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Emancipation Life Paths of Portuguese Cigano/Roma Women

Olga Magano [1,2]

1   Department of Social Sciences and Management, Open University, 1250-100 Lisbon, Portugal;
    olga.magano@uab.pt
2   Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES), Iscte—University Institute of Lisbon,
    1649-026 Lisbon, Portugal

Abstract: In Portuguese society, some Cigano/Roma women, during their life paths, distance themselves from the Cigano cultural tradition, particularly in regard to marriage, schooling, employment and social life. On the one hand, there is a feeling of attachment to traditional values as family pressure to marry or in relation to gender differentiation; on the other hand, these women express a desire for empowerment autonomy and emancipation in order to draw up their own trajectories and life projects. The results obtained with 21 in-depth interviews, 10 women and 11 men, indicate that Cigano women face greater difficulties with regard to early and inbred marriage and are more prone to be victims of family and domestic violence, but they are also the main drivers of change and social transformation of Cigano/Roma families.

Keywords: Cigano/Roma women; education; emancipation; life path

1. Introduction

Cigano/Roma culture is essentially based on blood relations and customs (Gamella 2013) and characterized by a strong division of age and gender (Arias 2002). The gender issue is particularly relevant to the differentiation of roles between men and women and is an important topic to understand the way of life and the constraints experienced by Cigano women. As in other geographical contexts, Portuguese Cigano/Roma women are often victims of various inequalities, in disregard of the legal assumptions of equity (need to promote balanced representation in society) and equality (access to equal opportunities in the various areas of education and access to training and employment). Often, some women are not treated equally within the family (without equity) and prevented from accessing certain basic rights such as compulsory schooling and access to vocational training and employment (without equality). This article aims to analyse the extent to which, on the one hand, Cigano cultural traditions can condition certain life dimensions, with a particular focus on access to education; on the other, it questions the "culture" of blame and complacency on the part of state bodies when it comes to enforcing access to rights.

The analysis carried out focuses on Portuguese Cigano women, observing their life trajectories of emancipation away from family and to social involvement. The (re)affirmation of identity results from the confluence of an ensemble of factors arising from the process of socialization and of social relationships with Roma and non-Roma, but also due to the impact of the media on the transformation of ways of life and the (re)conception of gender roles and too of the family members (Arias 2002). The empirical data that support the arguments discussed are drawn from qualitative research on the social integration of Ciganos into Portuguese society.

The results inform us of the life and social trajectories of Cigano women who are often "imprisoned" (Wacquant 2014) by a hierarchical family system, seeking to detail how they negotiate their spaces of autonomy within the framework of a social and family life, often conditioned by Cigano law and morality and dominated by a patriarchal culture. Yet, diverse situations can also be found. Taking into consideration the cultural pressures

and the strength of traditions exercised over these women in terms of socialisation, the patriarchal power and the effects on their lives, the backbone of the analysis will be life portraits of Cigano women whose life paths can be distinguished from other Cigano women given their search for greater freedom.

1.1. Theoretical Context: Cigano Culture and Gender Role Differentiation

The distinction and specificity of Cigano culture in the Iberian Peninsula rests on key central values. These include the idea of a common history, the common origin of all Cigano traditions, customs and language, the value given to age and experience as structuring principles of status, the role of women, respect and worship of the dead, as well as the cohesion and differentiation of non-Ciganos (Coelho [1892] 1995; Garrido 1999; Mendes 2007; Nunes 1996; Román 1994).

For Gamella (2013, p. 19), Gitano identity rests especially on the combination of two elements: blood and customs. It is these two sources of identity that serve to distinguish Cigano people from one other and from non-Ciganos. According to this author, customs change rapidly, but blood is transmitted from one generation to the next and is fundamental to identity and in-group inclusion or out-group exclusion. Equally, reference to having Cigano blood is often pointed out by Portuguese Ciganos as one of the intrinsic characteristics for the identification of being a Cigano (Magano 2010).

As all Portuguese citizens, the Cigano are expected to actively partake in social life and to take full advantage of their rights as equal citizens in a modern democratic society. This is seldom the case, however, given that marginalisation and social exclusion are very prevalent, which leads to a collective characteristic, that of a people shrouded in poverty and who possess great difficulties in accessing a decent life (FRA 2012, 2017).

The affirmation of Cigano culture is mainly due to the importance given to marriage, through the valorisation of endogamic marriages carried out at a very young age, through a complex network of family alliances that frequently determine the lives of young people, especially girls upon reaching the age of puberty (Magano 2017; Mendes and Magano 2016). As a result, breaching everyday life for a non-Cigano with values reminiscent of a traditional patrilocal society is a task that is difficult to achieve given the presence of family pressure and socio-spatial confinement.

Cigano men have more freedom of social movement and interaction with non-Ciganos, especially with non-Cigano women, in the areas of work and daily social relations that are farther away from family members and other Cigano people. As Lopes (2008, p. 79) points out: "Masculinity has the freedom to expand, to show itself, without compromising the identity of origin". Men's freedom of movement contrasts with the conditions and limitations of women and is indicative of asymmetries at the level of sexual and gender roles. For this author, the separation between men and women is thus ritualised with each passing day and becomes noticeable in the behaviours assumed in public, in which gender division is a constant.

To a large extent, what is meant by the "Cigano identity" involves the daily reaffirmation of the differences between men and women, through the way of dressing, body postures and gestures, behaviour assumed in public spaces and tasks performed and their times (Lopes 2008, p. 85). The characteristics that often define "Cigano", however, whether they be delineated by researchers or emphasised by Cigano themselves, are almost always essentialist and tend to homogenise around certain cultural traits, often "imagined" (Anderson 2005), or revealing an idealised conception of Cigano femininity (López Rodríguez and Sanz Hernández 2017). Seldom do they take into account the diverse and cultural plurality of Cigano women and men in which negative and stereotypical representations do not facilitate the uncovering of complex, social realities in various forms of cultural expression.

Surdu and Surdu (2006) point out that, almost always, Roma women are victims of double inequality: on the one hand, because they are women; on the other, as a result of being Roma, a gender gap particularly in accessing education comes to the forefront, placing Roma women and girls in an asymmetrical position.

The situation of gender inequality and the role of imposed submission often tends to be assumed by Cigano women: it is argued that men are physically stronger, and in possessing more strength, they are in a position where their say has greater weight, which is seen as facilitating the exercise of power within the family and permits access to more opportunities within society at large. According to Lopes (2008), who carried out an ethnographic study on Cigano people in the city of Lisbon, Cigano women rarely call into question their position as subordinates or the values of male authority and female obedience; these are internalised from an early age and seen as necessary, given that they are factors of cohesion, group harmony and expected gender behaviours as attributed to different life stages. This does not mean, however, that all Cigano women accept rules and cultural impositions in the same way. Questioning or not accepting the traditional role reserved for women may lead to family conflicts, often to the point of cutting family relations (Magano 2010; Magano and Mendes 2014; Missaoui 2004).

The issue of the existence of gender inequality among Cigano women is not specific to Portugal. In Romania, for example, a number of studies reveal this equal reality of inequality in which situations of poverty are closely related to women's lack of schooling (Bitu and Morteanu 2010; Jovanovic 2014; Kóczé 2009; Surdu and Surdu 2006; Vincze 2006). Similar results have come to light in relation to Bulgaria (World Bank 2014). Portuguese girls and young women, similar to other Cigano women, have greater difficulty accessing schooling and undertaking processes of learning and often end up in disqualified and segregated environments; they experience situations of discrimination and unfriendly educational environments, which are frequently fostered by teachers and also by the educational system. Generally speaking, there is often a lack of a stimulating learning environment in terms of educational offerings, as well as positive reference models within the family or cultural group. The lack of qualifications of Cigano women at the level of basic schooling and absence of adequate vocational training means that they do not have a real option to compete in the labour market for jobs and thus are "disempowered" (Bitu and Morteanu 2010; Pereira and Magano 2016) by not having acquired basic school and professional skills that allow access to the labour market.

One of the main indicators of gender differentiation and inequality between Cigano women and men currently is that of education levels (although compliance with compulsory schooling is very seldom met, regardless of gender). The family plays an important role in maintaining this inequality with the evocation of tradition and customs regarding what is expected of Cigano girls in terms of marital commitments. The will to preserve the tradition of a Cigano marriage prevails, even if this comes into conflict with a basic right to schooling. The impediment that keeps Cigano children from carrying out their education, however, may very well constitute a violation of human rights (Mendes et al. 2014).

In general terms, the majority of Portuguese Ciganos have high rates of illiteracy, as well as a failure to complete any level of schooling, let alone completion of compulsory schooling (12 years of schooling). Research has shown that in several residentially fixed Cigano families around Portugal, the majority of members are illiterate and do not have any degree of education (Medinas 2018; Pereira 2016; Pinto 2017). Despite increased enrolment of Cigano children in school systems around the country, failure and dropout rates continue to be widespread even before the completion of the second cycle of the Portuguese school system (grade 6) (Mendes et al. 2014, p. 81). Data from a survey of the Ministry of Education (Direção Geral de Estatísticas de Educação e Ciência (DGEEC) 2020) show that the number of Cigano students enrolled in public schools decreases as the level of education advances, and this is more pronounced for girls. This survey was applied to principals of public elementary and secondary schools, within the scope of the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities (2013–2020) and reinforced in 2018, by the Council of Ministers, with Resolution 154/2018, in relation to the need to complement the design and implementation of strategic measures in the field of schooling, among others. Among the data from a national study carried out in 2014, it can be observed that males stay longer in school than females (although in either case, very few continue beyond the

sixth grade). The justification presented by Cigano families concerning young girls is based on classes being mixed. Conviviality between the sexes at adolescence, especially with non-Cigano males without the supervision of the family, is seen as a danger to maintaining the tradition of female purity and is thus restricted (Mendes et al. 2014).

The decision concerning what women can and cannot do is under the control of men (e.g., husband, father) (Casa-Nova 2009; Lopes 2008; Magano 2010). It is also the male figure that oversees conversations they may have and declarations they may make. The same applies to work or the possibility of having a job outside the family home. Within the Cigano household, the idea of women reconciling outside employment with their domestic and maternal duties is perceived as impossible. In order to do so, they thus need the authorisation of their husbands and/or family (Mendes et al. 2014).

1.2. The Importance of Marriage to Cigano/Roma Portuguese Families

Given the differences that can be seen in terms of territory, the education of a Cigano girl is generally carried out keeping in mind their marriage to someone (Cigano) who must be approved by the family. Family alliances formed through marriage are still the heart of Cigano culture. They seek to ensure parental dominance within a group, through forms of commitment that involve planned marriages, sometimes promised or agreed upon even before the child is born (Magano 2010; Nunes 1996). Such promises or agreements establish alliances and end up having real consequences in the lives of the children and their parents. Research has made reference to such promises and agreements (Lopes 2008; Magano 2010; Mendes 2007; Silva 2014), as often pointed out by social workers working on local projects with Cigano families, as well as by Cigano people themselves. These planned marriages are also frequently pointed out as key factors in justifying school drop-out (Magano 2014; Mendes et al. 2014; Silva 2014).

Despite the strength of Cigano traditions, however, some freedom of choice is often referred to as being permitted to women when it comes to who they will marry (Gay y Blasco and Arias Lagunas state the same for Spanish Roma). At the time of concretising the conjugal alliance, the bride is given the possibility of breaking the commitment assumed by her parents, an act called "giving gourds" (Nunes 1996; Silva 2014) or "a withdrawal" (Magano 2010, 2014). These rituals of acceptance or rejection of the commitment of marriage are an elaborate way of preserving the girl's family honour (along with the fact that this is the only way a Cigano girl is able to choose her own Cigano boyfriend) (Casa-Nova 2009).

The preservation of female virginity is seen by both men and women as part of the Cigano culture as a sign of honour and respect for tradition. Failure to comply with this ritual is seen as an "embarrassment" to the family, a daughter's dishonour before her parents and the group (Casa-Nova 2009; Lopes 2008; Magano 2010; Nunes 1996). Cigano women function as the strength and weakness of the family, given that in them lies the pride and honour (or dishonour) of men (father, brother, fiancé, husband). However, the goal of preserving virginity until marriage makes her a hostage to the family, preventing her from prolonged schooling or professional undertakings outside of the domestic sphere. She is under the control of the family and under the watchful eye of men (Casa-Nova 2009, p. 140), who condition her social relationships.

Marriages between Ciganos, and especially within the group itself, are the most valued and desired. However, there are also exogamous marriages, both with non-Ciganos and with Ciganos from other groups who may possess different values when it comes to marriage traditions, and there are also instances of marital separations. Sometimes, the marriage of a Cigano woman to a non-Cigano man is less accepted than if it were the other way around, due to the fact that Cigano women are understood as being easier to assimilate (Magano 2014). Furthermore, the marriage of a Cigano man to a non-Cigano woman is more highly accepted, given that there is a greater tendency to stay within the culture. If Cigano women—who are thought to owe obedience to their husbands—are to marry a non-Cigano, it is believed (even expected) that they will follow their husband, and thus, the tendency to stop following the Cigano culture is more likely. When exogamous marriages

take place, according to the interviewees, the family is thought to be "less valuable" to the Ciganos (it is thus a situation in which one's individual act has consequences for the whole family) (idem). The preference that many hold for inbred marriages, to the detriment of exogamous marriages, is owed to the fact that marrying a non-Cigano is understood as a form of contamination of the "Cigano race". Frowning on the idea of crossing blood, marriages with people who share consanguinity or possess relations of affinity are thus preferred (Bastos et al. 2007, p. 213). Data from a national study on Ciganos (Mendes et al. 2014) reveal that the average age of marriage for this population is much lower than the national average.

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology adopted for this study was a qualitative approach with the application of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The sample is not representative from a statistical point of view due to the lack of official data on Cigano people in Portugal. A convenience sample was constructed according to the criteria defined for the study (Creswell 2014). Snowball sampling was used, and content analysis was performed of the narratives, with coding into categories and subcategories, following the guidelines by Bardin (2000). The study was carried out between 2008 and 2010, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 (47.6%) women and 11 (52.4%) men, residents of the cities of Bragança, Braga, Coimbra, Porto and Lisbon. Since the study was carried out, there has been a significant increase in the education level of Roma people, but they still remain at levels much lower than the national rates, with few cases of secondary education completion (12 years of compulsory education) and pre-eminence for higher education (Mendes et al. 2014; Direção Geral de Estatísticas de Educação e Ciência (DGEEC) 2020). This article focuses on interviews with Cigano women, mainly on gender roles, but also on the analysis of more recent transformations in Portuguese society in terms of activism and facing the Cigano social issue.

2.1. Participants

To select participants, we used the criterion of their having a job. Relying on snowball sampling, we carried out 21 interviews with the same number of participants. Of the interviewees, 10 (47.6%) were between 20 and 30 years of age (5 men and 5 women); four (19%) between 30 and 40 (four men and four women); three (14.3%) between 40 and 50 (all women); and four (19%) between 50 and 60 (all men). The social origins of the respondents' parents were also diverse, as not all were Ciganos. This diversity of parental origins is thought to be essential in order to be able to measure different lifestyles and lifestyle influences.

As regards levels of education, these were also diverse: while one (4.8%) woman was illiterate, at the opposite end, two (9.5%) respondents held Master's degrees. Five (23.8%) respondents had education through fourth grade (four women and one man); one (4.8%) woman had completed fifth grade; one man and one woman (9.5%) had completed the sixth grade; five (23.8%) respondents had a grade 9 education (three women and two men); one (4.8%) had a vocational diploma; two (9.5%) had completed 12th grade (two men); lastly, two (9.5%) had gained undergraduate degrees (one man and one woman).

In terms of marital status, 19 of the 21 are married (90%). Of these 19 interviewees, 14 (66.7%) have a non-Cigano spouse (in nine of these cases (47.7%), 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 ("Cigano marriage") (four men, 19%); common-law marriage with a non-Cigano individual (three men and five women, 38%); legal marriage with another Cigano (one woman); legal marriage with a non-Cigano (three men and one woman, 19%); separated (two women, 9.5%) and single (one man and one woman, 9.5%). It should be noted that five women (23.8%) were involved in precocious consensual unions (including with and without Cigano partners), in spite of them having jobs and a different way of life 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 had the following

professions: agricultural worker (1), caretaker of the elderly and children (1), cooks (1), waitresses (1), cleaners (2), a kindergarten teacher (1), a gardener (1), a sociocultural mediator (2) and attendee in a professional development course (1). The men, on the other hand, all worked in the service industry (1) as teachers and trainers (2), in sociocultural mediation (2), a service assistant (2), a night watchman (1), a technician (1), a police officer (1), and in sales and services (1). Nearly all of the men were previously involved in street trading (73%), often referred to as a way of Cigano life in Portugal, either as a way of supporting their parents or autonomously, in order to guarantee a level of income.

The women interviewed were between the ages of 25 and 45. Concerning marital status, eight of the participants are married (80%) (legally or common-law) and have non-Cigano men as partners. Of the remaining two, one is married to a Cigano man (10%), while the other is single (10%). Almost all marital unions occurred before the age of 20, and all have fewer children than their progenitors (between one and two children). As regards levels of education, these were also diverse: one woman was illiterate (10%); four held a fourth-grade education (40%); one woman completed the sixth grade (10%); three women had a grade 9 education (30%); lastly, one had gained an undergraduate degree (10%).

2.2. Procedure

Participants were informed of the objectives of the study and authorized their participation in the interview and for it to be recorded, according to the ethical research criteria for informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews lasted about two hours each on average and were conducted mostly in the interviewees' homes, but also in public spaces such as cafes and gardens. The interviews were transcribed in full, and the narrative speeches reflect the participants' verbalizations.

2.3. Material and Data Collection Instrument

A script was used to conduct the interviews, taking into account the theoretical framework on Ciganos in Portugal and in other countries, with questions on social integration and identity issues, as well as questions of culture and social relations (Goffman [1974] 1991). This is understood as being relevant to the social and symbolic spaces in which individuals move and interact. The interview guide has topics related to the biographical path, for example, for the socio-biographical record, variables such as age, profession or professional occupation, education and marital status were considered (in the cases where respondents were married or living in a de facto union, it was of interest to know if it was a union with a Cigano or non-Cigano) and the place of residence. But, the script also has questions related to life trajectories around schooling, work, social relations, etc., but also aspects related to cultural or identity traits that potentially inhibit or facilitate social integration processes (for example, a set of items related to the feelings of identification with the Cigano culture).

The diversification criterion was used for the number of interviews, according to gender, age, professional activities and saturation of information (Bertaux 1997).

2.4. Data Analysis

In the analysis of the data, we used the dimensions and categories of the interview guide and configured a characterization of the interviewees. This methodological process allowed a general notion about the volume and quality of the information available to be obtained, in addition to the diversity of information at our disposal. How do we make sense of the set of information without losing the richness of meaning? This was followed by an open-ended analysis in which the analysis framework was not previously fixed in which the biographical profiles were elaborated, discovering the "thesaurus" of the interviewees, the organization of the corpus through an analytical analysis grid and the choice of categories. Refer to the text variables that cut and organize the discourse (Poirier et al. 1995, p. 101). Dimensions of categorization were redefined on three major axes: social paths, integration and Cigano identity (what constitutes "being a Cigano"). For the validation of the data obtained, we resorted to triangulation, comparing and discussing the results with those

obtained through other investigations and with a national and foreign bibliography, as well as supporting sociological theories. The first axis concerns life paths, aggregating the categories related of places of the path of each one in relation to social and physical contexts, social ancestry (being or not descending from mixed families), the socioeconomic conditions of origin, the social status of families, the paths school and work, social relationships and distance from other individuals of Cigano origin. In the second axis, about integration, the discourses following the main dimensions of integration referenced by the bibliography were analysed (economic, social and symbolic) considering school, housing, health, work and participative citizenship. In the third axis, the anchoring axis of being a Cigano, we present results related to the feeling of identification with being a Cigano, the perspective of the "destiny" or the fatality of having a Cigano origin—a mark that imposes itself on their life experiences and which are referenced by the feelings of discrimination and racist attitudes of which they feel victims. The interviews were conducted in 2010 with Cigano women "integrated" in the labour market, and they allowed us access to the views of other Cigano women. However, since then, some changes have taken place with a significant increase in Cigano women involved in higher education courses, in activist movements against racism, as well as in Cigano feminism (see news items from newspapers, as happens in other countries), and this information was included in the triangulation with our data.

3. Results

Our analysis in this text focuses on the discourses of the women interviewed, their life paths and their thoughts on gender issues and the role of Cigano women and observing their life trajectories of emancipation away from family and social involvement. The empirical data that support the arguments to be discussed draw on qualitative research on the social integration of Ciganos into Portuguese society.

3.1. The Upbringing of Cigano Women for Early Marriage

Most references to Cigano culture highlight the importance of marriage. In fact, in many families, Cigano girls are prepared for marriage from birth, some "having their hand asked for" when still children, some even before they are born (through agreements between their parents). The practice of arranged marriages is a tradition some claim to be in disuse, but which is still in practice, albeit in a more flexible form. According to our interviewees, however, it is a practice that continues to exist, though certain rules have become more flexible. Allowing the final decision to marry or not to be made by the supposed future bride is one such example, implying that the commitment assumed by the parents when she was a child or before she was born will not come to fruition (Magano 2010, 2014). Marriages have traditionally been arranged between the parents of the bride and groom, something that is quite often still carried out today.

The value and symbolism that shroud women's virginity reveal these modes of hierarchy in the way that the individual morality of women and the honour of men and the group conjoin during the moment of the Cigano wedding. This act is seen as crucial to the survival of the Cigano identity, as well as being a form of exalting their separation from mainstream society and acknowledging their moral superiority, which produces and reintroduces the pride of being Cigano. The proof of virginity ritual is termed as "the removal of clothes" or simply "the test". The practice is still common within the families of many of those interviewed for this study is referred to by Gay y Blasco (1997) regarding Madrid Gitanos and also by Lagunas Arias (2002, 2009) for Catalan Gitanos.

For the women in this study, Cigano marriages continue to assume a central cultural role in defining Cigano cultural values. Rituals tied to marriage impact all stages of life in the lives of those who remain attached to the "Cigano way of life". Among the participants, however, degrees of importance of tradition will vary depending on whether the respondent is completely of Cigano origin or not. In the case of those who descend from mixed marital unions, the call for traditional purity tends to be more loosely defined.

A way to escape the commitment assumed by the parents is through "fuga" (eloping) with the male partner they truly want to be with, and then returning: the family will eventually accept the union sooner or later. Thus, along with the "withdrawal" outlet, these two means make it possible to get around rigid traditions tied to marriage. This process of "eloping" and return allows young women to make their own choices when it comes to who they will marry, as opposed to accepting their parents' demands, all the while saving family money with the wedding party. Marriages deriving from "a withdrawal" or "eloping" are shorter in time, will include fewer guests and are seen as reinventions of traditional Cigano weddings.

The interviewees have a tendency to express themselves about their lives by comparing themselves with other Ciganos and non-Ciganos. Some of those interviewed intentionally shied away from the possibility of Cigano marriage and the rituals associated with it by purposely engaging in relationships with non-Cigano men. From the point of view of Cigano culture, in doing so, they became "impure" and, thus, were no longer permitted a Cigano marriage. For these women, as made clear in their narratives, such a decision to not maintain tradition allowed them a certain degree of freedom, permitting them to move away from the strict rules often imposed on Cigano women.

In relation to women's virginity ("purity") at the time of marriage, opinions vary: some interviewees argued that it is a tradition that should be maintained, while others believe it should be done away with, given what some consider "its extreme outrageousness towards women". For those women who defended the second perspective, it is their understanding that, under this tradition, Cigano women continue to have to submit to what men want, possessing very little autonomy and freedom.

But also highlighted, however, are changes regarding this custom: "The younger Ciganos no longer care about the (virginity) test" (woman, 29 years old). Other interviewees, on the other hand, understand that the pressure for early marriage is a situation that many Ciganos simply cannot escape, and as a result, traditional ways of life continue to be reproduced. The internalisation of family pressure to marry in the traditional form continues and, as a result, leads to early marriages among Cigano girls who often lack any other alternative. If they extend their schooling, they end up being put aside by the family, considered as being defiled by their contacts with non-Ciganos. Such pressures lead them to submit to circumstances where early marital unions become a fact (Magano 2014).

3.2. Married Cigano Women: A Dream Come True or Continuity of Submission?

Among Cigano women interviewees, the possibility of marrying a non-Cigano man can be understood as an opportunity to get away from the Cigano group, to become more like "gentlemen" or "ladies", as well as a way of acquiring freedom and autonomy away from the Cigano world. The women interviewed who opted to marry non-Cigano men made no mention of ever considering marrying a Cigano man—that was never an alternative for them as these kinds of men are associated with a way of life they claimed they do not identify with.

These females recognise gender inequality in terms of marital choice: they understand that Cigano men are more likely—regardless of who they marry—to be well accepted by the wife's family, as long as the wife continues "a Cigano way of life", the husband continues to live according to "Cigano culture", and they embody their daily family life in accordance with the "Cigano way of life". This must be assured through negotiations and a process of acceptance by relatives from both sides, be they Cigano or not. In the case of women, however, such negotiations and acceptance are not always possible when the husband is non-Cigano. In one of the cases reported, the union with a non-Cigano man led to a rupture with the family of origin.

> "I did not spend much time with the Ciganos. I did when I was a little child, when I was obliged to go with my parents, and I had to. But from the moment when I considered myself my own boss, I left that behind. I always spent more time with the aldeanos, because for me there are people who don't, don't get there, they don't have the mentality,

they seem to be backward and they haven't evolved, it seems like they are fixed and those ideas carry on, right? And then, it is like this, if a person wants to have another kind of life, society says he cannot join in, he has to try to choose other paths, and in a way I also criticize many things in relation to Ciganos". (woman, 25 years old, Cigano mother and non-Cigano father, urban area)

Gender difference among Ciganos is also different when it comes to the widowhood and grieving: while male widowers are allowed to remarry, in the case of women, this is prohibited and considered taboo. During the phase of mourning a spouse's passing, deep manifestations of pain are expected. It is the solidarity of family and other Ciganos who must provide to meet their needs for survival and of their younger offspring, if this is the case (Pasqualino 1996).

3.3. Cigano Women as Victims of Violence

Portuguese law allows marriage from the age of 18, and it is possible to marry from the age of 16, with the authorization of the mother and father (or whomever has guardianship) of the minor who wants to marry, or if at the registry of civil registry, this authorization is waived. Until that age, marriage is not allowed[1]. However, there are frequent allusions to Cigano "marriages" with young people under the age of 16 (Lopes 2008; Magano 2010; Mendes et al. 2014).

Family violence (upon girls and women) and marital violence (husbands on women) is an issue that is often hidden, unrevealed and sometimes accepted by Ciganos in general. From the interviews carried out, narrative accounts revealed cases in which women were victims of violence, both by family and by (male) spouses. In some cases, having been victims of domestic violence led to removal from the Cigano family, but complaints of violence to the police or to the Commission for the Protection of Minors are not common despite the legal framework for the protection of victims of domestic violence[2].

(. . .) some of them don't even let women take the [contraceptive] pill, they want four or five children. The men go out and about and the women stay at home. When the girl says: "where have you been?", she is beaten. They take offence, and she gets beaten. You curl your hair, you go out selling, you come back, you put on your slippers and do your things at home. And they go out and about, drinking and hanging out with friends. They do what they want to do until 10 at night. And the girl, the woman, is always mistreated, always a slave. Cigano women are always slaves unless one day they try to get away and make a little life for themselves, then they may be able to. (woman, 45 years old, Cigano parents, urban area)

Furthermore, although marital separation between Ciganos is an issue that has been ignored scientifically, it is a phenomenon that also exists. Among our interviewees, for example, two are separated: in one case due to domestic violence and the other due to her partner being a drug addict and violent. References to other stories related to marital separations of relatives were also pointed out as being frequent, some referring to their own parents, which, as a consequence, led to them having been raised by other family members (Missaoui 2004). Perhaps Cigano women can only have this perception normally after negative marital experiences and somehow manage to free themselves from "Gypsy law" when they meet other marital and family "models" (Gay y Blasco 2011).

In this research, this aspect also emerges: manifestations of feeling the need to "leave" the Cigano life in order to move away from the daily contact with other Ciganos, often described as violent and aggressive, in exchange for a quieter life. For these women, moving away from the group and the "Cigano way of life" was a conscious and deliberate choice, thought to be the best alternative in order to seek out other life opportunities and to raise a family under different rules.

Work carried out by Magalhães (2005) in Lisbon describes situations of violence against Cigano women by family members on a daily basis. Furthermore, according to Bastos et al. (2007, p. 152), male violence is often tolerated, expected and even "codified" as an element of

Cigano culture. When such violence is taken to extremes due to alcoholism, drug abuse or mental health issues, a married woman can turn to her parents and older family members, who will often accommodate her. Before doing so, however, her parents or family members will try first to resolve issues with her husband. Generally speaking, violence against Cigano women is accepted not only by men, but also by women (Magalhães 2005; Lopes 2008).

The women interviewed indicated that Cigano girls start working early on within the family, ensuring the care of younger siblings and housework, often replacing their parents in carrying out these responsibilities. In addition to household work, however, Cigano girls also start work at the fairs and markets, engaging in all processes of the sales trade, from assembling structures to the actual carrying out of sales. Men are responsible, above all, for negotiations and the acquisition of products to be sold. Considering the roles of women in the Cigano world of commerce, the female labour force is thus of utmost importance to the survival of the family and the group (Mendes et al. 2014). Still, it is essential to point out that women are often given the role of domestic labourers and family caregivers by men who tend not to value the other tasks women carry out outside the domestic realm.

Despite the cultural and social pressures that come from the family and within group, it is common for Cigano women to make important decisions concerning their own lives and their own bodies. For example, these women have made decisions to use contraception (Casa-Nova 2009; Silva 2005), return to school, to engage in vocational training or get a job outside the group (Magano 2014).

"I knew where I stood, I always did what they bade me, I knew where I stood, I was sad because they called me ridiculous names: b... and gross. . . . I couldn't go to the cafe . . . . I had a friend, also of "our race" (she said) "Maria", come and have a coffee with me, it's okay", but no, I couldn't even get myself ready to go out. If they saw me putting clothes on, well, that would be it! It was all ugly names that they called people and I didn't want to be like that, so when I was 18, I met the father of my children and did a very smart thing—I ran away (. . .) I tried to get away to have a quieter life. To be able to work, make my life. Because they just want to sell stuff. For them, the best thing is selling, never leaving that, always selling. It's bad at the sales, but school doesn't want us, kids can go to school until fourth grade but then they leave, they make no effort to explain that from now on, you'll feel the lack of school, you need it to get a job anywhere. (. . .) The poor woman is going to be a wretch her whole life unless they run away like I did. Venturing out because her parents beat her, come looking for her and so she runs away from home . . . That's the only way!" (woman, 45 years old, Cigano parents, urban area).

Concerning the search for employment (all interviewees work as employees outside Cigano families), reported cases of discrimination when it comes to searching for work are due above all to the fact that employers often do not want to hire the individual once they find out he/she is Cigano. The structural conditions of society have different impacts on individuals and families according to their social status based on the level of education and professions developed and, consequently, on the production and reproduction of situations of social inequality, discrimination and racism, but also situations of poverty and spatial and social segregation (Magano and Mendes 2021; Wacquant 2014). Access to the labour market, therefore, is seen as systematically hampered when employers become aware of the potential employees' origins: often, employers will come up with excuses in order not to hire a Cigano candidate or pursue a dismissal if they find out that the worker is Cigano (as confirmed by Pereira 2016), but also because they do not have the necessary skills to compete in the job market due to low levels of education (the case of Cigano women with 12 years of schooling) and professional training (Magano and Mendes 2021) is still residual. In the case of the women in this study, situations of economic deprivation and poverty were frequently pointed out as reasons why they had to search out other ways of living, with the aim of escaping the "Cigano lifestyle". They also pointed to these factors to explain why they entered the workforce very early in life, often maintaining the desire to achieve financial autonomy as a personal goal. In large part, the educational levels of the interviewees are low, though higher than the majority of Cigano women who continue to

be hampered by the cultural and social role attributed to Cigano women by staying close to Cigano traditions, the family and the group. These issues were often raised and discussed by the interviewees, referring to their own life histories to describe things they desired, but were not allowed by their family because they were girls. Not all the interviewees attended school as children, for example, something that takes on greater relevance given the age of the women interviewed, all of whom are young women.

In addition to economic difficulties and family responsibilities, other reasons cited for early school leave include, as previously touched upon (although not explicitly mentioned by any of the interviewees), the fear of parents seeing their daughters have daily contact with non-Cigano boys—seen as a threat to the preservation of virginity—as well as schools often being far from where they live.

Cigano women generally perceive schooling and vocational training programmes as opportunities to improve their lives (Magano 2010, 2014; Pereira and Magano 2016). At the same time, however, they are aware that going down such a route presents many difficulties to overcome, be it on the part of Cigano families, or from the social support institutions responsible for public education and training.

Despite several cases of current women activists who are in higher education and also of our interviewees, the role of Portuguese Cigano women continues to be characterised by their submission and as frequent victims of aggression, first within their own families, then by their husbands. Situations of violence and aggression are aspects mentioned only by women, perhaps owing to the fact that it is they who experience such violence and aggression first-hand. The submission of Cigano women to their male counterparts is often exacerbated by the lack of economic and financial autonomy. Although Cigano women work in both the domestic space, as well as in the family's realm of economic activity, they do so without having the freedom to choose another profession or line of work. Cigano women cannot work outside the family, only within it (Lopes 2008; Nunes 1996).

The interviewees, on the other hand, acknowledge that they are different from the stereotypical image attached to Cigano women. Given that most either no longer live or have never lived with Cigano men, this makes it unfeasible to completely be part of a Cigano family, a factor that serves to justify their own removal from the "Cigano way of life". For these women, who can now be considered outsiders, the "Cigano woman", as they perceive her, continues to be a subordinate, a slave, a victim of violence who will get punished if she does not abide by the rules.

In some cases, their distancing from the Cigano family was also due to mistreatment. Among the interviewees, there were frequent references to aggression and violence that led to the desire to keep a distance from family and the "Cigano way of life". This issue is still under-recognized, especially by Cigano men and other women.

Exploitation and mistreatment of women often begin early in a girl's life, most often within the family, commencing with girls frequently being mistreated by their male siblings (Ilisei 2013).

3.4. Signs of Change: The Fight against Gender Inequality and the Emancipation of Cigano Women

The discontent and non-acceptance on the part of Cigano women, as conveyed by the interviewees, are understood by the way Cigano girls and women are bound to restrictions and strong family and group control. As a result, they have to find ways to deal with such issues. Modern ways of dealing with family restrictions, influenced by greater contact with the "outside world", therefore, permit increased relations with non-Ciganos, which, in turn, increase the greater likelihood of marital unions by choice and not by the parents' imposition. Resulting from this, the "fuga" is now an ever-growing ritual among young Ciganos, increasingly accepted by families and understood as a cultural trait incorporated into Cigano culture (Magano 2010, 2014).

In terms of educational pathways, taking into consideration the lack of incentives on the part of parents for prolonging schooling and the often-exhibited pride in not having their children in school, some of the women interviewed attributed to themselves the

strength they had to overcome social and family obstacles in order to succeed in prolonging their studies. These women are aware of the uniqueness of their journeys; they know they are rare cases compared to most Cigano women, having had the capacity to move away from what tradition expects of women. School attendance continues to be seen by these women as a still unfinished achievement, because Cigano girls continue to be withdrawn from school at a very early age based on the foundation of cultural traits that distinctively discriminate against their gender, from childhood right up to adult age. For this reason, there are still very few cases of Cigano women who have completed their compulsory education or who have a post-secondary education (Mendes et al. 2014).

The expression "to trace out life" often used by the interviewees reflects the essence of the life project carried out by these women. During adolescence, the participating women pointed out that it was important to take a break from the "Cigano world" and to relate socially with non-Ciganos. This was particularly emphasised where there is a non-Cigano parent in order to get to know one's non-Cigano side. The reasons given for distancing from Cigano family members is justified by the desire to lead a non-Cigano life (on the one hand, explained by their wish to be closer to non-Cigano relatives and friends; on the other, non-Cigano marital or professional options also contribute to understanding their distancing).

This interviewee moved away from the Cigano side of her family (her father's side) during her adolescence because of an attempt to forcefully have her marry a Cigano man. She states that the attempts to marry her off were constant. The option to distance herself from the Ciganos emerged as a personal life project, a plan that was consciously drawn up and guided by her desire to be free.

> *"I'm very happy with who I am, I'm happy with my life. I like my life! I like this freedom . . . if I had been born a man, I do not know. Men have more perks!". (Woman, 26 years old)*

4. Discussion

In Portugal, there are no educational policies aimed exclusively at Roma people, but since the 2016/2017 school year, there is a program that awards scholarships to Roma students in higher education; this is the OPRE Chevale program—Operational Program for the Promotion of Education[3]. This program has continued since that date, and there are already licensees under this program. More recently, a support program for Roma students in basic and secondary education was launched—Roma Educa[4].

This study was based on interviews with Portuguese women who are integrated into the labour market and are employees, and this is reflected in the results obtained. This distinguishes it from studies carried out in more circumscribed social and territorial contexts and also from more traditional Cigano families: the women in the study describe their way of life as "normal" (meaning different from the Cigano way of life). In that they do not see any differences between themselves and other non-Cigano women, in terms of work, dress, daily habits, family relations, etc. On the other hand, they do see their lives as different from the "Cigano way of life" that they left behind. The way they describe the lives of Ciganos reveals a "non-normalised" perspective within society at large, and they place themselves at a distance from these individuals. The interviewees often feel a need to emphasize their self-distinction in relation to other Ciganos based on the different ways of life based on work for others, distancing themselves from other Cigano people in their daily relationships and residential areas where there are greater numbers of Ciganos. It is from these perspectives that they define themselves in relation to others, Cigano and non-Cigano. Usually, social relations are thought of in terms of discursive narrative, as dichotomous, as Ciganos among themselves and between Ciganos and non-Ciganos, referring to cultural diversity and heterogeneity. The representation of the "Cigano way of life" is thus shaped by the way one acts and presents oneself, how one speaks and dresses and by a distinctive code that distinguishes them from other Ciganos, diluting them instead among non-Cigano people.

These women have dealt with both Cigano and non-Cigano people from a very early age, and their interactions with Ciganos were of a socially intense nature during their childhood, but became less so after reaching adolescence. The social mix brought about by exogamy and/or the close relations between Ciganos and non-Ciganos develops feelings of duplicity, of identity hybridism, brought about by the fact that some are only half Cigano. This situation led to adjustments and shunning any identification with and their sense of belonging to what it is to be a Cigano in the traditional sense. This, however, does not mean that they no longer feel like they are Cigano in their own right, blood and sense of being.

The type of job held by the interviewees contributes to their feeling of "normality", considering their experience in a society that is based on work and is structured in relation to the exercise of professional activities that assign social status (Bourdieu 1979; Schnapper 2007). Having a paid job, in addition to permitting a fixed income and serving to structure their way of life in terms of having a work schedule, also favours the creation of social relations with co-workers and other people that compose the social networks they are a part of and contributes to defining their social status and their financial independence as regards the family. As a result, this places them closer to society at large, while at the same time distancing them from their Cigano culture.

In relation to insertion in the labour market, there is a perception that "no one employs Ciganos" (woman, 40 years old) and that there are often "difficulties in finding means of survival" (woman, 36 years old), something that is aggravated by " . . . difficulties in selling. Need for other occupations . . . " (woman, 26 years old).

The women in this study consider that they dress in a "non-Cigano" fashion and wear clothes the same as those worn by other women: trousers, dresses, etc. This is considered to be of great important in order to affirm their social image between being Cigano and non-Cigano even when it can be seen that other Cigano women have not worn this type of Cigano clothes for a long time, but it continues to be part of the imagination.

The supposed closure of "Ciganos" in "community" takes the form of a family-centred social organisation during the course of daily life, implying non-participation in the social life of society at large, reserving cultural traits and values for themselves. In the case of those women who participated in this study, the "Cigano way of life" is dispelled by the way these women represent themselves, in their way of standing, how they talk and dress and by distancing themselves from the distinctive codes that define Ciganos, all the while diluting them among non-Ciganos. They want to get away from the stigmatised image of "I can tell right away that you're a Cigano" (woman, 26 years old) and to distance themselves from social stigmas attributed, in an essentialist manner, to all individuals of Cigano origin. The stigma in relation to the Cigano origin translates into concrete situations, which, in a certain manner, impose the almost hegemonic strategy of the concealment of the Cigano identity. The perceptions of others, concerning what it is to be a Cigano, thus negatively influence their daily lives. In this manner, stigmas are social marks that are embedded (Goffman [1963] 1988) in people's lives and are often difficult to distance oneself from. It is an issue that concerns social differentiation, which, according to the social normality established in the dominant surrounding society, is stigmatising and hierarchical. For Wieviorka (2002), there are marks that forever remain. Even when one tries to hide certain characteristics, such markings in their lives make this impossible. In this case, the "branding" of the Cigano origin clings to the identity of these women and the path they lead. At any moment, it can define the lives of these people, even when they opt to search out life paths that move them away from the daily experience of other Ciganos and their families.

Limitations of the Current Study and Directions for Future Research

This study took place in a period prior to the existence of a European and national strategy for the integration of the Roma, and at the time, it was difficult to find Roma women and men who were educated and work for employers who agreed to participate in the research. After this time, by virtue of some public policies of social protection, such as

the social impact of insertion and educational policies in the families' life's, the proposal of alternative school paths and some grants for Roma students in basic, secondary and higher education, these made the number of Roma people with a higher education and the number of activists for the Roma cause grow significantly.

It would be important to continue this investigation in a broader way, in terms of sample size and diversification of places of residence of Roma people, in order to account for the regional asymmetries that are felt in terms of schooling and entry into the labour market, especially by Cigano/Roma women, and to understand how they reconcile their paths of emancipation in relation to family and traditions.

5. Conclusions

Often, there is a gap between discourses that tend to reproduce stereotyped ideas of what are considered to be Cigano cultural traits, much in line with the concept of "imagined community" (Anderson 2005), and the life practices and pathways of this study's interviewees, who have opted to move away from the traditional Cigano way of life.

Cigano women continue to be characterised by their submission to men during all life stages, limiting their freedom of choice and access to compulsory schooling and making them play a very intense role within the family, one that does not prepare them for public life or an external social life outside the family. It has been revealed here, however, that not all Cigano women fit fully into this representation: certain Cigano women are emancipated, and several are in higher education and in associative and feminist movements.

Furthermore, although the life trajectories of the Cigano women in this study are set apart from Cigano traditions, they preserve a sense of anchorage to "the feeling of being Cigano", even though they strongly distinguish themselves from other Cigano women who have been studied in other contexts (Casa-Nova 2009; Lopes 2008). The continuous social transformations are reflected in their life conditions, as well as the way they think and act, leading to a dynamic process of social change and, as a result, altering the way they feel about being Cigano and how to actually be a Cigano (Associação para o Desenvolvimento Mulheres Ciganas Portuguesas (AMUCIP) 2006). This mismatch ultimately leads to a degree of distancing in terms of cultural practices, social relations and a sense of symbolic belonging to an "imagined community".

To conclude, it has been confirmed here that the vast majority of Cigano women encounter difficulties when it comes to school attendance and gaining professional qualifications. This pattern has also been neglected by official state entities (the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, Commissions for the Protection of Children and Youth, among others), given that such entities often postpone resolutions concerning these matters and do not intervene swiftly in such issues such as school drop-out and early marriages. With such matters being disregarded, women will continue to be unable to exercise effective citizenship in Portuguese society and will continue to be victims of gender inequality and discrimination, despite changes beginning to be seen with the participation of Cigano women in promoting citizenship, fighting for gender equality and taking the process of social demands into their own hands. Thus, it is of utmost importance to carry out compulsory schooling and to extend school paths, namely higher education, in order to guarantee female Cigano empowerment and civic participation as a way of promoting citizenship, equality, equity and social justice.

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Notes

1 Available online: https://eportugal.gov.pt/cidadaos/casar-ou-viver-em-uniao-de-facto#quem (accessed on 16 May 2022).

2 Available online: https://dre.pt/dre/detalhe/lei/57-2021-169602019 (accessed on 16 May 2022).

3 Available online: https://plataformamulheres.org.pt/projectos/opre-chavale/ (accessed on 15 May 2022).

4 Available online: https://www.acm.gov.pt/documents/10181/0/Regulamento_3a_Edicao_ROMA+Educa.pdf/0bfeea40-4978-47cb-96ef-2ac849f8688d (accessed on 15 May 2022).

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