverage attributed to that pain. To excite, move, arouse consensus, suffering must be shouted out; and the louder you shout, the more you break down the audience and listening barriers. Almost as if emotions are goods and almost as if the market imposes its rules, controlling supply and demand<sup>5</sup>.

From commodified emotions to commodified places, a dangerous industry is born, and it seems to forget the fundamental objective of Memory policies: learning from history as an exercise of the present and not only as a burden of the past; the emotional aspect can be analyzed as a tool for building interest in historicization, but never as the

<sup>5</sup> De Luna, *La Repubblica del dolore*, 34.

final goal of a project. For this reason, what it must be considered in the participation/construction of memory policies, in particular in the contexts of participation of minorities affected by the persecution actions implemented by Nazism and European fascism, is avoiding moving along the path of knowledge only of one's own piece of history, because there is a risk of triggering emotional recriminations that produce competition between categories of victims.

The consequences of "dark tourism" do not only take on commercial characteristics; by analyzing the way in which many visitors "enjoy" certain places, we understand that the approach to them is not only superficial but hides an inability to deeply understand the place. Selfies in front of the entrance to Birkenau, at the sign "*Arbeit macht frei*", or even inside the gas chamber of the Auschwitz I camp, are some examples of the behaviors that occur with worrying frequency. It seems necessary to immortalize one's presence in the places of horror, as if the fulcrum of the visit to the camp coincided with the participation in a particularly "dark" experience of which it is mandatory to produce documentation, completely neglecting the aspect of historical reconstruction and the process that produced the extermination. Even the policies of Remembrance are inserted into the era of consumerism and everything is consumed in that moment of the visit, to then go out and decide to eat an ice cream in front of the entrance to Birkenau, at a recently opened kiosk (built on a private area). Do not forget, however, that the economic activity is not just a matter of private individuals speculating on horror tourists, because for a long time it was possible to consume a meal at the self-service present right inside the former administrative part of the *lager*, in the Museum structure itself, whose windows offered a view of the blocks of Auschwitz I.

Putting a stop to the tourist industry around Auschwitz (and not only) could actually be an ethically proper solution that respects the victims, but would it be enough to change the approach to these places?

Would the practice of taking selfies in front of the camp end? But above all, would it be enough to return home aware that those places were born as the result of mechanisms of hatred still existing in our society? Or perhaps it could make a difference to focus on the ways of *crossing* certain places, experiencing them, reading them with a depth that goes beyond mere emotion, which involves a stay in Oświęcim

and not just in Auschwitz? The type of emotion linked to the vision of the Museum often disappears in a single instant, as soon as one crosses the exit and this delimitation into watertight compartments (first I was in the elapsed time of extermination and now I return to the current reality of democracy) does not connect the past with the present.

The same emotionality that makes one pronounce the formula of “never again, so as not to forget”, risks not allowing reflection on the tools necessary to produce an educational process to be elaborated: this is because the main tool that can produce action is that of historicization (historical knowledge of the road that led to Auschwitz), but it was downgraded in favor of an intoxicating emotional plan that leads to generic ethical statements which are not capable of producing the wealth of knowledge that could determine the basis on which to build individual or collective educational processes. This discrepancy becomes evident in the visit to Auschwitz: crying in front of the photo of the museum tour which portrays four Roma twins subjected to experimentation by the Nazi Josef Mengele, but also being unable to activate a plan of reflection on the stereotypes towards the Roma in the present. Or the emotional simplification according to which we proceed by equating past and present, using “pieces” of history used as stand-alone tiles: the Italian nomadic camps paradoxically become comparable to the extermination camp of Auschwitz, but instead a historicization of the processes of racialization implemented in the concentration camp would allow not to equate, but to understand how the Roma’s distance from the current majority society was constructed and how the latter has found different elements to express itself, so much so as to make them not comparable to Auschwitz, but the product of a consequent differentialist logic that has changed and has therefore been preserved over the centuries.

The emotionality that simplifies declaring the past and the present identical (yet each historical event is always different from another), makes the historical discourse problematic, which would instead allow us to identify the basis for understanding what the inheritance of Auschwitz has become in the modernity; a process that is not produced by equating, but by problematizing historical events and knowing them in their own singular specificities, ultimately through a critical comparison that represents a specific tool of the historian.

But a personal choice is also needed: that of entering the place of Memory and inevitably coming out different. The choice to make the effort to bring the experience we have just lived back into our lives, to give it meaning and make a change. Personal change certainly doesn't happen with a snap of the fingers upon leaving Auschwitz, but *crossing* this place is a step in the educational journey of people who live in the present and who each time have to reorient the gaze with which observing their daily lives.

### **3. Oświęcim, the relationship with the present**

Oświęcim, the town that existed before Auschwitz and which continued to exist after the Nazi occupation phase, if valorized within events and trips of Remembrance, can represent a training tool, precisely because it allows you to relate not only with death, but with life that must take on the symbolism and genocidal practice linked to the past. It is the need not to relegate these places only to mere cemeteries of extermination, but also to places of life and community building, if we do not limit ourselves to flying over them superficially and then returning to the nearby metropolises. This is the reason why the project activities carried out in Poland did not only include a visit to the Auschwitz State Museum, but a stay of several days in Oświęcim, to have the opportunity to understand the place that everyone judges only on the basis of parameters that refer to the theme of death. It was thus possible to perceive and know that in that town, many inhabitants work assiduously precisely to respect Memory, preserve it, but also make it live in the concept of active and participatory Memory. It was possible to take a different point of view from the usual one of the visit to Auschwitz, which allowed us to learn a lesson starting from the idea that the practices of hatred which culminated in the destruction of human beings are fought with the construction of communities for rights, for peace, for democracy. Oświęcim turned out to be a city truly rich in activism, educational projects, educational communication skills.

Oświęcim today is a continuously expanding town and has more than 40.000 inhabitants. The Auschwitz Museum is undoubtedly one of the main sources of work that pushes citizens from other areas of Poland to move to this city. The experience gained in the context of

the TRACER project has shown that these are not citizens who have crystallized an entire municipality around the memorial theme of the Nazi genocide. Oświęcim seems to realize the different role it must play in the present compared to Auschwitz and appears to be involved and active in the current debate on the protection of minorities and in the fight against forms of discrimination that pollute the present. Oświęcim is, as it is described on the city's official website, «a meeting place for people of various nationalities, regardless of religion and belief, a place where new generations want to build a future without wars and violence. [...] an open, multinational and multi-religious center for reflection and dialogue». For this reason, Oświęcim chooses to describe itself as “the City of Peace”. It is important to remember that this message launched by the Oświęcim of the present remains unknown to the majority of visitors of the Auschwitz Museum, who on many occasions find themselves reflecting on these themes hundreds of kilometers away from that place which could offer activation elements directly on site, right next to the museum that tells the story of the extermination.

Walking around the town of Oświęcim is a chance to know it better. Beyond the barbed wire of Auschwitz there is a vital and alive dimension waiting to be discovered. But to truly appreciate it, to immerse yourself in the response of a place that doesn't want to talk only about death, it is perhaps necessary to travel it on foot and simply let yourself be captured by its public narration. The “City of Peace” communicates directly with passers-by through various forms of art which are a fundamental element of collective storytelling. An installation organized by the Institute for Human Rights («Oświęcimski Instytut Praw Człowieka») reminds us that Oświęcim is «*miasto otwarte dla wszystkich*», “a city open to everyone”. You can walk on a colorful floral wreath, which recalls the city's solidarity with the Ukrainian people. The “Mural trail” features a collection of monumental murals, found on buildings in different parts of the city. Each of these works invites us to promote peace, to break cultural barriers and stereotypes, to live with respect for diversity. It has now become a tradition in Oświęcim that an artist can color the city with his work, on the occasion of the Life Festival Oświęcim: a music festival organized by the Peace Festival Foundation, held in June with the aim of building peaceful relations across cultural and national borders and combat

racism and anti-Semitism. Also, particularly relevant on a communicative and educational level are the “Talking heads”, murals that depict well-known and important people alongside one of their famous quotes.

Thus, walking through Oświęcim, it is possible to come across the words of the physicist, chemist and mathematician Maria Skłodowska-Curie (a figure valued precisely in the context of the European Union), who reminds us that «in life there is nothing to fear, only to understand». Understanding the lesson that comes from the history of a place like the town of Oświęcim and remembering it in everyday life; process which brings to mind the Stumbling Stones, *Stolpersteine* in German, an initiative spread internationally by the artist Gunter Demnig as a reaction to every form of denialism and oblivion, in order to remember all the victims of National-Socialism who for whatever reason were persecuted: religion, race, political ideas, sexual orientation.

And again, walking through Oświęcim, the visitor comes across Martin Luther King's message, «In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends». Likewise, the reproduced figure of Mahatma Gandhi seems to appeal to passers-by with his famous exhortation «Be the change you want to see in the world» and the politician Vaclav Havel who states: «Decent people cannot stand by and watch». These images aim to promote, especially among younger generations, values such as tolerance, human rights, peace, democracy and civil society.

In the “City of Peace” two parallel realities coexist, which have been carrying out for a long time the fight against prejudices and mechanisms of hatred, activating educational processes: Cafe Bergson and the Roma Association in Poland.

### *3.1 Cafe Bergson, walking between yesterday and today*

Cafe Bergson is today one of the main centers committed to the guarantee of every minority civil rights. It was born in 2014 thanks to

the American Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation (AJCF)<sup>6</sup> in the building where the last Jewish citizen of Oświęcim Shimson Kleuger lived, and right next to the only synagogue survived the Second World War. The position is not accidental, Cafe Bergson is in fact engaged in education on the *Shoah*, in a continuous project of memory preservation through educational activities involving various age groups. To understand the importance of this commitment, it is necessary to explain the social context that pushed the Foundation to create this cultural, educational and recreational center in Oświęcim. Before the Second World War, the Jewish community was very large and diverse in Oświęcim: about 58% of the inhabitants were Jewish, more than twenty synagogues stood in Oświęcim and there was peaceful coexistence between the Jewish and Christian communities.

Even today it is possible to appreciate how close the Great Synagogue<sup>7</sup> of Oświęcim, destroyed by the Nazis on the night of November 29, 1939, and the Church of Saint Mary Help of Christians, still functioning as a place of worship, were.

After the war, 186 Jews returned to Oświęcim (there were approximately more than 7.000 before the extermination). The majority were killed in their own town, inside the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, after having been transported to the ghettos of other cities. Upon the survivors' return, the only synagogue not completely demolished was restored and remained in use during the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1960s, due to growing anti-Semitic policies, the Jewish community decided to emigrate from Poland; the synagogue was closed and used by the city in a secular manner (for a period it even housed a carpet shop). Only in the 1990s, with the birth of the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation, was the synagogue renovated again and made available

<sup>6</sup> The Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation (AJCF) is a non-governmental organization founded in 1995 by Fred Schwartz with the aim of building a cultural, spiritual and educational center for the Jewish community. To date, the foundation takes care of the maintenance of the Oshpitzin Jewish Museum, the Synagogue, the Jewish cemetery, and the memorial that stands on the ruins of the Great Synagogue which was destroyed during the Nazi occupation. Furthermore, it financed the reconstruction of the building in which Cafe Bergson is located.

<sup>7</sup> The demolition was completed in the summer of 1941, when a detachment composed mainly of Polish Auschwitz prisoners was sent to clear the ruins of the Great Synagogue. This historic site where a special memorial stands today is managed by the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation and the artefacts found in the 2004 excavations are part of the collection present at the Jewish Museum in Oświęcim.

for a small group of Jews who remained in the town. It currently plays a dual role: it hosts the Jewish Museum, which deals with the preservation of the memory of the Shoah through the collection of photos, objects and artefacts connected to history, and it is occasionally used as a place of worship. Since there is no longer a Jewish community in the city of Oświęcim, the synagogue is open to groups of visitors from the Jewish Museum and the Auschwitz State Museum. In the year 2000, the building next to the synagogue was acquired by the Foundation, because the owner died. The structural conditions were precarious, so the foundation organized a fundraising campaign to renovate the premises and give birth, in 2014, to a new place that could host not only visitors or groups of tourists, but also and above all the local community.

Cafe Bergson marked a real turning point for attendance at the Jewish Museum. Before its opening, the population of Oświęcim had not shown great interest in the themes covered by the museum: a story, that of the Shoah, now distant in time and which no longer represented the citizens from a religious point of view.

After its opening, citizens began to frequent the Cafe and its surroundings, including the restored synagogue, despite some initial reticence. There were those who did not understand whether or not it was a place reserved only for Jews or for groups visiting the museum, but over time the Cafe has gained a rather large number of regular visitors and is currently one of the most popular places in the town of Oświęcim, thanks to a philosophy of great openness on the social issues of the present. Cafe Bergson is a significant example of proactive commitment for the present, because it is not limited only to the creation of training processes aimed at knowledge and preservation of the memory of the Nazi extermination, but it updates the mechanisms of hatred and discrimination that led to the reality of places like Auschwitz: it effectively implements a process of historicization, of knowledge that dialogues through places, between past and present. The Cafe organizes workshops calibrated to the age of the participants: the “Elder Brothers in Faith” project, an artistic workshop in which children learn the basic terms of the Jewish religion and the synagogue, through the use of games and colours; the “Auschwitz Jewish Center Fellows” program, for university students involved in historical studies on the Shoah or similar topics. An advanced study trip lasting

three and a half weeks to the most important cities in Poland related to the study program (Krakow, Warsaw, Łódź, Treblinka and Oświęcim). In Oświęcim, fellows participate in an intensive program at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, where they visit the camps, study the history of inmates, and take part in workshops with staff from the Museum's collections and education departments.

Teachers are a particularly important category for the centre. The “Anti-discrimination Education Academy” is a long-term program on which the foundation focuses most, and it is aimed at teachers of Polish or other humanities subjects in primary and secondary schools in the Polish regions of Małopolska and Górny Śląsk. The program provides specific training against stereotypes and prejudices, and uses the so-called VICE model (Visibility, Inclusion, Collaboration, Empowerment), which encourages the construction and maintenance of safe communities, because they are free from discrimination and violence. The effectiveness of certain educational processes in deconstructing stereotypes rooted in the present is based on the ability to consider the history of all the victims of the Nazi genocide. In fact, Cafe Bergson is not limited to ethical declarations but is built and proposed as a “neutral environment”: it is frequented by anyone, even by people not really interested in history who, by participating in the various public events, have the opportunity to read something about it even just in the posters that crowd the walls of the building. The Cafe itself is an indirect educational tool, as it is a place of informal training. Lively, effective and accurate communication intrigues the online community but also passers-by. It is in fact very easy to notice the building, thanks to its colored ribbons: a rainbow of colors, a banner, symbolizing that, at Cafe Bergson, everyone is welcomed with open arms, regardless of origin, gender, sexuality, physical and neurological condition, age: “Here you can be whoever you want, you can come and feel comfortable and safe”<sup>8</sup>.

The commitment continued in relation to the nearby war context in Ukraine with the #bergson4ukraine project, activated immediately after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Thanks to

<sup>8</sup> The motto “Here you can be whoever you want, you can come and feel comfortable and safe” was pronounced by Karolina Turza, manager and educator of Cafe Bergson, during an interview conducted in Oświęcim on 17th August 2023.

cooperation with the “European Solidarity Corpse” project, every year the Foundation hosts young volunteers from various countries (in particular now Ukraine), who have the opportunity to participate in the various activities offered: leading groups in the museum, working in the Cafe, taking care of the Jewish cemetery and the Memorial. The Cafe has become a place of welcome and redemption for Ukrainian refugees where, in addition to accommodation and employment, activities such as Polish lessons for foreigners, workshops and trips are offered. Finally, Cafe Bergson has been committed to the fight against discrimination towards the LGBTQAI+ community for six years now. This can be appreciated from the rainbow flags at its entrance, but also from having chosen to spread the slogan “*Nikt nie jest nielegalny*” (“No one is illegal”) through its business. This motto is inspired by the recent denial of civil rights in some regions of Poland towards members of the LGBTQIA+ community. In fact, there are (even if today only symbolically) LGBT-free zones, i.e. areas of Poland declared “free from homosexuals”. Oświęcim is not one of them, but the Cafe has nevertheless decided to act as a megaphone for any action against hatred and discrimination.

### *3.2. The Roma. From Oświęcim to the European gaze on the present*

Along the same road that leads to Cafe Bergson, the same road that reaches, on the opposite side, the Catholic church and passes next to the monument that recalls the ancient Great Synagogue which was destroyed by the Nazis, you will find the headquarters of the Association *Stowarzyszenie Romów w Polsce* (“Roma in Poland”), a key partner of the TRACER project, which works against anti-gypsyism at local, national and international levels. The Association was founded at the beginning of 1992, with the main objective of creating the conditions for the full participation of Roma in the life of the country. The reflection on places in relation to the construction of awareness of the history of the Roma and Sinti as a central element of European history finds in this context a natural constructive relationship between past and present. One of the main purposes of the Association is to remember and commemorate the Nazi persecution and extermination of Roma and

Sinti and its location in the city of the Auschwitz State Museum makes the concrete meaning of this objective immediate with respect to the past; in this case, the reflection on the present adds elements that make a concrete example of the possibility of managing educational actions, through a constant reminder that finds its fulcrum in historicization, but to make it the basis of appropriate and solid current training. The permanent exhibition entitled «Romowie Historia Kultura» («Roma History and Culture»), which can be visited at the Association's headquarters, is constructed as a narrative of the Roma history, starting from the movements of this community around the world (in Europe in particular), and makes immediately visible the stereotypes more rooted in the collective thought regarding this population, the same ones that formed the basis for the Nazi extermination and which remain in the present. There are paintings of women presented through the art produced by the majority culture in which "gypsies" become attractive, bewitching subjects, with mystical seductive powers and accused of being enchantresses and deceivers; the images of the men oscillate between the vision of extreme freedom (which however also constructs the figure of the "rootless and non-citizen gypsy"), up to that of the carefree musician, circus artist and therefore "obviously" nomadic and contextually described as a thief.

The European imagination has always been fascinated by the exoticism of these people, but at the same time annoyed by their presence which has been depicted as a cumbersome and dangerous diversity. The exhibition retraces the steps which, from this imaginary, led to the Nazi persecution, deportation and extermination of around 500,000 Roma and Sinti, of which around 23,000 in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp. From eugenic tests, to forced sterilizations, to the extermination in the *Zigeunerlager* of Birkenau (camp of the Birkenau gypsy families, officially indicated as the BIIE sector of the *lager*), which took place on 2nd August 1944, we are faced with a page of history that has almost never been told in school-books.

From the imagery of the negative narrative of the Roma in the majority culture, the historical phase of Auschwitz is addressed in the exhibition, through archival documentation, in order to historicize an event of the past which has long been denied in its character of extermination for racial reasons (the commitment of Professor Ian

Hancock<sup>9</sup>, a Roma researcher at the University of Austin in Texas, was necessary to achieve adequate knowledge of the persecution process implemented by the Nazis against Sinti and Roma and to achieve recognition of their extermination, which occurred as a final act linked to the definition of racial inferiority applied to the category “gypsies”).

The exhibition of the Polish association is a narrative journey that does not finish with the end of Auschwitz but continues with a story that once again becomes the story of Oświęcim, but above all the description of the relationship between the cultural majority and Roma minority in the post-war period. The events of the Roma thus leave the direct reference to Auschwitz and the passage to the personal and family history of Roman Kwiatkowski allow us to concretely consider the effects of a denied memory, as was that of the Roma at least until the 1980s. The Kwiatkowskis are a family of Roma who, as happened with the entire group of Polish Roma, arrived in Poland at least as early as the 16th century, due to pogroms against the “gypsies” carried out in Russian territories. Each family suffered Nazi persecution which resulted in the extermination and death of members of the community. The generations following that of the direct witnesses of the persecution returned to live on Polish territory alongside the majority community. In the 1980s, during the changes that led to the end of the Cold War, the Polish economic situation had worsened considerably and the need to identify those responsible for the general malaise caused new pogroms against the Roma who were used as scapegoats. In 1981, conflicts specifically targeted against the Roma population occurred. The first of these events took place on 9th and 10th September 1981 in Konin, where 70 Roma lived, while the second took place on 21st and 22nd October of the same year in Oświęcim, where 137 Roma were registered, including Roman Kwiatkowski with his family. A futile argument between a Roma and a non-Roma over a place in a queue sparked the conflict. Speculation about the financial situation of the Roma and the cultural resort to theft began to be widespread again. It was also said that Roma from nearby towns - Kęty, Chrzanów and Andrychów - would be resettled in Auschwitz blocks to keep them under control. Local committees were formed to expel the “gypsies” from the cities and actual agreements were stipulated with the

<sup>9</sup> Hancock, *The pariah syndrome*.

authorities of the Bielsko voivodeship (region) to remove them. Meanwhile, the demonstrators destroyed the property of the Oświęcim Roma and set fire to their cars and threw them into the Soła river. Roman Kwiatkowski's family, together with the other Roma in the Polish town, was forced to leave and move away from the city where they had always lived, to move abroad. The return occurred only two years later and on that occasion it was Roman Kwiatkowski himself who perceived the urgency and need to work on a cultural level for the participation of Roma in the social context at a local, national and international level: the idea of give life to the association *Stowarzyszenie Romów w Polsce* in that context and from 1992 significantly established its official headquarters in Oświęcim, where the Roma, including the Kwiatkowski family, returned to live.

In 2023, the association achieved government-level recognition; Therefore, it is recognized and supported as the official representative of Roma in Poland. It was during the period of building the association's activity that Roman Kwiatkowski established relationships with Romani Rose, one of the most well-known German Sinti activists and director of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma (born 1982). The Rose family was hit hard by the Nazi extermination: 13 of Romani Rose's relatives were murdered in the concentration camps, including his grandfather Anton who died in Auschwitz and his grandmother Lisetta who died during transport to Ravensbrück. The sons Oskar (who had managed to escape deportation right from the start) and Vinzenz (who survived Auschwitz) were saved; the two brothers continued to fight for the affirmation of the civil rights of Sinti and Roma in the post-World War II period in Germany. At an international level they worked assiduously for the recognition of the extermination of the Roma and Sinti as an element linked to racial persecution, and at a national level (until the 1980s the deportation and persecution of men, women and children which took place under the label "Gypsies" had been declassified as a social control action by the Third Reich, denying the specificity of persecution for reasons of race). Oskar Rose died in 1968, after the birth of his son Romani. Vinzenz Rose, who remained alive until 1996, wanted to build the first monument dedicated to the memory of Sinti and Roma within the section of Birkenau reserved for "gypsy" prisoners. He managed to follow up this project in 1974, paying with his own money for the construction of the monument which

still stands in the BIIe sector of Birkenau and which reproduces the wall of one of the barracks in which Sinti and Roma lived, imprisoned between 1943 and 1944 Auschwitz II. Romani, son of Oskar and nephew of Vinzenz, organized and took part in the public demonstrations that were carried out by the German Sinti for the institutional recognition of their own extermination, in order to be able to officially declare, starting from 1980, that it had been a policy of racial persecution: among the best-known demonstrations, the one that took place on Good Friday 1980, when twelve Sinti began a hunger strike at the memorial site of the former Dachau concentration camp (the Dachau concentration camp, the first to be built in 1933 in Nazi Germany, it was immediately a place of imprisonment of the German Sinti - the Sinti immediately lost the German citizenship with the promulgation of the Nuremberg laws), as they were considered dangerous asocials to be kept under control (the specific theories of racial inferiority on the category “gypsies” were developed in 1936).

The strike turned into a key event for the Sinti and Roma civil rights movement in Germany. The public protest action received particular weight thanks to the participation of concentration camp survivors Jakob Bamberger, Hans Braun and Franz Wirbel. Romani Rose intervened with a speech projected onto the present, recalling the past of death in the very place where the Memorial reconstructed by Vinzenz inside Birkenau is located. It is in memory of that speech held in 1980 that on Good Friday of each year, in a place that was the site of extermination, what the Sinti and Roma call a “hymn to life and peace in the present” is celebrated. Please note that the “*Landfahrerordnung*”<sup>10</sup> (Nomads Ordinance) remained valid in Bavaria until 1970; this had limited the fundamental rights of Sinti and Roma for decades in terms of housing policies, education and participation in public life. The Bavarian criminal police had continued to record the names, fingerprints and personal data of Roma and Sinti from all over Germany during the post-war period. This information was in some cases added to files already created during the Nazi period on each Sinti or Roma individual present in the area and the information contained therein was often used to deny compensation to Sinti and Roma survivors of the

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/heftarchiv/1997\\_4\\_3\\_margalis.pdf](https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/heftarchiv/1997_4_3_margalis.pdf) (Last access: August, 2024)

concentration camps who officially requested it. The strikers also tried to find out where these files were located. Their protest triggered a widespread wave of public solidarity and marked a turning point in the public perception of the minority.

About one hundred domestic and foreign media reported the events in Dachau. Eventually, the regional government publicly admitted that it was facing discrimination against Sinti and Roma. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior stated that the individual files of the Bavarian criminal police had been destroyed at the very beginning of the 1970s. It is on the basis of the results progressively obtained from this process of building rights and participation underway in the thirty years following the end of the Second World War in Germany, that the subsequent international relationships were born between Roman Kwiatkowski and Romani Rose who found themselves in collaborate in the annual celebrations in memory of the extermination of Sinti and Roma, but which have had the ability to project a concrete commitment to the construction and defense of civil rights in the present. It is through these reference figures present within the Roma communities and who belong to the generation of the children of the deportees, that the need to link the past of Auschwitz to the present of Oświęcim is clearly expressed, as well as the history of persecution that characterized Dachau, with the most recent events that made it a place for claiming rights in the present.

Through places and their complete historicization (between present and past) the valorization of the historical narrative can also be resumed through the narrative links between different generations: in the case of Sinti and Roma, this process has stopped, because (we will see it in some passages of this book) there are Sinti and Roma communities in Europe who, placed in conditions of extreme denial of rights and marginalization, have not been able to perceive themselves as a fundamental mechanism of community memory: some young people who took part in the TRACER project did not know anything about Auschwitz in relation to its own people nor the subsequent struggles for recognition that characterized the Roma of Europe. It is naturally not a personal responsibility of the younger generations, but the effect of the marginalization and centuries-old keeping at a distance that these people have suffered. In the meantime, the majority culture has not perceived the history of Sinti and Roma as an element of a common

history to be recovered, defended, preserved and made to germinate. The objective of reversing this process implies a necessary historicization of historical events, so that attention and interest can be reactivated for a historical narrative that had been destroyed by the conditions of extreme marginalization and keeping at a distance suffered by communities.

#### 4. Objects as witnesses between past and present

In the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, the Collections Department has at its disposal a tool capable of speaking, alongside witnesses, with an equally “audible” voice: the objects.

The idea that a complex of assets, as evidence of the history of a place and material repository of the memories of a past shared by those who inhabit it, is the object of a public interest directed at its identification, conservation and transmission to future generations, it has progressively established itself in Europe in the modern era<sup>11</sup>.

To deal with the memory of the Nazi and fascist genocide, however, it is necessary to go beyond the simple definition of cultural heritage, since this very particular heritage is made up of goods which, studied as a whole, give life to the concept of *mass objects* for the first time. This conception is in fact exclusively attributable to the objects found in the warehouses of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp after its liberation and was born precisely in this historical moment. These are objects that can be divided into categories (shoes, suitcases, pots...) found in large quantities, recorded as a whole and measured in cubic meters or by weight, and therefore not as individual pieces.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum was designed by the former deportees themselves to respond to the need to exhibit their personal possessions as they were found, piled one on top of the other, like a large shapeless body that simultaneously speaks of mass extermination and of every single life lost. The quantity of certain objects tells the extermination of the millions<sup>12</sup>, their quality and variety bring to light the

<sup>11</sup> Satta, *Patrimonio Culturale*.

<sup>12</sup> Historians estimate that, in Auschwitz alone, approximately 1.1 million people died during less than five years of the camp's existence. The majority, about 1 million people, were

social, economic, cultural and religious differences of the prisoners, in a narrative which, thanks to the indispensable conservation work of the Museum, is destined to never become extinct. The advantage of making memory through objects lies not only in the possibility of amplifying and making tangible the precious voice of those who have suffered the deprivation of those same goods, as the first inevitable stage of a process of dehumanization that led to death; through objects, it will be possible to continue the story even when the “era of the witness”<sup>13</sup> comes to an end, and we will need to search for humanity in the thread of a story that needs practical tools to be remembered. The «traces of life and murder, of humanity and dehumanization»<sup>14</sup> will thus be made indelible, towards a memory that does not remain “just a line in schoolbooks”, a fear that the former Auschwitz prisoner, nowadays Italian senator for life, Liliana Segre often expresses in her public speeches<sup>15</sup>.

The Auschwitz camp became the place where a real large-scale plundering of property was conducted. Before the deportation, the prisoners (mostly Jews, in this case) were usually informed that they would reach a new place of settlement and were allowed to carry luggage containing clothes, personal effects, objects of daily use, materials and specialist tools. After arriving at the camp, they had to leave their luggage on the ramp (*Judenrampe*<sup>16</sup>); and their clothes, immediately before entering the gas chamber.

Jews. The second largest group, 70 to 75,000, were Poles; and the third largest, around 20,000, Roma and Sinti. About 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war and 10 to 15,000 prisoners of other ethnicities (including Czechs, Belarusians, Yugoslavians, French, Germans and Austrians) also died there. (Data from the *The number of victims* section of the website [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org), last access: July 2024).

<sup>13</sup> Wieviorka, *L'Ère du témoin*.

<sup>14</sup> Cywiński, introduction.

<sup>15</sup> Senator Liliana Segre has repeatedly expressed in her speeches the fear that the Memory of the Nazi and Fascist genocide will be destined to oblivion after the death of the witnesses: «In the next fifty years, maybe a hundred, when we are all dead, there will be just one line in a history book and it will be because our children will still talk. Then not even that», see Erica Manna, *Liliana Segre, the bitter warning about the Shoah: "In a hundred years there won't even be a line in the history books"* available online at: [https://genova.repubblica.it/cronaca/2023/11/24/news/liliana\\_segre\\_lamaro\\_monito\\_sulla\\_shoah\\_tra\\_centanni\\_sui\\_libri\\_di\\_storia\\_non\\_ci\\_sara\\_neppure\\_una\\_riga-421118323/](https://genova.repubblica.it/cronaca/2023/11/24/news/liliana_segre_lamaro_monito_sulla_shoah_tra_centanni_sui_libri_di_storia_non_ci_sara_neppure_una_riga-421118323/) (last access: July 2024).

<sup>16</sup> The *Judenrampe* (“Jewish Ramp”) was a railway branch that stopped about 1 km away from the entrance to Auschwitz Birkenau. Active between the spring of 1942 and mid-May

The confiscated belongings in good conditions or of high quality were then transported to the warehouses called Canada<sup>17</sup>, waiting to be sent to Germany and destined for the civilian population or for German institutions and organizations<sup>18</sup>.

The confiscation of assets is, in fact, part of the conception of the “Holocaust”<sup>19</sup> as the fruit of modernity<sup>20</sup>: a modern society that loses control over the mechanisms of industrialization, which made it so powerful and admirable. The Holocaust bears witness to an «advancement of civilization»<sup>21</sup> in a double sense: with the “final solution” (*Endlösung*), the industrial potential and technological competence enhanced by our civilization reached new heights in successfully coping with a task of unprecedented; furthermore, always with the “final solution”, our society revealed to us a previously unexpected capacity, so much so that we had to admit that we had seriously underestimated the true potential of the material progress produced<sup>22</sup>.

[Auschwitz] was also an extension of the modern factory system. Instead of producing goods, it used human beings as raw material and churned out death as the final product, with the daily quantities carefully reported on the managers’ reports. The chimneys, the very symbol of the modern factory system,

1944, it was then replaced by the new railway ramp, which led directly into the camp. It was called this way because from 1942 the 90% of the prisoners who reached Birkenau were Jews, even though the ramp was used for all categories destined for Auschwitz II.

<sup>17</sup> The name of the Canada warehouses recalls an idea of wealth, in reference to a country considered rich in public opinion; unlike the warehouses in Mexico (considered a poor country), in which low-value goods were temporarily stored and then disposed of. Clothes, for example, were burned to minimize the risk of the possible spread of typhoid or other epidemic diseases.

<sup>18</sup> Lachendro, *Auschwitz after the liberation*.

<sup>19</sup> Here the term “Holocaust” is inserted to faithfully report the translation contained in Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*. The historian Giovanni Gozzini (Gozzini, *La strada per Auschwitz*) underlines that the term is used improperly to talk about Nazi extermination. On page 4, he recalls that “holocaust” indicates «the widespread practice among pastoral peoples of antiquity of offering a sacrificial victim to the deity by burning it completely in the fire as a sign of thanks or reconciliation. The problem is that this sacralizing meaning, increasingly massively used since the end of the 1950s to indicate the extermination carried out by Nazi Germany, is in reality completely absent in the Hebrew term of which it should be the translation: *Shoah*, “destruction”. It is therefore an improper and not insignificant terminological deviation, which tends to relegate the extermination to the realm of the inexplicable».

<sup>20</sup> Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*.

<sup>21</sup> Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History*.

<sup>22</sup> Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*.

spewed out the acrid smoke produced by the combustion of human flesh. The perfectly organized railway network of modern Europe transported a new kind of raw material to the factories, as it did other materials. In the gas chambers the victims breathed toxic vapors generated by prussic acid tablets, produced by the advanced German chemical industry. Engineers designed the crematoria, administrators created a bureaucratic system that functioned with a fervor and efficiency that more backward nations would have envied. Even the overall project itself was a reflection of the modern scientific spirit gone astray. What we witnessed was nothing less than a massive social engineering project<sup>23</sup>.

The history of Auschwitz is certainly not only the fruit of the fit of unstable and cruel minds, but rather - as Helen Fein<sup>24</sup> reflects - the unique but fully determined product of a particular concatenation of social and psychological factors, which led to a temporary disappearance of grip normally exercised by the civilization of human behavior<sup>25</sup>.

And in this plan, it is not difficult to understand why everything was functional to the Nazi (death) industry, even the possessions of that “human material”.

When analyzing shoes, for example, it is rare to find some that still have the sole: wood was one of the most requested materials by German industry, so the shoes found in warehouses were generally without them.

Although much material was reused to support the Nazi industrialization process, or confiscated by the Red Army after the liberation of the camp (the creation of the Museum was not thought of immediately), the numbers of objects found are in any case very high and, as the director of the Collections Department Elżbieta Cajzer says, «they reflect the dimensions of the tragedy»<sup>26</sup>: approximately 95.000 individual objects / 80 cubic meters / 2.550 kg.

Going more specifically:

<sup>23</sup> Feingold, *How Unique is the Holocaust?*

<sup>24</sup> Fein, *Accounting for Genocide*.

<sup>25</sup> Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*.

<sup>26</sup> Cajzer, *Museum Collections*.

c. 40 cubic meters of shoes; c. 3,800 suitcases, of which 2,100 with individual labels, names, surnames, dates of birth, addresses of the owners; more than 12,000 kitchen utensils (bowls, cups, pots); 470 prostheses and orthoses; 397 prisoner uniforms (now associated with the deprivation of humanity in the reality of the camp); 246 *talled*; c. 4,100 works of art (of which 2,000 created in the camp during its operation), as well as many other objects related to both the deportations and camp life. [...] The catalog of collections is not closed; still, even after several decades after the liberation, we have new acquisitions, donations from descendants of the victims, objects found in the areas of the former camps. The history of the place is still alive and every object, even the smallest, consists of an inseparable part<sup>27</sup>.

The director explains that families prefer to donate the few remaining possessions of their loved ones to the Museum out of «the desire to provide them (family heirlooms) with adequate care», with the awareness that certain objects have a particular need to be preserved in an appropriate manner and, above all, that such small objects only at the Museum «have the opportunity to speak about the tragedy of the victims with a clear, audible and solid voice»<sup>28</sup>.

Together with the documents, the objects found in the camp after the liberation served the National Special Commission of the Soviet Union (in charge of investigating the facts committed by the Nazi invaders) as evidence of the crime. Their voice then began to have resonance with the opening of the Museum. The exhibition immediately traced the way in which these objects were found in the various warehouses (in the attic of the *Aufnahmegebäude*, the building where prisoners were received as soon as they arrived at the Auschwitz I camp, located a few tens of meters to the right of the main gate with the writing “*Arbeit macht frei*”; or in the blocks of the so-called *Lagererweiterung*, the extension of the camp, a few hundred meters north of Auschwitz I)<sup>29</sup>.

It is no coincidence that the Museum still chooses to use the same “mass” exhibition today: the objects speak and tell collective but also very singular stories; however, the choice of how to make them speak is in the hands of the institutions. From the extermination of the Polish

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Lachendro, *Auschwitz after the liberation*.

population to the emphasis on the *Shoah*, to the attention, today, for all categories of victims without distinction: the narrative through objects has been carefully selected depending on the historical eras, but the concept of “mass objects” has always remained in all the variations that the Museum has foreseen. Whatever the motivation (as a reminder of the quantity of victims, to be faithful to how the belongings were discovered), displaying the objects in this way means making them “shout”, with a direct, shocking and effective communication.

Alongside the voice, there are also silences. Certain categories of objects were not found inside the camp warehouses, and this inevitably affected the narrative of a long-forgotten part of history. The typical objects of the tradition of the Roma and Sinti people have never been found. Yet there was even a camp created specifically to host them, the *Zigeunerfamilienlager*<sup>30</sup>, in which Roma and Sinti families lived together, not separated by gender or age. SS doctor Josef Mengele had his laboratory on the grounds of the *Zigeunerlager*. He carried out medical experiments on twins, people with dwarfism, irises of different colors or skin tumors (so-called *gamz*); but he was also particularly interested in attesting the “racial physical characteristics” of Roma and Sinti, to note their inferiority compared to the Aryan race, and the variation in the color of their skin according to their different origins, so much so that he commissioned the painter Dinah Babbit to portray them in color (black and white photography was not useful for his purposes).

«I remember very well the gypsy in the portrait *Zigeuner Mischling aus Frankreich* [*French mixed-race gypsy*] (left half profile of a gypsy with a blue kerchief on her head, inventory no. PMO-I-1-111). She was discouraged because her two-month-old baby had died in the camp. She suffered from stomach problems and the bread from the camp was bad for her. I managed to get additional rations of white bread»<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>30</sup>Opened in February 1943, Roma and Sinti families from many countries were imprisoned in the *Zigeunerfamilienlager* (“Gypsy” families camp), in particular from the territories of Germany and Austria, from the Protectorates of Bohemia and Moravia and from occupied Poland. The camp was overcrowded and hunger and poor hygienic conditions prevailed. On August 2nd, 1944, the camp was liquidated and approximately four thousand people died in the gas chambers.

<sup>31</sup> Testimony by Dinah Babbit, contained in Kapralski, Martyniak and Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, *Voices of Memory*, 44-45.

Babbit's paintings are the only tangible evidence (besides the documentation that sees them registered as *Zigeuner* – “gypsies”) of the presence of this population in the camp. Having a typical Sinti scarf, a colorful Roma skirt, would probably have meant talking about the Roma and Sinti genocide long before the 1980s. And this silence has consequences in today's society, in which knowledge about the persecution and extermination of this population still struggles to reach the majority of people and, consequently, the processes of hatred towards them are slow to be deconstructed.

A “silence imposed”<sup>32</sup> by the “condition of failure to de-fascistize” post-war Italy, but also by a certain absence of practical references, such as objects, which were able to give voice to the memory of a forgotten people, who instead was the protagonist of important forms of resistance, both partisan and internal to the concentration and extermination camps<sup>33</sup>. The history of places becomes a useful training tool for direct participation in multicultural contexts.

## Bibliography

- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 1991.
- Bravi, Luca. *Preface*. In Nencioni, Chiara. *A forza di essere vento. La persecuzione di rom e sinti nell'Italia fascista*, Pisa: ETS, 2024.
- Cajzer, Elżbieta. *Museum Collections*. In Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau (Ed.). *Zachować autentyzm (To preserve authenticity). The Conservation of Museum Collections and Archival Materials*, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim: Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum, 2021.
- Cywiński, Piotr M. A. “introduction by the director of the Auschwitz Birkenau Museum”. In Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau (Ed.). *Zachować autentyzm (To preserve authenticity). The Conservation of Museum Collections and Archival Materials*, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim: Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum, 2021.
- D. Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle, 1939-1945*, Holt, New York, 1990.

<sup>32</sup> Bravi, *Preface*.

<sup>33</sup> On 16 May 1944, the Sinti and Roma of the *Zigeunerlager* of Birkenau organized a real revolt against the guards, responsible for liquidating that specific sector of the camp. See the description of the events of May 16, 1944 in D. Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle, 1939-1945*.

- Feingold, Henry L. *How Unique is the Holocaust?*. In Grobman, Alex and Landes David. *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust*. Los Angeles: Simon Wiesenthal Centre, 1983, 399-400.
- Gozzini, Giovanni. *La strada per Auschwitz. Documenti e interpretazioni sullo sterminio nazista*. Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2004.
- Hancock, Ian. *The pariah Syndrome. An account of gypsy slavery and persecution*. Ann Arbor: Karoma publisher, 1987.
- Kapralski, Sławomir, Maria Martyniak and Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkowska. *Voices of Memory. Roma in Auschwitz, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum*. Oświęcim: Auschwitz Birkenau State Museum, 2011.
- Lachendro, Jacek. *Auschwitz after the liberation*. Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2018.
- Lennon, John J. and Malcolm Foley. *Dark tourism. The attraction of death and disasters*. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Rubenstein, Richard L. *The Cunning of History*. New York: Harper, 1978.
- Satta, G. *Patrimonio Culturale*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2013.
- Stone, Philip R. "A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions". In *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal* 54 (2006), n. 2: 145-160.
- Wieviorka, Annette. *L'Ère du témoin*. Paris: Plon, 1998.

## 4. Representation of Roma persecution in school curriculum development in Europe

by Ivana Bolognesi\*, Maria Alfredo Moreira\*\* and Luca Bravi\*\*\*

### 1. Representing Roma genocide in Europe<sup>1</sup>

In July 2020, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe produced a Recommendation which asked all member states of UE to include the history of Roma in school curricula and teaching materials (DC 099/2020)<sup>2</sup>. In previous years, the European Union has proposed specific digital dissemination tools, including factsheets that tell the story of the persecution of Roma in different countries during Nazism<sup>3</sup>. The role of the European institutions has been fundamental in promoting remembrance in the Union through numerous recommendations that have been circulated since the 2000s. For a long time, several programmes, funded by the European Commission, have indicated the history of Roma and Sinti people as a central theme to develop training and educational actions. Awareness of Roma history is different for each country; for example in Italy, the history of the fascist concentration camps reserved for “gypsies” between 1940 and

\* Department of Education “Giovanna Maria Bertin”, University of Bologna.

\*\* CIEd, Institute of Education, University of Minho.

\*\*\* Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology (FORLILPSI), University of Florence.

<sup>1</sup> Luca Bravi is author of the first section of the article (paragraph 1); Ivana Bolognesi is author of section 2 (paragraphs 2 - 2.1; 2.2); Maria Alfredo Moreira is author of Section 3 (paragraph 3 - 3.1; 3.2).

<sup>2</sup>[https://search.coe.int/directorate\\_of\\_communications#{%22CoEIdentifier%22:\[%2209000016809ee553%22\],%22sort%22:\[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22\]}](https://search.coe.int/directorate_of_communications#{%22CoEIdentifier%22:[%2209000016809ee553%22],%22sort%22:[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22]}) (Last access: August, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/roma-history-factsheets>; <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-genocide> (Last access: August 2024).

1943 and the subsequent deportation until 1945 are often unknown<sup>4</sup>. In the Czech Republic, the memorial commemorating the victims of the Lety u Pisku<sup>5</sup> concentration camp (reserved for the persecution of Roma people who were deported and exterminated in Auschwitz) was inaugurated on May 12, 2024. However, for decades, in the same area where the lager stood, the presence of a large pig farm was permitted and only the commitment of survivors, scholars and intellectuals allowed the memorial to be built in Bohemia.

The “National Inclusion Strategies for Roma and Sinti”<sup>6</sup> elaborated by each European State often recognize the importance of remembering the persecution of Roma for building active citizenship and the “Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025)” has focused on the role of the knowledge of history as an element for deconstructing stereotypes<sup>7</sup>. A significant part of the materials on Roma history has also been produced by the main Sinti and Roma associations present in Europe who are promoting both the knowledge in their own community and its diffusion as public memory policies<sup>8</sup>.

From the point of view of school curricula, it’s useful to consider the investigation on some specific European countries<sup>9</sup>: Italy, Poland and Portugal (chosen because they are the countries of the partners of TRACER - they had different involvement in the Second World War and they are different regarding the presence and condition of inclusion of Roma and Sinti on their territory nowadays); Germany (it can provide an interesting comparison in relation to the memory policies that it has built since the post war period<sup>10</sup>) and France (it represents

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.porrajmos.it/it/story/04-la-persecuzione-in-italia-1922-1943/> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Polanski, *Black silence*.

<sup>6</sup> <https://democracyinstitute.ceu.edu/projects/roma-civil-monitor-2021-2025> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>7</sup> <https://edoc.coe.int/en/roma-and-travellers/8508-council-of-europe-strategic-action-plan-for-roma-and-traveller-inclusion-2020-2025.html> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>8</sup> <https://dokuzentrum.sintiundroma.de/publikationen/>; <http://www.stowarzyszenie.romowie.net/Swiadectwa-190.html>; <https://www.porrajmos.it/it> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>9</sup> The data are those catalogued by the European Commission in the virtual library <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-genocide/virtual-library> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>10</sup> Wüstenberg, *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany*.

one Western European nation that was occupied and controlled by Nazism).

In the list below, for each country it is indicated:

- whether the Roma genocide has been officially recognized;
- whether the extermination of Roma is a specific part of the national school curriculum;
- whether there are ordinary training processes on the extermination of Roma.

### *Italy*

- There is no official acknowledgment of the Roma Genocide in Italy. The “Law 20 July 2000, no. 211, that institutes the Day of Remembrance” for those who have been deported in the concentration camps during the Second World War, doesn’t specifically mention the Roma.
- In every school level curriculum, the Holocaust and the Genocide of the Jews is included, but not specifically the Roma Genocide. School textbooks often do not mention the Roma genocide or include it in a generic way in the events of the Second World War.
- State institutions, research centers, foundations, non-governmental associations offer training seminars on the Roma genocide, but this action is not yet precisely defined in the training curricula. The National Strategy of Roma and Sinti is a fundamental reference to promote activities in this cultural context.

### *Poland*

- In 2011, the Parliament of Poland declared 2nd August as the official Roma and Sinti Genocide Remembrance Day.
- Activities to learn about the Roma genocide are generally part of Holocaust studies and are not generally included in school textbooks but in scientific books edited by foundations, associations and research centers;
- Some important training activities about the Roma genocide are planned by the Association «Romów w Polsce» (officially recognized since 2023 as a representative of the Roma community in Poland) in collaboration with Centre for Educational Development, the Jewish Historical Institute, the Institute of National Remembrance, universities, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

### *Portugal*

- Portugal has not officially recognised the Roma Genocide through law.
- The study of the Holocaust is compulsory in schools and it is part of the National History curriculum. It is taught at the third level of elementary education and in secondary school. All Portuguese students in the ninth grade (ages 13 to 14) study the Holocaust, but there is no specific indication on the study of the Roma genocide, except for the reference to a book on Roma in the Holocaust, as an example of bibliography that can be used in secondary education.
- State institutions, research centers, foundations, non-governmental associations offer training seminars on the Roma genocide, but this action is not yet precisely defined in the training curricula.

### *Germany*

- The racial extermination of the Roma and Sinti was officially recognized in 1980.
- The teaching of the Holocaust includes remembrance of all the victims of the National Socialists' regime. Special reference is made to persecution and Roma Genocide in the curricula of the *Länder* of Baden-Württemberg (secondary school: "Gymnasium"), Hamburg (secondary school: "Gymnasium", "Hauptschule" and "Realschule"), Hessen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (lower secondary school and "Gymnasium", "Hauptschule" and "Realschule") and Rheinland-Pfalz (lower and upper secondary school: "Gymnasium", "Hauptschule", "Realschule"). Since the curricula of the *Länder* are implemented, the description of the Roma Genocide can be found in the textbooks within the topic of Holocaust.
- The Education Department of the "Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Sinti und Roma", which was established in January 2001, focuses on gathering information on public and private education services, designing seminars for teachers and preparing teaching materials dealing with the history of the persecution of the Roma and Sinti minority during the National Socialist era and with civil rights activities in the Federal Republic of Germany. The department also analyses standard schoolbooks and makes recommendations. For each country, it is indicated whether the extermination of the Roma has been officially recognised, whether specific

policies exist in school curricula and whether ordinary training experiences exist:

### *France*

- Roma genocide is not officially recognized. In October 2010, a law proposal, (*Proposition de loi n°273*), was presented to the National Assembly stating the official recognition of the Roma Genocide and setting the official commemoration of this genocide on the 5th April. In 2013, French President François Hollande acknowledged the State responsibility in the internment of Roma from 1940 to 1946 during a tribute ceremony in Montreuil-Bellay, one of the 31 camps managed by the Vichy regime.
- The Holocaust studies are a general part of the French school curriculum. In 2008, the Ministry of Education issued an official bulletin directed at all educational authorities and enforcing the teaching of the Shoah and Roma victims of the Genocide. Yet, in the history teaching syllabi, Roma are referred to as “Tziganes” (“Gypsies”) and not “Roma”. The study of the extermination / Genocide of the Roma (and the Jews) is included in study of the Second World War. It is carried out at three levels of schooling: Primary “extension course”- “extermination of the Jews and Roma: a crime against Humanity”; lower secondary, third class: “Theme 3: Second World War, a war of annihilation (...) This is the context in which the Genocide of Jews and Roma was perpetrated in Europe.”; upper secondary, first class: Second World War, Genocide of the Jews and Roma – common strand of European history and memory.
- The question of the Roma Genocide is only sketchily addressed in teachers’ basic training.

According to the volume *The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks*<sup>11</sup>, which carried out an analysis of references to Roma and Sinti in textbooks in twenty different countries, some elements can be highlighted on history textbooks for secondary schools: in countries where the official recognition of the genocide of Roma and Sinti has taken place (Germany in particular), attention to the dissemination of history and the deconstruction of stereotypes is more

<sup>11</sup> Spielhaus, *The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and Textbooks*.

widespread and generalized. In Germany, the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma<sup>12</sup> was founded in February 1982 and its role was important for advocacy actions and for the recognition of Roma and Sinti as a national minority. In countries where there has not been specific recognition, activism is less widespread, and the knowledge of their genocide is less known. In Italy and France, books that generically name Sinti and Roma among the victims in the extermination camps always indicate them as “gypsies”, without reflecting on the word “gypsies” as a stereotype. The same volume analyses textbooks of other school subjects and in the same countries, even when dealing with books on civic education or geography, the most used term by authors remains “gypsies”.

In Poland, Roma activism is growing thanks to their association recognized by public institutions; Roma genocide is officially recognized. The derogatory use of the word “gypsies” is present in 2 out of 15 books analyzed by the European study. Deconstructing stereotypes is not just about using the right words (in 1981, in the town of Oświęcim - next to the Auschwitz State Museum - a pogrom took place against Roma families who were made scapegoats for the Polish economic crisis of that period), but a language that eliminates “wrong” words demonstrates a process of reflection on prejudice. In both Germany and Poland, the direct civic engagement of Sinti and Roma in the deconstruction of stereotypes is essential. The word “Zigeuner” (Gypsy) is totally absent in German history textbooks for the secondary school, or it is used specifically to indicate the category that the Nazis used in the concentration camps. Germany is also the country with the lowest percentage of hatred towards Roma and Sinti (37%); in France, it is 44%, in Italy 83%, in Poland 55%<sup>13</sup>, there is no data for Portugal; in the Pew Research study, the Iberian Peninsula is represented by Spain, which reports a percentage of 40%. Antigypsyism in Portugal is discussed in a recent article by sociologist Olga Magano and Tânia D’Oliveira<sup>14</sup> (about Roma in Portugal see the volume *Roma*

<sup>12</sup> <https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/en/central-council/who-we-are/> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>13</sup> Minority groups in Europe, Pew Research Center 2019: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/minority-groups/> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>14</sup> Magano, D’Oliveira, *Antigypsyism in Portugal*.

*in ten European countries*<sup>15</sup>, published by FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights).

The following analyses by Ivana Bolognesi (Italy) and Maria Alfredo Moreira (Portugal) on textbooks allow us to verify the data proposed by the European volume. They demonstrate how textbooks can risk transmitting fake information: processes of miscommunication can reinforce prejudices in public opinion, especially when the transmission of incorrect knowledge occurs in educational contexts such as school.

## **2. Italy: the representation of the extermination of the Roma communities in history textbooks for upper secondary school**

What is the representation of the Roma communities in textbooks for upper secondary school?

Starting from this question, a preliminary investigation was carried out on a small number of history texts for this school level with the main aim of understanding whether and how these communities are remembered on the theme of the Second World War, a central theme of the TRACER project.

The texts considered were eleven, all of them history texts for the third grade of secondary school, published in the time period 2009 - 2023<sup>16</sup>.

The historical period considered goes from the beginning of the twentieth century to the contemporary age: therefore, they describe the

<sup>15</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Ed.), *Roma in ten European countries*.

<sup>16</sup> The texts consulted are as follows: Calvani, *Finestre sulla storia dell'età della globalizzazione*; De Vecchi and Giovannetti, *Storia in corso. Civiltà, tecniche, industria*; Variuos authors (not specified) *Capire la storia. Il Novecento e la globalizzazione*; Borgognonea and Carpanetto, *L'idea della storia. Il Novecento e il Duemila*; Cioffi and Amerini, *Storia. Imparo con metodo. Il Novecento e il mondo attuale*; Paolucci, Signorini and Marisaldi, *Di tempo in tempo. L'età contemporanea*; Necci, Jacomuzzi and Montanaro, *Nel grande gioco. Storie idee persone*; Ardone and Pianura, *Voci della storia. Il Novecento e il mondo attuale*; Biggio, *La Storia a colori. Dal Novecento ai giorni nostri*; Greppi and Persico, *La storia è presente. Dal Novecento a oggi*.

causes that led to the First and Second World Wars and the social, economic and political consequences that ensued.

The Roma people appear in connection with anti-Semitism and racial discrimination, particularly when minorities deported to concentration camps in Germany are listed.

The criteria identified for the analysis of the texts were the following: terms used to define the Roma people; description and insights into the Porrajmos.

## 2.1 Terms: *Roma*, *Sinti*, *Gypsies* and *Nomads*

As already pointed out, all the texts considered include references to the extermination of this people, even if they are defined using different terms.

Some texts, five in total, use words such as *Roma* and *Sinti*: definitions considered appropriate by the communities themselves because they respect their own linguistic and cultural roots. However, they also continue to use the term *gypsies* as synonyms.

The other six texts use the definitions *nomads* and/or *gypsies*. We know that these two terms carry with them political choices (*nomads*) and historical aspects (*gypsies*) often derived from various forms of discrimination. These are terms that have been abandoned over time because they are characterised by semantic ambiguity: *zingari* has always been used in a derogatory sense, used by the native populations to negatively connote these groups; while *nomads* refers to a condition of wandering and vagabondage that, if it has characterised the lifestyle of these groups, today no longer distinguishes the majority of these communities present in Italian and partly European territory. Even today people prefer to use the term *nomad* rather than *gypsy*, which is considered more derogatory, but both are neither correct, nor are they in line with the historical-cultural identity of these communities.

## 2.2 Description and insights of the events of the Porrajmos

While the Jewish minority is given extensive coverage and references to other periods, such as the establishment of the Jewish state before the Second World War, the space devoted to the other minorities, who were also subjected to discrimination and extermination, is somewhat reduced.

All texts refer to the Roma minorities, when the subject of Nazi persecution of all those who were not part of the Aryan race is addressed; here is an example of a list: political and religious dissidents, Jews, gypsies and asocials such as homosexuals, the mentally ill or common criminals whose behaviour did not conform to Aryan social norms.

Two of these texts mention the Roma minority when referring to the symbols, triangles and stars, sewn on the jackets of people imprisoned in the camps.

In the camps there was a precise hierarchy among the prisoners who were distinguished according to the markings they were obliged to wear: at the bottom of the hierarchical scale were the Jews, marked by a star or a yellow triangle; then there were homosexuals (pink triangle); antisocials and gypsies (black triangle); political prisoners (red triangle); priests of different Christian denominations and Jehovah's Witnesses (violet triangle); immigrants, stateless persons and refugees (blue triangle); common criminals open round (green triangle)<sup>17</sup>.

In a single text, the extermination figures of all minorities are reproduced. This information is prefaced by the clarification that it is difficult to calculate the number of dead belonging to these groups. Those reported in this text have been made known by the British Foreign Office and are as follows: “5.6-6.1 million Jews; 3.5-6.1 million Slavic civilians; 2.5-4 million prisoners of war; 1-1.5 million political dissidents; 200,000-800,000 gypsies; 200,000-300,000 handicapped; 10,000-250,000 homosexuals; 2000 Jehovah's Witnesses) [...] total 13,012,000 to 18,952,000”<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> De Vecchi, Giovannetti, *Storia in corso*, 154.

<sup>18</sup> Calvani, *Finestre sulla storia dell'età della globalizzazione* p. 93.

Almost all of the texts considered (10) do not provide any in-depth study of the Roma minority: there is no mention of their history, let alone how families and groups were imprisoned in the camps and subsequently exterminated.

Except for two texts.

In the first text, in a brief explanation of the lexicon in a box in the margin of the page, the meaning of the terms *Roma* and *Sinti* is given, describing the following:

The two terms indicate a nomadic population spread throughout Europe and the world, often referred to as ‘Gypsies’. The word *Roma*, in the language spoken by this population, means man; the word *Sinti*, on the other hand, refers to the place they originally moved from, namely Sind, in present-day Pakistan<sup>19</sup>.

In the second text, there is an entire paragraph entitled “Gypsies are also persecuted”.

Although in the text of the paragraph the two terms, Gypsies and *Roma*, are used as synonyms, some insights are provided into the persecution and extermination of this minority.

It is pointed out that from the mid-1930s onwards, the *Roma* were segregated in camps built in large German cities and that from May 1940, as they were considered potential spies, they were transferred en masse to Poland and locked up in concentration camps from where they were transferred to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camps. 2 August 1944 was the day on which three thousand *Roma* inmates were gassed to death. It is also pointed out that concentration camps were also established in Italy for *Roma* who were later deported to Germany.

The most interesting aspect in this paragraph is the reference to the Porrajmos, i.e. the massacre of gypsies, which took place in many camps in Poland, Baltic countries, Serbia and Croatia.

This word is highlighted in the passage and refers to a small section, at the side of the page, where a brief elaboration is presented:

In the post-war period, the extermination of the Gypsies by the Nazis and their allies was called Porrajmos, which means ‘destruction’ in the Romani

<sup>19</sup> Cazzaniga, *La Storia che si vede. Il Novecento e il mondo di oggi*.

language. To commemorate the Porrajmos, a Day of Remembrance of the massacre of Roma and Sinti has been established in some European countries, which is celebrated on 2 August<sup>20</sup>.

Also in the margin of the page there are questions to verify the contents of the paragraph, such as: «What were the Gypsies accused of? How many European Gypsies were victims of Nazi executions?».

At the end of the paragraph, there is a colour photo in which «the head of the Centre on Racial Hygiene interviews an elderly Roma woman. The tragic consequences of this pseudo-scientific research were the deportation and extermination of thousands of Sinti and Roma»<sup>21</sup>.

Thus, a paragraph that, if brought to the attention of the students by the teacher, introduces various topics and related insights concerning this minority, often treated in a cursory and superficial manner.

However, two brief considerations should be added that relate the Roma minority to the Jewish minority.

The first. Jews and their persecution are often associated with the Nazi and Fascist regimes, but not with other totalitarianisms such as Stalinism, which also discriminated against and exterminated this and other minorities.

The second. It follows from this that even the Roma, who appear in the history text only in connection with the genocide of the Jews, are only associated with these tragic events, whereas these communities with their cultures, as described in the literature, intertwined their history with that of the majority groups and were an integral part of it, contributing to cultural development (music, painting, etc.)<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Paolucci, Signorini, Marisaldi, *Di tempo in tempo*, p. 232.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Fings, *Sinti e Rom. Storia di una minoranza*.

### **3. Portugal: the representation of the extermination of the Roma communities in history textbooks for lower secondary school**

#### *3.1 The National Curriculum*

In the case of Portugal, schooling is compulsory for 12 years, embracing both basic education (grades 1-9) to secondary education (grades 10-12). There is a mainstream curriculum for basic education, with minor adaptations done locally by schools. However, the History subject is taken by all students, from grade 5 until grade 9<sup>23</sup>. In secondary education, students have to choose a specific path that can be within a scientific area (like natural sciences, technology, humanities, etc.) or within a vocational or professional one (like music, dance, tourism, electricity, etc.). At this level, the History subject is only taken by students who choose either the path of Social and Economic Sciences, or Social and Human Sciences.

Regarding the topics of the Second World War, the Nazi Regime and the Genocide/ Holocaust, the national curriculum includes these in the 9<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, with the aims, content and methodological suggestions shown in Table 1.

As all students attend the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, our choice was to select this grade for the analysis of how the Roma genocide is dealt with.

<sup>23</sup> In grades 5 and 6, the History subject is done with Geography. From grade 7 onwards, it is a single subject.

Tab. 1 - Aims, content and methodological suggestions that frame Roma genocide<sup>24</sup>

9th grade	11th grade – History B (Social and Economic Sciences)	12th grade – History A (Social and Human Sciences)
<p><b>[Within the topic World War II]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To identify/ apply these concepts: Genocide; Resistance; Holocaust.</li> </ul>	<p><b>[Within the theme Totalitarian options]</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concepts/ notions: Totalitarianism; Fascism; Nazi Germany; Corporativism; Anti-Semitism; Genocide; Propaganda.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Strategic actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To collect and select data from relevant historical sources to analyse the subject matter;</li> <li>- To organize information collected in different historical sources;</li> <li>- To use different media to express learning (...)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Methodological suggestions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multimedia assignments and debates – The Holocaust: Collecting information on the Holocaust. Using bibliography such as (...) Otto Rosenberg (2001). <i>A Lente de Aumento, Os Ciganos no Holocausto [Roma in the Holocaust]</i>. Lisboa: Âncora Editora) or using the internet - <a href="http://www.remember.org/">http://www.remember.org/</a>. Organising a data base. Selecting, analysing information and recording on a CD ROM (...) Presentation to the school and debate (...)</li> </ul>	

### 3.2 Description and insights of Roma and the events of the Porrajmos

We analysed all the existing certified<sup>25</sup> textbooks for teaching the History subject in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (n=6), as schools cannot adopt non-certified textbooks. We looked at the teacher’s book, as it has methodological suggestions and extension activities.

<sup>24</sup> República Portuguesa - Educação (2018). Aprendizagens Essenciais – História. Ensino Básico e Ensino Secundário. <https://www.dge.mec.pt/aprendizagens-essenciais-0> (our translation). (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>25</sup> In order to be used in Portuguese schools, all textbooks have to be certified by the Ministry of Education. Textbooks are analysed and evaluated by higher education teaching and/or research staff, following a national call. The evaluation process aims to ascertain whether the textbooks are in accordance with the national curriculum.

As certified textbooks, all are adopted in Portuguese schools (both public and private)<sup>26</sup>. Those adopted by most schools are Textbook 1 (309 schools) and Textbook 3 (307). Textbook 5 follows (273), then Textbook 4 (168). Textbook 2 is adopted by 66 schools and Textbook 6 by 90.

All are published by Portuguese publishing houses and are of Portuguese authors. The authors are basic and secondary education teachers, with many years of experience, and higher education teachers. All books are 2023 editions.

In accordance with the national curriculum (see Table 1), the theme of Roma genocide is approached within the larger themes of the Second World War and the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe, following the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Roma genocide is included within the topic of the Nazi regime, its principles and propaganda, among which anti-Semitism, racism and racial persecution, eugenics, pan Germanism, and *Lebensraum*. However, one of the textbooks (Textbook 6) does not mention Roma genocide and/or persecution, so it was excluded from our analysis.

In the remaining 5 textbooks, Roma people are referred to as ‘Gypsy’. The Holocaust, also referred to as Shoah, is highlighted in all the textbooks, being the Roma persecution and/or extermination included *merely* as *examples* of other minorities that were subjected to Nazi racism, persecution and extermination, as the following excerpts<sup>27</sup> show:

**Textbook 1:** "With the aim of guaranteeing the purity of the Aryan race, the Nazi regime used repressive means and practices: persecuting or eliminating those who were regarded as 'impure' (disabled, homosexuals, gypsies) (...) Nazi racism took a violent nature, namely with the persecutions of jews and

<sup>26</sup> All the available textbooks are the following: Luís Sousa and Luiz Soares, *H.9, Asa*; Cláudia Amaral, Bárbara Alves, Tiago Tadeu, and Olanda Vilaça, *HSI9 – História Sob Investigação*, Porto Editora; Francisco Cantanhede, João Silva, Marília Gago, and Paula Torrão, *O fio da História*, Texto; Rui Correia, Jorge Guerreiro, and António Nabais, *Procura 9*, Raiz Editora; Cristina Maia, Ana Margarida Maia, and Ana Margarida Caraméz, *Vamos à História 9*, Porto Editora; Andreia Andrade, Helena Vieira, Patrícia Remelgado, and Teresa Magano, *Somos História 9*, Areal Editores.

<sup>27</sup> All excerpts are translations from the Portuguese language. They show all the mentions to Roma (Gypsies) that appear in the 5 textbooks.

gypsies." (p. 104); "During the **Holocaust**, other ethnic groups, like the gypsy, were also victims of the Nazi hatred." (p. 136, bold by the authors)

**Textbook 2:** "«Holocaust» or «Shoah» have been the most common expressions to name the systematic extermination of the jews, firstly, but also of communists, homosexuals, gypsies, physically and mentally disabled, psychiatric patients, Soviet war prisoners, Polish and Russian political activists, Jehovah witnesses, some catholic and protestant clergyman, and common criminals. They were all executed in the extermination camps, like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek and Chelmno, purposefully built for this dark purpose." (p. 140)

**Textbook 3:** "Nazism presented itself as **racist** and **antisemitic**. The regime implemented a policy of **mass extermination** of their political opponents, Jews and minorities (like gypsies, homosexuals, physical and mentally disabled)" (p. 87, bold by the authors)

**Textbook 4:** "The Germans would have the right to dominate the «sub-human» and protect themselves against those they perceived as able to «contaminate» the German purity, like Jews and gypsies, but also people with mental illnesses or even political opponents, like the communists." (p. 81)

**Textbook 5:** "Beyond Jews, all those who opposed the regime or regarded as inferior, as disabled people, gypsies, homosexuals, were taken to Nazi concentration or to extermination camps." (p. 91); "The nazis created more than six dozens of concentration and extermination camps, to where they sent all those who were regarded as a menace to the purity of the Aryan race: Slavic people, gypsies, homosexuals, disabled people and, specifically, jews." (p. 117)

The descriptions of the Roma genocide go from ‘merely’ being the subject of racism and persecution (Textbook 4), to being the object of systematic extermination, like other minorities (in the remaining textbooks). The importance of this genocide is undermined by the use of brackets (Textbooks 1 and 3), that shows how their fate was a by-product of minor importance when compared to the Shoah. There are no testimonials or historical documents specifically on the Roma (or on any other minority, beyond the Jewish people). Only one of the

textbooks explicitly represents the Roma, by including a photograph of a Roma woman being questioned by Nazi inspectors (Textbook 3).

Regarding the methodological approach, in line with the national curriculum guidelines (see Table 1), students are required to analyse historical documents, posters, and photos, researching events (like the *Crystal Nacht*) and life histories (of Jewish people), reflecting on anti-racist practices, writing texts on living in those times (including in Auschwitz), on the discrimination of minorities in present times (Rohingya, Uigures, LGBTI+), or on producing news articles, posters and even a mural. There are also suggestions on watching films on the Holocaust, reading books (most mentioned is the Diary of Anne Frank), and visiting museums in Portugal (like the Holocaust Museum in Oporto) or online Holocaust museums. Besides raising an awareness of the historical events connected to the Holocaust, seeking to advance explanations and interpretations on how and why they were promoted by the Nazi Regime, 3 textbooks explicitly connect past events with present situations, proposing activities that engage students in critical reflection and some form of activism, seeking to prevent a repetition of this dark time.

## Conclusion

The presence of stereotypes towards Roma causes a devaluation of the memory of their genocide: in the past, at least until the 1980s, the non-recognition of the persecution of Roma as racial extermination (similar to the Shoah) was often justified by declaring that the “gypsies” had been deported because “they represent a group of asocial people”. The stereotype still active in the present was connected to the racist concepts of the past and described the extermination of the Roma as an acceptable practice for public safety. This type of approach downgrades the importance of history and interprets the events of the past by preserving stereotypes in the present. For the TRACER project, it is paramount to develop a correct knowledge of the history of minorities as a necessary tool for building democracy and full citizenship. To that end, an analysis of the most important regulatory pedagogical tools, as textbooks are, is a key task to develop training and educational actions more adjusted to the several contexts in which they

take place. To conclude, we might add that every minority involved in these tragic events demands due recognition, and that this recognition arises from the awareness of each individual, from the formation of their own thought made up of knowledge and reflection, which can become a barrier to the propaganda of totalitarian regimes, or of the unbridled consumerism to which we are all subjected to today.

## Bibliography

- Ardone, Viola and Giuliana Pianura. *Voci della storia. Il Novecento e il mondo attuale*. Messina-Firenze: G. D'Anna, 2023.
- Biggio, Barbara. *La Storia a colori. Dal Novecento ai giorni nostri*. Trento: Erickson-Fabbri, 2023.
- Borgognone, Giovanni and Dino Carpanetto. *L'idea della storia. Il Novecento e il Duemila*. Milano-Torino: Pearson, 2017.
- Calvani, Vittoria. *Finestre sulla storia dell'età della globalizzazione*. Milano: Mondadori, 2009.
- Cazzaniga, Andrea. *La Storia che si vede. Il Novecento e il mondo di oggi*. Trento: Erickson – Fabbri Editori, 2022.
- Cioffi, Fabio and Franco Amerini. *Storia. Imparo con metodo. Il Novecento e il mondo attuale*. Trento: Erickson – Rizzoli, 2020.
- De Vecchi, Giorgio and Giorgio Giovannetti. *Storia in corso. Civiltà, tecniche, industria*. Milano-Torino: Pearson, 2012.
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights - FRA (ed.). *Roma in ten European countries. Roma Survey 2021*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022.
- Fings, Karola, *Sinti e Rom. Storia di una minoranza*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2018.
- Greppi, Carlo and Roberto Persico. *La storia è presente. Dal Novecento a oggi*. Milano: Garzanti Scuola, 2023.
- Magano, Olga and Tânia D'Oliveira, “Antigypsyism in Portugal: Expressions of Hate and Racism in Social Networks”. In *Social Science* 12 (September 2023), n. 511: 2-13. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12090511>.
- Necci, Alessandra, Ulisse Jacomuzzi and Giorgio Montanaro. *Nel grande gioco. Storie idee persone*. Torino: SEI, 2023
- Paolucci, Silvio, Giuseppina Signorini and Luciano Marisaldi. *Di tempo in tempo. L'età contemporanea*. Bologna: Zanichelli, 2022.
- Polanski, Paul. *Black silence. The Lety survivors speak*. Prague-New York: 1998.
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (ed.). *Roma in ten European countries*. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023.
- Spielhaus, Riem, Simona Szakács-Behling, Aurora Ailincăi, Victoria Hopson and Marko Pecak. *The Representation of Roma in European Curricula and*

*Textbooks*, Strasbourg: Leibniz Institute for Educational Media and Georg-Eckert-Institute and Council of Europe, 2020.

Various authors (not specified). *Capire la storia. Il Novecento e la globalizzazione*. Milano-Torino: Pearson, 2012.

Wüstenberg, Jenny. *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

**Second Part**  
**Transforming the present**  
**through history and memory**



## 5. Transforming and training through action-research on the history of Sinti and Roma

by *Maria José Casa-Nova\** and *Daniela Silva\**

### Introduction

We begin this chapter with some of the questions that Jack Whitehead posed in the introduction to his book "Living Theory research as a way of life":

«As you have worked on developing practice or knowledge as a contribution to a field or enterprise, have you ever thought ‘What’s the point’? For fame or fortune? Or, given that you fulfill your contractual obligations (...), is there something in addition that is needed to understand why, what and how you do what you do and hold yourself to account to? A something that enables you to believe your life and work are not only satisfying and productive, but also worthwhile?»<sup>1</sup>.

When we read it, we couldn't help but think of one of us (Maria José Casa-Nova) many years ago, when we began our research path precisely in a participatory action research project, within a team of mostly senior researchers working together with teachers from lower secondary schools in Portugal. During this 4-year project, we gradually gained awareness that this type of research, involving the participation of practitioners in a relationship that was intended to be equal, was one of the forms of research with which we most identified and that would come to be, alongside Ethnography, the way of carrying out research throughout a 28-year university career. And this

\* CIEd, Institute of Education, University of Minho.

<sup>1</sup> Whitehead, *Living theory research as a way of life*, 1.

identification, shared by the other author of this chapter (Daniela Silva), is closely linked to the answer to the question that Jack Whitehead asked (“What’s the point?”): trying to make research worthwhile for its contribution to the transformation of personal and social life. Ours and that of other people with whom we carry out (we do together) participatory action research. It was also the same principle that was at the genesis of the TRACER project and espoused by the international team that constitutes it.

This chapter briefly reflects on the participatory action research that transformed this project into reality, articulating with some of its practices and results.

## 1. Why participatory action research?

So, “why participatory action research in the TRACER project?” Because it is a research method that seeks to uncover unfair and oppressive realities, working with people who are socially deprived of the different types of power that confer social prestige (namely economic power, cultural power, institutional and symbolic power) and that are negatively perceived by global society and which, consciously or unconsciously, places these people on the periphery, as is the case with most Roma people. Because it is a method «with effective participation of the population in the process of research and knowledge production, fundamentally conceived as a process of collective education»<sup>2</sup>. Because as Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon so well mentioned,

People involved in critical action research aim to change their world collectively, by thinking about it differently, acting differently, and relating to one another differently – by constructing other practice architectures to enable and constrain their practice in ways that are more rational (in the sense of reasonable), more productive, and more just and inclusive<sup>3</sup>.

And because the aim of the project was to **unveil the unknown** (Roma Holocaust/Samudariyen) through research (bibliographic,

<sup>2</sup> Haguette, *Metodologias Qualitativas Na Sociologia*, 109.

<sup>3</sup> Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon, *The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*, 17.

graphic, literary), by young Roma and non-Roma, transforming this acquired knowledge into their own training and into the training of other young Roma and non-Roma in the schools and organizations taught by the young people who were part of the project. But also using the arts (painting, graffiti, cinema, theater) as a form of expression and transformation. This is what the TRACER project sought to build over its two and a half years.

Therefore, being involved in a participatory action research process as in the TRACER project included *commitment* (to the project and all the participants), *collaboration* (among team members), *respect* (for people, context and history), *construction of transformation* (one's own and that of others), where this type of research proves to be the most appropriate in “culturally complex societies”<sup>4</sup> such as the ones we live in.

But an important dimension for reflection and already discussed by other authors (namely Brown<sup>5</sup>), is related to the degree of participation of all stakeholders in all phases of the process: *does more or less participation in decision-making processes, more or less participation in some project activities than others, more or less participation in data analysis make the participatory action research method “less” participatory action research?*

Participatory action research of an emancipatory nature is an extremely valuable method at the service of exercising democratic citizenship (awareness, dialogicity and participation). However, in all its dimensions (or in its “pure” theoretical conception – action research in its “strong version”, as Esteves said<sup>6</sup>), it is difficult to implement as it implies constant commitment and responsible practices, power sharing and decision-making on equal terms in all phases of the project, on a regularity that the personal life of each participant, their experiences, life history, perceptions and understanding of different social phenomena do not allow.

In this sense, we agree with Brown<sup>7</sup> when she points out that «depending on the design participatory research needs to be seen as a

<sup>4</sup> Balakrishnan and Claiborne, *Participatory action research in culturally complex societies*.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, *Scope and continuum of participatory research*.

<sup>6</sup> Esteves, *A Investigação-Ação*.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, *Scope and continuum of participatory research*, 2.

continuum from being minimally participatory to being fully egalitarian, whereby realistically most participatory research designs are situated somewhere in between the two».

This is what happened during the development of this project, with young Roma and non-Roma becoming research beginners, giving “wings” to creativity and imagination, in a project that intended to be transformative based on the arts, with differentiated participation in the different phases of the project.

## **2. Unveiling the unknown: knowledge, participation and empowerment**

If this project intended to work on the memory and historical awareness of the Holocaust/Samudaripe Roma with a view to knowledge and dissemination, aiming at the transformation of mentalities and practices, the involvement and participation of young Roma and non-Roma in the different phases of the project was fundamental, although with different degrees of participation.

In this second part of this chapter, we intend the *unveiling of the unknown* and to present a set of activities developed by the group of young leaders from the Portuguese team, within the scope of the TRACER project and where the action-research method took place.

The action-research activities that we chose for this chapter are: a) research and bibliographical reading on the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripe, (knowledge of their own history) by young Roma and non-Roma and conducting interviews with Roma people with memories of armed conflicts or experience of racism and lower secondary school history teachers; b) the reflections made by the group of Portuguese young leaders who visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp in Poland; c) the training of young leaders on the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripe, who accompanied the entire development of the project and d) training of teenagers attending the 7th and 9th grade of schooling, carried out by young Roma and non-Roma who were part of the TRACER team.

## 2.1 Research and reading bibliography on the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen

Research and reading bibliography on the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen marked a second stage of the project that resulted from the first training phase of the young leaders. The training covered the different stages of the project's implementation. Initially, the training focused on preparing young leaders to become facilitators and trainers for other young people on the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen in the second part of the project.

At the beginning of the project, training was held for young Roma and non-Roma leaders on Roma Arts, History and Culture:

1. Presentation of the project and raising awareness of its importance among young people.
2. Explaining the role of young people in the project and their importance as leaders (what it means to be a leader).
3. Role played by Art in awareness raising and social transformation.
4. Training on what is intended with the research of documentary sources on the Holocaust/Samudaripen and how bibliographic research is carried out.
5. Training on the History of the Roma people.

In this training, we sought to develop a leadership training program for the TRACER project Portugal and we also worked on the different forms of research and investigation in projects in the area of social sciences, as a preparatory form for the project activities. After training, the young leaders began research activities.

In the first stage, the research was important for enhancement of their knowledge, and clarification and awareness about the reality of the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen. Each young leader, as they developed their research on the topic, prepared a reading sheet with the identification of key words, the topic and a summary of the contribution of the document/book to the project. Some of the texts that were worked on were, for example: the work of Alexander Ramati (1985), *Quando os violinos se calaram (When the Violins Went Silent)*; the article by Henry Huttenbach (1991), *Porajmos – El genocidio nazi de los gitanos de Europa, Nombres*. The work of J. Bársony and Á.

Daróczi (Eds.), *Pharrajimos: The Fate of the Roma During the Holocaust*, the chapter of Joanna Talewicz-Kwiatkoska (2018), Research Report: Resistance and Survival of the Roma and Sinti in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The reflections on the literature on the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen researched by the group of young leaders were important to increase historical awareness of the Roma genocide during the Second World War. The debate and reflections produced were shared by the group of young leaders and discussed within the broader team, and this activity helped to build historical memory and awareness about the Holocaust/Samudaripen.

The young leaders also produced documentaries that were later used in training in the lower secondary schools where the project's training activities were implemented.

As part of the research activities, the young leaders conducted several interviews with Roma and non-Roma people with historical memories of war events, armed conflicts or experiences of racism, and with history teachers in secondary education.

## *2.2. Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum: reflections by the group of young Portuguese leaders*

One of the major milestones of the TRACER project was the visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial and museum, former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp, in Poland, on May 2023. After the visit, the young leaders wrote a set of reflections on the experience, of which we transcribe some examples here and which highlight the profound impact that the visit had on the team.

«It is difficult to express in simple words what I experienced in Poland, more precisely during my visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. It is difficult because I am not the same person - without hyperbole. In that place of horrors, I saw the emptiness of Saint Augustine, the abyss of Nietzsche and the trivialization of evil by Hannah Arendt. I saw the extreme of human cruelty and, strangely, I did not feel anger, but a great and profound sadness, as well as the desire that 'what' happened there would never happen again. I saw human reason being used for the most horrendous actions

imaginable. There is no book that can convey the sensations that the visit provided, since I felt, saw, smelled and touched one of the worst episodes» (Young leader A).

«For anyone, visiting what is known as ‘the largest cemetery in the world without graves’ is an emotionally overwhelming experience and a stark re-visiting of a past that many choose to forget. For me, a young Roma, the experience was more loaded with meaning and reflection. The visit to Auschwitz Birkenau was the reinforcement of a historical bond and the memory of a resistance that I and many other young Roma were deprived of learning about and recognizing. We must remember that despite the terror and suffering, democracy won. Let us celebrate every day the resistance of a people whose wings they tried to clip but failed» (Young leader B).

«Witnessing and participating in the Roma Resistance Day ceremony was a great privilege for me. I felt deeply moved throughout the entire moment. Honoring and remembering the memory of those people and their bravery in this way was unforgettable. It “forced” us to face the suffering without any escape, as we were surrounded by the chilling fusion sound of violins and Hungarian cymbals, together with the grey landscape of the ruins of the barracks where millions suffered until their last days. It also represented a certain mixture of mourning and struggle, which I think would have reflected well how the Roma communities themselves may have faced their fate there in the *Zigeunerlager*» (Young leader C).

The visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp was the culmination of a process of historical awareness that would significantly shape the actions included in the training courses run by young leaders that would later take place in lower secondary schools.

## *2.3 Youth training on the Holocaust/Samudaripen by young leaders*

### **2.3.1 Workshop in a class of a course in a lower secondary school**

After visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, the project team and some young leaders developed a workshop about Roma genocide (Samudaripen) in June 2023, in a lower secondary school class in the district of Braga, Portugal. Most of the students in this class were Roma students and the training that was developed was received with curiosity and expectation. When we started training with the students, most of them were surprised by the theme and revealed lack of knowledge about the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen. The students participated and discussed the theme with enthusiasm because we were working with them on important historical moments of their ethnicity, a fact that marked a moment of learning about their culture, as they wrote: «I learned more about my culture»; «About the Holocaust, I gained encouragement when I saw someone representing my ethnicity (testimony of one of the students)»; «It was very sad. There is death of the Roma» (testimony of one of the students); «I really enjoyed learning the history of the Roma» (testimony of one of the students).

As we discussed and presented moments from the visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp (such as the categories of prisoners in Auschwitz and the book of names), the Roma students reflected together on their own living conditions and questioned the processes of discrimination present in society, the extreme of which is translated into genocide. In addition, we also reflected on the processes of discrimination that they sometimes feel from the general society, which often leads these students to express feelings of disbelief regarding their future social integration.

One of the aspects that marked the reflection was the low or non-existent expectations of these students regarding their academic future and the lack of knowledge that their path could involve higher education, evidencing low expectations regarding their school performance. Most of these students intended to finish 9th grade and not continue their studies, aspiring to professions with little social prestige,

reproducing, in the sense of Bourdieu and Passeron<sup>8</sup>, the cultural and social position of their parents. Thus, from the discussion of the topic of the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen, and through research/reflection-action, we recorded some “conscientization”<sup>9</sup> on the part of the children of their place in the world and a more critical view of their own place. The students wrote what had most impacted them in the Workshop and some wrote that: «I learned not to give up on our dreams no matter how many difficulties we face» (testimony of one of the students); «I learned that being a Roma doesn’t mean I can’t fight for my dreams and be someone in life» (testimony from one of the students); «Today I learned that my Roma culture is valuable» (testimony from one of the students). Other students wrote: «You shouldn’t criticize other people» or «We are all equal», in the search for a more just and equal society<sup>10</sup>.

### **2.3.2 Workshops in classes of a lower secondary school (12-16 year-old students)**

The training provided in lower secondary schools included training for young people and teachers. In the context of training for young people, the activities were carried out in two different schools in the district of Braga, and included three classes. The facilitators of these sessions were Roma young leaders members of the project, who planned the weekly session on joint reflection on their own training practices and the contributions of the students, in accordance with the principles of action-research. Thus, giving meaning to the dialectic of reflection – action – construction of historical consciousness, the young leaders sought transformation among the students in the research. With the aim of raising students awareness of the Holocaust/Samudaripen, the violation of Human Rights, discrimination and racism, theoretical and practical training was carried out with three 7th year classes at another school in Braga. In this training, students had the opportunity to hear about the Holocaust/Samudaripen and racism,

<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu and Passeron, *A Reprodução. Elementos para uma teoria do sistema de ensino*.

<sup>9</sup> Freire, *Conscientização: teoria e prática da libertação: uma introdução ao pensamento de Paulo Freire*.

<sup>10</sup> To know the study of the construction of educational success of Roma children, see the works of Casa-Nova, 2002, 2008; Casa-Nova et al, 2020a, 2020b.

making drawings, painting pictures and building artefacts related to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The participants were 58 young people (15 in class 1; 19 in the class 2 and 24 in the class 3). In the table below, we present an example of the content of one of the Workshops, developed and planned weekly, taking into account the reflections made by the participants in each session.

*Tab. 1 – Sessions of the training*

Session 1	Presentation on the Roma ethnic group, their way of life and cultural elements. The Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen
Session 2	The Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen – presentation and report on the experience of visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp. Discussion with the young people. Formation of groups and selection of artistic activities to develop.
Session 3	Video (produced by the young leaders) on the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen and reflection among all on the values of society (activity on what values should the society we want to have?). Start of artistic activities by the different groups.
Session 4	Development of artistic activities by the students.
Session 5	Conclusion of artistic activities by the students.

Throughout the sessions, the young leaders encouraged reflection among the students, who expressed their feelings and acquired knowledge through art. The use of art in this action-research project, expressed in the form of paintings or sculptures, led to active involvement among the students in the activities, to the point that they asked to continue their work at home and to work on it in their free time. The use of these forms of artistic expression had a transformative/constructive effect on greater historical awareness of the Roma Holocaust (Picture 2).

*Pic. 2 - Picture drawn by students about the suffering in the Holocaust*



The students highlighted their horror at what happened and said they would act daily to prevent events like this. At the end of the training, the students had the opportunity to express what they felt and what they learned during the training. From what they wrote and said, what became most evident was the respect for human beings, for each other's culture and for Human Rights: «Many people were tortured, mistreated and greatly despised just because they were of different origins, ethnicities and religions than Hitler» (testimony of one of the students); «We

learned how much everyone who participated in the Holocaust suffered, that Roma are not what they say» (testimony of one of the students); «Respect people regardless of their culture or community» (testimony of one of the students), «I learned that the Roma community was very misunderstood» (testimony of one of the students); «I learned that we should value other cultures more and always understand our history» (testimony of one of the students).

They also highlighted the value of collaboration and acceptance of difference, as they write: «It portrays something very sad that should be talked about in all schools and make sure that this never happens again» (testimony of one of the students); «I learned to be grateful for today being able to express myself without being judged» (testimony of one of the students); «Many people were mistreated [...] when what they wanted was peace, freedom and equality» (testimony of one of the students); «We learned how cruel they were out of pure prejudice» (testimony of one of the students); «I learned to distinguish right from wrong» (testimony of one of the students), «I learned not to support the Holocaust»; «Not to accept the Holocaust» (testimony of one of the students). The use of the verb “to learn” associated with the distinction between good and evil and awareness of human rights is recurrent in the reflections.

The use of art was essential for participants to express their feelings about the Holocaust, because «Through their powers for expression, evocation and illumination<sup>11</sup> the arts lend themselves towards exploring experiences and expressing feelings and emotions or other concepts that would be otherwise difficult to verbalize»<sup>12</sup>.

The experience and participation of young leaders throughout the project in activities to raise awareness of the historical Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen led to a committed process of changing the historical consciousness of the young participants, and this research project strengthened this dialectic of research – reflection – action not only among the young leaders but also among the students in the training. This dialectic was expressed in the form of art, through drawings, paintings and sculptures by the students, resulting in a process of denouncing a society that disrespects Human Rights by giving visibility to the historical memory of the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen.

### **2.3.3 Technical artistic workshop for a mural painting**

To finalize the research/training project - action in schools, the Portuguese team decided to paint a mural on the wall of a lower secondary school in Braga because we consider that a school is the best place to learn about Human Rights, as is the case with the Holocaust. It took place after 12 hours of training in a classroom with three 7th year classes and involving students from the same classes.

A plastic artist<sup>13</sup>, known in the city of Braga for having carried out several artistic interventions in the city, was invited to provide this training that gave rise to the mural (Pictures 3 and 4). Continuing the work that the groups had carried out in the classroom, young people's awareness was at its highest, as well as their motivation. During the training, students expressed their thoughts and feelings about human rights violations and the importance of preventing these violations through their daily actions, having learned to express themselves through the arts and becoming aware of their transformative power.

<sup>11</sup> Barone and Eisner, *Arts based research*.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *Scope and continuum of participatory research*.

<sup>13</sup> Painter Alexandre Pinheiro, artistic name: Bekam.



*Pic. 3 and 4 - Young people painted the mural and the exhibition in Braga*

The group included twenty young people (11 girls and 9 boys) from 9 countries (Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Iraq, Morocco, Syria, Andorra, Canada, and Luxembourg). This activity took place in May 2024. At the beginning of June, an exhibition of the work done by the participants was inaugurated at the school, with their families and other members of the community being invited. In Portugal, at a middle school in Figueira da Foz, a mural was also painted to raise awareness of the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen in the community (Pictures 5 and 6).

*Pic. 5 and 6 - The mural in Figueira da Foz*



## Final considerations

History is better understood with images and documents that make visible the people who are part of this History. Who produced it. History is learned and apprehended actively by reading, writing and telling others. The TRACER project sought to do this.

Knowledge and awareness of the Roma Holocaust/Samudaripen; awareness of the importance of all human beings being treated equally and humanely; the awareness that all human beings are worth the same and that everyone has the capacity and possibility to build their future, continuing to fulfill their dreams, are results that are part of TRACER's "portfolio": more empowered young Roma, aware of their rights and capabilities, societies more informed about the Holocaust/Samudaripen and Roma culture, as well as their belonging to European culture are some results of the project.

Of the project results, which will never truly be known in all its dimensions because individual and collective transformation processes take place in the medium and long term, those that were possible to observe and hear in the present and which this book seeks to highlight, showed that the project was worth it. And one of the tangible results of the training with young Roma in one of the lower secondary schools was the continuity of the school path of six of the young people who decided to go to the 10th grade before the project they had decided to leave school at the end of the 9th grade. This "conscientization" about the role of education in the society, in which we work with these students, is a remarkable and unforgettable result of the project.

We remember Paulo Freire's words: «Education doesn't transform the world. Education change people. People transform the world»<sup>14</sup> and it is transformative projects as TRACER that help to build a more democratic and humane society.

<sup>14</sup> Freire, *Educação e mudança*.

## Bibliography

- Balakrishnan, Vishalache and Lise Claiborne. *Participatory action research in culturally complex societies: opportunities and challenges*, *Educational Action Research*, 25:2, 185-202, 2017 DOI: 10.1080/09650792.2016.1206480.
- Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean Claud Passeron. *A Reprodução. Elementos para uma teoria do sistema de ensino*. s/d: Editora Vega.
- Barone, Tom and Elliot W. Eisner. *Arts based research*. New York: Sage, 2011.
- Brown, Nicole. "Scope and continuum of participatory research". In *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 2021, DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2021.1902980.
- Casa-Nova, Maria José, Maria Alfredo Moreira, M. A., Silva, D. V., Rodrigues, J., & Ribeiro, L. RISE – *Roma Inclusive School Experience. A experiência portuguesa/ The portuguese experience*. Lisboa: Alto Comissariado para as Migrações-OBCig, 2020a: <https://hdl.handle.net/1822/85365>.
- Casa-Nova, Maria José, Maria Alfredo Moreira and Maria Teresa Tagliaventi (eds.). *School education, minorities and life opportunities: Roma inclusive school experiences*. V. N. Famalicao Húmus, 2020b: <https://hdl.handle.net/1822/85373>
- Casa-Nova, Maria José. *Minorias e escolaridade*. In Casa-Nova Maria José and Paula Palmeira (Coord.). *Minorias*. Ministério do Trabalho e da Solidariedade Social, 2008.
- Casa-Nova, Maria José. *Etnicidade, género e escolaridade*. Lisboa: IIE, 2002.
- Esteves, António Joaquim. *A Investigação-Acção*. In Augusto Santo Silva and José. Madureira Pinto (Orgs.). *Metodologia das Ciências Sociais*. Porto: Afrontamento 1986: 251-278.
- Freire, Paulo. *Conscientização: teoria e prática da libertação: uma introdução ao pensamento de Paulo Freire*. São Paulo: Cortez & Moraes, 1979a.
- Freire, Paulo. *Educação e mudança*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1979b.
- Haguette, Teresa Maria Frota. *Metodologias Qualitativas Na Sociologia*. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 2010.
- Kemmis, Stephen; Robin McTaggart and Rhonda Nixon. *The Action Research Planner. Doing Critical Participatory Action Research*. New York: Springer, 2014.
- Whitehead, Jack. *Living theory research as a way of life*. Brown Dog Books, 2018.

## 6. Knowing the history in the educational context

by *Luca Bravi\**

### 1. The role of history in educational processes

The traces that the young participants in the TRACER project left inside the Auschwitz State Museum, visited in May 2023, ideally mark the path for a reflection on the relationship between knowledge of history and the methodological-formative aspect, to build memory processes. What purpose can history serve, especially when dealing with the recovery of the events of a minority such as the Roma and Sinti?

Among the tools used to tell the story, the TRACER project has assigned a fundamental role to the visit to Auschwitz, where even Roma and Sinti, under the label of "gypsies", were physically eliminated, because they were considered inferior by race. In this contribution, the analysis will focus on the role of places of memory in knowing history, in particular Auschwitz, to reflect on the theoretical and methodological level implemented by the European project. The mediation of places of memory in educational processes is generally considered useful, but according to which theoretical references?

Short-term and long-term objectives are fundamental aspects to consider in the construction of an educational process and it is probably at this level that the most frequent misunderstandings occur. The short-term objective of an educational process that starts from the events of Auschwitz can never be the generic construction of memory, but always historicization, that means knowledge of the specific history of the initial, intermediate and final process that Auschwitz represented. Knowing history corresponds to historicizing events. Historicizing Auschwitz means expanding as much as possible historical

knowledge about events happened in that area from 1940, when Auschwitz I was opened as a base camp, until 27 January 1945, when the camp was liberated by the Red Army, after it had expanded to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Auschwitz-Monowitz and its many subcamps<sup>1</sup>. From this point of view, the history of Roma and Sinti must connect to the history of other categories that were deported to the extermination camp. This approach opens a range of innumerable knowledge that the trainer must consider about the time available, the experiences that he wants to connect to it, the age of the people he is addressing, the specificity of the history of the different categories of deportees who were imprisoned in Auschwitz, the personal stories of the participants in the training. Historical knowledge always needs a specifically structured path to be learned and tools that are suitable for generating interest.

Historicization of this educational process is the short-term objective, but the long-term objective can be identified in the construction of an “active memory”<sup>2</sup>, understood as the ability to transform the activity of approaching history into daily actions turned to peace, democracy and equal relationship between communities and individuals. It doesn’t correspond to a series of generic and theoretical intentions: historicization of Auschwitz have to be used as a specific pedagogical tool: the theorization of ethical concepts represents a phase that always follows the historicization of past events, because historical knowledges constitute the necessary basis for producing theoretical reflections.

## 2. Crossing Auschwitz

In the TRACER project, Auschwitz represented a “milestone”, but it is necessary to avoid its crystallization. The history of Auschwitz can represent an element of activation for an educational process, in consideration of its symbolic impact on a global level: nowadays,

\* Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology (FORLILPSI), University of Florence.

<sup>1</sup> State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, *Auschwitz studies*.

<sup>2</sup> Bravi, *Percorsi storico-educativi della memoria europea*.

naming Auschwitz in a public communication refers immediately to the entire story of persecution, deportation and extermination, but from a historical point of view, it is important to be aware that Auschwitz is the final phase of a process that produced the extermination and elimination of lives reduced to "pieces" to be eliminated; Auschwitz does not even represent the end of deportations, because its liberation on 27 January 1945, anticipated by almost four months the last liberation of Mauthausen concentration camp (5 May 1945) and its satellite camps, in the days immediately following.

Auschwitz can be placed at the centre of an educational process that has active memory as its long-term objective, but it provided that Auschwitz isn't a dogmatic symbol of evil. In *Modernity and the Holocaust*<sup>3</sup>, Zygmunt Bauman defines it as a concrete representation of the "great factory of death" that was activated with the aim of eliminating the lives defined as inferior: some of specific Auschwitz elements have continued to characterise post-Auschwitz modernity:

- technology, which has permitted innovation: it was the ability to build large gas chambers and an industrial system for the disposal of bodies);
- bureaucracy (the capillary division of tasks: it was the possibility of removing direct responsibility for the deaths in the gas chambers from each of the subjects involved;
- «culture of the gardener», that Bauman defines the action of someone who eliminates the plants declared to be weeds from a garden (in defense of the beauty of the garden): this kind of action is considered as a generative action and not as a destructive one; «gardener's culture» is comparable to the social organization that considered the project of a racially pure "new man" as the better point of arrival. From this point of view the extermination become an action to improve society and not as a mass murder; this message also characterized education and training in the regime's schools.

Not crystallizing Auschwitz and its history means being able to link similar reflections to the achievement of full knowledge of the past. The process of historical knowledge described can be activated either through a chronological approach that leads from the beginning of the

<sup>3</sup> Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*.

dictatorships to Auschwitz, or as a path backwards that moves from Auschwitz towards the clarification of the previous phases; in both cases, the fundamental aspect is to identify historicization as the basic tool for didactic and formative work.

It is a methodology that can be summarized in the ability to “cross Auschwitz” rather than “visit Auschwitz”: it means the possibility of traveling through historical time to gain awareness and historical knowledge. From this point of view, the focus of pedagogical reflection must be directed at the methodologies and tools that can be used to make this knowledge interesting and activatable in educational contexts. One of the most frequent formative errors about memory of the twentieth century is the tendency to put ethical reflections as first objective of a training process: we talk about education for peace and connect it to the generic reflection about extermination that took place in the concentration camps, without considering the problem of clarifying the entire proceeding that made humanity capable of extermination: we often use historical facts considering them as symbolic images disconnected from their stories. “Crossing Auschwitz” faces the need to structure a narrative historical *continuum* to identify specific focuses of historical studies which are the basis for arriving at the ethical considerations. In this context the historical and pedagogical school subjects collaborate each other.

The analysis of the links between past and present is now more urgent: 15 years ago, the Italian historian David Bidussa wrote:

Once the testimonial voices of an event disappear, what will we have in our hands? How will we process that void? And at the same time, how will we reflect? The question concerns the capacity of those voices to speak and raise questions; not just to reproduce themselves. In that empty terrain, the dimension of post-memory will arise, of a reflection that will live structurally on the capacity to process documents. There, the problem of the relationship between testimony and history will arise. When the eyewitnesses have disappeared, when those voices no longer have a voice, we will find ourselves with a defined archive of stories, which will tell scenarios and situations. It will be a question of making those stories narrated as “documents” work. At that moment, the irreversible passage between the twentieth century and “current events” will take place<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Bidussa, *Dopo l'ultimo testimone*.

“Crossing Auschwitz”<sup>5</sup> means attempting a path that can never be limited to replacing the role and presence of the witness with the re-proposal of a recorded interview. How to start again? From the relationship with the places where the historical events took place. It allows to resume the narration of the story in connection with multiple elements: the past, the present (in which the place continues to live), but also the people who have passed through those places.

Reflecting on the specific place of Auschwitz (as proposed in TRACER) means being able to consider all places as a useful training tool to be included in the narrative *continuum* of a project. This is not a totally new path if we consider that the first valorization of the places started with the deportees who survived the concentration camps. The first journeys immediately organized after the war (to return to the places of their personal suffering) were made in a situation of lack of collective interest. Today we are in a different phase and the collective and public relationship with these areas has changed and it poses critical issues that must be addressed. There has been a progressively more widespread rooting of the so-called “Memory trips” between the 1990s and the 2000s. At the same time, the journeys proposed by many tourist operators to the concentration camps (in particular to Auschwitz) have increased, giving rise to a “mass tourism” that often risks turning into “horror tourism”. In 2019, there were more than 2 million visitors to the Auschwitz State Museum, in 2023, after a sharp drop due to the closure for Covid, they returned to exceed one million presences and the figure of one million has been constantly reached by the museum for at least a decade. If we were to consider the quantitative data, we should imagine having a part of the population with a fair amount of knowledge about Auschwitz history, but it does not correspond to the reality; so it is possible to identify the difference between “visiting” and “crossing Auschwitz”: visiting corresponds to placing oneself in front of a monument of extermination that “must be seen” at least once in a lifetime, but we need to transform Auschwitz from a monument to a tool for training and historicization, if we want to build a process of knowledge.

Some direct witnesses, including Liliana Segre (Italian Holocaust survivor and Senator for Life of the Italian Republic since January

<sup>5</sup> Rizzin (ed.), *Attraversare Auschwitz*.

2018), have been able to create a generative relationship between the past of persecution personally experienced and the civil commitment to be built in the present: they were the ones who translated the “lesson of Auschwitz” into a message of democratic life; they did not remain tied exclusively to the story of death. “Crossing Auschwitz” also requires knowing what kind of life exists near the State Museum of Auschwitz nowadays: imagining human existence in the same area where an extermination camp once stood seems impossible; nevertheless Oświęcim (the town existed before Nazism and it came back to exist after Auschwitz) is today a city of peace, where many informal and formal groups, bodies and associations live to work defending human rights. The relationship with life in places of death is a very delicate subject, because knowing history does not mean denying the possibility of any ordinary daily life, otherwise the result becomes that of crystallizing that area at the time of the extermination. It is in this new borderline between life and death, between Auschwitz and Oświęcim, that the educational path can propose a useful problematization of current events.

### **3. Voices and traces**

Here are some of the considerations made by young Roma and non-Roma people who participated in the TRACER project and who took part the visit to the Auschwitz State Museum:

«I always knew that my people were hated in Italy and in Europe, but I didn't think that anti-Gypsyism (hatred towards Roma and Sinti) was so high in the country where I was born.

My story, or rather the story of my parents, starts from a region of the former Yugoslavia, Macedonia (now an autonomous nation). My parents decided to move to Italy for economic reasons and, once they arrived, they found themselves living, not by choice, in the nomad camp of Foggia, in a housing situation that was not linked to their belonging to the Roma community, because in Macedonia they had a house and there was no nomad camp. I was born in Foggia, in the camp, and lived for the first six months of my life in a Kampina (trailer in the Romani language). As a child, I thought it was normal to live in a camp; my parents are foreigners and I thought that all families with foreign parents lived in a camp, just like me. As I grew up, I discovered

that that housing situation, which I now consider inhumane, was intended only for Roma.

My mother always wanted me, my brother and my sister to have a better future, and she always believed that school and education were a fundamental tool to use to achieve this goal. Yet, it was at school that I discovered what it meant to be a Roma girl, and I had to live perceiving the hatred that most people have towards my people; a hatred so deep that sometimes it made me drown in pain and fear of not being accepted by the people around me.

At school I discovered what it means to be a “gypsy”, to feel unworthy of being part of this society, marginalized by society; that is exactly what happened: the nomad camps were built far from the city. My family later moved to the nomad camp in Pisa which was in an industrial area. I stayed there until I was 5 years old. My parents managed to get the house when I was about to turn 6 and from then on, my life changed. The house allowed me to live my life like any other child, but it did not eliminate the prejudices that I felt on me. Those remained and still remain when I was going through my adolescence, I understood how necessary it was for me to hide my identity and not tell others that I was Roma: the words of hate, the prejudices and discrimination were too strong and the only shield I had was precisely the denial of my identity. Only in high school did I have the courage to reveal to my classmates my belonging; and it was in high school that I began to learn about the history of my people: reading in the history book that the Roma and Sinti were also exterminated made me both nervous and curious. On the one hand, the book spoke, even if only for a few lines, about the history of my people, on the other, it used the derogatory term, “zingari”, that the majority society has given to us Roma and Sinti. The term zingari does not exist in my community and we do not use it. When I asked the teacher to delve into the topic of extermination, unfortunately she was unable to tell me much, and this is because the history of this genocide is not yet well known. So I started to do my research on my own and at university I had the opportunity to delve deeper into the topic with my first trip to Auschwitz: going to “visit” the places of memory is the first step in reconstructing the past, because “crossing” the concentration and extermination camps is not enough if you don’t start a reflection on the present and on what still feeds prejudice. The prejudices of the past have not yet been deconstructed and are always present in our daily lives. The image of the “gypsy” as a thief, dirty and criminal is a stereotype rooted in our society».

(Senada, from Tuscany, Italy)

«I am Teresa and I am now 18 years old, but I learned about this part of history, linked to Roma and Sinti culture, when I was only 13. It happened

almost by chance: on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance, my school organized a meeting aimed at third-year classes and it was something "different" compared to previous years: the topic this time was not the Shoah, but the extermination of Roma and Sinti, which I had never heard of and the topic struck me so much that at the end of the meeting I remained asking a thousand questions and I was invited to continue my "interview" at the camp, where one of the speakers lived. From then on, my interest grew together with my desire to know more about the Roma and Sinti culture and I took every opportunity to get to know it better, interviewing and listening to stories, until I wrote one of my own, dedicated to a hypothetical friend, to whom I confided, in a letter, my story as a proudly Sinti girl, telling her about my people and my family and all those stereotypes attributed without really knowing who we are, just because we are "different" and being different is still scary today and it is better to attack and isolate rather than try to know, as I did. I submitted this imaginary story to the Memory Journey competition, winning it and having the opportunity, therefore, to deepen my knowledge of History by visiting the concentration and extermination camps of Mauthausen and Ebensee and then continuing to participate in meetings and demonstrations, until I became part of the TRACER project, which gave me the opportunity to improve myself, forming me as a more aware person and citizen».

(Teresa, from Tuscany, Italy)

«For me past is very important. History is the teacher of life, like Cicerone said "*Historia magistra vitae*". It makes me really sad that people are forgetting the history, in fact nowadays many of them are choosing nationalism. And for me this means that they didn't understand the past, they didn't visit places like Auschwitz-Birkenau camp. My dream is bringing them all here and showing what the nazi genocide was. I was lucky to grow up here. Oświęcim is a very interesting place. As a citizen of this city, I love it with all my heart, despite its dark side of history. But we need to understand that through education we can really make the change. And growing up here is a sort of continue life lesson, it's a way of always facing the history. So the young generation must educate itself to protect the future from the repetition of what happened in the past».

(Sabina from Oświęcim, Poland)

«Visiting the Auschwitz camp was a bit of a strong experience. I didn't know many of the things that happened in the past and I was happy to be able to learn them. It was a beautiful experience, a new experience».

(Shannon from Modena, Italy)

«From the beginning I was enthusiastic about the project: the training part on the extermination of Roma and Sinti, the trip... Going to Auschwitz has always been a big dream for me, because I wanted to try to experience what I had learned about this page in the history of our people. A very sad story, which particularly affects me, because it speaks of me, of my community. Even just the opportunity to travel with my grandchildren was very important, it made me even more enthusiastic, because I would have had this experience with my family. I felt that in this way I could bring home a story that no one knows. Especially adults like me, experience it as something distant, almost as if it did not belong to us. Instead, thanks to this project, I understood that it concerns us closely, I gave meaning to all the discrimination that I have always suffered as a Sinti woman. I was able to understand the origin of the stereotype that we still carry with us today. In our community I notice a lack of mutual listening between the elderly and the young. Fewer and fewer elderly people talk about their past, because they tend not to be listened to, and vice versa. There seems to be a great distance between generations. But if certain stories are not told, they are forgotten. Traveling to Auschwitz, delving into its history, allowed me to give voice to forgotten stories».

(Simonetta from Modena, Italy)

The collected reflections have proposed the voices of young Sinti (Shannon and Simonetta) and Roma (Senada and Sabina) and non-Roma (Teresa) women. The most evident fact that emerges from their words is the poor knowledge of historical facts, especially in Italy, both in the Sinti and Roma communities and in the majority community (in both cases, regardless of the level of education achieved)<sup>6</sup>.

In the case of Poland, where awareness of the history of the Roma during Nazism is more widespread within the minority, it should be considered that Sabina was born and lived in Oświęcim and she is the daughter of the international activist Roman Kwiatkowski. In any case, the need to include the Roma and Sinti historical events in European history appears to be a decisive factor. The most important question concerns the type of processes that knowledge of this specific part of history can activate. It is useful to reflect on aspects that concern the formation of identities within Sinti and Roma families. In countries where prejudice is higher, the construction of identity, especially in

<sup>6</sup> Bonomo, *Voci della memoria*.

adolescence, cross through the perception of belonging to "two worlds", one internal and one external to their community. This condition forces Roma and Sinti to develop strategies for surviving stereotypes that result, in most cases, in hiding their community membership when they find themselves in the external majority context.

Contact between majority and minority has always existed historically, but in the context of self-narration, the identity of young Roma and Sinti is often affected by "gypsy" prejudice. For this reason, many Sinti and Roma go through phases of shame, guilt and anger towards their community, from a very young age<sup>7</sup>.

From the point of view of the relationship with history, there is often an element of disruption in the narrative process: living one's identity problematically also causes a distancing from participation in the construction of collective memory in the public sphere; in Sinti and Roma communities, the storytelling of history exists, but in national contexts, elaboration and dissemination of Roma historical events in public memory is not created. One of the most serious problems is that Roma and Sinti stories spread by the majority often corresponds to stereotyped images. There is a possible useful process that is the same that inspired the TRACER project: the construction of a public space that can be frequented by both people belonging to the majority and minorities. From this point of view, school (and every context aimed at training and formal and informal education) can represent useful environments for the construction of this common space that allows us to recognize ourselves within a "common history".

## Bibliography

- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 1991.
- Bonomo, Bruno. *Voci della memoria*. Roma: Carocci, 2013.
- Bidussa, David. *Dopo l'ultimo testimone*. Torino: Einaudi, 2009.
- Bravi, Luca and Stefano Pasta. "Memoria a più voci" per la partecipazione pubblica delle minoranze". In *Pedagogia e Vita* (2022), n. 3, 85-97.
- Bravi, Luca. *Percorso storico-educativi della memoria europea*. Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Bravi and Pasta, "Memoria a più voci per la partecipazione pubblica delle minoranze".

Rizzin, Eva (eds.). *Attraversare Auschwitz*. Roma: Gangemi, 2020.

Białecka, Alicja, Krystyna Oleksy, Fabienne Regard and Piotr Trojanski (eds.). *European pack for visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum*. Council of Europe and Polish Ministry of Education, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2020.

## 7. Visiting history. “Crossing” the camp of Auschwitz

by *Silvia Bencini*\*

*Moon, take all your light, come here with your shine and charm.  
Stay here forever with your beauty, with your grace.  
[...] Come here, Moon, stay here, I will show you the tomb of my people.  
Illuminate it with your one ray. You see, I look at you from my barred hell.  
I find myself in the heart of hell, in which my people are dying<sup>1</sup>.*

The concept of visiting places of Remembrance was born in the immediate post-war period, mainly in the form of pilgrimage, at a time when society deliberately distanced itself from the events of the Second World War. The creation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum was strongly requested by a small number of former prisoners of the camp, who wanted to transform the *lager* into a site of Remembrance in which to commemorate the victims and tell the stories of those who did not survive, of the “untestifiable”, as Giorgio Agamben defines the *Muselmann*:

The witness usually testifies for truth and justice and from these his words draw consistency and fullness.

But here the testimony is essentially valid for what is missing in it; contains, at its center, something untestifiable, which deposes the authority of the survivors. The “true” witnesses, the “full witnesses” are those who did not testify nor could they have done so. They are those who “have hit rock bottom”, the *Muslims*, the submerged. The survivors, as pseudo-witnesses, speak in their stead, by proxy: they testify to a missing testimony. [...] The “untestifiable” has a name. He is called, in the jargon of the camp, *der Muselmann*, the Muslim”<sup>2</sup>.

\* Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology (FOR-LILPSI), University of Florence.

<sup>1</sup> Gradowski, *I am in the heart of hell. Manuscripts of a Sonderkommando prisoner found in Auschwitz.*

<sup>2</sup> Agamben, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz.*

Already in 1945 it was possible to visit the site of Auschwitz. However, the visit was limited to organized groups or took place on the occasion of certain ceremonies. Only after the beginning of the construction work on the various exhibitions, the Museum started to come to life and work regularly. In 1946, 100,000 visitors and pilgrims visited the place (many people, especially relatives of the victims, considered the visit as a pilgrimage). The following year there were 170,000 people. It was possible to make both individual and group visits. In both cases, the visitor had to be accompanied by a custodian or another member of the Museum's nascent staff, who acted as a guide.

Entry required the purchase of a ticket, and the income was used for organizational work. Before the official opening of the Museum, the guides showed the main entrance to the Auschwitz I camp with the writing "*Arbeit macht frei*", the Block number 11 and the "Wall of Death" in the courtyard, the Crematorium I, the interiors of the brick and wooden barracks, the ruins of the crematoria and gas chambers of Birkenau.

The inauguration of the Museum took place on June 14th, 1947, in the presence of tens of thousands of people, mostly former prisoners, their relatives and delegations from many Polish and Jewish communities and political organizations.

Only on July 2nd, 1947, the «Sejm» (Polish Parliament) approved the law establishing the Museum. The legislation stated that «the area of the former Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz, together with all buildings and equipment located there, must be preserved forever as a monument to the martyrdom of the Polish and other peoples. [...] The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has the task of collecting and bringing together evidence and materials associated with Nazi crimes, making them accessible to the public and studying them in a scientific way».

This atypical situation, in which the museum was opened before the approval of the legal act regulating its operation, arose from the desire to hold the opening ceremonies on 14th June, the seventh anniversary of the arrival at the camp of first transport of Polish political prisoners, while the first possible session of Parliament was scheduled for the beginning of July. Not wanting to postpone the opening, the authorities

decided that the Museum could start operating before the required legislation was approved.

Today the meaning of visits to the Museum has retained its pilgrimage-visit profile only in relation to the celebrations of important anniversaries, such as the liberation of the camp on 27th January 1945 (a date institutionalized at an international level as “International Holocaust Remembrance Day”), or the liquidation of the *Zigeunerlager* (“gypsy camp”) on 2nd August 1944. Every year, on important dates like those just mentioned, institutions, volunteers and pilgrims from all over the world head towards the camp to commemorate the victims of Nazism<sup>3</sup>.

But in general, the very high numbers of visits to the Museum (in 2023, there were 1,676,000 visitors) are mainly due to two diametrically opposed ways of access to the place which are nowadays far from the concept of pilgrimage: a superficial approach that takes shape under a profile of mass tourism (or “dark tourism”), which we talked about in the first part of this book, alongside a necessary and significant educational intent towards the history of the place.

Visiting Auschwitz today means not only commemorating, but also entering the context of educational processes that start from the need to know the past of Nazi and fascist extermination, to understand and deconstruct the mechanisms of hatred of the present.

Precisely with this training purpose, TRACER project identified the journey through the Auschwitz Memorial site as a fundamental stage for the education of young Roma, Sinti and non-Roma girls and boys about the history of the Nazi genocide and, in particular, that of the extermination of the Roma and Sinti people.

Young people from three different countries (Italy, Poland and Portugal) started from very different levels of knowledge on this page of history: the group was made up of university students, part of the Roma and Sinti communities, who had a clear understanding of the history of their people; non-Roma students who equally knew it; Roma and Sinti youth who had never heard of it; and finally young Polish people who live in Oświęcim and have to interface with the place’s past on a daily basis.

<sup>3</sup> Keen, *Right to remember*.

After a pre-departure historical training, the very heterogeneous group set off together towards the city of Oświęcim, with the aim of “crossing” the Auschwitz camp through a visit to the Museum.

For some participants, the visit went beyond their own expectations:

«Being at Auschwitz-Birkenau a place where millions of lives were meticulously, systematically, and inhumanely taken away is something very difficult and challenging to describe and put into words. Everything we had learned about the Holocaust is there for us to see and witness, yet its stark reality by far surpasses all previous expectations.

The enormous scale of this horrific event is terrifyingly well represented by the size of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. We were in shock as we tried to process how this scale translated into countless victims. It is impossible to truly comprehend those numbers. Throughout the camps, we were confronted with efforts to represent this monstrosity – piles and piles of belongings, hair, ashes, numbers – but the gigantic book listing the names of Holocaust victims by far surpassed all these representations. It revealed the painful truth behind the numbers we are used to read in books and documentaries – those numbers have names.

The thickness of the air inside the gas chamber in Auschwitz, its damp smell, and the markings on the walls left deep roots in our memories. It is difficult to imagine how this killing process was conceived. Putting ourselves in the victims’ shoes is an easy task, but simultaneously unbearable for an empathetic exercise. But trying to think like these killers seems impossibly absurd. Birkenau revealed how their only thought was on exterminating people, faster and more efficiently, ever seeking to optimize their macabre process. We learned how, at times, their need to kill quickly surpassed the capacity of their machinery. The memorial atop the ashes of a mass grave next to Crematorium IV – where the families of the ‘Gypsy Camp’ (*Zigeunerlager*) were taken – stands as evidence of this fact. This mass grave resulted from “The Night of the Gypsies”, August 2nd, 1944, the night of the liquidation of the ‘*Zigeunerlager*’, when nearly three thousand people were killed, and the number of bodies exceeded the crematorium’s capacity. Replicas of children’s drawings from the barracks walls showed how creativity can emerge even in the darkest of places, while simultaneously capturing the grim omnipresence of lifeless bodies in their day-to-day lives».

(From an exponent of the Portuguese group)

Sharing the visit to the camp allowed the young participants to elaborate together thoughts and reflections on the history of the place but also on its reality in the present:

«A certain feeling of helplessness followed our footsteps during the visits, highlighting the voyeuristic nature of such a trip. Some of us discussed the absurdity and perversity of this kind of tourism, even as we acknowledged its importance as a life lesson and a shared unforgettable memory. The realization that our footsteps traced the paths of prisoners, solely for the purpose of gaining knowledge still lingers in our minds in a conflicting way. Our ability to walk back along a route that was designed as a one-way journey to the gas chambers feels both like a privilege and a strange relief. As we retraced our steps, we recognized a certain stoic need to make of use of that privilege to fight against and prevent humanity from ever repeating such atrocities».

(From an exponent of the Portuguese group)

Coming into contact with the history of the extermination of Roma and Sinti had a particular meaning for young Portuguese Roma: perfectly integrated into the social context in which they live, in peaceful coexistence with the non-Roma population, the Portuguese Roma declare that they have lost their attachment to the traditional references of their people, and even the use of the *Romanes* language (a language that unites all Roma and Sinti communities, although presenting differences depending on the country of origin).

«Learning about the experiences of the families in the ‘*Zigeunerlager*’, and their treatment, was horrific. The accounts of the terrible experiments conducted by the physician Josef Mengele on Roma families, and the futile efforts of biomedical scientists searching for biological racial differentiators, were eye-opening. They clearly demonstrated what a late-stage racist ideology looks like, revealing that humans can, at times, descend to unimaginable depths of evil.

A mixture of relief, pride, privilege, and sadness was felt during the commemoration of the 79th anniversary of the Roma’s heroic resistance on May 16, 1944, against the SS. Honouring and celebrating the memory of those who fought that day was an unforgettable experience. The shivering sound of the Hungarian cimbalom and the violins of the ceremonial band delicately painted the surrounding grey, ruinous landscape where millions perished. The speeches by Roma delegations from various countries, along with the

group photos taken with the Roma flag, reflected the significance of the date as a day of both mourning and resistance.

The experience of feeling, touching, seeing, and even smelling those places was overwhelming – even its silence was deafening. Our minds are not wired to comprehend, process, and endure such immense pain. Some cried, others were left speechless, while others sought to distract themselves as much as they could. At times, an inopportune joke would spark laughter in a kind of desperate attempt at an emotional escape from the intolerable weight of those places.

Those May days were filled with contrasting experiences. We not only bore witness to the aftermath of humanity's most vicious and cruel ideas and beliefs but also engaged in important cultural exchanges between people from different nationalities and ethnicities. So, as we crossed through death-camps that materialize a worldview of deeply entrenched race-based intolerance and prejudice, we simultaneously built bridges across borders and cultures, enriching our individual and collective differences.

Focusing on Roma people's experience and history, our journey aimed to uncover these "invisible" stories and records. Our group of young leaders was composed of Roma and non-Roma youth. We were challenged to set aside boundaries we are often trained to see and act upon – boundaries based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, and nationality – and give way to communication. And communication was the cornerstone of this experience. We discussed the past, the present, and the future. We talked about the dangers of what we had learned and witnessed, exchanged worldviews and life experiences, shared local and national political knowledge, but, most importantly, we explored our similarities and differences as equals».

(From an exponent of the Portuguese group)

Dealing with a part of history reserved for their people and doing it together with different realities (Italian Roma and Sinti and Polish Roma), has stimulated processes of knowledge and construction not only of a collective memory, but also of a common European Roma identity.

«Over the course of a week, we realized how much of our life experiences are similar, yet also very different. Our previous rigidly encoded boundaries began to blur as we talked, danced, and interacted with one another. Broad social and cultural categories of difference gave way to more specific, smaller, mundane categories, such as people who dance flamenco and those who don't, people who like Polish food, cat lovers, people who mostly talk

about food or politics, non-English speakers, students, student-workers, and so on. But most interestingly, these smaller distinctions did not lead to segregation.

We saw Roma and non-Roma youth discussing, learning, and sharing dance traditions, exchanging musical tastes, beliefs, and lifestyles. Some discovered new ways of being and feeling Roma, new boundaries and frameworks to guide their identities, and new histories on which to build solid foundations of identity. Initially, many questioned whether someone was Roma or non-Roma, often judging by physical appearance or the way they walked, talked or interacted. Interestingly, most of these assumptions were proven incorrect, further blurring the aforementioned boundaries.

Many of us encountered Romani speakers for the first time. Curious eyes and ears gathered around them as they read Romani signs and plaques. Phrases, words, and accents were exchanged frequently. Enriching discussions emerged about the importance of Sinti and other Roma groups recognizing each other as Roma, challenging distinctions solely based on historical experience. The consensus on such a topic reflected how those days helped consolidate a common Roma identity among Roma youth. Even though broader Roma groups, such as the Portuguese Calon, may not have experienced the *Samudaripen* as the Sinti and Rom groups did, the prejudice, persecution, and genocide that it represents serves as a common memory and an historical milestone for Roma identity. Most dialogues took place during lunch or dinner, during breaks, or while on the road.

It was highly motivating for us all to witness the achievements of the Roma associative movement, such as the creation of museological places like the one in Oświęcim, along with the Block 13 in Auschwitz. These places represent crucial reservoirs of Roma Holocaust memory, without which there would be almost no content related to those infamously invisible crimes. This served as an example for our national associations, showing what struggle and organization can achieve. As young leaders, we now have renewed references and examples to guide our paths».

(From an exponent of the Portuguese group)

One of the strong points of TRACER project was to unite together people who, before the trip, felt this part of history far from their reality and those who, instead, live it on a daily basis.

The Polish Roma who live in Oświęcim have to experience the double face of this city every day, in its vital profile, but also in the death one related to the Auschwitz camp. The choice of many of them is to consciously recognize the history of this place of Memory, living it

with the utmost respect, but without considering its past as the only side of a peaceful and calm city.

«Every time I cross the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, it's really hard for me. Now I can peacefully walk there, but eighty years ago it was the place of extermination of my community and in general of some many people... Normally when I approach the camp area in Brezinka with car or bike, I always mute the music or stop talking in sign of respect for all the victims».

(Sabina from Oświęcim, Poland)

And right next to those who experience Auschwitz every day, people who would never have thought of visiting it took part in the trip.

«I never thought I could take a plane. For me and my family, flying has always been a taboo: beyond the sky we thought there was war.

But we all decided to face our fears, to trust the project, such was our curiosity about what awaited us. When I arrived at the camp, I didn't expect to find an endless expanse of green grass. It floored me. Auschwitz-Birkenau in spring is a beautiful place to see, surrounded by nature. I found it jarring with my thoughts: for me this was not a pleasure trip, but a massacre trip. So around me I didn't see the beautiful vegetation that surrounded me, it's as if I fully experienced what happened in that period. Even though I was a little prepared, because when I went to Fossoli I had thought about the same thing. Those places that we now perceive as empty are actually full of a tragic history that can be felt as you walk through them step by step».

(Simonetta from Modena, Italy)

Retracing the route in Auschwitz-Birkenau that took the prisoners from the transport wagons to the barracks or gas chambers, the participants had the opportunity to realize that those places which are now empty or semi-empty are full of the history of at least 1.3 millions of people deported to the Auschwitz camp. But the educational process underlying the visit to the camp makes no sense if it does not lead to a reflection on the empty places of the present. The emptiness of today's Mediterranean Sea actually hides a theater full of too often forgotten massacres; the invisible geopolitical borders, ground of innocent deaths.

TRACER approach to the visit to the Auschwitz camp, together with Michele Andreola (official guide-educator of the Museum), made

the place of Memory a tool to stimulate reflections on the present in the young participants, which make them protagonists of a community that wants to learn the lesson of the past of death in order to act in support of life, solidarity, democracy and the rights of every single human being.

«Among the things that have most marked me in my training path aimed at understanding history, there are certainly the visits to the concentration and extermination camps. In May 2019, for the Memory trip, when I was just thirteen years old, I visited the Ebensee and Mauthausen camps and five years later, with the training trip of the TRACER project, I visited the Auschwitz camp.

These experiences made me aware and also affected me emotionally because I was overwhelmed by a sense of emptiness at the thought of the atrocities suffered by millions of human beings who differed in no way from me, contrasted with an infinite sense of recognition and gratitude for having been born in the “right part” of the world in an apparently better time. I realize that History has not educated us sufficiently, because in too many places, not even that far from us, certain atrocities continue to be repeated and women, children and men, without any fault, continue to die.

Therefore, I feel invested with a great responsibility: what kind of meaning would my knowledge and awareness have if they remained just confined to me?

I feel the duty, through the means I have, to spread the stories, the tales that encouraged me to learn more, to as many people as possible, because if even just a little girl, as happened to me, becomes interested and then she spreads it in turn...from one it becomes many and what you know is no longer scary, but you can eat, drink and laugh together at the same table: for me it was like that».

(Teresa from Tuscany, Italy)

## Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Quel che resta di Auschwitz. L'archivio e il testimone*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998.
- Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation (Ed.). *Państwowe Muzeum, Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu*, Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Report 2023.
- Bravi, Luca. *Percorsi storico-educativi della Memoria europea. La Shoah nella società italiana*, Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2014.

- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Ed.). Roma in ten European countries. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023.
- Keen, Ellie. *Right to remember. A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2014.
- Lennon, John J. and Malcolm Foley. *Dark tourism. The attraction of death and disasters*. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Gradowski, Zalmen. *From the Heart of Hell. Manuscripts of a Sonderkommando Prisoner; Found in Auschwitz*. Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2017.
- Stone, Philip R. "A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions". In *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal* 54 (2006), n. 2: 145-160.
- Rizzin, Eva (Ed.). *Attraversare Auschwitz. Storie di rom e sinti: identità, memorie, antiziganismo*. Roma: Gangemi, 2020.

## 8. Reporting the history and transforming the present

by Emma Ferulano\*

Mitat<sup>1</sup>:

*“This is a really bad story about the Samudaripen/Porrajmos. In Germany, there was a guy, Herr Hitler, who persecuted Jews and Roma, and the Roma in particular were locked up in unreachable places. The trip to Auschwitz was very meaningful for me and my fellow travellers, to see our ancestors, grandparents, great-grandparents, who experienced that reality”.*

### 1. What was the genocide of Roma and Sinti?

For the group from Naples, the TRACER project was a long dive into uncharted waters.

The girls and boys who formed the leading group followed us with confidence and curiosity into a historical adventure that, until then, they knew nothing about and that had affected them only indirectly. We had to devise a long and comprehensible artistic, cultural, and pedagogical path to approach and explore it.

Second generation Roma migrants from the countries of former Yugoslavia, in particular Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Croatia, some of them already the parents of a third generation of very young children, candidly brought their experience of living in the informal camps of the metropolitan area, from Scampia to Giugliano in Campania, with all that this experience entails.

They – the grandchildren of people who had to flee the war in the Balkans – preserve in their memories and in their family stories the experience of ethnic cleansing and the trauma of the erasure of entire villages, archives, and registry offices. This is still reflected today in the complicated process of obtaining identity papers, despite the fact that they and their children were born in Italy.

\* Association “Chi rom e...chi no”, Naples, Italy.

<sup>1</sup> Mitat is one of young Roma participant to TRACER project of the group from Naples.

The story of the Holocaust and the Porrajmos/Samudaripen began as a macabre tale unfolding in a hazy past. The contours were gradually defined through the use of audiovisual materials, the collection of direct testimonies from members of Roma and Sinti communities in other regions of Italy, and finally the trip to Auschwitz, which materialised the painful words, the unspeakable suffering, the stories of broken communities and of lives bludgeoned to death by an atrocious institutional design. Today they are finally and painstakingly being brought to light.

## 2. The journey to Auschwitz

Here is a short report of the impressions of Mitat, Mersiana, Antonio, and Giovanni during and after the trip, that they bring to the others who stayed in Naples. For the *Roma/Neapolitan* group, it was a significant experience, and for one of them it was also the first opportunity of traveling such a long distance. Everybody was excited to travel and happy for the hospitality. They were also very satisfied with the food. The group were very much “inside” the situation and, considering their starting point – the lack of education and cultural tools, the complex personal backgrounds, lack of habit to travel, (sometimes it seems that they live in a *parallel world*) they made a big effort to be up to the challenge of the situation and the place, and to overcome mutual and stratified prejudices.

Everybody was impressed by the Polish organization. The visit to the camps and the stories they listened to improve their knowledge and strengthened the understanding of what had happened in that historical period. It was clear that this was enabled by a substantial work of research and collection of documents, testimonies and stories. This is very important for the restoration of memories of Roma people around Europe, in the same way that our work is important to keep those memories alive in young people.

Meeting with the other groups, including people of different ages and backgrounds, was also an important part of the experience. Despite the different languages, they found ways to communicate and socialize, to create relationships and informal exchanges. Our group learnt that very cool and skilled young Roma people live around

Europe: they attend university and are more accustomed to express themselves and talk about complex issues. On the other hand, our group felt more comfortable during informal and convivial moments, where they can draw their sympathy and be playful.

For our group, it was more difficult to stay in the workgroup, concentrating during a brainstorming session, using and writing words and completing the tasks, because of their difficult backgrounds.

### **3. The history and the present**

In the midst of TRACER's workshops, as a kind of warning to those who have no memory, a terrible event occurs: the death of little Michelle, 6 years old, electrocuted by a wire on 13 January 2024 in the Via Carraffiello camp at Giugliano in Campania. For many of us, Roma and non-Roma alike, this cannot be considered an accident. It is the direct consequence of a system that has relegated hundreds of people to living in inhuman conditions: the real miracle is that news like this do not hit us like fists every day. The responsibility for Michelle's death falls on public administrations, politicians, and an entire community who allow that a few steps from their homes, next to the cultivated fields of fruit and vegetables that end up in the markets and on everyone's tables, families composed mostly of young adults, teenagers, and children, live by getting by as best they can, barely reaching the threshold of survival, in an unacceptable gap of inequality that should generate a permanent revolt. This revolt should involve the communities themselves, but also all those who still think that we are all equal in the world and that social justice should prevail. Instead, an event such as Michelle's death is somehow accepted, allowing a kind of fatalism to prevail. - It means that this is how it had to be: on the part of the victims, because they somehow have to explain such an immense tragedy that has generated a collective shock and could be a trauma, among many others, that cannot be overcome. And on the part of the rest of the world that thinks that, after all, they had it coming because they want to live that way. This aberrant and distorted logic that is expressed by the majority, led by the media and the institutions through the voices of respectable people and politicians, basically serves to place the responsibility entirely on the victims. They are

deemed guilty of belonging to a minority, to a community - the Roma community - which is still heavily discriminated against, starting from an explicit institutional racism that translates into the total absence of policies and a daily life made up of toil, abuse, and denied rights. It serves not to take on any burden, not even fulfilling their duties as public administrators, e.g. in terms of urban and housing planning, and to continue perpetrating what can in fact be read as a methodical destruction of an ethnic minority carried out through the lack of access to basic rights, and the erasure of cultural values and cultural documents. The history of the past is intertwined with the history of the present in this cruel but revealing way. In fact, for generations, entire Roma communities have been repudiated, isolated, despised, and annulled. With the young people of the TRACER group, some of whom live in the Giugliano camp, who are literally blocked by the police and have a hard time even reaching the workshops, we begin to reflect more concretely on the parallels between past, present and future; on the need to remember, rebuild and not forget; on the concrete repercussions in everyday life of wicked policies that seem so distant to us, and instead.

Together with the young people of the leader group and the young people we do workshops with, we retrace the stories of the Roma communities as we approach Remembrance Day, which at this point becomes a much more understandable and heartfelt commemoration than it has ever been.

In the camps of Cupa Perillo in Scampia, the ancient Roma community, mostly from Serbia and Macedonia, is slowly disintegrating and fragmenting, uprooting itself or surviving in an area in which it had believed it could live in peace, it is currently in a total stalemate, which is highly damaging - leading to the death of Davide Jovanovic on 29 February, an Italian Roma citizen who was also electrocuted by electricity. In Giugliano, the equally ancient Roma community from Bosnia with the Balkan wars of the early 1990s, still numerous, has remained in the quagmire - literally - of inept administrations guilty of not having wanted to find any solution - and could not because the European Community has for at least a decade been providing funds, strategies and expertise to overcome the obvious discrimination suffered by Roma throughout Europe and in all areas. Since the shedding of a few tears in 2013 by honorable members and members of the

Senate's human rights committee on a visit to the Masseria del Pozzo authorized camp built on a toxic dump officially recognized as such - a camp later dismantled - not much has changed for the Roma in Giugliano, many of whom are Italian citizens.

The Roma communities in Giugliano have been present in the area for about thirty years, with at least two generations born on Italian soil. Many have obtained residence permits and even Italian citizenship, but their legal status, although largely regular, is in stark contradiction with the total precariousness of the housing, work, and social conditions in which hundreds of them live. The diaspora of the Roma in Giugliano has been going on for many years, in total invisibility and in the deafening silence of the institutions - local, regional, national. This has allowed the humanitarian tragedy of the authorized camp of Masseria del Pozzo to take place in 2013 where 384 people, including 218 minors, were allocated with funds from the Ministry of the Interior on the basis of a resolution of the Prefectorial Commissioner in place of the municipal administration, which was placed under commission for camorra infiltration. According to a dossier presented in 2014 to the Senate Commission on Human Rights by a working group of activists, jurists, and associations, the site of the camp was known for its extremely dangerous environmental situation, being located in the ASI area near illegal dumps that had already been recognized, seized, and under investigation. The Masseria del Pozzo camp was a glaring example of discrimination and violation of fundamental human rights, in total disregard of domestic and supranational law and of what has been recommended for years by European bodies and guidelines contained in the 'National Strategy for RSC Inclusion' adopted by the government for the years 2012/2020. In the years leading up to 2016, there were several unsuccessful attempts to find decent housing solutions and rent support measures. After having been tolerated beyond all limits under the eyes of the regional and national government, in 2016 the camp was finally cleared, led only by voluntary groups from civil society (the network of extra-territorial associations and the world of activism) but without any alternative solution. For the Roma of Giugliano a new diaspora begins, with serious responsibilities of an administration - local but also regional and national - that acts without control, continuing to violate human rights. In Giugliano, a political and cultural discourse has not been pursued with the right determination

and continuity within civil society, that would guarantee basic rights and reinforce values such as acceptance, respect, and interculturalism. These concepts are increasingly alien to our societies.

Suffice it to think of the attitude of the local schools: no one wanted to take in the Roma minors, who for years were forced to face a 25 km journey every morning to reach the schools in Scampia, in another municipality, until they were finally allowed into local schools in recent times. This was achieved thanks solely to those who, in the sphere of religious voluntary work, literally fought in first person for years to guarantee the right to study and access to school for the Roma children of Giugliano.

Among them was Michelle, who was supposed to go to school today with her classmates, and who couldn't wait for her dream to come true.

No institution showed up to offer condolences to the family and an entire community that will long mourn Michelle's death. The fire brigade did show up, however, and Enel, the electricity company, proceeded, seemingly mockingly, to impound the power station without bothering to offer an alternative solution and leaving the entire camp in darkness, including the shack where the wake was held.

As Remembrance Day is approaching, we are getting closer to officially remembering the victims of the past.

But what is memory for? It is clearer to us now: it serves to understand, to unite us and to transform a present and a future that no longer exist as long as children, who leave home to fetch water because they are not guaranteed it, die.

By the will of her family Michelle is going back to Bosnia - a land battered by war and ethnic cleansing from which otherwise perhaps her grandparents would have never left. Italy no longer deserves her.

After her death, the joint intervention of task forces that met several times in inter-institutional round tables led to, in order: seals and interruption of the electricity supply, control blitzes with consequent seizures of cars and various means of transportation, and finally, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, to the climax of the closure of the public water supply.

It is not easy to cut off the public water supply, which flows from the earth, especially in a land that still serves the cultivation of fields. It takes some organization. The guys from the Tracer group in Giugliano who witnessed the scene unflinchingly told us that the operation

of screwing and shutting off the water supply was in fact quite arduous, with a massive deployment of forces to carry out the orders of the North Naples Public Prosecutor's Office.

But they tried hard, and in the end they succeeded.

Securing, removing the electric cables - but the electricity has been gone for more than twenty days, they are running on generators - disconnecting the water because of the abusive connection.

The ambiguity and violence of the institutions, in this dramatic story, has reached its most sophisticated point. On the one hand, the media tells a story of solidarity, consternation, and efficiency: extolling the plans that have been set in motion for schooling, even with an allocation of European funds; reaffirming the will to settle once and for all the four hundred and fifty people who have been living in total precariousness for too long; and yet stressing the need to restore order and security. On the other hand, in reality, institutions showed no mercy and a strong fist against a scenario that is clearly overflowing with illegality and attempts at survival. It is clear that the strategy is the one we have already seen in many other circumstances in the city of Naples - in the neighbourhoods of Gianturco, Scampia, Ponticelli, Barra: we are facing an induced eviction. If you do not decide to leave, we will take everything away from you, including water, even at the cost of bordering on unconstitutionality and casually ignoring world resolutions - the UN, in a resolution passed on 28 July 2010, declared access to drinking water and sanitation a human right.

The culprits, once again, are the victims who pay twice, three times, four hundred times, and are the only ones who pay. The young people participating in TRACER cannot move from the camp because they use car batteries to charge their phones, otherwise they would be isolated and unreachable. They can't go out, they can't work, they can't participate in the pathways that could painstakingly lead to better and greater opportunities.

But the question of rights, when it comes to the Roma, is easily dismissed. Proof of this is the fact that all the minors in Via Carrafiello have been refused access to schools in the area for years - here Article 34 of the Italian constitution has been fully violated: School is open to all. Lower education, imparted for at least eight years, is compulsory and free - until, after only the threat of intervention by the Juvenile Prosecutor's Office, one school popped up that, according to those who

have been involved in this battle for years, making it a life mission, was sent directly by providence.

And one has to rely on providence once again to see as a miracle, on Monday 29, after five days without water either for drinking, cooking or washing, the arrival of a tanker truck with five thousand litres of drinking water - sent by the Migrantes Foundation of the Italian Episcopal Conference. Despite this inhuman situation, as the Roma children's school year had finally begun, in the middle of January, in the throes of enthusiasm they still managed to maintain attendance.

And the participants of the TRACER leader group also found creative means to continue the workshops they were so passionate about and never missed.

## **4. Facing the history to talk of redemption**

### *4.1 Trollmann and redemption*

On their return from Auschwitz, the group leaders shared with everyone else the story of a German Sinti boxer, Johann Wilhelm Trollmann, nicknamed Rukeli, which was the one that struck them deepest in their hearts and stomachs. Rukeli, which means tree in the Sinti language, so called because of his imposing stature and curly hair, and also known as Gipsy, a nickname that he had sewn onto his shorts, was a gypsy who became the national champion of the middleweight division, at a time in history when boxing was a sport that conferred a certain prestige on nations. With the rise and consolidation of Nazism, his persecution began, causing him to lose everything, from his title as champion, to his daughter and his right to procreation. He ended his life in 1944 at the age of 37 in a concentration camp. Challenged by a Nazi officer who had recognized the champion despite a life of hardship in the camp, he decided to accept the challenge and 'decided to die a champion'. And so Rukeli becomes the symbol of all stories of oppression and redemption, which comes to life in the magic of a story inspired by reality, a tale in images and music that we have decided to dedicate to Michelle.

Rukeli, Gipsy, puts on his gloves, forgets that he is reduced to skin and bones, starts his dance, punches and knocks out the Nazi officer,

and with him the entire apparatus of power. The next day, they take him out, but his story has become a symbol. We worked on the collective reading and rewriting of his past history of injustice, which intersected with all the injustice we have seen concentrated in the days in Giugliano since Michelle died. Every time we read and repeated in dozens and dozens of audio recordings the text of Trollmann's story, written in the first person as if Rukeli were each one of those boys, we were moved and inside us, in the shiny eyes of the boys and girls, that boxer who fights today and for eternity for justice and freedom, and not just for himself, stirred.

The Day of Remembrance comes at a catastrophic time globally.

With more than 10,000 children killed since the one hundred and ten days of war and bombing in the Gaza Strip, the celebrations are not only about the victims of the past but become cultural witnesses of what we wish would never happen again, and instead strikes us with extreme violence every day.

With the young people of TRACER, both those in the leading group and the dozens of young people we met in the schools, we learnt and were able to observe that painstaking work is being done to recover hundreds of hitherto submerged and forgotten stories that tell us what happened.

A history made up of 500,000 precious stories, such as the victims of segregation and Nazi horror, which we tried to understand in depth through art workshops, to see all the discrimination and inequality to which entire categories, including the Roma, are still subjected. We decided to disseminate to a wider audience the story of Rukeli, which we freely reinterpreted in this way.

Here is a piece of it. Imagine it being read by a young man of about twenty, like the young champion Trollmann was before he ended up in a concentration camp.

## Gypsy

*My name is Johann Wilhelm Trollmann.  
But those were the 1930s, the years of Nazi Germany, of the theories about  
the pure race  
pure race, the Aryan race, and all that rubbish there...  
So they started calling me Gypsy... The Gypsy!  
Inferior race, they said.  
But I knew how to put them right.  
At 15 I was already South German champion and ready to leave for the Am-  
sterdam Olympics.*

*Then, before departure, Zirzow, my manager, came looking for me:  
They won't let you leave. They say that a gypsy, a Sinti, cannot represent  
Germany.  
But you'll see: we'll make up for it, he said.  
And so we did. I didn't go. But then I stood up for myself.  
One by one the Aryans went down!  
Under the Gypsy's fists!  
Look at him, he seems to dance. People were saying.  
It's like hearing a gypsy fiddle when he punches  
After 14 victorious fights they proclaimed me champion of Germany.  
And then I cried: me, Rukeli, a Gypsy...  
I had punched Nazism!*

## **9. Presenting the history. Building Memory through art**

by *Inês Aydin\** and *Liliana Moreira\**

### **1. TRACER and the memory's mechanisms through filmed interviews**

#### *1.1 Epistemological advantages of filming interviews*

Understanding memory, based on video recording of interviews, but also the way in which the memory of a historical or biographical event is constructed in the present context, is one of the objectives of this article.

The epistemological and methodological issue arose from the moment that the members of the TRACER project in Portugal collected narratives, with a camera, having to choose and also reject images in order to “order them chronologically” and “shows” the Memory through videographic means.

Much of the work we find on Memory revolves around writing as the only legitimate way of returning the research and results that have been found. Some, the more “positivist”, denied the possibility of exploring fieldwork through images, recognizing only their illustrative capabilities. From this perspective, the arguments advanced are reduced, on the one hand, to the perception of the unlimited forms that the videographic process allows with regard to image manipulation, and on the other hand, to the perception of the limited forms that the film camera induces in its most basic operations (e.g. limitation in framing the image, need to use an instrument that obstructs direct contact between the interviewer and the interviewee, etc.).

At the same time, there are many other interested parties, from researchers to filmmakers, who have contributed and managed to impose the use of audiovisual in the work on the issue of Memory. For example in the field of social sciences, Marc Piaux emphasizes that exploration through images not only contributes in a privileged way to putting certain objects of study into perspective, which other types of more classical methodologies could not achieve, but that their use can also unveil new objects and new fields of exploration<sup>2</sup>.

Taking these premises into account, the interviews carried out within the scope of the TRACER project, and presented below in this section, assume that the use of video can be as legitimate a way as writing in the restitution of a work on Memory, without however compromising the seriousness of it. Furthermore, the use of filmed interviews in this proposal to explore the field of Memory in the context of Roma communities, proved to be essential as a starting point for a research that was intended to be creative, but above all heuristic, where we could develop an involving and dialectic between the communities, project members, Roma or non-Roma, the research object and finally the instrument used to collect and return the data.

## 2. Memory as a “social fact”

If we consider that the discourse given about the past corresponds to our social framework of the present, the challenge that arises is to build the foundations of this analysis through understanding the relationship we have with the past, and not through the past as static time. We thus join the tradition of Maurice Halbwachs<sup>3</sup> on two levels: first, Memory as a “social fact”; second, most of our memories emerge when others remind us.

Analysing the discourse of an individual's relationship with the past is, above all, understanding how the experience of the past is told in the light of the experience of the present, that is, a reconstruction of the past according to the social frameworks of Memory. Having said

\* Agência para a Integração, Migrações e Asilo (AIMA), Portugal.

<sup>2</sup> Piaux, *Anthropologie et Cinéma*, 266.

<sup>3</sup> Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*; Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*.

that, it is necessary to take into account that the interviewer, when asking questions to the interviewee, can sometimes break silences and create disorders in the discourse that is constantly being renegotiated.

The reference to Halbwachs leads us to reflect on the Memory of a biographical or historical event, in the form of its rooting in physical spaces that were turned into mythical elements. If we take into account the narratives collected through video, we see the existence of collective representations. In addition to a common narrative model, which is sometimes quite localized in spatial and chronological terms, the analysis of the narratives also shows a memorial reconstruction that has as its backdrop the coherence of memories within the community. It is through Memory that communities can continue to reproduce themselves according to cohesion and social norms.

### **3. The role of the TRACER project in the construction of memory**

The use of audiovisual media is a preferred means of making the narrative collection process transparent. More than the written rendering, whose sometimes extremely formal format screens the impact of the research on the subject studied, the audiovisual rendering shows without ambiguity what is the role of the interviewer in the work of understanding the construction of the Memory. Furthermore, through images it is possible to show that the interviewer sometimes intervenes ultimately in the work of constituting the Memory that he is investigating, particularly in the final rendering. In other words, it is a question of showing that we can study Memory as a “thing” modelled by social “constraints” (in the Durkheimian theory), of showing how Memory is itself objectified, to the extent that it provides “stability” within groups to make it a basis for action in the present; and finally how the interviewer despite himself has a role in the reification of a memory. It is necessary, especially with regard to this last element, to be aware of this action of reification, which otherwise often goes unnoticed, only to be able to master it and handle it with great caution.

In this sense, the filmed interviews carried out in this project also led us to the need to reflect on the relationship with the past, as a condition for creating a social bond and raising awareness against racism

and discrimination against Roma people, but also both as a form of reconstruction of the Memory of the Roma Holocaust and the Memory of the Roma people. In terms of this relationship to the past, these two kinds of memory turn out to be very socially intertwined, but we can distinguish the two. The first – memory of the Holocaust – appears as a story and can be anchored with greater or lesser intensity in the public space. This memory is an integral part of collective Memory. The second – memory of Roma people – is both represented and atomized in private spaces, to which we could define as individual memory.

Collective memory will remain the backdrop to individual memory, to the extent that the latter, as a social fact, is always forged in relation to the former. Halbwachs<sup>4</sup> captures the interrelation between the two memories:

*Nous dirions volontiers que chaque mémoire individuelle est un point de vue sur la mémoire collective, que ce point de vue change suivant la place que j'y occupe et que cette place elle-même change suivant les relations que j'entretiens avec d'autres milieux<sup>5</sup>.*

The author then goes further than just the link, because between the two memories there isn't a pure interrelation, these changes depending on the position in the social spectrum and/or in the interaction with others.

On the principle of studying social frameworks concerning the reconstruction of memory, it was important for us to understand the relationship to the past in the present of Roma people through images. In other words, it is about the creation of images about a past that is adjusted to the social frameworks of the present. To do this, images in the literal and figurative sense, even before being considered as research tools, were taken as research objects. In fact, the audiovisual documents produced and presented below can leave traces on the memory construction, either through social representations or with iconic representations.

<sup>4</sup> Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*.

<sup>5</sup> Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, 94.

#### **4. Presenting the history and constructing the memory through filmed interviews with Portuguese Roma**

As with the TRACER project it was intended to make the discovery of the past and the reconstruction of a community memory about the Holocaust and the Roma and Sinti genocide (Porrajmos), the Portuguese TRACER team set the goal of involve the Portuguese Roma communities in collecting narratives about this impressive historical happening through filmed interviews with older Portuguese Roma people. These filmed interviews are a contribution i) to improve information and knowledge on the past and on the present situation of Roma, ii) to raise younger generations' awareness of stereotypes, iii) to spread anti-discrimination messages for all and iv) to promote literacy on rights to protection against discrimination for Roma people, ensuring that no person is disadvantaged on the basis of racial or ethnic origin, place of origin, sex, gender identity, age, nationality, disability, education, economic situation and social condition, among others, considered in isolation or in combination (intersectional discrimination).

In Portugal, some filmed interviews with Roma people were conducted by the national team (AIMA, I.P., University of Minho and Ribaltambição association) on the subject of the Holocaust and the importance of historical memory. Five Roma people living in various locations in Portugal, in the north, center and south, were invited to share their testimony about their memories, perceptions and experiences related to these issues and to the discrimination and racism suffered by Roma in Portuguese society<sup>6</sup>.

Firstly, each partner of the Portuguese TRACER team tried to identify older Portuguese Roma people who could contribute with their direct or indirect testimony about the genocide suffered by Portuguese Roma during the Second World War and help build historical knowledge and awareness in this regard. The selection of interviewees took into account territorial representativeness and social heterogeneity.

Secondly, during 2023, the filmed interviews were carried out face-to-face at locations proposed by the participants, using a script and

<sup>6</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (ed.), *Roma in ten European countries*.

recording the answers by members of the TRACER project team. It should be noted that the audiovisual recording was made mainly by amateurs.

In third place, the five testimonies collected resulted in the production of four videos. Two of these videos have been edited and the remaining two correspond to the original recording. Thus, two videos concern the narrative of a person living in Porto (José Maria Fernandes)<sup>7</sup>, another video contains the interview with a person living in Figueira da Foz (Zara Oliveira)<sup>8</sup> and the remaining video contains the testimony of three people living in Beja/Alentejo (Edite Maria, Acácio Fialho e Marcelina)<sup>9</sup>.

Due to the country's historical and geographical reasons, such as the neutrality of Portugal in the Second World War, there are no evidences that the Portuguese Roma population was arrested and killed in the concentration camps. Therefore, the Portuguese TRACER team decided to try to construct a historical memory of armed conflicts experienced by the Portuguese Roma, referring to the social impacts of war. The emphasis has been placed on the Portuguese Colonial War, also known as the War of Liberation or War of Independence, which took place between 1961 and 1974 - a period of confrontation between the Portuguese Armed Forces and the forces organised by the liberation or independence movements formed in the provinces of the then Portuguese overseas territories, in particular Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. The revolution of 25 April 1974 overthrew the dictatorship that had dominated Portugal for more than four decades, opening up a wide range of possibilities as to the way forward. Additionally, we also try to focus on the experiences of discrimination lived and felt by Portuguese Roma in the past and in the present.

Analysing the content of the narratives allows us to highlight various meaningful reflections, for example:

<sup>7</sup> Filmed interview with José Maria Fernandes. Available at <https://youtu.be/gyqcqR0Fuj4> (part 1, portuguese version) and <https://youtu.be/qdAaoW470Pc> (part 2, portuguese version) (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Filmed interview with Zara Oliveira. Available at <https://youtu.be/M1W2VIEhoiM> (portuguese version) (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>9</sup> Filmed interview with Edite Maria, Acácio Fialho and Marcelina. Available at <https://youtu.be/avZu4e4h0jQ> (portuguese version). (Last access: August 2024).

1. given the age of the interviewees and the lack of family members or friends who took part in the Second World War, all the testimonies reveal the lack of knowledge about the Roma Holocaust, about this part of the Roma history;
2. the memories of the Colonial War are vague and distant, essentially translated into fear and resistance to going overseas;
3. the abuse and violence of the Republican National Guard (a Portuguese Security Force) towards Roma people, especially before 25 April and towards nomads;
4. the cruel impact of participation in war on human lives, leading to mental illness and lifelong trauma;
5. the improvement in the living conditions of the Portuguese Roma population after 25 April 1974, with sedentarisation and the supply of council housing (still not accessible to all);
6. the persistent, systemic and structural racism and discrimination that affects Roma people in their daily lives;
7. the enormous challenges that still exist in improving the situation of Roma people, in terms of education, employment, housing, health, equality, inclusion and participation;
8. the need to strengthen the importance of Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education (Roma Memory) to increase public knowledge across Europe.

## **5. Transcription of the video through written editing**

In this section we exhibit a partial transcript of the filmed interviews<sup>10, 11</sup> as well as some of the captured images, in order to highlight iconic aspects, such as the spaces chosen for the filming, the environments, the surroundings, the visual artefacts and the people's presentation and expressions. Filming took place at the headquarters of Roma associations located in neighbourhoods and in a camp.

Below is a selection of the speech in each filmed interview.

<sup>10</sup> Filmed interviews are available on research area of Tracer webdoc <https://tracerproject.eu/webdoc/> (Last access: August 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Access to the full transcript will be available in the description of the respective videos.

## *Filmed interview with José Maria Fernandes, Porto, Portugal*



*Pic. 7 - Caption. Sequence of video images.*

**José Maria Fernandes (JMF):** I'm José Maria Fernandes, 67 years old and from Porto. I'm President of the Portuguese Romani Union (União Romani Portuguesa) and of the Recreational and Cultural Association "Os Viquingues".

**PT: Portuguese Roma people took part in the Portuguese colonial war. What do you know about this participation?**

**JMF:** First of all, I have to say that Roma came to Europe fleeing wars. Contrary to what people think, Roma don't like wars. (...) The police went to the camps and violently grab the Roma to take them to the troops. Roma never liked being in the army, but because they were hunted by the police during the dictatorship, they were taken to the army with a certain amount of violence and Roma people went to the army against their will. (...) And I know people perfectly well who went to war overseas. I only know one case that went to war on his own initiative. (...) Fortunately he's still alive and I recognise that he's radically changed the way he is, the way he talks, because he came traumatised from the war. (...) He still has mental problems today. He's totally different from the war. (...) He doesn't really like to remember it, because it's like this, from what I've heard, sometimes they ended up killing people, even children, and he was traumatised and he doesn't like to talk about what happened in Guinea.

**PT: Do you have any further thoughts on Portugal's participation in the Colonial War?**

**JMF:** I saw it, I heard it, I lived through it. We lived in Bonjardim street. So the house we had had an attic, so there were relatives of mine, including my late father, so they would come and sleep in the attic so as not to be hunted down by the police, so as not to go to the army. But the police found out that they were sleeping there, they broke into my house, went up to the attic and caught the men who were over 18 by the hair and took them to jail, so that they could go to the inspectorate and do their military service. And that was something that marked me. It marked me because I saw it and lived it. And

it's unfortunate to see the police coming into your house, aggressively grabbing people, beating them, grabbing them by the hair and taking them away. My family, including my late father. That marked me.

**PT: Didn't your father take part?**

**JMF:** My father, they took my late father to prison. (...) As my late father was over 40, he couldn't go into the army and they ended up sending him away. But it wasn't just him. There were many Roma who were hunted, people in their 30s and 40s, and they took them by force and sent them to the army. But then they realised that they were too old to be in the army and after a few months they were released, so they were sent away.

**PT: Regarding experiences of discrimination and racism in your youth, what type of discrimination and racism was most common in Portuguese society?**

**JMF:** So, these kinds of situations, I have to say that unfortunately, after so many years, I still feel that there is the same discrimination that existed 50 years ago. It's like this: the Roma, and this happened to me, can't rent a house to live in because people, the owners of the houses, won't rent to Roma. As unfortunately happened to me, and continues to happen, if you decide to buy a second-hand car, the owners of the cars won't sell them to Roma because they're afraid. This kind of discrimination still exists today and unfortunately it has affected many Roma, because they can't rent a house to live in or buy any kind of goods. They can't, because people won't give in, they're afraid of the Roma. I don't understand why. Because I went to buy a car for cash in Ermesinde and they simply wouldn't sell it to me because I'm a Roma. I had to ask a friend of mine, who is an engineer that I worked with, to buy me a car. I personally couldn't and still can't today. In order to rent a house, (...) luckily, I have a daughter-in-law who isn't Roma and she rented me the house. They wouldn't rent it to me, but they did to my daughter-in-law. Because they saw that she wasn't Roma, they rented it to her and I went to live there.

**PT: In your opinion, are there differences in the type of discrimination and racism between the past and the present?**

**JMF:** I don't see any differences. I don't, because that's the way it is. I'll give you an example. If there's a person who isn't a Roma, who is illiterate, and there's a Roma who has an university degree, if they see both of them asking for a job, people, employers, are quicker to give the person who isn't a Roma and is illiterate a job than the Roma who has an university degree. That's discrimination. What more can I say?! I just have to say that where the Roma don't feel discrimination is in healthcare. They are treated as human beings and not as Roma. That's where I don't feel discrimination. But otherwise, everywhere, in all sorts of places, we feel discriminated against, but not in

healthcare. We're treated like human beings. We're also discriminated against in schools, because if a Roma person does a small thing they make a big deal out of it, because he's ou she's Roma. I can't accept that mayors make blocks just for Roma, schools just for Roma. I can't accept that. It's only making it harder for us to integrate into the society we live in. It's only making it harder for us, because if they divided the Roma up into the neighbourhoods that exist throughout the city, it would make it easier for us to integrate. When mayors take down a camp, they send all the Roma to the same place and that's making it harder for us to integrate into the society we live in.

**PT: Would you like to make any other comments on these themes, on the Roma Holocaust, on what happened in the Second World War?**

**JMF:** I followed the Colonial War. I'm aware of some situations. I heard something about the Holocaust, that there was a Roma who was considered a hero because he was on the front line, but I don't know much more about it. I'm aware of the Colonial War, the Overseas War, because I was with them, I saw a lot of Roma going into the army, I know what they went through and that was something that really marked me in a certain way because of the way the police acted against the Roma. The Roma always ran away from the police and when they could hide, they hid. And unfortunately they took the Roma aged 30 or 40 into the army, who eventually realised that, in fact, those men couldn't be there, because they were old, and after a few months they ended up sending them away.

**PT: Do you have any historical memories of the end of the Colonial War and 25 April?**

**JMF:** I am the founder of the first association that exist in Portugal. It was created on 18 April 74. Fortunately, we organised the association on 18 April and on 25 April there was the revolution, which was our good fortune. I'm here today because of the revolution. If it hadn't happened, I wouldn't be here. I have to say that if there's one Portuguese human being who has felt freedom, it's the Roma. It was the Roma, because Roma have always been persecuted. After 25 April, things improved, I'd say 90%. We really felt freedom, because we had always survived through, well, business, where in order to do business they were always on the run from the police. After 25 April, things improved. The Roma stopped being persecuted as they were before 25 April.

## *Filmed interview with Zara Oliveira, Figueira da Foz, Portugal*



*Pic. 8 - Caption. Sequence of video images.*

**Zara Oliveira (ZO):** My name is Zara de Oliveira and I was born in 1949 on 18 January. I used to be a saleswoman, but now I'm retired, so I don't do anything. Look, I lived in a council house for 20 years, which was like a shack, and then when we were there they gave us a house here in Brenha neighbourhood and I've been living in that house for 15 years now. We've had more things, we've been more busy and we value what we have now more than we did before.

I went to school until fourth grade, which is better now than before because I only learnt to read and didn't learn to write. And then when I got my driving licence. I was 52. When my children were at home, they drove and took the van to the fairs, we went to the fairs and at that time the fairs were good and sold a lot. But then, when my children got married, I had no one to drive the van for me and I started to get my licence, I got my licence when I was 52. I was happier than I am now. Now I've lost my husband, I'm a widow and I'm sadder.

**PT: Do you know anyone in the community who took part in the Portuguese Colonial War?**

**ZO:** I remember a young man who is still here from Figueira, who went off to war but when he came back he wasn't well, he had problems. And some others who went, I don't know their names, but I knew they went and when they came back they didn't come back well.

**PT: When you were young, what kind of discrimination and racism was most common in Portuguese society?**

**ZO:** When I was a child and went to school, I was discriminated against because I was called Cigana. And then I grew up, there was a time when I was old enough, I was 17 and I got married and travelled the world. And when we stopped in a town, Guarda [Republican National Guard, one of the portuguese security forces] would come and take us away. I remember one time we stopped in Alcobaça, it was raining a lot, and we got to that place and my husband set up a stall, he and his brother-in-law. At that moment, when we had the tent up and the fire going, the Guarda came and made us take the tent down and leave. And that's what they used to do to Ciganos in

the old days. They weren't ordered to stay in one place for more than 24 hours. They were chased off the land.

**PT: Do you think the type of discrimination and racism is the same today? What differences do you find between the past and the present?**

**ZO:** It's better now, there's less racism, because the children are all in schools and ATLs now. It's better now than it used to be. In the past we were bullied a lot and we weren't valued at all. We were like, I don't know, dogs that were run from one place to another, from one land to another. But this is better now. And the government helps people. It helps those with small children. They've been helped a lot. And I think everything is much better now than it used to be in my day.

**PT: What is the Holocaust for you?**

**ZO:** The Roma suffered a lot, they had no value. And now they have more value, because they're given more importance and they have houses. And nobody had houses before. They lived in tents all over the world. Those people who judged the Roma. I don't have the education to talk about certain things, but I know what people suffered. I don't know. I think it was this holocaust here in Portugal, that they judged, I don't know. Roma had no value to the people and now... I don't know how to answer that...

*Filmed interview with Edite Maria, Acácio Fialho and Marcelina, Beja, Portugal*

**Edite Maria (EM):** [Unknown age.] We used to go to Santa Vitória, Guarda would come and send us away. We'd go to Ferreira, Guarda would come and send us away.

**PT: What was the biggest difficulty when you were a nomad?**

**EM:** The Guard sent us away. We had no home. My children couldn't read because we didn't have a camp where we could be effective. I had seven children and none of them could read.

**Acácio Fialho (AF):** 50 years old.

**PT: Do you know anything about the African War? Do you know any stories?**

**AF:** No.

*Pic. 9 - Sequence of video images (from left to right, top to bottom).*



**PT: There were many Roma who fought in that war. Didn't your father ever talk about that war? Don't you know any stories about that war?**

**AF:** No.

**PT: So, what experiences can you say you've had in the past in relation to racism and discrimination?**

**AF:** We were here and the Guarda, even under water, in the rain, sent us away. We wouldn't sit still. Sometimes we'd shake the food pot on top of the wagon while it was raining water. It was raining water and we were fined.

**Marcelina (M):** 58 years old.

**PT: Do you know any stories about the Colonial War?**

**M:** Not at all, miss.

**PT: Didn't your mum and dad never talk about it?**

**M:** No.

**PT: So, tell me about your time as a nomad?**

**M:** My time as a nomad... I don't know anything. It was old.

**PT: But what were the difficulties you were facing?**

**M:** We'd get here, the guards would come and send us away. They didn't want us and issued notices/fines.

**PT: What's more? In what other ways did you and your family suffer during that time?**

**M:** We were there under water, it was raining, the Guard was chasing us under water and we had to cover ourselves with a blanket, we were just selling all our lives. Now that we're here on this bit of land, we don't walk so much under the Guard.

## **Bibliography**

Halbwachs, Maurice. *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1925 [1994].

Halbwachs, Maurice. *La mémoire collective*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1950 [1997].

Piault, Marc Henri. *Anthropologie et Cinéma*. Paris: Nathan, 1950 [1997].

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (Ed.). *Roma in ten European countries*. 2022. Available at <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/roma-survey-findings> (Last access: August 2024).

## 10. Leaving a trace in the present

by *Maria José Casa-Nova\**, *Maria Alfredo Moreira\** and *Maria Teresa Tagliaventi\*\**

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

As we write this chapter, we keep reading everyday news on protests and, even riots, in several locations in Europe, fueled by far-right wing movements, targeted at immigrants and ethnic minorities. Antigypsyism is still rampant, as well as Roma widespread poverty and social exclusion.

Even though anti-Semitism is on the rise again, the Shoah is no longer denied and there is an international consciousness on the importance of preserving the memory of the infamous events connected to the 2nd World War and to the Nazi regime. The same cannot be stated about the Roma and Sinti genocide, or Samudaripen, too often denied and/or explained on the basis that these people were criminals, so their persecution and fate were fully justified<sup>2</sup>.

As Kapralski states, «The Roma memory of the genocide they experienced during World War II was not ‘made to matter’ and therefore remained limited to the individual remembrance or family memories, insulated and neither communicated to broader audiences, nor supported by cultural institutions and discourses»<sup>3</sup>. Roma and Sinti have historically «neither a public voice nor material or educational

\* CIEd, Institute of Education, University of Minho.

\*\* Department of Education “Giovanna Maria Bertin”, University of Bologna.

<sup>1</sup> Maria José Casa-Nova and Maria Alfredo Moreira are authors of paragraphs 1, 2 and 4; Maria Teresa Tagliaventi is author of paragraph 3.

<sup>2</sup> IHRA (Ed.), *Recomendações para o ensino e a aprendizagem sobre o holocausto*.

<sup>3</sup> Kapralski, “Between mneme and anamnesis”, 10.

resources to raise awareness about the Nazi genocide»<sup>4</sup> and their “right to remember”, as Jews have had: «In the absence of European-wide networks, let alone the global diasporic structures and media available to Jewish victims, the persecution of the Roma could not easily be communicated or processed as a collective, Europe-wide experience either as it was going on or in its immediate aftermath»<sup>5</sup>.

The right to remember and understand one’s own past and history is crucial to the “strengthening of Roma youth identity”, a “tool for fighting for human rights and against discrimination”<sup>6</sup>, “an aspect of learning about, through and for human rights”:

Working on remembrance, however, is more than just history. As practised in human rights education and in education about the Holocaust, remembrance is more than just learning about the past: it is learning from the past so that it is not repeated. Furthermore, it is about restoring a sense of dignity and justice to the victims and to their families and communities<sup>7</sup>.

History does not exist disconnected from time and place. For this very reason, its knowledge and apprehension cannot be disconnected from the time and space in which the phenomena that gave rise to it were produced. It's called historical contextualization.

Knowledge of history is at the origin of the construction of historical memory. From this knowledge and this memory, a historical consciousness is built.

A society that does not remember its history is like a person that does not remember the past. If we don't remember our past, we don't know who we are. We need history for the construction of identities, whether social or personal.

But the importance that each one of us gives to historical facts varies according to each one's experiences; the knowledge we have, the sensibility we built. For this very reason, memory and historical consciousness are not the same in all of us.

We apprehend History according to our experiences, according to who we are. We thus build a historical consciousness that gives us

<sup>4</sup> Bartash and Neringa, “Introduction”, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Rosenhaft, “East Prussian Sinti and/as German expellees”, 62.

<sup>6</sup> Keen, *Right to remember*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Keen, *Right to remember*, 8.

tools for analyzing social reality; operative instruments to reflect and transform societies.

When this occurs, it means that training has taken place. And it is this training that enables the construction of autonomy and a path to empowerment.

Since Confucius, there has been theoretical reflection on the importance of historical empathy for the construction of better societies<sup>8</sup>. Historical empathy allows us to connect with people from the past and understand their suffering in events that negatively impacted humanity.

## **2. Building collective historical memory and consciousness in the present**

During the TRACER project, we saw, we heard, we read, we wrote, we spoke, we thought, we reflected. Individually and together, we built collective historical memory and consciousness. We became more human. More aware of the importance of the daily construction of Human Rights. And our role in this construction: “History is better understood with images and documents that make visible the people who are part of this history. Who produced it. History is learned and apprehended actively by reading, writing and telling others”<sup>9</sup>.

This project was developed with that purpose: the construction of a historical memory and consciousness, through reading, writing, speaking and using artistic formats for the education of others that, in the process, would give room for our own transformation.

As key messages of the TRACER for Roma and non-Roma participants<sup>10</sup>, we can highlight the following:

### *1. The Holocaust was something done to the Roma*

Researching about the Roma and Sinti genocide, having access to historical sources and testimonials, visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau

<sup>8</sup> Tan and La Londe. “Empathy as a virtue”.

<sup>9</sup> Casa-Nova, Maria José and Daniela Silva. *Transforming and training through action-research on the history of Sinti and Roma* (chapter 5 of this book)

<sup>10</sup> Keen, *Right to remember*, 70.

camps, reflecting individually and in group, among many other activities, helped participants realise that genocide is not something that you bring on yourself, a fate that is written and that you cannot escape from. Genocide is a crime against humanity and there is no crime perpetrated by a social group that can even justify it.

## *2. Roma participants should take pride in their identity*

Being in a group of Roma young people from three European countries that shared communalities, but also desires, expectations, and hopes, along with an awareness of a common history and culture, brought about a heightened sense of four different aspects of Roma identity<sup>11</sup>: cultural (substance), social (relation), historical (process), and individual (choice). Creating a common «memory of the genocide of Roma [may become] the ‘foundational trauma’ of their new identity»<sup>12</sup>, helping unite the Roma and Sinti communities into a common political project of recognition and acceptance.

## *3. Roma people can contribute to reshaping society*

Like any other social group, Roma and Sinti do not exist outside of history<sup>13</sup>. Their centuries’ old history in Europe speaks volume of their contribution to a common European space, but also of centuries’ old relentless persecution and discrimination. An increasing awareness of their history and culture, carried out by research on Roma genocide, along with teaching and disseminating the information acquired through diverse artistic formats, helps foster more activist stances on young Roma. TRACER’s focus on education for remembrance and for human rights will certainly give «young people an understanding of the terrible past events which continue to influence some people’s lives today; and partly about helping them to identify patterns in their own behaviour which recall some of the underlying reasons for the Genocide»<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Kapralski, “Between mneme and anamnesis”.

<sup>12</sup> Kapralski, “Between mneme and anamnesis”, 18.

<sup>13</sup> Kapralski, “Between mneme and anamnesis”.

<sup>14</sup> Keen, *Right to remember*, 91.

### 3. Traces between past and present

TRACER was a challenge for several reasons: for the complexity of the project, for the methodological difficulty, for the little-known subject matter, for the direct involvement of young Roma and non-Roma and the communities they belong to, for being an international project and including very different realities, perspectives, visions. Like all projects, particularly those using participatory action-research, it was built up along the way, in the interactions between the leader groups, the partners, the target groups involved during the numerous actions.

The strength of this project, and its originality, was having combined historical awareness and social change. The genocide of the Roma people was the collective element. Discovering, deepening, reasoning about the Porrajmos was a way to join young people from different countries and contexts around a common goal, that is not educational only. The project promoted active participation, empowerment, and the capacity for self-determination of the people involved as well.

The project's message, as adopted by its participants, is that present knowledge is contingent upon an understanding of the past. The two concepts are mutually reinforcing and interdependent, forming a dialectical relationship. Each individual's life is situated within social contexts through which contact is made with the past. This past provides the context for personal, familiar and collective memories, and serves as the foundation for future (re)construction.

In the event of certain components being missing, it is necessary to reconstruct them. The lack of knowledge regarding the genocide of the Roma people represents a significant gap in understanding that is fundamental and important for both the Roma and Sinti community and for non-Roma people.

It was not easy to achieve the objectives of the project, which were certainly very ambitious. The actions were all carried out to the great satisfaction of the participants and the quality of the products was very good. But what was achieved went further than expected. The project brought about a change not only collectively but also individually in the participants involved, and not only in the young people who

followed the whole course, but also in the teachers and students who took part in the workshops.

The fact that it was an international project enabled the young people involved to “discover” each other. The different ways in which Roma minority is recognised and protected in different countries has led to strong social inequalities and different demands for rights, which were also evident in the groups that participated in the project. Portugal’s inclusive policy, which also passes through incentives to attend the education system, up to the highest levels, has favoured the presence in the project of young Roma university students, with a completely different history from, for example, Italian Roma and Sinti youth. The young Roma from the Italian leader groups are mostly residents of Roma and Sinti camps, regular and irregular. The camps are already a tangible example of racial segregation and mark the symbolic border between Roma/Sinti and non-Roma. The policy of institutional segregation that has been in place in Italy for years has not encouraged integration and school attendance. The young leaders of the project are representatives of completely different life situations. Thus, young Portuguese university students in Poland found themselves confronted and working together with young people who had left school early without graduating and who are still fighting with their families and associations for the recognition of basic civil rights. The mutual discovery of belonging to a minority that lives in different contexts and realities fostered in all the participants of the leader groups an awareness of how discriminatory policies still affect everyday life, but not only. The confrontation opened up new horizons, on one hand by encouraging those with a lower educational profile to believe in the value of education, for example by returning to school, and on the other hand by promoting increased attention to social inequalities and their construction in history among young university students.

Past events leave traces in the present: we find them in the places where the events occurred, but also in the mentality and feelings that people preserved and reproduced in the social policies promoted by institutions.

The most visible traces of this project are the artistic events promoted by young leaders and adolescents (murals, short films, booklets,

plays) in which memories become part of a social narrative building bridges between past, present and future.

## 4. Conclusion

Those more interested in the genocide itself, mostly historians, are focused predominantly on the past, studying the history of what did happen, and if they include the present into their field of interest, they treat it as a consequence of the past events. Those more interested in the present situation of Roma communities may include the past into their research by studying the memory of what happened and the present functions of this memory<sup>15</sup>.

As Keen<sup>16</sup> poignantly reminds us, «The period leading up to the Holocaust was a time, after all, when general public attitudes towards the Roma were not dissimilar to those we find today».

History has a troublesome way of repeating itself. It is our hope that the TRACER project, along with many other social and educational initiatives, may stand in the way of keeping Roma and other genocides from repeating themselves.

## Bibliography

- Bartash, Volha and Neringa Latvytė. “Introduction: Memory and recognition of the Nazi genocide of the Roma in the Baltic context”. In *Journal of Baltic Studies* 54 (2023), n. 1: 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2023.2162681>.
- Casa-Nova, Maria José and Daniela Silva. *Transforming and training through action-research on the history of Sinti and Roma*. In this volume.
- International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) (Ed.). *Recomendações para o ensino e a aprendizagem sobre o holocausto*. IHRA: 2019: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/recomendacoes-para-o-ensino-e-a-aprendizagem-sobre-o-holocausto>.
- Kapralski, Sławomir. “Between mneme and anamnesis: On the memory and forgetting of the Roma Holocaust”. In *Journal of Baltic Studies* 54 (2019), n. 1: 7-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2023.2156565>.
- Keen, Ellie. *Right to remember. A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Kapralski, “Between mneme and anamnesis”.

<sup>16</sup> Keen, *Right to remember*.

Rosenhaft, Eve. “East Prussian Sinti and/as German expellees: Beyond mémoires croisées”. In *Journal of Baltic Studies* 54 (2023), n. 1: 47-66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01629778.2023.2143386>.

Tan, Charlene and Priya Goel La Londe. “Empathy as a virtue: A Confucian interpretation and a tool to address anti-Asian hate crime”. In *Critical Studies in Education* 65 (2023), n. 2: 162-180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2023.2249057>.

## Authors' biographies

**Inês Espírito Santo Aydin** is a sociologist (Phd., EHESS, Paris). Currently she is working at the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA I.P.), Lisbon. Her work combines the study of international migrations and minorities and the sociology of social inequalities, situating them in the social relationships of class, sex and “race”.

**Silvia Bencini** is a junior research fellow at the department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology of the University of Florence. She is involved in social history of education studies and in educational and communicative processes of European memory.

**Ivana Bolognesi** is an Associate Professor of the Department of Educational Sciences of University of Bologna. She is particularly dedicated to the themes related to the inclusion of Roma children and of foreign origin and their families in the educational services and in primary schools.

**Luca Bravi** is a researcher at the Department of Education, Languages, Interculture, Literatures and Psychology of the University of Florence. He teaches History of Educational Processes and History of Communication and deals with social history of education in relation to inclusion policies in Europe, history of the media about their influence in educational contexts and valorisation of European memories (in particular regarding Roma and Sinti memory in Europe).

**Maria José Casa-Nova** is a professor and researcher in the area of Sociology of Inequalities, Department of Social Sciences of Education, Institute of Education, University of Minho. She has been researching and developing political-civic activism with Roma communities in Portugal for over 30 years and has published books, book chapters and articles in 9 countries in the areas

of Sociology of Intercultural Education, Educational Policy, Ethnicity, Racism, Gender, Roma Culture, Human Rights, Ethnography.

**Emma Ferulano** is active in pedagogical, social, political and artistic fields. She is one of the founders of Chi rom e...chi no, Arrevuoto. Teatro e Pedagogia, La Kumpania, operating for 20 years in Scampia, Naples, with Italian and Roma communities and of Antropica producing ethnographic documentaries. Storytelling, theatre, workshops, street art, social investigations are tools to create relationships, narrate territories and trigger processes of participation and awareness.

**Liliana Moreira** is a sociologist working at the Department for Promoting the Integration and Inclusion of Roma Communities (ROMA) of the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA, I.P.) since 2024. She has been a researcher at the Observatory of Roma Communities (ObCig) from 2015 to 2023. Throughout her professional career, she has worked and researched mainly in the fields of social inequalities, adult education and public policies for equality, integration, inclusion and participation of Portuguese Roma people.

**Maria Alfredo Moreira** is a professor and researcher in the area of Didactics and Teacher Education, at the Institute of Education, University of Minho. She has been a visiting scholar in the USA, Brazil, the Maldives, Timor-Leste and Europe, developing teacher education courses and publishing in the areas of Foreign/ Second Language Education, Action Research, Pedagogical Supervision, Social Justice Teacher Education, and Pedagogy in Higher Education.

**Daniela Silva** is an Assistant Professor of Department of Social Sciences of Education and researcher at the Research Centre in Education, Institute of Education of the University of Minho. She holds a PhD in Education, in the area of knowledge of Organization and School Administration and has experience in research projects in schools and non-formal education organizations. She has taught several subjects and courses, in the areas of social sciences of education: Sociology of Education, Educational Administration and training management, in initial and master degree training of educators and teachers.

**Maria Teresa Tagliaventi** is a researcher at the Department of Education Studies of University of Bologna, where she teaches Sociology of Education, Welfare State and Social Policy. She focuses her research mainly on

inequalities and differences in educational processes and the impact of social policies on the well-being of children and families. She was the coordinator of RISE – Roma Inclusive School Experiences, an international project funded by the EU REC Program and the coordinator of TRACER (Transformative Roma Art and Culture for European Remembrance) funded by CERV Programme. She is the UniBo referent for CREAN, Children's Rights European Academic Network.

## **Groups of young leaders involved in the TRACER project**

### **Portugal**

Bruno Cardoso, Delfim Boguinha, Joana Fernandes, João Brunho, João Gonçalves, Mariana Gil, Maria João Rosa, Natália Serrana, Natanael Santos, Salvador Gil, Vera Oliveira.

### **Italy**

*From Florence and Prato*

Silvia Bencini, Francesca Gianassi, Noell Maggini, Teresa Marini, Lidia Osman, Morena Pedriali, Senada Ramovski, Arianna Egle Ventre.

*From Modena and Bologna*

Raul Attanasio Salvatore, Maria Caputo, Shannon Triberti, Eduard Quirini.

*From Naples*

Francesco Pio Barbato, Lorenzo Calabrese , Francesco Capuano, Antonio Caso, Renato Catello, , Gennaro Cirella , Ginevra Dini Ciacci, Mario Civitaquale, Ciro Esposito, Rasim Husic, Emanuele Jannuzzi, Mersiana Jasari, Mitat Jasari, Simon Jeve, Francesco Liccardo, Mariano Licenziato, Angela Muharem, Paraska Muharem, Seat Muharem, Francesco Pio Magrini, Luca Mollo, Paolo Gaetano Palladino, Giovanni Radosavljevic, Pia Antonia Riccio, Matteo Sorrentino, Vittorio Stiletti, Francesco Maria Talotti, Biagio Visconti, Domenico Viviano.

### **Poland**

Sabina Kwiatkowska, Beata Surynt, Patrycja Mroczek Wajs, Roksana Mroczek Wajs.



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM  
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION STUDIES  
"GIOVANNI MARIA BERTIN"



Universidade do Minho



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
FIRENZE

**FORLILPSI**  
DIPARTIMENTO DI FORMAZIONE,  
LINGUE, INTERCULTURA,  
LETTERATURE E PSICOLOGIA



Funded by  
the European Union

---

*Itinerari e dialoghi di storie dell'educazione*  
Diretta da G. Bandini, G. Seveso, C. Sindoni - Open Access

---

*Ultimi volumi pubblicati:*

TIZIANA PIRONI (a cura di), *Maria Montessori tra passato e presente*. La diffusione della sua pedagogia in Italia e all'estero (E-book).

Questo   
LIBRO

 ti è piaciuto?

---

**Comunicaci il tuo giudizio su:**  
[www.francoangeli.it/opinione](http://www.francoangeli.it/opinione)



VUOI RICEVERE GLI AGGIORNAMENTI  
SULLE NOSTRE NOVITÀ  
NELLE AREE CHE TI INTERESSANO?



ISCRIVITI ALLE NOSTRE NEWSLETTER

SEGUICI SU:



**FrancoAngeli**

La passione per le conoscenze

Copyright © 2024 by FrancoAngeli s.r.l., Milano, Italy. ISBN 9788835168393

# FrancoAngeli

## a strong international commitment

Our rich catalogue of publications includes hundreds of English-language monographs, as well as many journals that are published, partially or in whole, in English.

The **FrancoAngeli**, **FrancoAngeli Journals** and **FrancoAngeli Series** websites now offer a completely dual language interface, in Italian and English.

Since 2006, we have been making our content available in digital format, as one of the first partners and contributors to the **Torrossa** platform for the distribution of digital content to Italian and foreign academic institutions. **Torrossa** is a pan-European platform which currently provides access to nearly 400,000 e-books and more than 1,000 e-journals in many languages from academic publishers in Italy and Spain, and, more recently, French, German, Swiss, Belgian, Dutch, and English publishers. It regularly serves more than 3,000 libraries worldwide.

*Ensuring international visibility and discoverability for our authors is of crucial importance to us.*

---

# FrancoAngeli



torrossa  
Online Digital Library

This book seeks to reflect theoretically and empirically on the process and results of the European project TRACER (Transformative Roma Art and Culture for European Remembrance), financed by CERV (Citizen, Equality, Rights and Value) Eu programme. The main protagonists have been young people, mainly Roma and Sinti, living in different places and countries of Europe, with their own history that anchors them to different communities, but joined by belonging to discriminated minorities and to a transnational people who recognise themselves as a community characterised by diaspora. The project's goal has combined historical knowledge of the genocide that occurred during World War II with an analysis of the construction of prejudice and the role that racism has had on the collective consciousness of a modern society. The methodology used is participatory action-research in public history educational context, a process able to make the protagonists aware of a path of knowledge, promoting training actions towards other people and leaving traces of memory in the present through artistic events.

The volume presents the theoretical foundations and practical activities that refer to the public history as a tool for inclusion, participation and social recognition of European communities representing minorities in their countries: a multidisciplinary and participatory action-research aimed at building active citizenship in formal and informal educational contexts.

**Luca Bravi** is researcher at the Department of Educational Sciences, Languages, Interculturality, Literature and Psychology of the University of Florence. He teaches History of Educational Processes and History of Communication.

**Maria José Casa-Nova** is professor and researcher in the area of Sociology of Inequalities, Department of Social Sciences of Education, Institute of Education, University of Minho.

**Maria Alfredo Moreira** is professor and researcher in the area of Didactics and Teacher Education, at the Institute of Education, University of Minho.

**Maria Teresa Tagliaventi** is a researcher at the Department of Education Studies of University of Bologna, where she teaches Sociology of education, Welfare state and Social policy.