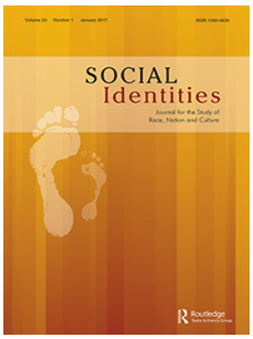

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Social Identities

Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture

ISSN: 1350-4630 (Print) 1363-0296 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csid20

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To cite this article: Olga Magano (2017) Tracing normal lives: between stigma and the will to be *Cigano*, Social Identities, 23:1, 44-55, DOI: 10.1080/13504630.2016.1227700

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2016.1227700

SOCIAL IDENTITIES, 2017
VOL. 23, NO. 1, 44–55
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2016.1227700

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Tracing normal lives: between stigma and the will to be *Cigano*

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ABSTRACT

Despite the stereotyped homogenisation of the *Ciganos* (or Gypsies/Roma) – often perceived as poor and marginalised – many have in fact taken different personal and family life paths. Taking into account a perspective of differentiated socialisation processes, social and family contexts and frames of life experiences, the aim of this paper is to present the main results obtained from a qualitative study where in-depth interviews were conducted with *Ciganos* integrated in the Portuguese labour market (as employees). Our focus is on the processes of social integration, on the many revelations of social and cultural pluralism, and on Gypsy identity, centring attentions and how such identification often serves to challenge the static and hegemonic conceptions about the cultural traits and representations of this population.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 22 October 2015
Accepted 15 August 2016

KEYWORDS
Ciganos; gypsies; social integration; social identity; social change

The background of the problem: references and practical challenges

In the 1990s, a significant number of *Ciganos*[1] joined Gypsy association movements in Portugal and in Europe, an act that brought to the public eye new insider perspectives on Gypsy culture. This participation would particularly serve to denounce the extreme poverty of some *Ciganos*, particularly of those living in camps or in substandard housing conditions (Brinca, 2009; Castro, 2012; Mendes, 2007). This empowerment of *Ciganos* through associative movements (AMUCIP, 2006), along with the visible affirmation of the existence of other *Cigano* identity forms – for example, via the appearance of famous individuals of *Cigano* origin in the media (Câmara, 2003) – has revealed different ways of life amongst *Ciganos* and various forms of interaction between them and society-at-large (Casa-Nova, 2009; Lopes, 2008; Magano, 2014).

Up until 2013, there was no legislation or social policy aimed specifically at *Ciganos*. Previous, they had been referenced in the National Action Plan for Inclusion (PNAI, 2006–2008),[2] but in a vague and generalised manner. In terms of universal policies, however, this referencing had a strong impact on a number of local projects, especially those which aimed to help *Cigano* families in their fight against extreme poverty. Historically, in Portugal, attention was first given to *Cigano* concerns with the implementation of the Special Resettlement Plan (1993) that successfully served to relocate various *Cigano*

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families suffering from substandard housing conditions. From 1997 onward, *Ciganos* became eligible to receive Social Insertion Income (SII) with the establishment of a minimum social income in order to help reduce poverty and to encourage schooling amongst *Cigano* children. There have also been many changes in health-care benefits, such as universal access to the national health-care system, free vaccination and access to a 'family doctor'. The European Union has also prepared reports and made recommendations and resolutions to promote schooling, access to housing, health and employment which culminated in the elaboration of the European Strategy for the Integration of Roma (European Parliament, 2011), a measure which has been imposed on all member states. In Portugal, this has resulted in the creation of the National Strategy for the Integration of *Ciganos* (ACIDI, 2013).

Despite the European Union and Portugal's concern with inequality and citizenship of *Ciganos*, problems of extreme poverty and exclusion, illiteracy and social discrimination continue to exist amongst this population (Bastos, 2012; ERRC/NÚMENA, 2007; European Commission, 2004; FRA, 2012). The fact is that the majority still live in socially closed off, urbanistically unsuitable, segregated territories (Wacquant, 2014).

A study carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – FRA (2012), conducted in 11 member countries, reported that 80% of Gypsy respondents belonged to households at risk of poverty, with Portugal having the highest percentage (nearly 100%). This seems to indicate that social policy reveals an inadequate gap between the cultural characteristics and the social origins of *Cigano* beneficiaries (ERRC/NÚMENA, 2007; Santos, 2013). The difficulties in obtaining fixed residence and the legislation created to regulate the ways of life and cultural expressions of *Ciganos* aim to compensate for a history of persecution, banishment, marginalisation and exclusion, a pattern common among countries with significant Gypsy populations (Fraser, 1997; Nunes, 1996). Thus, in Portugal, no different from other countries, studies on *Ciganos* report the highest rates of poverty, with this population living in inadequate and unhealthy living conditions (ERRC, 2014; Mendes, Magano, & Candeias, 2014), along with possessing high illiteracy rates, high early school dropout rates and lower levels of vocational training (CPESC, 2009; Santos, Oliveira, Rosário, Kumar, & Brigadeiro, 2009). *Ciganos* are also highly targeted by policing action when street market inspections are carried out, often resulting in the confiscation of goods and arrests (Moreira, 1999). The study by Mendes et al. (2014) shows that poverty and the exclusion of *Ciganos* in Portugal continues to exist, as proven by their continued reliance on SII. Even when they are not poor, many are still stigmatised due to the fact that stigmatisation is a form of symbolic exclusion that responds to the negative stereotypes that all representatives of an absolute membership category are, in principle, marked by numerous stigmas and stained images (Goffman, 1988 [1963]). The fact of the matter, however, is that not all Gypsies are the same.

The available data on *Ciganos* in Portugal are most often about people living in poverty and social exclusion; people who are more easily identifiable (ACIDI, 2013; CPESC, 2009; Mendes et al., 2014), who often live in social housing alongside other *Cigano* families, and are, therefore, more easily referenced by the technicians of municipalities and local projects. There are, however, *Ciganos* who have been acculturated and integrated into the Portuguese society, and who are more socially invisible. Taking employment, along with the obtaining of certain levels of education, as the main criterion for social integration (Brüggemann, 2014), these variables are used as measuring sticks when considering social

and economic integration from a sociological perspective (Berlin, 2015; Magano, 2010, 2014). For this study, social integration is understood as the participation between citizens in the setting of communal living through instances of socialisation (family, school, work, etc.) (Schnapper, 2007; Wieviorka, 2014). Our principal criterion, however, is that of employment, as a way to distinction from the traditional image of a Cigano person. There are different ways of joining and participating in mainstream society, mainly through economic (integration in production and consumer activity), social (integration in primary groups and global society through ties with social institutions) and symbolic dimensions (norms, values and collective representations that define social spaces) (Gaulejac & Léonetti, 1994). In this way, the idea of *Cigano* integration is different from *Cigano* assimilation for the concept of *Cigano* itself continues to exist, defined by those *Ciganos* who embody social norms and who participate in society through social and economic activities. They may live a more integrated life (in the midst of mainstream society), but they still possess feelings of being *Ciganos* (Magano, 2014). The objective of this study, centring on the integration of *Ciganos* in Portugal, is thus to understand and identify the social mechanisms and social and family contexts that lead to life paths that differ from those of traditional *Ciganos*.

Life path analysis – theoretical and methodological considerations

The concept of Velho's (1999) 'life project' considers an individual to be an agent with the autonomy to make life choices, even in contexts of strongly conditioned cultures. On the other hand, Goffman's concept of 'experience frames' evidences the possibility of having overlapping socialisation processes, which become embodied in varied types of frames (Goffman, [1974] 1991). In turn, in Lahire's (2003) concept of plurality of identity, the identity construction process is seen as a composite of identities that each individual accumulates, merging various identifying features that become reconfigured. These concepts allow us to see why *Ciganos* are not simple receivers of social norms and rules. In other words, they are able to internalise, reshape and rebuild in different ways what they have learned from the socialisation process (Dubet, 1996). Each individual can internalise social norms and rules in a very specific manner – this is the 'social space' referred to by Bourdieu (2001). Integrated *Ciganos* can be considered 'class defectors' by other *Ciganos* in Lahire's sense (2003), and may demonstrate a conscious desire to separate themselves from the social exclusion and marginalisation that defines the everyday *Cigano* life. *Ciganos* are, therefore, able to emerge from the social structure, break the cycles of social reproduction and have individual life projects, even if this means distancing themselves from the group they belong to and from certain values of 'tradition'. The individual can incorporate different cultural traits without exclusively being one or the other, but several at the same time, including new traits (Lahire, 2003; Maalouf, 1999).

The social and cultural transformations in Portugal, since the implementation of the democratic system in 1974, have not only impacted Ciganos (individuals and their households), but have also effected relations and interactions between *Ciganos* and non-*Ciganos*. New ways of thinking (on the part of society-at-large as well as *Ciganos*) have emerged, leading to the symbiosis and metamorphosis of cultural traits (Mendes & Magano, 2016). It is on this theoretical-methodological argument that the present study on the integration of *Ciganos* is based. In this qualitative sociological study, in-depth

interviews were conducted with the aim of learning about life trajectories and, through life stories, understand the configurations of social relations and the logic behind the actions *Ciganos* have taken in life. The aim is to learn more about their life-cycles, the sociocultural contexts in which they occur, the social institutions they involve, the social models they refer to, and the importance of family and social relationships that allow these individuals to have lifestyles different from traditional *Ciganos*. In order to trace these cycles, it was necessary to consider the socialisation processes, the social networks, the contexts in which each individual interacts and their opportunities that diversify their social relationships. Being a qualitative study, the principal criterion used for the selection of respondents was whether they had paid jobs, an obvious variable in downplaying the stereotype that '*Ciganos* do not work'. In sociological terms, the kind of work they do, their occupation, and their employment status continue to be the main variables used to define social status in contemporary societies (Schnapper, 2007). The accusation of not working and not paying taxes are the most common accusations against the *Ciganos*, along with living of state support (Silva, Sobral, & Ramos, 2012).

The Ciganos interviewed: socio-demographical profiles

The present study, carried out in Portugal, was methodologically guided by the qualitative research principals, using in-depth semi-structured interviews as the main research tool. To select participants we used the criterion of having a job. Relying on snowball sampling, we carried out 21 interviews with as many participants.

The interviews were conducted from 2008 to 2010 with *Ciganos* found all over continental Portugal, both in urban and rural areas (including such districts as Bragança, Braga, Coimbra, Lisbon and Oporto). Among the interviewees, 10 were between 20 and 30 years of age (5 men and 5 women); 8 between 30 and 40 (4 men and 4 women); 3 between 40 and 50 (all women); and 4 between 50 and 60 (all men). The social origins of respondent's parents were likewise diverse, as not all were *Ciganos*. There were six men and four women whose parents were both *Ciganos*; three men and five women whose mothers were *Ciganos*, but not their fathers; one woman and one man had a *Cigano* father and a non-*Cigano* mother; while one respondent had a *Cigano* mother and a half-*Cigano* father. In summary, 10 respondents had *Cigano* parents, while in 11 cases, 1 of the parents was not of *Cigano* origin. This diversity of parent's origins is thought to be essential in order to be able to measure different lifestyles and lifestyle influences.

With regards to levels of education, these were also diverse: for example, while one woman was illiterate, on the opposite end, two respondents held master's degrees. Five respondents held a 4th grade of education (four women and one man); one woman had completed 5th grade; one man and one woman completed the 6th grade; five respondents had a grade 9 education (three women and two men); one had a vocational diploma; two had completed 12th grade (two men); and lastly, two had earned undergraduate degrees (one man and one woman).

In terms of marital status, 19 of the 21 are married. Of these 19 interviewees, 14 have a non-*Cigano* spouses (in nine of these cases, one of the interviewees' parents is not a *Cigano*). The breakdown of the various types of unions was as follows: common law marriage with another *Cigano* ('Gypsy marriage') (four men); common law marriage with a

non-*Cigano* individual (three men and five women); legal marriage with another *Cigano* (one woman); legal marriage with a non-*Cigano* (three men and one woman); separated (two women) and single (one man and one woman). It should be noted that five women were involved in precocious consensual unions (including with and without *Cigano* partners), this in spite of them having jobs and a way of life different from that of traditional *Ciganos*.

All of the interviewees stated that they worked for an employer, which, as previously mentioned, was one of the selection criteria for the study. The women possessed the following professions: agricultural worker, caretaker of the elderly and children, cooks, waitresses, cleaners, a kindergarten teacher, a gardener, a sociocultural mediator and a professional development course attendee. The men, on the other hand, all worked in the service industry as teachers and trainers, in sociocultural mediation, service assistant, a night watchman, a technician, a police officer, and in sales and services. Nearly all of the men were previously involved in street trading (often referred to as a way of *Cigano* life in Portugal), either as a way of supporting to their parents or autonomously, in order to guarantee a level of income.

The distinction between life paths of Ciganos

The *Ciganos* studied, in most cases, live in the same places where their grandparents live or had lived, the majority having lived in what can be considered adequate housing conditions since childhood. Only one respondent mentioned having lived in shanty housing up until her parents were relocated and re-housed (in Lisbon), while another pointed out having lived with her family in a camp (in Braga). The rest of the respondents all lived in owned or rented houses, most of them in social housing. Poor housing conditions during childhood were considered by some of the respondents to having originated difficulties in other life spectrums, such as going to school with poor hygiene (due to lack of water or electricity, for example).

Mixed ancestry proved to be an important issue for the interviewees – it was an essential aspect of their life path and it had an impact on their social and family networks. Non-parental family members also had an impact on some of the interviewees' lives. For example, two women were not raised by their parents (both parents of *Cigano* origin), but instead by other family members (one by her *Cigano* grandmother, the other by a non-*Cigano* stepmother during childhood and by a non-*Cigano* aunt during adolescence). Another woman (with *Cigano* parents) was raised in a host institution. Our results thus indicate that cases exist where *Cigano* children end up not living with their parents this being due to family problems or different life situations, for example, such as divorce or separation of parents, serving a sentence of imprisonment of a parent or parents, among others.

This mix of *Cigano* and non-*Cigano* origins allows for different a socialisation processes amongst *Ciganos*, on the one hand, access to *Cigano* cultural aspects (the '*Cigano* way of life'), on the other hand, living with and learning about the cultural aspects of non-*Ciganos*. These double influences particularly have their advantages for individuals when making personal and professional choices. Without a doubt, having *Cigano* and non-*Cigano* relatives puts these individuals in a privileged situation where they develop close and constant social relationships in both cultural spheres, while learning at a young age how to move between them and how to incorporate aspects from both.

> Yes, it's true, I can't lie … I don't have much of a *Cigano* life, do I? None at all, actually! How can I say this, it's because of my life path, really, because I was brought up with my father's family which is a *Cigano* family as well as my mother's family, which isn't a *Cigano* family. I spent the first 9 years of my life with my father's family. (Woman, 26 years old, Cigano father, non-Cigano mother, 9th grade education, mediator)

Also key here is the fact that the social life in the contexts of everyday life with other *Ciganos* and non-*Ciganos* (neighbours, friends, teachers, godparents, schoolmates, etc.) is an important factor that favours the fluctuation between the various cultures universes. Referring to his path in schooling and career, one of the interviewees reinforces this idea stating: 'I had to harmonise between being in the "community" and being in Portuguese society' (Male, 24 years old, *Cigano* parents, urban) this in order to advance in life.

The concept of a *Cigano* social background can be described as 'pure', 'impure' and 'less pure', and exists as an important element to justify life paths taken and options made, which the interviewees believe to have moved them away from being a 'standard *Cigano*'. When both parents are Ciganos or when the father is a *Cigano*, there is *Cigano* purity. In the words of one interviewee:

> […] for the *Ciganos*, as long as there is a child from a *Cigano* man, even if the mother is non-*Cigano*, which happens to be my case, they are pure *Cigano*. When children are from a *Cigano* woman and a non-*Cigano* man, that child is not pure anymore. (Man, 52 years old, Cigano father, non-Cigano mother, master's degree, professor)

To sum up, it is therefore the father who passes on the purity of the *Cigano* origin. Nevertheless, while this distinction is an important one to *Ciganos*, for society-at-large, distinguishing non-*Ciganos* from *Ciganos* is often impossible, thus everyone ends up being treated in the same way – almost always in a discriminatory manner.

> A person goes to work, at work they socialise with various people, with so many different faces, but they always know when someone is a descendent of *Ciganos*! Then there is always that 'Oh, she's *Cigano*!' There is always that. But, in a way, I feel proud! Once, there was this girl, when I worked as a cleaner with her, and she said to me: 'Hey, they told me you are a *Cigano*!' I replied: 'Actually, I'm not really a *Cigano*, I'm half-*Cigano*' (Laughs). (Woman, 25 years old, Cigano mother and non-Cigano father, 9th grade education, gardener)

Some interviewees referred to themselves as having been born in an integrated family with this being the point of distinction that casts them apart from other *Ciganos*. This was particularly the case among those whose family origins are of a high socio-economic status. In this case (as was the case with two male interviewees), there is no experience of living 'among *Ciganos*'; these individuals are well aware that their lives have taken a radically different path from those of 'true' *Ciganos* who choose not to socialise with non-*Ciganos*. An often self-distinction between the *Cigano* individuals is the need to differentiate themselves from other *Ciganos*, especially the upper classes from the poorer or lower social classes (in the sense of Bourdieu's concept of distinction, 1979).

Social co-existence with non-*Ciganos* is present throughout the lives of the interviewees mainly through the frequent cases of state patronage, both in the literal and metaphorical sense, as well as from specific individuals who give them access to assets or information, such as the possibility of receiving an education. This demonstrates the importance of factors outside family and community that permit non-*Ciganos* to create life paths with

more access to social capital, information and social orientation than what is most often available to most *Ciganos* (Magano, 2012).

The women who were interviewed are also aware of their different life paths in comparison to the lives of other *Cigano* women. For some, they see their paths as personal conquests, achieved either through individual effort or with the support of family members. Our results confirm that *Cigano* women continue to have more difficulties than men in gaining access to higher education. However, cross-referencing the data on education levels with social origins reveals that the female interviewees with the highest levels of education are the offspring of mixed couples. In some cases, *Cigano* women interviewed referred to a set of values recognised as being important in *Cigano* culture but of which they have not adopted to their own everyday lives. Instead they identify with an imagined *Cigano* woman's identity (Jovanovic, 2014). On the other hand, this is not the case with the men interviewed. We are here reminded that seven of them have *Cigano* parents, while only four have parents of mixed origin. This fact stresses the difference in accessing education between genders in the *Cigano* culture (Magano & Mendes, 2014). In the case of women, being the offspring of mixed-origin parents, or being raised by relatives or host institutions, became essential factors towards proper schooling. *Cigano* men give different reasons for not completing their compulsory education, often stressing that finishing or leaving school was a personal choice, and not one dependent on parental decision. Although the level of education of the interviewees is higher than that of the previous generations, it is still below the level of compulsory education in Portugal (this is mostly the case with women) and can be explained by the continued gender discrimination in *Cigano* culture with regards to schooling.

> School? I never really went to school. No, not ever. It's like this: When I was living in my parents' house, my brothers, all of them, went to school. That's why they have a 9th, 10th grade of education. They've all got really, really high levels of schooling. But because I was the eldest – there are six of them, seven including me – I had to get up at seven in the morning, make them breakfast, get them dressed and take them to school. […] (Woman, 40 years old, Cigano parents, no schooling, cleaning lady)

Having both parents of *Cigano* origin leads to a closer relationship with other *Ciganos* through social or religious activity. Having a *Cigano* or non-*Cigano* marriage can also promote higher or lower levels of withdrawal from the '*Cigano* culture'. The families of the interviewees are smaller, possessing fewer children, this when compared to their parents' families. The tradition of the '*Cigano* marriage' is seen as a tenet of the *Cigano* culture and a rite of passage to the adult *Cigano* world. It is a tradition that implies a bride being a virgin and acts as a way of exercising control over women. Early teenage marriages and inbreeding with close relatives, for example, is the norm. Despite this, some *Cigano* women from the Trás-os-Montes region of northern Portugal stated that they were unaware of these marriage traditions along with others, such as arranged marriages, proving one's virginity as well as certain festive rituals, as often described in the *Cigano* literature on this matter (see, for example, Nunes, 1996) that focuses on male *Cigano* discourse. For some of the women interviewed, whose families still follow more traditional *Cigano* ways of life, such as inbreeding for example, forming a union with a non-*Cigano* male implies liberation from a '*Cigano* marriage'. Some interviewees referred to certain ways of getting around the more rigid traditions that often come with '*Cigano*

marriages', referring to 'elopement' or getting married 'Spanish-style', where the man and/or woman are allowed to make their own choices instead of accepting their parents' impositions.

The professional activities of the interviewees also reflect the differences in education levels between men and the women. Men hold more qualified jobs than women; the majority of women, in fact, hold unskilled jobs (only one woman is a qualified professional – a kindergarten teacher). Although most of the participants were street vendors in the past, all stopped carrying out this activity as soon as they got the opportunity to work for an employer, something highly valued for providing a fixed monthly income. One of the interviewed men, however, works for an employer during the week and continues to work as a street vendor during the weekend. He states that he tries to make 'sales' whenever he can to help balance the family budget. His example serves to indicate that it is possible to reconcile street vending and another job at the same time. Concerning the women interviewed, all but one stated that they had never worked as street vendors. Still, both men and women reported being systematically discriminated against whenever they apply for a job and when it comes to getting recognition for the work they do. In order to gain paid employment, many stated often having to conceal their *Cigano* origins. If the worker's true background is discovered, it often results in dismissal or it is used as an excuse to not promote him/her. Interviewees make reference to the fact that in order to find paid work, they need to have enormous willpower and persistence. Additionally, after getting hired, they feel that they are constantly being put to the test and have to demonstrate their skills and show what they can do.

Changes and diversity in the concept of being a Cigano

For my interviewees, their goal is often to lead a 'normal' lifestyle (in the sense of being a non-*Cigano*). Still many claim to identify with being a *Cigano*, making it known that they still feel the need to pass on to their children certain *Cigano* cultural traits, even if those traits are 'culturally imagined'; this so the offspring can learn the difference between a *Cigano* and a non-*Cigano*. One interviewee stated that he wants his son to be a '*Cigano* doctor' – that is, he wants him to be highly educated, but, at the same time, not forget his cultural identity.

Not following the '*Cigano* way of life' seems to imply that one does not feel one is a *Cigano*. That said, this demonstrates the need to revise the concept of what being a *Cigano* is, in order to incorporate new ways of 'being a *Cigano*'. 'Being a *Cigano*' can be seen from different perspectives, among them, a biological perspective, understood as an inheritance, a genetic transmission, and a matter of 'blood' and destiny. Another perspective deals with the '*Cigano* look' used in the creation of a social image of the *Cigano*, almost always linked to 'street vending', but also related to ways of dressing, walking and talking, and to how *Ciganos* relate to other *Ciganos* and non-*Ciganos*. Being a *Cigano* is also identifying with certain *Cigano* values, such as the importance of family, the union between people and festivities.

The interviewees differentiate those *Ciganos* who have 'evolved' from those who have not, as well as 'real *Ciganos*' from those who are not 'pure'. Identification with *Cigano* culture manifests itself through 'pride in being a *Cigano*', 'pride in the path travelled' and in the claiming of the right to be called a *Cigano*, despite not having the way of life

of a traditional *Cigano*. Ultimately, what matters is that *Cigano* social and cultural origins are accepted, which one of the interviewees refers to as having '*Cigano* guts'.

Final considerations: between having the mark of being a *Cigano* and wanting to be a *Cigano*

The results of this study show that *Ciganos* distance themselves from essentialist and socially dominant stereotyped representations of situations of poverty and social exclusion: these are men and women of *Cigano* origin who have become integrated. Social integration is measured by the ability to become invisible as *Ciganos* and to hold a profession different from that of what is considered *Cigano* tradition (street vending). For women, in particular, leaving the *Cigano* lifestyle is a conscious choice and one that will lead to future opportunities. The expression 'tracing a life path', as used by some of the interviewees, expresses the idea of authorship of one's life path and of the choices that will guide it.

With the growing importance of individualisation and the social division of labour in contemporary societies, it is becoming ever more difficult to be a *Cigano* in the traditional sense (Bhopal & Myers, 2008; Smith & Greenfields, 2013). Due to social and technological changes, certain jobs have disappeared. This has led to some *Ciganos* not having the needed schooling nor qualifications to find other alternatives in the work world. Also of note is the entrapment caused by certain social policies, particularly the SII. A person's or family's insertion into a new social class, as highlighted by Standing (2015), can often be defined as precariat, possessing enormous difficulties when it comes to labour market insertion, often of a nature where the job to be carried out is menial, of short duration and underpaid.

The internalisation of the non-*Cigano* way of life highlights the modern rationality of self-control (Elias, 1989 [1939]), through demonstrations of evolutionary distancing towards other *Ciganos*, the difference between the established (integrated) and other *Ciganos* (seen as non-integrated outsiders) (Elias & Scotson, 1994). The other *Ciganos* are seen as 'old-fashioned', an expression referred to in some of the discourses when discussing the different inevitable phases of integration, where those who are not integrated are considered to be less developed. This notion of 'being left behind' is represented by negative characteristics, such as lack of hygiene, inability to plan for the future (for example, not being forward-thinking and capable of saving money), interpersonal violence (situations of civil disorder), self-imposed isolation within the group and being undeserving of the respect of others. These individuals share and trigger different codes in different dimensions of their trajectories, linking to these ideologies the interpretative 'provinces of meaning' of their place in society (concept of Alfred Schütz used and developed by Velho, 1999). Being an integrated individual and a *Cigano* demonstrates the plurality of *Cigano* integration – being an integrated *Cigano* shows that identity formation is a continuous process; an individual is not only a single dimension, but a composite whole built on the accumulation of experience and representations that help to define life choices (rational choice) and plot life projects – there are composite, multiple and plural identities (Lahire, 2003; Velho, 1999).

The study of trajectories and biographies of individuals of *Cigano* origin allows us to discover singularities in the processes of integration and identity construction, the provinces of meaning and the creation of an interpretive approach, to explain the results of social

and identity integration. Integrated Ciganos move within multiple contexts, which make them a plurality of beings and products of multiple experiences, casting aside, once and for all, the static perceptions about Ciganos ways of life and identity.

The social construction of the concepts is thus somewhat artificial. As Stewart (2010, p. 2) argues:

> Our notions of 'culture,' of 'ethnic group' or 'people' are so utterly rooted in the schemes derived from practices of nation states (which are, or at least strive to be, homogeneous, neatly bounded entities) that Romany communities appear as an anomaly.

Concerning conceptions of normality, there are complex reflections that express the internalisation of diverse identity traits that leads to formulations of what is *normal* in the *Ciganos* world and what is not normal for non-*Ciganos*. In other words, as they become more integrated into society, they stop being *normal Ciganos*. Notwithstanding, they continue to feel that they are *Ciganos* and they are proud of that. Under this scenario, Okely's (2010, p. 40) perspective that 'Gypsies have been creative bricoleurs' and that 'Gypsies have continuously created and recruited their cultural autonomy with notion of authenticity in the midst of the others' space and culture' could not be more applicable.

Notes

1. In Portuguese, the word for Gypsies is that of *Ciganos*. In this text, I use the terms *Ciganos* and non-*Ciganos* (non-Gypsies) because the terms have a less pejorative sense than that of the term 'Gypsy'. The designation 'Roma' is a European political construction used only by social mediators or specific official institutions that is not used by Gypsy people themselves. For more information about this conceptual construction, see Simhandall (2009).
2. National Action Plan for Inclusion was a social action plan directed at individuals and groups that suffer social exclusion (such as immigrants, ethnic minorities, seniors, handicapped, among others). The 2006–2008 Plan was the first and only one of its kind to be carried out in Portugal.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

The research and translation of this text were supported by FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, (Foundation for Science and Technology), Portugal.

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