

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE RAISING OF INEQUALITY: THE ROMANI COMMUNITIES AND THE MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Romani people are a minority that has been historically excluded, neglected, and persecuted in the different countries where they are settled, especially if we consider the context of their arrival in Europe and the colonization processes developed by European nations. Thus, this paper sheds light on how the Romani communities have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic from the communication and health perspective and provides a critical view of the abovementioned processes. We discuss theoretically how these ethnicities are crossed by multiple oppressions that place them in an unequal situation and the role of communication in their social inclusion or the maintenance of their exclusion. We highlight how their invisibility and how historical stereotypes were highlighted during the pandemic, deepening the unequal relations. From a critical perspective on discursive relations, we analyzed two journalistic reports from 2020, the local newspaper *O Popular* in Brazil and the national newspaper *ABC* in Spain. Some results suggest that the Romani population has been somewhat held accountable for disseminating the virus. Moreover, they seem to have been silenced as subjects capable of articulating and reflecting on their conditions and situations in the pandemic context, showing similarities in the portrayal of the Romani people in the Ibero-American context.

KEYWORDS

Romani people, communication, health, inequalities, COVID-19

A PANDEMIA DA COVID-19 E A POTENCIALIZAÇÃO DAS DESIGUALDADES: COMUNIDADES CIGANAS E MEIOS DE COMUNICAÇÃO

RESUMO

Os povos ciganos são uma minoria historicamente excluída, invisibilizada e perseguida nos diferentes países onde se encontram, especialmente se considerarmos o contexto de sua chegada à Europa e os processos de colonização desenvolvidos por esse continente. Diante disso, trabalhamos neste texto os modos como as comunidades ciganas estão sendo impactadas pela pandemia da COVID-19, a partir de discussões das áreas da comunicação e da saúde, bem como de uma visão crítica dos processos mencionados anteriormente. Refletimos teoricamente sobre como essas etnias são atravessadas por múltiplas opressões que as colocam em situação de desigualdade e qual o papel da comunicação em sua inclusão social ou na manutenção de

sua exclusão. Destacamos como sua invisibilidade e estereótipos históricos foram aflorados durante a pandemia, aprofundando as relações de desigualdades. A partir de um olhar crítico sobre as relações discursivas, analisamos duas reportagens jornalísticas publicadas ainda em 2020, uma, no Brasil, do jornal goiano *O Popular*, e outra, em Espanha, do jornal ABC de circulação nacional. A culpabilização das populações ciganas pela disseminação do vírus e seu silenciamento enquanto sujeitos capazes de articular e de refletir discursivamente sobre suas condições e situações no contexto da pandemia foram alguns dos resultados encontrados, mostrando semelhanças nas representações dos povos ciganos no contexto ibero-americano.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

povos ciganos, comunicação, saúde, desigualdades, COVID-19

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, we witness the most significant technological advances ever seen. At the same time, millions of people suffer from hunger, and poverty devastates the population worldwide. If poverty is the worst aspect of inequalities (Therborn, 2001), hunger is the worst aspect of poverty. So much so that the United Nations created the millennium development goals in 2000, where Goal 1 is to eradicate poverty and Goal 2 is to end hunger. Only in Goal 10 the expression “reduce inequality” (Roma, 2019, p. 39) is mentioned. Since the World Health Organization declared a pandemic due to the new coronavirus in 2020, this context gained new outlines and proportions. Many Romani people have struggled to guarantee food security, a situation condemned by Brazilian and Spanish activists and researchers in public notices (Aluizio, 2020; Khetane, 2020).

According to Santos (2010), the world is divided by yawning gaps: on the other side are the oppressed by modernity and its three primary forms — capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and colonialism; on this side, a minority that enjoys inclusion through the consumption, mostly white Europeans and their descendants. Those on one side, such as the Romani¹, Santos (2010) calls them “communities of the South”. The “South” does not only refer to the Southern countries. The dominant North and the excluded South exist in any country.

¹ The construction of their identities and cultures does not follow a homogeneous process among the different Romani ethnicities and groups. There are multiple identities, different groups, and subgroups that vary according to the region and the country where they live, and they are used to identify themselves in three ways: (a) “the Rom, or Roma, who speak the Romani language; they are divided into many subgroups”; (b) “the Sinti, who speak Sinto; also called Manouch”; and (c) “the Kalon, Kalon or Kalé, who speak the Caló language” (Moonen, 2011, p. 12). Following Moonen (2011, p. 12), bibliographic references do not reach an agreement about how to write the Romani self denominations. As the author, we use the Convention of Writing Tribal names (1953), approved in the first Brazilian Meeting of Anthropology, choosing to use “the Rom” and not “the Roma”; in the same way “the Kalon”, “the Sinti”, among others, without flexing the end into plural. According to Silva Júnior (2018, p. 40), the word “cigano” standardize different ethnicities under the same name, and in such a manner in many European languages (gypsy in English, or *gitano* in Spanish, for instance), was charged with negative stereotypes and semantics. Such a situation motivated the European Romani movement to propose a change, replacing “cigano” and the equivalents in the European languages with the term “Romá”. However, this terminology is questioned by the Kalon and Sinti, which do not feel represented because it pertains to the way groups and subgroups from Rom ethnicity designate themselves. In the author’s words (Silva Júnior, 2018), “even though there is an inclination to designate all Romani ethnicities as Rom or Romá, including a pointer of the United Nations to it; we cannot classify them in this way” (p. 46). As explained by Silva Júnior (2018, p. 41), the word “Romani” is a patronymic of “Romá” also used to name the language of the Rom groups. It could not be used to classify all the Romani ethnicities, but due to a fluidity issue, we will use it as a synonym of the term “ciganos” and point to the Romani from all ethnicities. Moreover, as we are talking about different Romani ethnicities and identities, we use the words in Portuguese always in the plural to depict this diversity, such as “Romani people”, “Romani communities”, and “Romani person”.

It is the geopolitics of knowledge (Dussel, 2005) that naturalized oppressions against other people and globalization as a new pattern of world power, whose classification of the population is based on the idea of race (Mignolo, 2005). Through coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2008), the European-hetero-Christian-bourgeois-man was constructed as the peak of evolution, which defines who is or is not human.

According to Bourdieu (1989), inequality can be measured by the distribution of economic or cultural capital among groups. Barata (2009) ponders that “when we talk about social inequality, we normally refer to situations that involve some degree of injustice” (p. 12). These problems can be overcome, but they are not due to a political choice. They are tied to social organization and reflect the iniquity in societies. Then, inequality is an essential factor in comprehending the Romani population’s situation.

In this context, in which multiple forms of social, educational, economic, and cultural inequalities had already an impact on the Romani people (Silva Júnior, 2018) and the COVID-19 pandemic deepening them, we try to comprehend how the media portray the pandemic impact in these groups and how it collaborates to the discursive construction of these realities. To make these analyses, we draw on the theoretical discussion about the historical processes of construction of ethnic-racial inequality in the Romani communities and the role of stereotypes to analyze news reports that approach the Romani issue in the context of the pandemic in two newspapers, a Brazilian and a Spanish one.

2. ETHNIC-RACIAL INEQUALITIES: THE CASE OF THE ROMANI COMMUNITIES

In Europe, the Romani populations were forced to adapt their culture to the sanctions they suffered (Sierra, 2017). Their mobility was condemned, while their stay in certain territories was denied. When the European nations were busy with the Romani, they treated them as enslaved people or a problem, forbidding the manifestations of their culture (Fienbork et al., 1992/1998). At the same time, slavery labor was forced on the African and American continents; Europe implemented measures against the Romani, such as their expulsion from Portugal, England, the Netherlands, Venice, and Milan; or the implementation of forms of slavery in Spain, England, and Moldova (Matache, 2014).

They were accused of practicing witchery, bringing epidemics, forging currency, starting fires, having a different aspect, but above all, being strange. And even today, the Roma are scapegoats when, in times of social and economic crisis, it is necessary to hold them accountable to draw attention away from the real problems. (Fienbork et al., 1992/1998, pp. 14–15)

Because of the persecution, the Romani people reached the European colonies (Río, 2017). In Spain, the banishment was seen as ineffective: it was believed they could change the constitution and security in America (Gómez, 2017). In Brazil, the Romani trajectory is connected to the colonialist policy of Portugal. Innumerable antigypsyism policies sought genocide, expulsion, or sedentarization (Borges, 2007). The lusophone country applied three types of exile: the colonial, the internal, and the galleys (Menini, 2014). Such practice happened during the colonial period.

Along with the expulsion, Portuguese authorities implemented norms that persecuted the Romani populations in the colony (Costa, 2012). Among them are the episodes of the so-called “Romani scurreries”, when the police invaded camps and killed many people (Teixeira, 2008). This persecution happened in all the states. The scurreries appeased after 1950, but they never stopped. From the 1960s, the rural exodus, which impacted the Brazilian population affected the Romani communities, most of whom abandoned their nomadism in the country to take up residence in the urban peripheries (Silva Júnior, 2009).

Such discrimination against the Romani populations is called “antigypsyism” or “romaphobia” (Bastos, 2012), which includes the construction of Romani portrayal as the eternal foreigner and the disqualification through stereotypes, with their identities associated with marginalization and poverty. To a great extent, such an image is reinforced with productions of academics and experts who concentrate their analyses on the Romani limitations as a collective, which would be consequences of the cultural aspects of the group (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2015).

The means of production of symbolic content, such as arts, science, literature, traditional media, common sense, and the Western imaginary, including those of Spain and Brazil, have mostly reinforced stereotypes (Silva Júnior, 2018). Stereotypes about the Romani population strengthen generalizations of individual negative experiences to the entire group. The dominant society ascribes deviant behaviors to the Romani collective (Fazito, 2006). When seen in non-Roma, they blame the individual, not the collective (Garriga, 2000). While “the positive life experiences with the Romani people are classified as an anecdote, exceptional or atypical facts” (Oleaque, 2014, pp. 67–68).

A considerable part of the power relations is processed through the attribution of identity to the other and the acceptance/rejection/strategic management of this identity (Araújo, 2002). “Who has the power of representing, has the power to define/classify and determine the identity” (Silva et al., 2000, p. 91). When we approach the relationship between Romani communities and state institutions, media outlets, or other institutions, we are dealing with a struggle for symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989). Then, we understand that the symbolic violence produced by stereotypes was used to justify social inequalities and the Romani people’s exclusion processes.

2.1. THE PLACE OF THE MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GENERIC “GYPSIES”

The media plays a fundamental role in the construction of public debates, contributing to the consolidation of narratives about social groups and influencing the construction of their identities and relations between the dominant society and the minorities. However, frequently, instead of contesting stereotypes about minorities², hegemonic media generate dominant negative messages about them. One of the consequences of this process is that minorities themselves internalize these stigmatized images, assuming stereotypes

² See the works of Willem (2010) and Ross and Playdon (2001) on how different minorities in different countries are treated through stereotypes in the hegemonic media.

or experiencing low self-esteem (Ross, 2001; Willem, 2010). According to Willem (2010), the stereotypes disseminated in the media are stronger than those of daily situations because the messages are produced in a sophisticated and professional manner.

These messages create what Bonomo et al. (2017) call “indirect contact” between the majority group and the minorities. In this study about the Romani populations in the state of Espírito Santo, in Brazil, for instance, the level of contact and knowledge of the participants related to this ethnic minority is very low, emerging primarily through movies and/or soap operas; in other words, indirectly. That reinforces the centrality of the hegemonic media in this process.

Overall, the works that analyze the representation of the Romani populations in the media can be summarized in two ideas: the recurrent presence of stereotypes based on folklore and a linear relation of this group with conflictual situations (Silva Júnior, 2020). Oleaque (2014) identifies, in his research about the Spanish press, that the individuals portrayed are always read from a collectivization point of view coupled with de-personalization. The word that is the most related to gypsies is “families”; followed by references to “clan”, “ethnicity”, and “race”. A good part of the analyzed material is related to conflictual situations. When it is related to conquests or talents, the individual is highlighted as an exception or a folklore perspective. In the press reports related to “problems”, which are presented as excuses to question political actions, the Romani subjects usually have a passive role. In some cases, they are portrayed as responsible for the “problems” that affect the dominant society. We can notice there is little room for the Romani people, and when they are interviewed, they are usually associated with references that ridicule them or reinforce marginalized experiences (Oleaque, 2014).

In a work that analyzed the Spanish newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo* between 2017 and 2019, Figueira-Cardoso et al. (2021) confirmed the existence of stereotypes relating “the Romani to the artistic world”, in which “artistic-cultural products associated with Romanipen” (p. 224) are extolled while the subject itself is made invisible and excluded, sometimes, associating them to criminality (p. 225). The authors also identified “contents that denounce the unequal conditions of access to goods and services by members from Romani groups, as well as the discriminatory practices of which they are frequently the target” (Figueira-Cardoso et al., 2021, p. 225). In these cases, there is a more significant incidence of “narratives of Romani about their own experiences” (Figueira-Cardoso et al., 2021, p. 225), showing some progress concerning previous periods, as in Oleaque’s (2014) work. The analyzed material coincided with the election of four Romani deputies to the Spanish congress (Gonçalves, 2019).

In Brazil, Miranda (2017) identified a “scarcity of news related to the ethnicity and the recurrence of thematics related to crimes allegedly committed by individuals of Romani origin, rarely identified by given names” (p. 140) in pieces of news analyzed between 2014 and 2015. All of them were published on sites or portals with local coverage, showing the absence of this minority in the media news within the national range.

To the author,

the use of the generic term “gypsy” names the individual as much as the ethnic group, encouraging the perception that all individuals of Romani origin would be identical and reinforcing the stereotype of the out-of-law Romani or the ethnicity inclined to break the law, being an identity determiner and therefore guilty even before being judged. (Miranda, 2017, p. 145)

We can see a more prominent reference to the Romani people in the Spanish press if we compare it with the Brazilian reality; at the same time, both countries associate this group with criminality. The more extensive variety of themes approached in Spain, giving room to political issues, could influence special media coverage about how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Romani communities. However, as discussed previously, when it is related to a world health crisis, minorities can easily be given the role of scapegoats, reinforcing stereotypes and worsening the unequal social conditions they already experience.

3. THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS ON A CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

Discursive relations are not symmetrical. There are negotiations and conflicts so that a point of view becomes hegemonic (Araújo, 2002). The right to speak and to be listened to is a dispute, and the symbolic power is at stake (Bourdieu, 1989). Due to a series of mediations, some interlocutors retain a more significant part of this power and become hegemonic voices. Others, lacking the economic and symbolic capital, stay aside from discourses, having their voices dismissed or silenced (Araújo, 2002).

Structurally, this right is related to public policies, which constitute each other only when they are circulated and appropriated (Araújo & Cardoso, 2007). In other words, the right to communication is not dissociated from the right to health and the notion of citizenship. There is a strong relationship between communication and inequality, expressed by invisibility and silencing (Silva Júnior, 2018). Without visibility, there are no public policies, financial resources, or proper services (Araújo, 2002).

Thus, communication can aid in behalf of justice as much as the maintenance of inequalities. This symbolic market is an infinite and continuous flow, composed of three elements: the production of symbolic goods, their circulation, and appropriation (Araújo, 2002). It operates in any communicative act, including those produced by the media, public policies, and social fights. This process is fundamental to constructing a critical analysis of the relationship between COVID-19 and the Romani communities.

In this context, we propose the study of two cases related to the coverage made by newspapers about the pandemic in Romani communities, in Brazil and Spain, in 2020. The choice of the two countries is due firstly to the authors' previous fieldwork experience in these places. Such experience expands and delves into the selected material's analysis due to a broader historical, social and cultural knowledge of the chosen countries. Moreover, the choice evidences two different contexts in the relation between state,

Romani people, and colonization. While Brazil represents the exile policies practiced by Portugal, expelling the Romani population to its colonies' lands (Río, 2017), Spain assumed a different stance believing the Romani population could adulterate the constitution of America and its security (Gómez, 2017).

We reflect on whether these different stances concerning the Romani people in both continents could change how these communities are treated by society and portrayed by the media. We seek to comprehend the discursive place of these communication outlets and that demanded by the Romani communities in a context of a health crisis. In this debate, we address the idea that communication is part of practices stemming from health policies. Moreover, we seek to comprehend through the analyzed texts how the selected newspapers approach the Romani communities in the COVID-19 pandemic context, what space was given to them, and to what extent the construction process of this “other gypsy” is broken or reproduced.

In the Spanish case, we chose an example that had a great repercussion among Romani associations and activists. The analyzed material features a journalistic report published on two pages of the newspaper. At least 13 social media pages of Romani activists and associations in Spain denounced the approach chosen by the *ABC* newspaper, which is over 100 years old and represents the conservative view in the country.

From Brazil, we introduce a case in the city of Trindade, in the state of Goiás, that had repercussions in the local media. We opted for this case because the agenda “Romani and pandemic” is absent in the main communication outlets from the national press. *O Popular* is a newspaper that dedicated a relevant space to approaching the Romani people during the pandemic in 2020. The subject surfaced after the articulation of Romani militants and researchers from this field with the newspaper editorial room (Longo, 2020). After that, the topic was highlighted on the G1 Goiás portal (Oliveira, 2020) and the local TV news of Globo enterprise.

4. THE NEWS REPORTS OF THE NEWSPAPERS *ABC* IN SPAIN, AND *O POPULAR*, IN BRAZIL

In Spain, the coronavirus pandemic was followed by racist acts, and with the Romani population, that was not different. The cases of blaming the Romani communities for the virus diffusion were spread through WhatsApp and the media. Activists and Romani institutions faced two challenges: mobilization to guarantee meals and minimum incomes to those who had their economic life affected by social distancing, especially those working in commerce, and to fight disinformation and hate speech related to the coronavirus.

The mobilization resulted in the production of articles and reports denouncing the approaches, with reflections about racism and the pandemic. Some examples: the news from the fact-checking page Newtral, titled “La Guardia Civil Niega que un Grupo de Vecinos ‘Gitanos de Haro’ Hayan Rechazado ‘Seguir los Protocolos de Sanidad’” (The Civil Police Denies That a Group of Neighbors “Romani From Haro” Had Refused to “Follow Health Protocols”; Maroñas, 2020); the news from El Cierre Digital, with the title

“Santoña: Acusan Injustamente a los Gitanos de la Localidad de Transmitir el Coronavirus” (Santoña: The Local Romani People Are Unfairly Accused of Transmitting Coronavirus; J. M. Fernández, 2020); or the news from “No Te Creas Estos Audios de WhatsApp que Siembran el Pánico Sobre el Coronavirus” (Don’t Believe the WhatsApp Audios That Sow Panic About the Coronavirus; Méndez, 2020). On the other hand, Romani associations produced pieces for condemning racist episodes, such as Fakali, which had one of their notes reverberated on *La Vanguardia* (EFE, 2020) and Europa Press (*Asociaciones de Mujeres Gitana Alerta de Episodios “Racistas y Antigitanos” Durante la Crisis del COVID-19*, 2020).

The case that had more repercussions was the journalist’s report on the cover of the newspaper *ABC Sevilla* (“El Confinamiento Para Frenar el Coronavirus Fracasa en los Barrios Marginales de Sevilla”, March, 2020), the Spanish autonomous community with an enormous Romani population. The photo, which fills all the cover, shows a policeman with his back to the camera in a blurred foreground. In the background, four women in an apartment window raise their hands outside, and their expressions can be interpreted as laughter or protest. The caption says: “neighbors of Tres Mil neighborhood reprimand agents that compelled them to remain in their homes” The title reads: “the hard lockdown of marginal Sevilla – the most troubled neighborhoods disobey the order not to go out”.

Las Tres Mil Viviendas is a known neighborhood in Sevilla, built during the Franco dictatorship in its urban policies developed between 1960 and 1970 to combat the growth of people living in shacks (called *chabolismo*), reaching the already excluded Romani families (Gonçalves, 2019). These neighborhoods degraded fast due to the high concentration of families, remote locations, and inadequate infrastructure.

The cover journalist report of the newspaper *ABC* stands in this context. Despite not mentioning words like “gypsy” in the main report, it is amply known in Spain that the neighborhood Las Tres Mil Viviendas is one of the biggest Romani ghettos in the country³. The journalist report “El Confinamiento Para Frenar el Coronavirus Fracasa en los Barrios Marginales de Sevilla” (The Lockdown to Stop the Virus Fails in Marginal Neighborhoods; March 20, 2020), by Silvia Tubio, begins by opposing “us” and “they”. On one side, the “Sevilla confined in their houses”, which makes an effort to stop the virus from spreading, and on the other, “the troubled neighbourhood”, which disregards orders (p. 22).

The text gives some examples of “noncivic behaviors” in other peripheral neighborhoods, such as the detention of five people in the region called “Los Pajaritos”, another neighborhood with a concentration of Romani population, after a conflict with the police. The reporter uses the term “clan” to identify the involved people. The journalistic report features the declarations of the commissioned Jaime Bretón, responsible for the South Polygon, zone where the neighborhood is located, referring to the family clans⁴ to blame those people who do not adjust to the recommendations from the authorities.

The journalistic text ends by relating non-compliance of lockdown with social exclusion. However, the accusation falls on only a particular group of neighbors. The only

³ To read more, see Silvia Agüero Fernández (2018).

⁴ A very used term in Spanish journalism to refer to the Romani communities (Oleaque, 2014).

neighbor speech quoted is not named. She is identified as a neighbor and portrayed in an infantilized context by narrating her attitude of joking and applauding while she returns to the streets as soon as the police leave the scene. The scene contrasts with the seriousness of the phrase she says: “if we do not have anything to eat, officer. We will have to go out” (p. 22).

In the related text, the title “La Iglesia Evangélica Mantiene los Cultos” (Evangelical Church Keeps the Cults; March 20, 2020), we find the only mentions of “gypsy ethnicity”. In this text, the reporter mixed information about religious celebrations during the lockdown and a contagion case in a vigil when the government had not yet determined the national quarantine. The situation had repercussions on the media because it was one of Spain’s first big centers of contagion. However, it generated much false information and hate speech against the Romani population because two audios circulated on WhatsApp alleging that the infected Romani families refused to follow the health protocols.

In Brazil, despite the pandemic being largely present in all mainstream media, the Romani populations are absent from this scene. National content was published about the subject through journalistic reports related to scientific institutions, alternative media, and Romani movements (Silva Júnior & Gonçalves, 2021). Thus, we opted to focus on a case that was in the spotlight in the local mainstream media, referring to a community of Kalo ethnicity from the city Trindade, in Goiás, circulating in the newspaper *O Popular*, on the news portal G1 Goiás and the TV Anhanguera, affiliated to Globo. We participated in the articulation process to expose their situation in the media through contact with the newspaper *O Popular*.

The Romani community of Trindade has lived in the city for more than 100 years, concentrated in the neighborhoods of Vila Pai Eterno and Samara, formed by nearly 1,200 people. The case came to our attention through the WhatsApp group “Romani Studies”, of which we are members, and gathers Brazilian and foreign researchers.

We talked to two community leaders, the couple Simone and Erli, intermediating with the journalist from *O Popular*, that had a phone conversation with the article’s author for more than 1 hour and received documents on the subject, including the *Nota Pública: Pesquisadores e Ativistas Alertam Para Racismo Contra Grupos Ciganos Durante a Pandemia e Cobram Plano Emergencial* (Public Notice: Researchers and Activists Denounce Racism Against Roma Groups in Brazil During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Demand an Emergency Plan; Aluizio, 2020), that was not mentioned in the journalistic report, whose title is “Uma Comunidade em Pânico” (A Community Panicking), published on 22 July 2020. Among the sources used, there is a more prominent highlight to the so-called official sources, represented here by Trindade city hall, included in the first paragraph and the subheading “Trindade city hall states to have given support”. Representatives of this administrative agency detail how they provided quality service to the Romani people that live in the city. They also say that the responsibility of the contagions was of the community itself when they had a party gathering the people together. On the other hand, Aluizio Azevedo’s and the community leaders’ speeches are less present in the text, in an inferior position since the first paragraphs are more critical in a journalistic press text.

The journalistic report begins with an objective title, and a contextualization of the panic people live in the Romani community. However, the subheading has the first reference to a stereotype of what would be, according to the text, an identity trait: “more than 50 people of a Romani group from Trindade, whose festive meetings are one of their cultural characteristics, were infected with the coronavirus. A man died” (p. 11). The reporter describes the community anguish, tries to contextualize how big the community is, and, without quoting sources, says the community leaders denounced not having access to the service due to the prejudice in the health system.

Nevertheless, the final word is given to the city hall, which contests the information, asserting that they have provided the necessary service and blames the people from the community, reaffirming the stereotype of “festive people”: “the municipal health department says that since the pandemic began, it has assisted the Romani people and has increased the attention after a party that happened in June, which would have contributed to the dissemination of coronavirus (SAR-Cov-2) in the community” (p. 11).

There is the voice of three leaders of the Romani community from Trindade in the text: Erli Gomes da Silva, Simone Soares da Costa, and Júlio César. They are all used to confirm the version of the party stereotype. In the third paragraph, for instance, Erli and Simone have their speeches constructed to reinforce that the trait of the Romani collectivity is responsible for the contagion. In the fifth paragraph, the voice highlighted is of a priest of a Presbyterian church. The link of an Evangelical religious institution acting in the Romani communities is a clear reality in Brazil and Spain, as we also saw in the previous analyses of the *ABC* newspaper.

Another voice mentioned in the sixth paragraph is the National Secretary of Promotion Policies of Racial Equality, Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, Sandra Terena, who, according to the journalistic report, would have been mobilized by activists and researchers of Romani culture to overhaul the fact. This paragraph, to denounce the omission of the Federal Government and the city hall, also features a speech by Aluizio de Azevedo, one of the sources used to represent the voice of the Romani communities.

An excerpt of this paragraph includes the words of the article’s author in the following terms:

from what I heard until now, nothing happened, Trindade city hall keeps very silent, as well as the Federal Government, and the community is terrified. And the worst is that those in better conditions are leaving the city and may infect other people in different places, says Aluizio de Azevedo, a Kaló Romani. (p. 11)

This speech was taken out of context and distorted to blame the Romani victims. The lack of reference to the public notice, for instance, makes the contextualization of the Romani communities’ situation difficult since their displacement is vital even to their survival, considering that door-to-door sales are the primary source of income for the majority of people from these ethnicities. Therefore, traveling is a matter of income.

Moreover, contrary to the journalistic report, Aluizio de Azevedo did not attend and accompany Terena's meeting or visit to Trindade. Instead, he participated in April, alongside Romani activists from all over the country, in a virtual meeting with the secretary, when she stated that the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights would make staple food baskets and hygiene kits available to the Romani communities, but would not meet all the demand because they were not enough resources.

Therefore, we noticed that the approach of both the newspapers, *ABC* from Spain and *O Popular* from Brazil, reproduced negative images about the Romani people when the subject is their relation with the pandemic, further reinforcing old stereotypes in the social imaginary in both countries.

5. STRATEGIES TO INVISIBILITY AND SILENCING: SOME FINAL WORDS

Most symbolic representation systems, such as arts, cinema, literature, theatre, dominant media, and even hegemonic science or common sense, reproduce stereotypes and racism of a devastating and harmful collective imaginary related to the Romani communities. Such representations justify and expand social exclusion, poverty, or extermination/genocide. These historical exclusion processes subjugated the Romani populations for more than five centuries and are still valid in other formats and platforms.

Both journalistic reports confirmed that the mass media has an essential role in keeping the Romani voices silent. There are no Romani characters or narratives about their ways of life, customs, or traditions. When there are, they are stereotyped, have their voices diminished, or are made irrelevant on a subject where they should play a key role.

The expulsion policies that led to millenary nomadism of the Romani communities that became a cultural element are part of the coloniality of power (Mignolo, 2007). The persecution policies, physical violence against the Romani people, and structural racism in public services, including health and communication, are some reflections on excluding the Romani people from citizenship.

From the coloniality of knowledge point of view (Lander, 2005), the Romani invisibility is manifested in science, as the Romani people are absent from research or, when present, they have their voices silenced in the official history, omitting their contribution to the construction of Brazilian identity and culture or, in the case of Spain, being used in a way that suits the objectives of the nation. This colonization is materialized, for instance, in the deletion of the Romani narratives, which are not referred on books and school curricula and are not considered by the hegemonic paradigm, a situation that happens in Brazil (Silva Júnior, 2009).

From the colonial perspective of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2008), invisibility is reflected in the processes of stereotyping, silencing, and racially demising. These tactics are used in all symbolic products of hegemonic media, such as in both journalistic approaches analyzed. Such processes affect the social imaginary of different societies, feeding prejudices and racism in the policies of public professionals and services.

In the journalistic reports, the victims themselves are to blame for the COVID-19 contagion. At the same time, public authorities are exempted from their responsibilities, such as the exclusion, for centuries, of the Romani communities, namely from the health service. We verified that health system managers are given priority, endorsing the right to speak and the truth prerogative, defining dominant narratives. However, like Silva Júnior (2018), we comprehend that the Romani people “fight for inclusion, pronouncing and enacting tactics of resistance to remain in the dispute for symbolic power and to conquer the right to health, communication, and citizenship” (p. 19).

Translation: Gabriela Marques Gonçalves and Amanda Rodrigues Ferreira

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