

SIMMEL AND BEYOND

Edited by Pedro Caetano and Maria Manuela Mendes

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Classical and Contemporary Social Theory

SIMMEL AND BEYOND

THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF SIMMEL'S THOUGHT

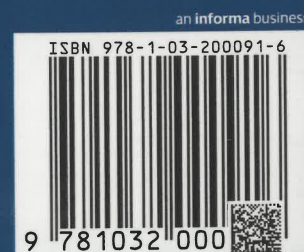
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3 Roma/Ciganos and the condition of internal strange in Portuguese society

The construction of otherness

Maria Manuela Mendes and Olga Magano

Revisiting the *Excursus on the Stranger* by Simmel

Simmel's stranger describes the experience of individuals in a world where cross-cultural contacts are more frequent and intense and where societies are characterised as global (Bauman, 1998), multicultural, more complex, hyper-mobile (Jackson et al., 2016) and by super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007). In such contextualization, we can provide a more expansive and deeper understanding of the Simmelian stranger. The "universalisation of strangeness" depicts the postmodern urban experience. Simmel's thinking underlies the formulation of the sociology of strangerhood, and his influence in the social theory of the stranger has endured both in the classical approach to the stranger (e.g., Schutz) and in more postmodern perspectives (Bauman and others).

We argue that the Portuguese Roma, known as Ciganos, embody the metaphorical figure of the stranger, indicating an ongoing relationship of strangeness and tension that marks the history and framework of interaction between the Roma and other social groups.

This figure may be conceived in a symbolic and metaphoric manner. The dynamics of the processes of figuration refer to social morphogenesis. The features that best characterise strangers are their position in space and time as well as their social and relational status. In Simmel's perspective, this figure involves some explicit ambivalence. It should be recalled that being a stranger implies a certain extraneousness and one of the criteria that best define this status is mobility (first criterion). The mobility associated with the figure of the stranger and with alterity invokes its encapsulated dualisms: identity versus alterity and distance versus closeness.

In his *Excursus on the Stranger* (Simmel, 1999 [1908]), the stranger is not a wanderer who comes today and leaves tomorrow, but someone who takes up a fixed position inside a geographical circle, combining a relational status that lies somewhere between the close and distant. However, the strangeness that is generated configures a positive relationship, embodying a special form of reciprocal relations, where the stranger's position simultaneously implies a relationship of being far away while closely present. In turn, the

factors of repulsion and distancing generate a form of coexistence and union in the reciprocal action.

Frequently, the stranger is associated with the outsider, someone who does not belong to the social milieu and who represents a threat to the social balance (Elias and Scotson, (2000 [1965])).

Simmel considers the history of economics as the benchmark, where the stranger has tended to be the tradesperson and, for this reason, is never arrogated as a "landowner". The stranger tradesperson is situated within a group yet faces beyond, being rootless and interacting at different levels of the social organization. The restriction to pure trade and very often to pure finance, enshrines the stranger with a certain singularity, by endowing mobility. If this mobility takes place within a closed group, then this figure personifies that intermingling of closeness and distance, which constitutes the stranger's formal position. With the stranger one has only certain more general qualities in common; the Simmelian concept of the stranger is *relational*.

The stranger has a structural position indicating his/her position in space, meaning that the stranger is both wandering and fixed and that spatial relations are the condition and the symbol of human relations. Moreover, this figure is characterised by a position in time: for example, this could be a person who arrives today and stays tomorrow – a person without a history. But it also involves a social position, paradoxically: like the poor and several "inner enemies", the stranger is a member of the group itself while not being part of it, revealing a specific form of interaction, conceived by Simmel as a very positive relationship. Other definitional criteria are added, since the stranger is not a landowner, as noted above, but a tradesperson, distinguished by mobility: the figure of mobility (trade) is rootless and intervenes at different levels of social organization. Other criteria depict this figure, such as the relational position, which is essentially determined, by the fact of not having belonged from the very beginning to the group into which the stranger imports qualities (Simmel, 1999 [1908]). Škorić et al. (2013) argue that the relational position can be found in the essence of the excursus, in its emphasis on a unique form of social difference (where persons are identified on the basis of their origin) and a unique form of social relation (where distance and closeness are in a state of constant, reciprocal tension). The criteria of objectivity assume a particular and ambivalent form of participation. The ambivalence does not mean disengagement and disinterest, rather a relative extraneousness added to a relative freedom. The difference is established based on the similitude of the numerous individual differences over and above a non-differentiation – the preponderance of the general similarities over a particular relationship. In fact, the stranger has a "bird's-eye view" (Marotta, 2012) and is not immersed in the particularities of the opposing parties.

Simmel notes that the stranger could be a Jew, but could also be someone else. Although actual allusion to the Roma is absent, it would appear

implicit in his *Excursus on the Stranger* (1999 [1908]). The Roma are the eternal and "internal stranger". Indeed, there is a tendency to emphasise the general qualities we have in common with the Roma and to accentuate the particularities, but we can also deny the factors of similarity, as is often the case with the Roma. Generally, they are conceived in an essentialist and stigmatizing way, as a homogeneous and monolithic group. Based on a qualitative study on the Portuguese Roma/Ciganos (Mendes, 2012), our aim is to illustrate and explain how the Roma embody this metaphorical figure and as such indicate a constant relationship of strangeness and tension that marks the history of the interaction between society at large and the Roma.

Portuguese Roma/Ciganos: an overview and portrayal as "strangers"

The Roma have always been relegated to a condition to strangeness and difference (contrast), despite being the largest ethnic minority in Europe (10–12 million) and having lived in most European countries for over five centuries (Liégeois, 1994).

In Portugal, their numbers, possibly underestimated, put them at around 50,000 to 60,000 people (ACIDI, 2013). The majority of the Portuguese Ciganos neither identify with nor recognise themselves as Roma, Rom or Romani, but with the Portuguese word *Cigano*, which has obvious derogatory meaning for the majority of society. Only the Cigano mediators, the leaders of Cigano associations and activists know and recognise the term *Roma*. This is one of the reasons that we believe that it still makes sense to use the term *Ciganos*. The Portuguese Ciganos belong to one of the dominant subgroups in Europe and the Americas, the Caló/Calé. The sparse historical records documenting the presence of the Ciganos in Portugal date back to the 15th century. Following the initially warm welcome of the Ciganos, they began to be perceived as lazy, undesirable and fearsome. Measures were taken leading to their persecution, expulsion, sentencing to the galleys, subjection to the death penalty and attempted forced assimilation (prohibition from speaking their language, begging, wandering from one place to another); they were flogged in public, deported to the former colonies, had their children taken from them and their families broken apart. And these were recurring practices throughout the Portuguese history at least up to the democratization of Portuguese society (Alfaro et al., 1999) (the revolution of 25th April 1974). But this also happened in many European countries, which inflicted similar punishment and even their slavery, extermination and sterilization right up to recent times. Despite being present in Portuguese society since the 15th century, they continue to be considered strangers in their own country, constituting the eternal "internal stranger" (Simmel, 1999 [1908]; Bochaca, 2003; Robert, 2006), where the "eternal stranger" (Amin, 2013) does not interact or connect with others, but instead lives at a distance from them.

In Portugal, they are neither recognised as an ethnic minority nor as a national minority. The process of sedentary settlement of the Portuguese Ciganos has been expanding and consolidating for many decades now, yet the social representation of the Ciganos continues to be strongly stereotyped and linked to the image of the "nomad", footloose and free of all and any commitments. Nowadays, most of Ciganos are sedentary and, in cases in which they are not, their choice of a "nomadic" lifestyle arises from a complex web of relationships whose agents are not merely Cigano families and persons, but also, for example, institutions, local authorities and other Cigano and non-Cigano people.

The majority live in urban areas (in social housing or substandard housing with deplorable living conditions), and in general they speak Portuguese, Spanish and "Cigano language" (Roma, Romani, Calon, etc...), stand firm to a religion that is primarily evangelical, but closely followed by Catholicism. Even today, their social relations are mainly forged through bonds created by in breeding; despite the slow-moving but salient changes, they are still characterised by low levels of education, high rates of school dropout and illiteracy. They are especially linked to street vending, but also to fairs and markets. And non-Ciganos still accuse them of social anachronism and living in micro-societies, of not wanting to integrate (Lopes, 2008).

We believe that there continues to be excessive homogenization of the concept of Portuguese Ciganos, dumping them all into a monolithic, univocal and homogenizing category (Mendes, 2007; Magano, 2014; Mendes et al., 2014). To the contrary, what we find among Portuguese Ciganos is cultural heterogeneity and different forms of social and spatial insertion; we observe differentiations between those who live the life of Roma/Ciganos compared to those who live as "lords/non-Ciganos", a wash with nuances in terms of lifestyles and even cases of reconciling aspects of different ways of life (Magano, 2010). Even the scientific bibliography about Ciganos fluctuates between rejection, exoticization and romanticization. As a rule, the cultural difference portrayed in relation to the Ciganos is associated with a negative alterity (Silva et al., 2014).

In fact, there is huge diversity and cultural heterogeneity among Portuguese Ciganos, showing various forms of social and spatial incorporation (Magano, 2010; Nicolau, 2010; Magano and Mendes, 2014). The Ciganos themselves consider that there are regional and social differences between the "Beirões" of the northern hinterland, the Galicians, the "Alentejanos" of the deep south, among other differentiations, including frequent other self-assertions of distinctions among Cigano peoples, sometimes within the same geographical territory.

Investigating Portuguese Ciganos: the construction of their otherness

In all truth, Simmel alludes to the Jew while the Roma are absent from his writings, but it would seem that they are implicitly included, as the Roma

are often characterised as a marginal group of people typically revealing criminality, idleness and dirt or, alternatively, expressed in romanticised and exotic terms (Okely, 1983; Mayall, 2004; Bhopal and Myers, 2008). However, we argue that the Roma represent the "perfect" example of Simmel's description of the stranger (Clark and Greenfields, 2006). For academics, the Roma are very distant or "hard to reach", positioned as "exaggerated strangers". This distance, identifying the Roma as being "hard to reach", is similar to a wider public discourse that understands the Roma and non-Roma to be distinct and separate groups of people (Myers, 2016), which facilitates the processes of stereotyping and exoticization imbuing the Ciganos.

By homogenizing the entire group, it becomes easier to accept general assumptions about the Roma, which in time acquire the status of universals or become common knowledge. Such knowledge, discriminatory in nature, leads to the non-Roma believing that the Roma are natural-born wanderers, incapable, both physically and mentally, of conforming to basic social norms. Typecasting Roma as nomads, entertainers and criminals informs the inherent anti-gypsyism of our present day. The characterisation of Roma culture as homogenous, static and unequivocal enables the reproduction of anti-gypsyism, bereft of deeper knowledge of the cultural plurality and different lifestyles, very often echoed by the media, social players and education professionals (Mendes et al., 2021).

Over the last few years, there has been a resurgence of these racist narratives that are incitements to the hatred of the Roma people, that are offensive and humiliating, that legitimate the existing structural and institutional inequalities, demonstrating the fact that the Ciganos have been a major target throughout the history. The attacks on Romani populations are inscribed in a much broader context marked by a historically systemic and structural discrimination sedimented in society and in its institutions. There appears to be some transversality in the public controversies involving the Roma in different European countries, despite the existence of legislation and strategies to integrate the Roma in European and national plans, where European Union Member States may even be penalised in terms of financial assistance due to official whistleblowing on situations of discrimination perpetrated by the actual States. Yet, the Roma are accused of being lazy, living off state subsidies, not working, kidnapping children, being nomads or not assimilable. In the perspective of Nedim Karakayali (2006), strangeness is produced by the conviction that the other is not fully human. This conviction makes it possible, sometimes even necessary to exclude the stranger, where this exclusion can sometimes take a murderous form. Strangers are simultaneously members of a group and outsiders.

Methodology and fieldwork

In this section, we present and discuss empirical evidence revealing processes of construction of otherness, collected during fieldwork conducted among Ciganos resident in Lisbon Metropolitan Area, based on 40 semi-structured

Box 3.1 Transversal public controversies that involve the Ciganos

2017: Czech Republic. President Milos Zeman stated that the *Roma do not adapt and are unable to work*.

Italy. Matteo Salvini advocated the creation of a register for Roma people; the police destroyed hundreds of makeshift homes of Roma who lived in camps on the outskirts of major cities.

Portugal. André Ventura (Chega party leader) said: *but in Portugal we have a culture with two types of worrying things: one is that there are groups that, in terms of income composition, live almost exclusively from state subsidies, another is that they are above the rule of law*.

2018: France. Militias attacked Roma in Paris following false news alleging that they abducted children.

Hungary. Orban said *migrants are like gypsies, but migrants are worse because they come from outside Hungary*.

2019: Portugal. Fatima Bonifácio (famous historian): *the Roma, above all, are unassimilable: organized in families, clans and tribes, they maintain the same life habits and values*.

Source: prepared by the authors, 2020–2021.

and in-depth interviews and ethnographic research. All the interviewed Ciganos were Portuguese women and men of different age cohorts. The interviews lasted 60 to 40 minutes on average, and the categorization and analysis were done using In-Vivo software. This was part of a broader investigation focused on capturing and understanding perceptions and portrayals of situations, practices and contexts regarded as discriminatory.

In particular, studies on Ciganos usually focus on the discontinuities between “Them” and “Us”. This means that they tend to accentuate the differences and dichotomies, especially as the researchers are not usually Ciganos themselves. We were not interested in characterising behaviours and cultural features, considering them as aspects that typify a certain population or social group. Doing that would be fixing and reifying those groups. Being a Cigano is something performative, as it is apprehended and shared within the group, but also in the contact and confrontation with the “Others”. Processes of self-classification also serve strategic purposes, such as, for example, maintaining or even elevating *ingroup* levels of self-esteem. Strategies to defend identity enable avoiding, preventing or even playing down emotional responses to situations that entail humiliation, shame, frustration, hostility, sadness, dissatisfaction, nervousness, tension or anxiety.

Our attention focused on the discourses of the interviewed players, which offered us revealing elements of representations, constructed from the interpersonal relationships with other groups and individuals, namely in specific face-to-face situations (micro levels), even though, to a certain extent, these

are predetermined by the relationships of power that define the macro-social order, the social status and identity attributed to one and another. We also investigated the way that life trajectories condition how they relate to the majority of society who are not Ciganos (at a macro and micro level). In order to understand the processes of otherness, we must focus on the cultural interpretation of social structures and the categories which mediate the interaction between strangers and non-strangers.

The construction of the strangeness*Insights from fieldwork: an inside “view”*

For the common citizen, the classification of individuals and groups as Ciganos could reflect their ethnic or racial or even national belonging. In the discourses produced by some Ciganos and essentially by the *Others*, the Ciganos appear represented as “foreigners” and as “not Portuguese”, strangers and “stateless persons”, in view of their cultural specificity and the fact that their geographical and cultural origins are other (Lopez and Fresnillo, 1995; Mendes, 1997; Santamaría, 2002). In this context, it is important to scrutinise how Ciganos perceive the way that the *Others* categorise them and, in turn, how the Ciganos categorise these *Others*.

It is crucial to stress that some of the interviewees stated that it does not make sense to use particular terms to classify the different minority groups. Hence, the need to name the *Others* is understood as a tendency to perpetuate preconceptions with respect to those who are perceived as being different. Some of the interviewees think that dichotomous names should be abolished, as should those that demarcate Ciganos from non-Ciganos. One interviewee, Marta, sees some utility in the use of names to classify foreigners, but considers that it is unacceptable to establish ethnic or other differentiations among those who are all national citizens. Accordingly, she asks:

We are people. I think that it should all be the same. As for the Brazilians, it's understandable because they are from another country, but I am Portuguese. I think it's strange. You are white. And what am I? Cigana?
(woman, 21 years old)

Along these same lines, Henrique draws attention to the fact that his identity card only states that he is a Portuguese citizen and nothing more. Thus, he makes it very clear that the fact that Ciganos are named as such is nothing short of a form of discrimination

(...) I think there's no reason for such, on my identity card it doesn't say... whether I am of the Cigano race, or that I'm white or anything else, why should it be said in any other context?

(man, 38 years old)

But there are also those who argue that the Ciganos are not concerned with the name given to them, that they do not even think about it. Nevertheless, the fact is that the name by which they are called by Others could simultaneously generate feelings of belonging or, conversely, it could fire up positions and strategies of resistance. Indeed, the Ciganos are active agents in the construction of their self and hetero representation, manipulating codes and labels, according to the situation and context. When individuals self-classify themselves as a member of a social group, their emotional responses may be largely underpinned by their identification and feeling of belonging in relation to that group. According to Mackie and Smith (2002), the stronger the identification with a group, the greater will be the tendency for that belonging to the group being incorporated in the self-concept. According to Gamella (2013), Cigano identification is based on two pillars: blood and traditions.

Thus, the names used by Cigano people in their self-identification could be viewed as mechanisms of recognition of collective belonging and identification, but also, and simultaneously, of recognition of differentiations and marking of distances. The name serves not only to nominate, but also to classify and declassify. Curiously, when interacting with non-Ciganos, we also find Ciganos who apologise for being Cigano, as if they were guilty of the negative charge attributed to the name Cigano, as if merely by association this downgraded the individual *a priori*. In this regard, Dolores tells us that

"There are some people who just say 'sorry, that we are Cigano'" (woman, 32 years old).

The interviewees like being called by their given name, without any reference to their ethnic belonging. Henrique was one of the interviewees who stated that the association of the name to the ethnic group is information portraying depreciative meanings, having argued:

Mister so-and-so, of Cigano ethnicity... this Cigano ethnicity is excessive; and unless an end is put to that, this prejudice is not going to stop. When a Cigano misbehaves, they emphasize, it is emphasized that he is a Cigano; when he's not a Cigano, for example, an Alentejano, they don't mention that.

(man, 38 years old)

In particular, for some children and young people, the fact that they are publicly called Ciganos, especially by non-Ciganos and in a school context, can be profoundly insulting. Marta recalls that, as a child, when they called her Cigana, she felt offended and reacted aggressively. She noted, however, that she no longer feels that outrage. Nowadays, a certain loftiness and pride inspire her status as a Cigana, yet Portuguese: *"I am Cigana. I am a Portuguese Cigana. I think I'm a normal person. Cigana is a name they give me because I am a little bit different"* (woman, 21 years old).

The Cigano label can thus have numerous meanings, and despite the pride shown by the interviewees in their belongings, there is a notion that the invocation of the word *Cigano* refers to other meanings that do not match those that the Ciganos attribute to themselves, being depreciative and differentiating. Daniel points to other adjectives that immediately emerge in the collective imagery:

Look, you said the most difficult word. Being Cigano, now let's withdraw the word... for example, let's remove the word Cigano, I know what Cigano means... let's remove the word, 'what is a Cigano?'. Look, the way I see it, I am proud to be Cigano... I'm proud to be a Cigano, I'm not ashamed to show myself and say 'I am Cigano', my children are Ciganos, I am proud to be what I am... Now, it's different if someone comes up to me with 'you are a Cigano, you are a liar', because the word Cigano means many things, like liar, dishonest, thief.

(man, 37 years old)

The pride in their ethnic identity is rooted in feelings cultivated since infancy, both through processes of oral transmission and by processes of ideological elaboration, that provide the individuals with a self-regulating capacity in response to the prejudices and processes of denigration of their social images shown by the surrounding society. But Ciganos are also active agents in the construction of their self and hetero representations, by manipulating the labels prescribed to them and the situations and contexts that are unfavourable to them.

It was not always easy for the interviewees to differentiate race from ethnicity, especially as the Ciganos endow the word "race" with a double meaning that varies according to the object, but is frequently used to identify Cigano families (Bastos et al., 2007). Hence, on the one hand, "race" is used in popular discourse as a category identifying social groups and can apply just as much to other minorities as to the majority; on the other hand, "race" serves to internally designate family groups, as will be explained further ahead, with Ciganos avoiding to talk about or evoke the *race* of others, as this is imbued with a certain sacredness (1). Despite the intention to mitigate the pejorative sense of the word "race", the use of the designation "ethnicity" ends up by being merely yet another form of differentiation as it is almost always used only for socially and economically vulnerable groups (Machado, 2001).

The interviewees remarked on a significant change they have witnessed over time in the processes of hetero-classification, as the term "Cigano race" is no longer heard as frequently, appearing to have been shunned and replaced by the term "Cigano ethnicity". This linguistic change seems to have been perceived most acutely in the mid-1990s, and the Ciganos themselves appear to no longer incorporate this term in their daily discourse. Among the interviewees, it is especially the men, because they tend to be

more schooled and have more diversified social experiences, who define the Ciganos as an ethnic group (eight interviewees). But even so, the term "race" still continues to be the most used.

For Tiago, there are various possible forms of classification, referring to "race and ethnicity or clan... but... I think it sounds a lot better to say ethnic group rather than race" (man, 29 years old). This interviewee argues that nowadays the term "race" is rarely used, even by Ciganos to describe and name themselves, claiming that this term is more suited to non-rational animals than to human beings. The interviewee adds that "now, at this moment in time, in order to show a little more respect ... for people, ethnicity should be said and not race. Race is for dogs. It's more for animals..." (man, 29 years old).

Other interviewees prefer to be classified as an ethnic group, like Jorge who stresses that the Ciganos are an ethnic group that shows "some identity, some sentiment, even if only of the memory of ancestors, of the ethnic group in itself" (man, 47 years old). Elsa also rejects the idea of belonging to a different "race", arguing that "we are an ethnic group, but are inserted in your race, we have different traditions, I don't see myself as being of another race" (woman, 28 years old).

The use of the term "race" is more common among women, who classify their *ingroup* and the *outgroups* as *races*. Juliana firmly asserts that all people are equal, as all "are living souls"; however, in her humble opinion, humanity is divided into two races: the Ciganos and the non-Ciganos (woman, 54 years old).

The classification of the Ciganos as a *community* is practically non-existent in the discourse of the interviewees, although this form of designation appears in many official documents (ACIDI, 2013).

A minority of interviewees think that the Ciganos are an autonomous *people* who live in a sort of society set apart from the majority; therefore, also in terms of collective memory, there is a partaking of the idea of strange, different. Cristiana shares this position, revealing

(...) I see them as a people who don't allow themselves to be integrated in society but I also see them with enormous discrimination. Many of them want to integrate and they don't allow that, and I also see them as a people deprived of affection, tenderness, understanding.
(woman, 43 years old)

This idea that Ciganos are a people is related to other assumptions, in particular that of the Ciganos being "survivor people", that, despite their long history of persecutions, have managed to keep some of their main traditions intact. Daniel concludes, in this regard, that these people have very strong and consistent traditions; "otherwise, they would probably no longer exist today..." (man, 38 years old). Nowadays, new discourses emerge on this issue, especially based on the idea of "resilience" and of resistance.

Viewing this from a different angle, it is important to consider the various names that the Ciganos use to call non-Ciganos, and which have a relatively discriminatory intention. This is one of the possible forms of reproduction, through a kind of "boomerang effect", of the discriminatory practices to which the Ciganos are generally subjected to by the majority. The discriminated minority also has powers and abilities to act as an agent of discrimination in relation to the Others.

The dominant and most usual name used by the interviewees when alluding to non-Ciganos is that of "*senhores*" meaning lords or masters. This term is used most frequently by Ciganas, the women, as the men appear to have more diverse linguistic resources at the tip of their tongue when referring to non-Ciganos, but also "Portuguese" or "Pategos".

For Ciganos, a "*senhor*" is someone strange who belongs to the majority, but this is also a form of strengthening their own identity and reiterating that they are different, superior and even better, as they do not indulge in the immoral and improper conduct that characterises non-Ciganos. Paloma Gay y Blasco (1997, pp. 517–535) considers that this form of naming is, above all, a reaction by the Ciganos, albeit recent, as a way for them to flaunt their opposition and resistance to the centuries-old discrimination that they have faced. In the case of the integration of Ciganos, for example, in the labour market, they are frequently said to be working towards "*assenhorar*" meaning "turning into lords or masters" (Magano, 2010).

But there is another meaning, reminiscent of the memory of their nomadic past and ancestry linked to their persistent relationship of non-ownership of the geographic space and their relationship upheld with the majority players who were generally owners of the land on which they camped when they arrived at a particular place. In Spain, the Gitanos use the term "*paisano*", or fellow countryman, when referring to non-Ciganos. Gay y Blasco considers that this term has a euphemistic slant, meaning "person of the land". Both this term and that of "*payo*", also used by the Portuguese Ciganos emphasise "the links of the non-Gypsies to the land and, by implication, the Gitanos' distance from it" (Gay y Blasco, 2001, p. 645). And this is the meaning that Tiago attributes to the name "*senhor*", in stating

he is the senhor because he's the one that rules, he doesn't rule over everything, but when we arrive, it's like 'ah, this is mine', he is the lord and master of his things, and that's why he rules over what belongs to him.
(man, 29 years old).

This forma of naming has nothing to do with the greater importance given or any sign of reverence when addressing someone, but is rather due to the fact that the Cigano stands before someone who has a relationship of possession, in being an owner, for example, of land, houses, pastures. Indeed, Carlos reveals that even today the Ciganos rarely use the term *larai* (in Romani) which "means farmer. It's that rich man owning the estate" (man, 18

years old). It is believed that this meaning has lost some of its pertinence in current times, primarily in the urban and coastal zones, as a result of the progressive sedentary settlement of the Ciganos in the national context. Despite their internal diversity, the Ciganos have traditionally always been associated with trade (itinerant, at fairs, markets, door-to-door) and being self-employed, and this is still a relatively important business activity among the Portuguese Ciganos (on a full-time or part-time basis).

However, albeit much less so than "*senhores*", the Ciganos also use other names, where, in order of importance, we find Romani words such as "*paitos*", "*pailhos*", "*lacorrilhos*" and "*payos*". The interviewees confess that all these terms in "Cigano dialect" are falling into disuse, being abandoned, as they are increasingly less invoked. For Jorge, this phenomenon is understandable as "*the actual language is disappearing*" (man, 47 years old). Occasionally, other names emerge such as "*pategos*", "*pajos*", "*pajitos*", "*romba*" and "*rombilha*". It is interesting to note that the Ciganos never say *non-Ciganos*. These forms of naming themselves and others reveal processes of mutual estrangement, and this closeness and distance harbours a particular tension: the awareness of what is common to all pulls into focus that which is not shared (Riley, 2008).

*The historical and geographic origin of the Ciganos:
outside and/or inside*

Among the interviewees as a whole, the geographic origin of the Ciganos raised some controversy, with a duality of perspectives: some said that the Ciganos originated from a zone outside Portugal, with a subset pointing to India as the geographic zone of origin, while others indicated Persia and Egypt. But the majority firmly believe that the Ciganos did not come from abroad and only recognise themselves as national citizens, rejecting references to any real or possibly mythical country (Kenrick, 1998). This idea reinforces their position of extraneousness, objectivity and relative ambivalence in the context of Portuguese society.

Clara revealed that she feels outraged when someone tells her that the Ciganos are not from here, and reiterated her belief in her Portugueseness: "*Ah, they are from Egypt! ... What? We were born here! We were born here; we are from here! We were born here, we are from here, we don't have any other country.*" (woman, 29 years old). Dolores recently attended a literacy course and recalls that in one of the classes the teacher categorically stated that the geographic origin of the Ciganos was rooted in Egypt. This idea appears totally preposterous to her, and she displayed her outright disbelief of such a proposition: "*But I come from Lisbon, my mother came from the Alentejo (laughter). My mother is from Palmela (close to Lisbon), my grandmother is also from Palmela, we are all Portuguese. My grandfather...*" (woman, 32 years old). For some of the interviewees who reject an origin outside of Portugal, this idea can only be an "invention", in other words, a "lie" created

by non-Ciganos for the purpose of further excluding and marginalizing the Cigano people. Isabel is firm in her belief that "*we are Portuguese, we didn't come from anywhere else. We are from here, right?*" (woman, 49 years old).

For some of the interviewees, the mysteries and myths woven around the geographic origin of the Ciganos are signs pointing to a sort of "closely guarded secret", similar to others that the Ciganos refuse to disclose. Marta tells us that non-Ciganos only know what the Ciganos wish to reveal. This interviewee does not know if the Ciganos actually have another country of their own, whether real or mythical, but if it does exist, then it would have to be "Cigoland". On the other hand, she denies that there could be any origin outside of Portugal, namely India, as she cannot even see any linguistic similarity between *Romani* and *Hindi*. Marta argues:

I think that the Ciganos are worldwide. There are Ciganos all over the world. India has Indians, Portugal has the Portuguese. Whatever, many ... Where do all these people come from, Cigoland? But our language is the same as yours. I don't speak any Romani. Our Romani has almost entirely vanished. I can't even put together a sentence in Romani. I can't, not even my parents can.

(woman, 21 years old)

In contrast to the interviewees who reject and cast doubt over a geographic origin outside of Portugal, there are those who defend the Indian origin of the Ciganos, pointing to some evidence that helps to corroborate and sustain this thesis. Sara merely says that she "*suspects that the Ciganos came from India*" (woman, 68 years old), highlighting the similarities between the Ciganos and Indians in terms of language, physical appearance and attire. But this idea was passed down to her by other Ciganos, mainly by her ancestors, especially by her maternal grandfather who was Hungarian. Glória also recalls that her parents and grandparents gave her that idea, explaining

but I don't know, it was before my time... it was a long time ago, but that was what they said, that they had Indian traits. I heard that from my father and from my mother... and from my grandparents who are already deceased, right?

(woman, 37 years old)

Among Portuguese Ciganos, the idea of their foreign origin is not accepted by the majority. Nevertheless, Rui has no doubt as to the geographic of the Ciganos, especially because there are a series of words in Cigano dialect that are similar to words in *Hindi*:

(...) *manusch*, *manusch* is a Hindu word, *hindu*, *manusch*, and Ciganos say *malusch* which has the same meaning, it means man. *Malequim* is a girl in Hindu, *lacrim* in Cigano dialect, it's exactly the same, just the

pronunciation is different. *Sona, sonacai* means gold. *Panim* is *palhim* meaning water, and there are many more.

(man, 32 years old)

Michael Stewart (1997), in Harangos in Hungary, did not find empirical evidence of historical nature on the existence of proto-Cigano populations. But Stewart framed the Rom of Harangos in the European context, in which they have been living for over five centuries. We endorse his argument in clearly stating that the Ciganos are part of ourselves, a part that we have difficulty in exploring and acknowledging.

Distance versus closeness

For the majority of the interviewees, being Cigano is something that is acquired almost innately, a type of primordial umbilical cord, which "comes from within" and is born with the person, that must be nurtured and overseen by means of family socialisation, and by the experience of life flourishing within the Cigano group. Clara stresses that "*being Cigano... It's something that was born with us. I think I was born like this; I was brought up this way*" (woman, 29 years old). Concerning the importance of the person's moulding by the family web anchored in the intragroup community space, Jorge declares that "*being Cigano*" is as a result of the "*family relationship and greatly due to enjoying being a Cigano...*" (man, 47 years old).

The interrelationship between nature and nurture is also present in the interviewees' perceptions of the meaning of what it is to be Cigano. For Marisa, being Cigano is something that "*is in our blood*" (woman, 29 years old). However, it is the education received in the family and community context that appears to exert a determinant moulding power on the individual.

"Being Cigano" is also perceived as a type of "genetic-social" heritage which is passed on from parents to children, being self-perpetuated along generations within the family and community. Helder is one of the interviewees who view the social significance of being Cigano as inseparable from a peculiar lifestyle, in which the family and economic business as a pedlar at fairs is the bedrock.

It's living a normal life, calm, with no major stress, selling at the fair, being an itinerant salesman, bringing up my children the same way I was brought up, and always trying to live a better life (...) I must convey to my children and to the people around me that this is my lifestyle.

(man, 28 years old)

This is a lifestyle in which we distinctly observe the primacy of the collective over the individual. The centrality of the collective experiences clearly structures the interactions of the daily life of the individual. In this regard, Carlos testifies that the individual has little or no relevance, by saying "*It's the*

parties... the friends... There's a lot of friendship, strong friendship, people are even... a Cigano arrives or a cousin or whoever and helps, they are very close-knit" (man, 18 years old). The density and intensity of social relationships, in particular the Cigano intragroup sociability, conviviality and friendship, are essential in structuring the personal and social identity of the individual.

Simmel considered that the stranger is not assimilable, yet for Tiago "*being Cigano*" is synonymous with belonging to a people that is proud to possess a very specific culture and has not been assimilated. But what is most intriguing and fascinating is the aura of mystery enshrouding the Cigano group. Thus, Tiago confesses:

(...) I also think it's wonderful... for example, being Cigano, because we are a very mysterious people and... they want to know more about the Cigano, beyond what he might say, and they are unable because there's nothing written, there isn't anything... that was documented on paper, that was written in books about the Ciganos, very often they ask me 'so, where did the Cigano come from?'

(man, 29 years old)

Francisco considers that "*being Cigano*" only gains meaning by comparison with the Others. Their existence and their meaning only come alive due to the ostracization faced by the Ciganos from the majority; were this not the case, the Ciganos would likely already be assimilated:

(...) all Ciganos want a home like any other Portuguese person has, all Ciganos want their children to have their own professions. Ultimately, all Ciganos want the same things that any other person, of any other social class or non-Cigano group wants to have. But, due to the ostracization... they have endogamic behaviour, and this reinforces their group status and gives them a strength that they wouldn't otherwise have.

(man, 29 years old)

For some members of the Cigano group, self-identification as a Cigano is not devoid of inner tensions or even contradictions that can be difficult to deal with. Despite being occasional situations, some of the interviewed women gave ambivalent answers to this question, manifestly unveiling the existence of inner tensions and a sort of "fractured self", to revisit one of the terms coined by Giddens (1994) on the issue of personal identity. Thus, some Ciganos verbalise a critical and negative self-identification with their ethnic self-affiliation, illustrated in the case of Cristiana who testifies that being Cigana is "*not being cultured, not respecting anyone and following traditions that in my opinion are insane*" (woman, 43 years old). This interviewee criticises the current tendency of reupdating traditions that are enacted more for the sake of habit, due to censorship and social pressure, which, in her perspective, is incomprehensible and unjustifiable.

Marta reveals some ambiguity in her self-identification as a Cigana, contesting the rigidity of some principles underlying "Cigano law", saying:

In some aspects... I like being Cigana, some days I like being Cigana, other days I don't, and I don't because that's just the way it is. I really like some things about the Cigano race and... but Cigano law just doesn't make sense to me.

(woman, 34 years old)

In turn, Lúcia notes that "*all the traditions have already ceased*", only marriage is upheld according to tradition, which she expects should endure, stressing that

The only one that I hope never ends, and it won't end, is for women to marry as virgins, but the rest has all finished. From what I can see, it has all ended.

(woman, 21 years old)

For these interviewees, the Cigano ethnic identity is increasingly devoid of content, as the traditions that are currently observed are progressively rarer and thus less used as specific identity markers of differentiation between Ciganos and non-Ciganos.

Pride in their ethnic belongings, dignity, freedom and autonomy, more than aspects of personal order, are part of their "social DNA". Marisa actually says "*because that is in one's blood*." (woman, 29 years old). The freedom so often invoked by the interviewees is also perceived as rebelliousness, which is learnt very early on in their existential contexts, as Filipe explains: "*children are naturally very restless and energetic, and where there are many Ciganos it's just like that*" (man, 29 years old).

The importance of freedom, not only in terms of action, but also concerning thinking and expression of opinions and emotions, is highlighted by Tiago as one of the aspects that the Cigano group most treasure. The interviewee admires the Ciganos as they are "*a people who never wanted to be closed in, a people that moved, and always moved outdoors...*" (man, 29 years old). Family and group socialising takes place in these contexts of freedom, in which obedience to orders and imperatives extrinsic to the group is not instilled from an early age, which partially explains the Ciganos' low predisposition to work as employees of others outside the group. This freedom, cultivated from a tender age, is reflected in the individual's independence in deciding and managing his daily life as he pleases. Jorge remarks that the Cigano can

(...) even with very few resources, decide that today I will work as a salesman, do what I please, but if I don't feel like it then I won't work as a salesman, even if I might not have enough to eat, and hey, if there's a

wedding tomorrow, I might stay there for four days, and if there's a funeral the day after tomorrow, I might be there for two days, and I don't have to explain anything to anyone.

(man, 47 years old)

This freedom in the management of personal life gives the individual plenty of free time to establish and reinvigorate social, family, neighbour and community relations. But the secrecy involved in some of their ancestral cultural traditions is an aspect that Ciganos find convenient to regularly impress upon non-Ciganos. For Simmel (2004), the fact that secrets are kept between the two groups (Ciganos and non-Ciganos) permeates the entire relationship between the two. This author defines a secret as something that offers "the possibility of a second world alongside the obvious world, and the latter is most strenuously affected by the former". The secret¹ is perceived as a sociological technique, in other words, a form of action that seeks to achieve certain goals, among which the strongly accentuated exclusion of all not within the circle of secrecy, resulting in a "correspondingly accentuated feeling of personal possession" (Simmel, 2004, p. 145).

Marta refers to the indelible difference between myth and reality and how the actual Ciganos themselves contribute to maintaining and recreating a false imagery about the group:

Because that's the way it is, the books don't tell the truth. I could be telling you a whole pack of lies. You don't know if what I'm saying is true. You understand? The books just put in writing what people say, and people never tell the truth. Believe me, I swear that I'm telling the truth now.

(woman, 21 years old)

Secrecy is kept through lying, joking and mockery, which are walls erected in defence whenever taboo subjects are touched on, that cannot be disclosed openly to non-Ciganos, such as virginity, homosexuality or death, among others. Francisco considers that these defence strategies with a very clear intentionality are activated spontaneously because these mechanisms are instilled in these individuals from a very early age.

These and other strategies to defend their actual ethnic identity, combined with their intense family and group socialising, transform the Cigano into a survivor who has withstood the hardships and more or less forced tactics of assimilation faced over the centuries. It is important to recall that Simmel's stranger does not want to be assimilated (Škorić et al., 2013), but it is clear that there is a type of game, between wanting to integrate into various dimensions of social life but at the same time wishing to preserve their culture and cultural identity, which has contributed to the lingering persistence and construction of a certain cultural representation about the Ciganos.

Final remarks

As we were able to confirm in this study, the Ciganos are in a social position of major ambivalence between the outside and inside, between the remoteness and closeness. The Simmelian stranger seeks out the similarities between himself and the community in order to find a new way to connect with others as he attempts to find his true individuality in the strange place (Motiee and Lieaghat, 2016).

There are relations of distance and closeness, the boundaries subsist, rather than being visible, they are experienced with an awareness of the tension that draws strangers and non-strangers closer together or pushes them apart in an interplay of reciprocal actions. For Simmel (1999 [1908]), the distance inside a relationship means that the close is faraway, but the actual fact of the alterity means that the faraway is close.

In core practices and values of greater social significance for the identity of the "We", particular emphasis is given to the centrality of the family, marriage according to tradition, gender inequality in the framework of relations between men and women, the way that mixed marital unions are still viewed, the role of evangelical worship in the ingroup, the crucial importance still attached to street vending and the way the group manages money, their freedom and sense of mobility.

Revisiting Simmel's analysis, there are historical and cultural differences between Jews and Roma. Bearing in mind the importance of distinctions in the treatment of these two social groups, the focus here is on their shared experiential discriminatory practices of strangeness in European contexts.

In some countries, the history of the Roma inspires connotations of roaming vagabonds who travel from town to town and whose existence is dependent on petty sales. As presumed salesmen, the Roma come and go, interacting intermittently with the majority. To the present day, the Roma are considered wanderers *par excellence* (Hadziavdic, 2012). This reference to wandering, often cited at best as a romanticised perception of Roma, a comment void of much constructive critique, remains a foremost hindrance to the recognition of the magnitude of the persecution of Roma throughout history (Hadziavdic, 2012).

Finally, the stranger is not an essentialist and fixed category, but, as we have demonstrated, consists of multiple configurations. The constitution of the stranger exists at the intersection of a series of theoretical discourses and social experiences. In the case of Cigano people, we can see this flexibility and ambivalence of discourse in various dimensions of their cultural life, fluctuating between integrative perspectives in the sociological sense, endorsement and incorporation of Portuguese societal values and standards, but also the manifestation of a desire to preserve their "strangeness", especially when it comes to aspects of Cigano identity belonging.

Note

- 1 For Simmel (2004, pp. 143–153), secrecy gives the person enshrouded by it an exceptional position, in that it puts up barriers between people and leads to intensified imagination about things unknown and mysterious.

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