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Revisiting the Weberian conceptual framework
and its relevance for analysing ethnic
and racial relations in contemporary times

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Abstract

Max Weber was a forerunner and one of the most innovative sociologists of his time. Among the many and diverse contributions to his extensive work, this article aims to highlight his importance and pioneering spirit in the analysis of ethnic and racial relations. Based on the fact that Romani people (known as Ciganos in Portugal) comprise the most numerous minority in Europe (10–12 million), we aim to discuss the relevance and limits of certain conceptual tools and forms of (self) categorization of Ciganos/Roma, namely those based on racial and ethnic phenomena, revisiting Max Weber's writings. Based on a qualitative study carried out on Portuguese Ciganos/Roma, using in-depth interviews of women and men resident in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, we seek to question the pertinence of these forms of categorization when applied in operative and empirical ways to Ciganos/Roma persons in contemporaneity.

Keywords: Max Weber; ethnic and racial relations; Ciganos/Roma; Portugal

1 Introduction

Weber's perspective still offers some of the most important insights concerning issues related to race and ethnic relations and his influence is still significant among contemporary authors (Stone, 1995; Banton, 2007; 2008; Winter, 2000; 2020) and in the sociology of ethnic and racial phenomena. Nevertheless, Max Weber is less known for his contribution to the analysis of ethnic and racial relations (e.g. Brubaker, 2009; Banton, 2014). It is against this background that this article seeks to discuss the relevance of some of his concepts and forms of categorization of and by Ciganos/Roma, namely those based on racial and ethnic belongings, especially the Weberian concepts of ethnic group, race and community.

In an exploratory discussion, we look at the limits and potentialities of these conceptual tools for the study of collective identities, in addition to the analysis of racial and ethnic relations, and the racial and ethnic boundaries of Ciganos/Roma in contemporary societies. Although Weber's references to Roma are rather rare, not explored in depth and somewhat unnoticed by many Weberian scholars, we are particularly interested in ad-

addressing the theorising and operationalization of these concepts, empirically based on Portuguese Ciganos/Roma. This article is organized into four sections: in the first, we revisit some of the relevant concepts for the analysis of ethnic and racial relations; in the second, we present a diachronic and synchronic overview of Ciganos/Roma in Portugal; this is followed by an explanation of the research methodology, data collection and analysis techniques; the fourth section, is centred on an investigation and discussion of the two main axes of analysis: the categories which are used and preferred in naming Ciganos/Roma and the meaning of 'being Cigano/Roma.' Finally, we reflect in an analytical and comprehensive manner on the operativity of Max Weber's conceptual framework when transposed to empirical research regarding the examination of Portuguese Ciganos/Roma, and about Weber's legacy in the analysis of racial and ethnic relations in contemporaneity.

2 Max Weber's legacy: Some contributions to the analysis of ethnic and racial relations

Weber was a pioneer and innovator of his time by discussing the subject of ethnic and racial relations, contributing in an unavoidable way towards the definition and consolidation of sociology in relation to ethnic and racial phenomena. It must be said however that certain sections of his book *Economy and Society* which was published posthumously, specifically those focused on these themes, are subject to translation controversies in the versions translated from German to English and Brazilian Portuguese.

According to Max Weber a 'much more problematic source of social action' is race (Weber, [1920] 1978, p. 385), which in turn, creates a *group* only when it is 'subjectively perceived as a common trait: this happens only when a neighbourhood or the mere proximity of racially different persons is the basis of joint (mostly political) action, or conversely, when some common experiences of members of the same race are linked to some antagonism against members of an obviously different group' (ibid.). For Max Weber the most important 'is the belief in' and not the common past. Moreover, a shared ethnic origin does not constitute a group (Banton, 2008). In this context Max Weber goes beyond and defines ethnic groups as 'human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists' (Weber, [1920] 1978, p. 389). This concept is thus little related to biology as Elke Winter (2000; 2020) clearly demonstrates that Weber progressively shifted from a biological conception of race towards a sociological conception (Meyran, 2005).

For M. Banton, Weber speaks of *ethnic communities* and not ethnic groups (Banton, 2007), defining them as a human group who believe they have common ancestors which provides a basis for the creation of a community. Essentially, they have a presumed common past and a 'presumed identity'. In other words, for Weber, ethnic belonging does not in itself constitute a group, but facilitates the formation of a group in the political sphere, with ethnicity operating as a mechanism maintaining monopolies (Weber, [1920] 1978) and social closure, in addition to being a form of political mobilization (Weber, [1920] 1978;

Malesevic, 2004; Banton, 2008). The belief does not create the group, but it can be important for the maintenance of the group, and the group's goal is to monopolise power and status. It was primarily the political community that inspired belief in shared ethnicity (Banton, 2008). However, the existence of a political community is a precondition for ethnic group action (Malesevic, 2004). The shared descent presumably facilitated the maintenance of a distinctive religion.

Race, caste or culture are equally important in generating the belief in common ethnicity. It is presumed identity among social actors which represents a potential for group formation, communal relations and social action. This potential for social action implies a belief of social actors in common descent based on racial and cultural differences.

In *Economy and Society*, Weber ([1920] 1978) declared that a racial group was constituted only when people perceive themselves and others as possessing common inheritable traits derived from common descent (an idea of racial belonging). For Weber, membership of a race was a source of communal action. Weber did not agree that race was to be determined solely by physical characteristics. The author refers to a tendency towards 'the monopolization of social power and honor' and a 'tendency which in this case happens to be linked to race' (Weber, [1920] 1978, p. 386).

The idea of group closure is also a key concept in this context: for Weber 'any cultural trait, no matter how superficial, can serve as a starting point for the familiar tendency to monopolistic closure' (Weber, [1920] 1978, p. 388); in this regard, its importance manifests itself particularly in order to grasp the origin, dynamics and consolidation of ethnic and racial groups, namely the tendency towards the monopolization of economic, social and political benefits, as the intention of this monopolization is to close the social and economic opportunities to outsiders.

It can be considered that even today the Ciganos/Roma occupy liminal and interstitial spaces between traditional communities and modern societies. A social relationship is open to 'outsiders if and insofar as its system of order does not deny participation to anyone who wishes to join and is actually in a position to do so.' In turn, it is closed 'against outsiders so far as, according to its subjective meaning and its binding rules, participation of certain persons is excluded, limited, or subjected to conditions. Whether a relationship is open or closed may be determined traditionally, through affect, or rationally in terms of values or of expediency' (Weber, [1920] 1978), p. 43).

While this text does not claim to be exhaustive, it seems relevant to explore one other concept of Weber's sociology. Thus, in the early years of the 20th century, Weber described Gypsies (Ciganos/Roma) as well as Jews, as pariah people. In his view 'the purest form of this type is found when the people in question have totally lost their residential anchorage and hence are completely occupied economically in meeting demands of other settled peoples – the gypsies, for instance, or, in another manner, the Jews of the Middle Age' (Weber, [1916] 1958, p. 13).

His concept of pariah people is connoted with communities characterized by a loss of 'residential anchorage', characterized as a distinctive hereditary social group, by 'political and social disprivilege'; by 'a far-reaching distinctiveness in economic functioning' and by ritual separation from mainstream society (Weber, [1916] 1958). In Ancient Judaism, Max Weber adds other identifying traits, such as the segregation, they 'were ritually separated, formally or de facto, from their social surroundings' (Weber, [1916] 1958, pp. 3–4).

Other aspects should be highlighted, namely the importance of ritual separation characterized by prohibitions against commensality and intermarriage. Weber perceived Jews as a race and as a pariah group without residential anchorage and hence completely occupied economically in meeting demands of other settled peoples (Weber, [1916] 1958), a category applied also to ‘impure’ Hindu castes and Gypsies (Barbalet, 2022). Some authors criticized Weber for the apparently pejorative connotation of the term people, which constituted yet another controversial issue.

Despite over a hundred years having passed since the publication of *Economy and Society*, it remains that as Roger Brubaker (2009, p. 22) states ‘The literature on ethnicity, race, and nations and nationalism was long fragmented and compartmentalized’ in different and separate fields of study. Loïc Wacquant (2023, p. 127) is also very critical and in a neo-Bourdieuian spirit proposes to ‘historicize the notion of “race”’ on the one hand and on the other to ‘disaggregate the ethno-racial phenomena into its “elementary forms” of racial domination, categorization, discrimination, segregation, reclusion and violence.’

3 The case of Ciganos/Roma in Portugal: an overview

Ciganos have always been attributed a condition of strangeness and difference (contrast), despite being part of the largest ethnic minority in Europe (10–12 million), rooted in most European countries for over five centuries (Liégeois, 1994). In Portugal, this population, perhaps underestimated, stands at 50 to 60 thousand people (ACIDI, 2013). While certain Cigano academics, mediators, association leaders and activists, recognise themselves and mobilise under the term Roma¹ (Kóczé, 2015; Kokora, 2022), the majority of Portuguese Ciganos do not identify themselves or even recognise themselves in the labels ‘Roma’/‘Rom’/‘Romani’; instead, they use the term ‘Cigano’, which takes on a mostly derogatory meaning for the majority society and for many Ciganos. This is one of the reasons that we believe that it still currently makes sense to use the term Ciganos in its emic sense. Portuguese Ciganos belong to one of the dominant subgroups in Europe and the Americas, the Caló/Calé. In Portugal, the collection of ethnic statistics is not allowed; as such, the only recent study which presents a more complete, quantifiable and reliable picture was produced in 2014 (Mendes et al., 2014). Portuguese Ciganos present a certain heterogeneity and different forms of social and spatial insertion with various nuances in terms of lifestyle and even cases of reconciliation of different lifestyles (Magano, 2010). In fact, we tend to forget that there is enormous diversity and cultural heterogeneity among Portuguese Ciganos and various forms of social and spatial incorporation (Magano, 2010; Mendes et al., 2014).

There is differentiation between those who say they live a traditional Cigano life (Magano, 2010) and others who follow a lifestyle closer to that of ‘gentlefolk/master of the non-Ciganos’. The Ciganos themselves consider that there are regional and social differences between the ‘Beirões’ (from the interior-centre of the country), the Galicians, the ‘Alentejanos’ (from the more southern centre), among other factors of differentiation, with

¹ Adopted from 1971 onwards, following the World Roma Congress in London.

frequent self-distinctions among the Ciganos themselves, sometimes within the same geographic territories. Although a large part of the Ciganos is currently settled, where this is not the case, the choice of a 'nomad' lifestyle arises from a complex web of relations whose agents are not only Cigano families and persons, but also institutions, local authorities and other Cigano and non-Cigano persons, often with practices of forced nomadism. However, the social representation of what being a Cigano is still continues to be marked by a certain Eurocentric stereotyping linked to the image of a 'nomad', free of all and any social commitments and ties. In some Portuguese local territories, Ciganos continue to be subject to constant expulsions, with an 'ancient category' having been reinvented, that of the compulsively nomadic Cigano population (Nievas, 2023; Assunção, 2019). This term is a social and even political category which serves purposes of racial domination and classification, describing what is perceived as a racialized and deviant way of life deeply embedded in the nature and culture of the Ciganos by institutional actors.

More recently, the Report of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2022) highlighted some indicators of structural inequality between the Ciganos and the population in general in various countries. Accordingly, in 2021, 80 per cent of the Cigano population lived below the poverty threshold in their country of residence,² with the most adverse situations having been found in Spain, Italy (98 per cent) and Portugal (96 per cent). Moreover, the inequalities at this level between Ciganos and the population in general are among the highest in our country, reaching 16 per cent of the population in Portugal, 21 per cent in Spain and 20 per cent in Italy (FRA, 2022).³

4 Methodological strategy

A qualitative methodological strategy was used in this research, as we were interested in accessing the interior world, socially constructed by its subjects, where we were tasked with the interpretation of its 'social meaning through mapping and "re-presenting" the social world of research participants' (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004, p. 5). The main advantages of this approach being: 'qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social and physical sciences [...]. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, pp. 3–4).

In addition to the use of documental analysis, our empirical analysis included semi-structured and in-depth interviews as its primary technique, which played a key role in the context of this research. The aim is to follow the Weberian interpretative understanding, insofar as interviews are the technique par excellence that allows us to capture the extent to which the individual who acts attributes a subjective meaning to their behaviour of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course (Weber, [1920] 1978, p. 4). This instrumental resource gave us a better understanding of the 'I' as well as its past, generally aimed at gaining a better grasp of subjective data (ideas, beliefs,

² Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia.

³ A total of 8461 interviews were conducted, with 568 having been in Portugal.

opinions, attitudes, emotions, conduct), as well as aspects of reality not always directly observable or even measurable (Foddy, 1996), offering the researcher in-depth and rich information on matters sometimes of delicate, complex and sensitive nature. A total of 40 interviews were held with Cigano women and men, resident in Lisbon Metropolitan Area, on average lasting 90–130 minutes. In the selection of interviews, we considered various criteria, such as gender, age, marital endogamic and/or exogamic relations, and occupations in different sectors of activity, given that the objective was to present a range of social protagonists and learn about their contrasting social trajectories and life conditions. In an initial phase, the contact with the interviewees was regular, personal and without any institutional networks; rarely was there ever any institutional mediation; in one or two situations, the initial approach required the researcher to visit residential spaces where they could meet the target population with greater ease, and they generally showed openness and willingness for an interview. The majority of interviews were then held in the interviewee's home and only rarely were they in public spaces (cafés, parks, etc).

The methods of analysis of the qualitative data entailed a thematic analysis and a typological analysis, using NVivo qualitative data treatment software. It was possible to identify emerging categories, based on the available information, rather than imposing categories and ideas *a priori*. The main topic involved issues related to the history of the family of origin and the current family; residential, school and professional trajectories; representations in relation to the majority; categorizations; prejudice; self-identification; perceptions about fields of discrimination and associated feelings, among other aspects.

5 Analysis and discussion

This section is divided into four components: starting with a brief description of the study's participants; followed by an analysis and discussion of the results of the interviews, centred on the evolution of the use and meaning of the categories mobilized to name the Ciganos/Roma; a third part focuses this discussion on the two categories of race and ethnicity; and fourthly explores the social meaning of belonging to Ciganos/Roma.

5.1 Some socio-demographic characteristics of the study's participants

The interviews were held with 22 men and 18 women of which: around half were younger than 29 years old, the majority were married (29) – in mostly endogamic relationships (only three were in exogamic relationships, with a further three being separated/divorced from non-Cigano people); 12 interviewees had passed primary education; eight had passed higher secondary education; six had passed lower secondary education; and two held university level degrees. In relation to the pattern of their social and professional integration, over half are unskilled workers (21), followed by administrative, commercial and service industry employees (nine). There are some limited cases of men who are technicians, mid-range intellectuals and scientists (three). Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the majority of those active are independent workers (26). There is a higher proportion of interviewees in Lisbon council (14), followed by other councils in the metropolitan area of

Lisbon (AML), such as Amadora, Seixal, Sintra, Cascais, (each with three people, respectively). Only 15 revealed a consolidated geographic rootedness (living in the council in which they were born), while 25 interviewees were born in a council where they do not currently live, with ten originating in a council of the metropolitan area of Lisbon and ten were outside this area mostly from councils in the Alentejo region.

5.2 Categorization and classificatory categories

Among them, it is above all the men with higher schooling levels and more diversified social experiences define the Ciganos as an ethnic group (eight interviewees). Even so, the term 'race' still continues to be the most used. However, some of the Cigano interviewees state that it does not make sense to use labels to name the different minority groups. Hence, the need to name and categorize the Others and those who are different is understood as a feature revealing the reinforcement and perpetuation of prejudice in relation to those who are different. For some of the interviewees, designations that demarcate Ciganos from non-Ciganos should be abolished. Henrique⁴ draws attention to the fact that his national identity card only stipulates that he is Portuguese and nothing more. He thus makes it very clear that the fact that Ciganos are designated as such, is nothing more than a form of discrimination, emphasizing that: 'I think that it serves no purpose; on my identity card it doesn't say... whether I am of Cigano race or whether I am white or something else, why should it be said in any other manner' (Man, 38 years old, six years of schooling).

But there are also those who argue that Ciganos do not care, they do not even think about the categories attributed to them, as the daily constraints and deprivations facing them are so pressing that this is an issue that does not concern them. The name by which they are designated by the Others may simultaneously generate feelings of belonging, or on the other hand, it may possibly incite positions and strategies of resistance. Indeed, the Ciganos themselves are active in the construction of their self and hetero representation, manipulating codes and routines, according to the situation and context. When persons self-categorize themselves as a member of a social group – the Ciganos –, their emotional responses may be grounded to a large extent in their identification and feeling of belonging to that same group. Following Mackie and Smith (2002), the stronger the identification with a group, the greater the tendency for that belonging to the group to be incorporated in one's self-concept. The labels with which they identify may be perceived as mechanisms of recognition of belonging and collective identification, but also and simultaneously of recognition of differences and marking of distances. The name is not only used to designate but also to classify and declassify.

Banton (2014, p. 330) argues that 'real groups (as opposed to categories) are multidimensional' and above all, those interviewed like to be called by their own name, without any reference to their ethnic belonging (Weber, [1920] 1978). For Arlindo, the word 'Ciganos' in the plural, and as a collective, is nothing more than a mere name given to a certain group of people, just as it could have been any other. This interviewee says that, in times

⁴ The following names are those used for the interviewees: Henrique, Arlindo, Daniel, David and João.

gone by, these people who are currently known as Ciganos, were designated and known by another name. Arlindo states: ‘they call it that, it’s the name they gave, in the past it wasn’t a Cigano, it was “ruçada” (blond), it’s there in the 3 volumes, I don’t know if it’s in the 3 volumes of the history of Portugal. Do you know what a Cigano was called in the past? He was a Cuban’ (Man, 60 years old, four years of schooling). This interviewee appears to reveal some discomfort and annoyance with the negative meaning that the majority associates with the word Cigano.

The Cigano label can thus have numerous meanings and despite the pride and honour (Weber, [1920] 1978) shown by the interviewees in their ethnic belonging, there is a notion that the invocation of the word Cigano refers to other meanings that do not correspond to those that Ciganos attribute to themselves, taking on a depreciative nature. Daniel points to other qualifiers that are immediately conjured up in the collective imaginary:

Look, you talked about the most difficult word. I am proud to be a Cigano, I am not ashamed to show myself and say ‘I am Cigano,’ my children are Ciganos, I am proud to be what I am... But it’s different when someone approaches me [saying] ‘you are Cigano, you are a liar,’ because the word Cigano means many things, it means liar, conman, thief, there you are (Man, 37 years old, four years of schooling).

João also considers that the term Cigano is pejorative as it refers to a person who engages in certain ‘business deals’, meaning someone involved in swindling. The interviewee clarifies that: ‘The word “Cigano” means crook. And hence, the word “Cigano”’ (Man, 45 years old).

5.3 What are Ciganos/Roma: a race or/and an ethnicity?

Some of the interviewees who attended the information and training sessions under the Social Insertion Income (RSI) social policy measure (low-income benefit), or those who attended literacy or vocational training sessions, learnt in these formal education contexts that the Ciganos are an *ethnic group*. However, it is not always easy to draw a clear line between race and ethnicity, especially as Ciganos give the word ‘race’ a double meaning, which varies according to the object. Hence, on the one hand, ‘race’ is used in common language as a category identifying social groups, applicable both to minorities and the majority; on the other hand, *race* serves to internally designate family groups, as explained in the footnote below, where Ciganos avoid talking about and evoking the *race* of others, as this is something endowed with a certain sacredness.⁵

Over time, the interviewees have shown a significant shift in the processes of being labelled by others, as the designation ‘Cigano race’ no longer tends to be heard as fre-

⁵ Race refers to family members, whether they are alive or already deceased. This is the central element of the Cigano social structure, based on patrilineal descent. Race is thus the social group to which the persons belong by birth, encompassing all the descendants on the paternal side of a Cigano who has already died and given his name to a particular family group. The founder of the lineage is someone who lived two or three generations before the oldest contemporary person and belongs to an extended family (Presencia Gitana, 1990, p. 98).

quently, apparently being shunned in favour of the term 'Cigano ethnicity'. This linguistic change seems to have been envisioned more sharply in the mid-1990s. The Ciganos themselves appear to have already incorporated this designation in their everyday language.

Some also consider that, for Ciganos, it is irrelevant being self-classified or labelled by others as a race or an ethnicity. For Tiago, there is a variety of possible forms of classification, stating that 'race and ethnicity or clan... but... I think it always sounds better to say ethnicity rather than race' (Man, 29 years old, nine years of schooling). This interviewee argued that, nowadays, the term 'race' is rarely used, even by the Ciganos themselves, to describe and name themselves, claiming that this term is better suited to non-rational animals than to human beings. The interviewee added that: 'now, at the moment, in order to show a little more respect... for the people, ethnicity should be said, race should not be said. Race is for dogs. It's more for animals.'

Other interviewees who prefer to be classified as an ethnicity, put forward other arguments. Jorge emphasized the belief in a common ethnicity (Weber, [1920] 1978), arguing that Ciganos show 'some identity, some feeling, even if it's only a memory of ancestors, for the ethnicity in itself' (Man, 47 years old, higher education). Nelson denies that the Ciganos are a 'race', claiming that they are in fact an ethnic group, expressing that 'Ciganos are a group that entered into Portugal... that entered into Andalusia in 1510; therefore, it's no race, but rather a group' (Man, 30 years old, six years of schooling). Elsa also rejects the idea of belonging to a different 'race', arguing that 'we are an ethnicity, but we are inserted in your race, we have different customs, I don't identify myself as being of another race' (Woman, 28 years old, six years of schooling).

Júlio advocates the idea that the human race is simply one and, therefore, what could differentiate the Ciganos from the Others is ethnic belonging, stressing that Ciganos are '[...] an ethnicity. It's heavy talking about a Cigano race, the word race is for dogs. I think that we are all of the same race, but I can't really explain it properly' (Man, 33 years old, illiterate).

In an intragroup context, and as noted above, naming someone's 'race' is a form of identification and affirmation of belonging within the Cigano group, and its invocation is not something that should be done lightly, as showing a lack of respect, even if verbally, for someone else's 'race' could give rise to violent acts. The invocation of a person's race is strictly associated with the utmost respect devoted to the dead in the in-group, where verbal or any other insults to ancestors are inadmissible. Should this happen, Clara made it perfectly clear that the reaction to restore the 'good name' of the race can only be violent:

But, if a Cigano says 'your race'... Oof, if someone says, 'your race', oh, there will be a brawl immediately. Because then I am forced to say his race as well, straight away. So that mine is not... dishonoured. Because if he touches on race, he's picking on people who are already dead, you see? Understood... It really upsets us... It really churns our stomach. It causes a brawl immediately... Dead certain. No-one stays there. (Woman, 29 years old, illiterate)

In the in-group, the term 'race' thus has a very peculiar meaning, it is a word that is never uttered in vain. Accordingly, among themselves, Ciganos avoid talking recurrently about 'races' because, as Filipe states: 'saying "race" could be taken amiss, because race affects everything, it involves relatives who have already died, it entangles a lot of things' (Man, 29 years old, three years of schooling). The affective component is profoundly

enmeshed in the person's 'race', in a nutshell. It serves to identify the person in relation to the in-group's members, thus rapidly indicating that person's network of family relationships and even relationships with 'contrary' families.⁶

The use of the term race is more common among women, who classify their in-group and out-groups as 'races'. Dolores categorically states that Ciganos are 'a race all united together' (Woman, 32 years old, four years of schooling). Sara conceives Ciganos as a race, which is ruled by its own laws autonomously of the surrounding society, arguing that:

The Ciganos are a race who only know their own law. It's a law. For example, this is hypothetical... there's a Cigano who treated the other badly. The oldest goes over to him 'have you no shame? Aren't you ashamed of treating so-and-such badly? He's such a good man, he's so humane, he doesn't deserve that. Please go and apologize to that man immediately.' They all accompany him and he does that. They shake hands, 'I am sorry for having offended you.' They hug one another. (Woman, 68 years old, four years of schooling)

Juliana staunchly states that all people are the same, as all 'are living souls'; however, in her perspective, humanity is still divided into two races: the Ciganos and non-Ciganos (Woman, 54 years old, three years of schooling). Race emerges as a form of identification and knowledge among people, Mónica stresses that '[e]veryone must have their race, they must have a name, and I can't take that away' (Woman, 34 years old, two years of schooling).

Another perspective that was found in some testimonials is that the Ciganos are a very ancient race, which is characterized by a globalized dispersion. Rui notes 'therefore, there are Ciganos worldwide, it's a millennial race' (Man, 32 years old, seven years of schooling).

The classification of Ciganos as a 'community' is practically absent from the interviewees' discourse. In addition, a minority of interviewees thought that the Ciganos are an autonomous 'people' living in a kind of society separately from the majority. Cristiana shares this position, highlighting:

I see them as a people who don't allow themselves to be integrated into society but I also see them with a lot of discrimination. Many of them want to integrate and they aren't allowed, and I also see them as a people starved of affection, kindness, understanding. (Woman, 43 years old, nine years of schooling)

This idea that the Ciganos are a 'people' is associated with other perspectives, in particular that the Ciganos constitute a 'survivor people' which, despite its long history of persecutions, has managed to keep some of its main traditions intact. On this issue, Daniel concludes that it is a people with very strong and consistent traditions 'otherwise they probably wouldn't exist' (Man, 38 years old, higher education).

The proposition that the Ciganos are a 'people' is underpinned by the argument that this group's reality overpasses and goes far beyond the concept of ethnicity. In this context, Francisco demonstrates that there are 'various ethnicities' within the Cigano group, by stating:

⁶ Ciganos with whom they have conflicts that have resulted in deaths and the injured family can respond in the same way.

Those of the Iberian Peninsula are the Calons, the Manouche are just of France, those of Eastern Europe are the Rom, those of Southern Europe, Greece, Turkey, Albania, Bulgaria are the Kalderash. Therefore, this is a minority of an immense confusion, which is much easier to discriminate generically positively than actually specify, because if we try to specify, we will enter into the domain of the social sciences and then easily lose ourselves because it is still all very poorly studied. (Man, 29 years old, 12 years of schooling)

However, it is considered that what is referred to as ‘ethnicities’ corresponds to sub-groups that are located within the Cigano ethnic group. Indeed, the *Rom* (the most numerous and which include the *Kalderash*, *Lovara* and *Tchourara*) are essentially present in Central and Eastern Europe, and in some Scandinavian countries; the *Manouches* or *Sinti* are especially concentrated in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France, and are also dispersed throughout various Central European countries. The *Caló* or *Gitanos* are the Ciganos of the Iberian Peninsula⁷ (Moutouh, 2000). Fraser (1995) adds that Southern France has some groups of *Gitans*, and also distinguishes the *Calé* of Spain from the *Ciganos* of Portugal.

5.4 Social meaning of ‘being Cigano’

For the majority of the interviewees, being Cigano is something that is acquired almost innately, it is a kind of primordial affinity. Sofia expresses the nature of being Cigano as something acquired at birth. Nevertheless, she is also careful to stress that it is in the interaction that the similarities and differences with respect to the Other are perceptible, making the ethnic identity stand out more. Thus, internally and subjectively, the interviewee feels that she is Cigana because

One is already born Cigana and I really consider myself Cigana. And you [the lady interviewer] consider yourself a lady. You think that you’re different from me, don’t you? I think so. I think that I am different from you, and you think that you’re different from me. It’s not because I am Cigana, but I guess I am already from this race, from birth, already everything. (Woman, 17 years old, four years of schooling)

This primordial affinity which ‘comes from inside’ and is born with the person, must be nurtured and polished via family socialization, as well as through the lifelong experience acquired within the midst of the Cigano group. Clara stresses that: ‘Being Cigano... It’s something that’s born with us. I think I was born like this; I have got used to this’ (Woman, 29 years old, knows how to read and write). Regarding the importance of the person’s moulding via the family network anchored in the intragroup social circles, Jorge states that ‘being Cigano’ arises from the ‘family relationship and greatly from liking to be Cigano...’ (47 years old, higher education).

⁷ But there are also specific groups within the *Gitanos*, particularly in Spain, such as the *Béticos* of Andalusia, the *Kalé* of Catalonia, among others (Moutouh, 2000, p. 49).

Daniel experienced an ‘in-between’ (Mendes et al., 2023) life trajectory with a dual belonging having attended higher education and even married a non-Cigana and lived with his parents in council housing among Cigano relatives and neighbours. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that since his parents’ deaths, his affinities with the Cigano group have become restricted to certain moments, limited ‘to a few relatives and little more...’ (Man, 38 years old, higher education). This interviewee identifies himself as Cigano. Being Cigano is part of this personal identity, and he confesses that he never questioned his ethnic identity, saying that ‘I was born as such, I accept that I am [...]. I know the rules and I try to comply with them. Not comply with them, I try not to surpass them.’

The affective component associated with ethnic belonging is an aspect that is also highlighted by João, who stated that ‘for me, it’s a feeling. It is, it’s a very real feeling. It’s born with the person’ (Man, 45 years old). This personal feeling from within is generally associated with another form of emotional manifestation which is frequently reiterated by the interviewees, expressed in an almost boundless sort of pride in their ethnic belonging. This pride of their collective and ethnic belonging and a sense of ethnic honour (Weber, [1920] 1978, p. 391) is embodied in positive feelings which strengthen personal and even group self-esteem. About this dimension, David emphasizes that he feels happiness, stating: ‘I think that it gives me great happiness, the bliss of being Cigano and living as a Cigano and having my traditions as a Cigano’ (Man, 37 years old, four years of schooling).

In view of the processes of structural and historical stigmatization and marginalization to which the Ciganos have been submitted since time immemorial, we can suppose that these persons have incorporated feelings of grief, shame and modesty in assuming their Cigano identity. But, in fact, rare are the cases in which this happens. Filipe denies that the positivity associated with his ethnic belonging coexists with feelings of humiliation and shame, by stating that: ‘I don’t feel ashamed to show what I am, I feel proud’ (Man, 29 years old, three years of schooling).

Being Cigano is incorporating, in the ‘I’, emotions apprehended and experienced in intergroup contexts, and which are incorporated and felt very intensely. The exacerbated acceptance of emotions, even contradictory and extreme, is one of the aspects that, for Rui, best defines the Ciganos. In this view, ‘being Cigano is in fact the culture, in my case it’s music. [...] it’s joy when there is joy, the Cigano is very joyful. And then he weeps bitterly for his dead, in that sense I am Cigano with absolute certainty’ (Man, 32 years old, seven years of schooling).

The interrelationship between the social and biological (Weber, [1920] 1978) is also present in the interviewees’ perceptions about the meaning of what it is to be Cigano. For Marisa, being Cigano is something that ‘is in your blood.’ However, it is the upbringing in a family and community context that appears to exert a determinant modelling pressure on the individual. One interviewee highlights the relevance of family upbringing, when stating:

If we were to take two babies and one were brought up in a non-Cigano family, that baby being Cigano, and the other, a non-Cigano baby, were brought up in a Cigano family, the latter will be Cigano while the former will certainly be white. I am Cigana via my father, mother, grandparents. My entire family is Cigana. (Woman, 29 years old, nine years of schooling)

Being Cigano is also perceived as a 'tradition' left by the ancestors which is re-updated on a daily basis. For Romana, it is 'a tradition which has many years' (Woman, 34 years old, does not know how to read and write).

'Being Cigano' is also regarded as a kind of 'genetic-social' heritage which is transmitted from parents to their children, and which is self-perpetuated intergenerationally in family and community contexts. Helder is one of the interviewees who perceives the social meaning of being Cigano as something rather inextricable from a peculiar lifestyle, which can be characterized as follows:

It's having a normal, calm life, without major stress, selling in the fair, being an itinerant trader, bringing up my children the same way that I was brought up, and always trying to live better... already integrated into society. I think that I should convey that if my life is good like this, I should convey that to my children and to the people surrounding me, that this is my lifestyle. (Man, 28 years old, nine years of schooling)

This is a lifestyle in which the primacy of the collective over the individual is clearly observed. The centrality of collective experiences is rather structural in the daily interactions of the individuals. In this context, Carlos demonstrates that the individual is of little or no relevance, in stating that: 'It's the parties... the friends... There's a lot of friendship, huge friendship, people are really... well, I don't have a life, a Cigano, if a Cigano or a cousin or whoever arrives and helps, they are very united' (Man, 18 years old, knows how to read and write). The density and intensity of social relations, particularly of Cigano intra-group sociabilities, conviviality and friendship, are essential in the structuring of the subject's personal and social identity.

For Tiago, 'being Cigano' is synonymous with belonging to a people who are proud to possess a very specific culture and who have not been assimilated. But what is most intriguing and fascinating is the aura of mystery enshrouding the Cigano group. Hence, he confesses:

I also find it really amusing... for example, being Cigano because it's a people steeped in mystery because... they want to know more about the Cigano, beyond what he may speak of, but they can't achieve that because nothing has been written down, there's nothing... papers have been produced, books have been written about the Ciganos, very frequently they ask me, 'but where does the Cigano come from?' (Man, 29 years old, nine years of schooling)

The sense of ethnic honour is linked to the 'conviction of the excellence of one's own customs and the inferiority of alien ones, a conviction which sustains the sense of ethnic honor, is actually quite analogous to the sense of honor of distinctive status groups' (Weber, [1920] 1978, p. 391). Is being Cigano perhaps also a question of personal desire and choice? Jorge argues that it is not enough to 'want to be so,' as it is necessary not only to respect the traditions, but also to identify cognitively and affectively with the family and group memories accumulated over generations. The interviewee stresses that 'it's wanting to be, wanting to be and respecting an ethnicity and showing some identity, some feeling, even if it's only a memory of ancestors, for the ethnicity in itself' (Man, 47 years old, Portuguese, higher education). Jorge considers that it would be positive and desirable for there to be an evolution towards 'being Cigano' becoming an 'identifying reference', of a more neutral nature, thus no longer being an essentially ethnic reference.

For some of the interviewees, the assumption of their Cigano identity is reconciled with the performance of professional activities that are different from the traditional ways of life associated with itinerant trade. Accordingly, the fact that the person is self-employed or works in a sector in which Ciganos are not traditionally inserted does not mean that she or he is no longer Cigano. Alexandrino states that he manages to reconcile his belonging to the Cigano group, participating in group activities and honouring Cigano traditions, with his professional activity as a carpentry teacher in a private social solidarity institution (IPSS) which administers vocational training actions for young people who have dropped out of the education system. The interviewee clarifies that employment in a professional activity outside the in-group does not repress or annul his ethnic identity:

Well, some people ask me 'how to you manage to do the two things?' because it's like this, I am able to be with them, there's a party, a wedding, I am precisely what I am, I am Cigano, I do the same things they do, I respect the same things, the same traditions, I also wore black for my dear father, I also spent 2 years wearing black, and what I did is what they do, I didn't watch television either, I didn't drink, I didn't do anything else, neither more nor less, just the same. It wasn't because I had a job that those things were going to change. (Man, 32 years old, six years of schooling)

For Francisco, 'being Cigano' only becomes meaningful when compared to the Others. Its existence and meaning only makes sense as a result of the ostracism experienced by Ciganos dealt by the majority; if this were not the case, the Ciganos would already have been assimilated:

[A]ll Ciganos want to have a house, like any other Portuguese person has, all Ciganos want their children to have their own professions, at the end of the day, all Ciganos want what any other person, of any other non-Cigano Portuguese class or social group wants to have. But due to the ostracism... they have endogamous behaviours; this strengthens their group status and gives them a vitality that they would not otherwise have. (Man, 29 years old, 12 years of schooling)

For some interviewees, self-identification as Cigano is not free from inner tensions and even conflicting emotions that are difficult to handle at a personal level. Although only in occasional cases, some of the interviewed women expressed ambivalent answers to this question, with the manifest existence of inner tensions and a kind of 'fractured self' – revisiting one of the terms coined by Giddens (1994) on the issue of personal identity. Thus, some verbalize a critical and negative self-identification in relation to their ethnic self-affiliation, which is the case of Cristiana who emphasises that being Cigana is 'not having culture, not respecting anyone and following traditions that, in my opinion, are insane' (Woman, 43 years old, nine years of schooling). The interviewee criticizes the fact that there is a tendency to re-update traditions that are honoured more as a result of custom, censure and social pressure which, in her perspective, is incomprehensible and unjustifiable. The manifestation of a somewhat schizophrenic identity is a singular phenomenon among the interviewees. Marta reveals some ambiguity in her self-identification as Cigana, contesting the rigidity of various tenets of 'Cigano law', saying:

In some ways... I like being Cigana, some days I enjoy being Cigana, other days I don't like it, and I don't like it because that's the way it is. There are aspects of the Cigano race I prize dearly... but Cigano law, for me, certain specific conditions they have don't make much sense, don't work for my temperament. (Woman, 34 years old, two years of schooling).

Juliana confesses that being a Cigano in our contemporary times does not 'mean anything.' The interviewee reveals that she only seeks to follow the tradition of mourning, 'but, as for the rest, for me, the Ciganos no longer exist...' (Woman, 54 years old, three years of schooling). In turn, Lúcia remarks that 'all the traditions have already ended,' only marriage is kept according to tradition, which is expected to perpetuate, emphasizing that:

The only one that I hope will never end and it never will end, is that women marry as virgins; now, the rest has already all gone. From what I have seen, it's all gone. Women have male friends who are not Ciganos, men have female friends who are not Ciganas, everything has finished, for me, it's all gone. (Woman, 21 years old, four years of schooling)

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

5 Concluding remarks

Beyond the political and academic controversial debates surrounding the use of the Weberian conceptual framework and considering the socio-historical transformations which have taken place for over 100 years, the applicability in today's society of some of the concepts defined by Weber reveals several difficulties. Firstly, in the case of Ciganos/Roma, while the category of ethnic group seemed to be meaningful to members of the community under study (Banton, 2014), we note that the belief in ancestry, in the affinity of origin and primordiality continue to be important in self-identification. However, their classification as a race and/or ethnicity brings out some ambiguities surrounding processes of growth, diversity and complexity of Ciganos/Roma identities and considering their cultural heterogeneity. Moreover, the identification and characterization of Ciganos/Roma as an ethnic and/or racial identity engenders dynamics of ethnicization and racialization which lead to processes of reification and homogenization, and this in turn could contribute to the reinforcement and reproduction of the most severe inequalities and phenomena of increasing anti-Gypsyism, especially in the European territory. As has become clear, self and hetero identification as a race and ethnic group is somewhat procedural, dynamic and contextual, with the interrelations between the cognitive, affective, social and biological dimensions standing out. These categories and their meaning are mobilized in a strategic manner with agency for self and hetero-knowledge and to situate themselves in the complex game of chess which is social space.

Secondly, the idea of Ciganos as pariahs also shows some gaps. Ciganos/Roma people did not have a single homeland in the conventional sense (non-territorial Roma nation) (Goodwin, 2004); in general terms, they were forced to settle and assimilate and are incorporated in some sectors of the regular economy, some keep to a few traditional practices of ritual separation in face-to-face interaction in relation to non-Ciganos/Roma, despite the segregation and socio-spatial marginalization they suffer. With regard to other aspects, a lesser rigidity towards social closure, a growing fluidity of borders, the rise of social permeability and exogamy, among others, are increasingly recurring practices today.

Finally, concerning the coeval topics of race and ethnicity, they still embody a semantic core, around which identity (individual, group, national) and social organization systems are interwoven. They persist as structuring ideas of the social and political life of human communities. Social groups still self-define themselves in terms of identity around these categories, sometimes perceived as ‘natural’, ‘essential’ and a-historical. These categories, among others, are mobilized both in the processes of construction of identities and in those of differentiation. Their use and re-updating show mechanisms and logics of inclusion (the members) and exclusion (the non-members). In this regard, it is important to highlight that the actual racial and ethnic classifications continue to be activated and re-updated for the purpose of defending privileges, limiting access to power and regulating the competition in access to socially and politically scarce positions and resources (Banton, 1991), to demarcate borders and reify processes of racialization, ethnicization and social inequalities. L. Wacquant (2013) speaks of the emergence, in a clearly Bourdieusian perspective, of a sociology of ethno-racial domination, and for whom Max Weber’s writings were essential, attributing to these the functions of ‘dismantling those ethno-racial articulations on paper, thus helping to forge better tools to possibly dismantle reality’ (Wacquant, 2013, p. 141). In this line of research, it is important to better explore the applicability of the conceptual framework of Max Weber to real and current studies, as Weberian concepts evidently continue contain potential explanatory relevance in contemporary times.

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