



EMPOWER

European key Multipliers
PromOte aWareness against
Racism and xenophobia

STEREOTYPES BETWEEN RACIAL CAPITALISM AND TRUTH REVERSAL

A research between Italy, Spain, Hungary

by

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As part of the European project EMPOWER



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PREFACE

IL RAZZISMO È UNA BRUTTA STORIA

Dear Readers,

the work of these pages by the researcher Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau', with the visual and reflective contribution of the artist Wissal Houbabi, was born on the occasion of the European project EMPOWER, which sees Italian (ACRA and Il Razzismo è una brutta storia), Hungarian (Antropolis) and Spanish (ENWAD) organisations involved in activities to reflect and contrast racism in their respective countries.

As part of the project activities, Il Razzismo è una brutta storia had the task to produce a research on the main stereotypes related to people with a migrant background in the three countries and on the most effective ways to fight them.

Together with Ghebremariam Tesfau', we decided to address this mandate in a non 'classical' way, by building on the many research studies that have already been carried out over the past decades in this regard. Many stereotypes have been deconstructed through data but still, if we look at the situation today in the Europe of 2024, this approach does not seem to have had an impact in counteracting dehumanising migration policies and ethnoracial-based logics of inequality that perpetuate asymmetry between an 'us' and a 'them'.

This 'them' encompasses and suffers the broad spectrum of the effects of racialisation and discrimination: examples include the externalisation of borders, labour exploitation, abuse of power by the police and the lack of protection of their rights suffered by migrants and historical minorities such as the Roma.

Will fighting certain stereotypes lead us to change the direction of all this?

Hence, the idea of leading the reader to question the way stereotypes are thought of: no longer causes of racism but a consequence of it, a result, a tool for it to perpetuate itself.

The first part of the research brings in an analysis on stereotypes that adopts the theoretical framework on 'racial capitalism'. The second part is a small journey, real and virtual, that Ghebremariam Tesfau' and Wissal Houbabi made in the three countries involved in the project, Italy, Hungary and Spain, and specifically in Rosarno, Budapest and Barcelona. The description of the encounters they experienced is another way of saying that anti-racism can only occur in relationships and in the commitment to build something different, even if it seems like a drop in the ocean. Houbabi's images and his reflections allow the reader to get even closer to those encounters and capture some of the emotions of those days.

As the organisation Razzismo è una brutta storia we are happy that this work has seen the light of day and hope it will inspire new anti-racist solidarity research.

Good reading,

Il Razzismo è una brutta storia

Abstract

This research aims to examine a specific dimension of stereotypes, that of "reversal." Stereotypes indeed serve various functions and have different natures. In the following pages, through three national case studies, we will interrogate a particular function of stereotypes: that of "reversal." While some stereotypes represent generalizations and prejudices – dysfunctional ways of grappling with the complexity of an (as yet) unknown world – others stereotypes actually function to conceal reality in order to reinforce a status quo. Through three case studies, we will demonstrate the continuity of this reversal function – and its consequences and resistance strategies – within social dynamics, and the perceptions of migrant and racialized individuals in three different European contexts: Italy, Spain, and Hungary.

The analysis of specific case studies will allow us to investigate how ethnoracial stereotypes impact the lives of those subjected to them and how these stereotypes deviate from reality to present an essentially inverted image. In particular, we will explore some very common stereotypes: the perception of immigrants and minorities as "social parasites" and a "burden on welfare," as well as their criminalization, which involves the tendency to perceive migrant and racialized bodies as dangerous and prone to criminal activity.

Through this research, we will seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex social dynamics related to stereotypes, immigration, and racialization, while simultaneously demonstrating their effects and how resistance is possible. Specifically, we will show how analyzing stereotypes as reversals is useful for understanding both the functioning of structural racism and for defusing the stereotypes themselves, spreading new awareness and tools to counter racism.



Introduction

The research stems from a reflection on the role that stereotypes play in the social reproduction of the existing order. The research project Empower, within which this research is included, aims to recognize and combat stereotypes and hate speech. This is a well-trodden line of research and field of study and action in recent years, both from a scientific perspective and in terms of policies and institutional interventions.

If we consider Italy, the context from which this research originates, we find that the only parliamentary commission tasked with discussing racial discrimination is the "Extraordinary Commission on Intolerance, Racism, Anti-Semitism, Incitement to Hatred and Violence," chaired by Liliana Segre, a life senator who survived the Holocaust. The commission's specific mandate is to investigate hate crimes and hate speech. However, hate crimes and hate speech are the result of a context of structural and institutional racism, of which they are only a violent manifestation with an episodic character. Moreover, these expressions are often penalized because they are not functional to the maintenance of a pacified racial and social hierarchy.

*It is important (...) to distinguish racial prejudice and racism. For racial prejudice is an attitude of hostility and hatred toward persons and peoples based on negative assumptions about biology and culture. But racism is the imposition of this attitude as social policy and social practice.
(Karenga 2003)*

This research aligns itself with the body of work on stereotypes and hate speech, with the aim of offering a systemic and critical perspective on structural racism, analytically addressing stereotypes in their function of concealment and discipline. Often, the focus has been on sanctioning the (mental) stereotype as the problem in itself, rather than as a symptom, as an indicator of a broader system in relation to which it serves one or more functions. This clearly has significant implications in the institutional sphere, as it determines the actions taken in the context of combating stereotypes. As Ashley Doane puts it:

The conflict between individual and structural definitions of racism leads to important differences with respect to policy implications for addressing racism. If racism is defined as a set of institutional and social practices, then the logical policies would include structural change, vigilant enforcement of civil rights laws, race-based remedies, and significant changes in cultural practices. On the other hand, if racism is viewed as a problem of individual attitudes and behavior, then the logical response is to condemn and punish individual acts of prejudice and discrimination, or to combat racism by "educating" the next generation to be more tolerant of differences.

Stereotype and prejudice are here understood as part of the private arsenal that constitutes individual racism. Accordingly, in order to counter this racism, attempts will be made to eradicate prejudice and stereotype in the individual through cultural and educational interventions.

But how does the analysis of stereotypes change when we view racism as a structural, institutional, and everyday phenomenon rather than as an expression of individual racist psychology?

The question that drives this research concerns the relationship that stereotypes have with structural racism. If, following Doane, the postcolonial and decolonial schools of thought and critical theories on "race," racism, and racialization, we understand racism as a pervasive social phenomenon, one that originates from the colonial event and continues to produce, both nationally and internationally, a "global hierarchy of humanity" (Grosfoguel 2016), what function do stereotypes play within such a system?

1.1 Stereotypes between Structural Racism, Racial Capitalism, and Criminalization

To address this question, it is first necessary to identify the framework of systemic racism. Critical schools of thought (Third World Marxism, Post and decolonial schools, Critical Race Studies) have long identified the symbolic and material matrix of racial hierarchy in a process of violent capital extraction (human and non-human) from the Global South. This phenomenon, with historical origins in colonialism, is now referred to as "racial capitalism." Racial capitalism

(Robinson 1983; Bhattacharyya 2018) is an approach to analyzing the economy and the capitalist system that considers racism and racial oppression as integral components of capitalism itself. This perspective suggests that capitalism produces and exploits racial inequalities to perpetuate its cycle of wealth accumulation and economic power. This insight is rooted in both Marxian work, particularly in the twenty-fourth chapter of "Capital" dedicated to the so-called "primitive accumulation," and subsequent works that hypothesize the need for a continuous reproduction of violent accumulation processes in spaces considered "pre-capitalist."

In the theory of racial capitalism, it is argued that racism is not simply a separate social or cultural issue but rather an element embedded in economic and political structures. In advanced capitalist countries, this manifests transversely, particularly within the labor market (racial segmentation of labor), access to credit, and other economic spheres that may penalize racialized communities and produce their social marginalization. Therefore, the theory of racial capitalism is a theoretical perspective that examines the interconnections between capitalism and racism, suggesting that the economic system extracts value from the production, exploitation, and reproduction of racial inequalities. The theory of racial capitalism, in a sense, reveals the very function of racism, which is the commodification of racialized (dehumanized) lives. And if systemic racism relies on a capitalist process of value extraction – especially from certain groups – to inquire into the function of stereotypes, we must identify the role they play in the exploitation of racialized subjectivities.

1.2 Scarcity, Distribution, and Competition: Minorities as a Social Burden

In a seminal essay from 1974 titled "Ethics of the Lifeboat," Garrett Hardin presents an argument against solidarity between the Global North and South (and consequently, towards migrants and within a nation itself). For Hardin, if the wealthy nations of the world were to help the poor nations, it would negatively impact future generations (native to the Global North). The author employs a metaphor, that of the lifeboat, to represent the distribution of resources in the world: rich countries have spots on the lifeboat and thus have the necessary resources, while poor countries are in the water, lacking the basic resources for dignified survival. The lifeboat can only hold a certain number of people, much like the Earth's resources can support only a certain amount of life (the theory of scarcity): if people increase, the lifeboat sinks. For this reason, it is argued that Western countries (the wealthy nations) should not squander their (scarce) resources on humanitarian efforts that ultimately have negative repercussions for everyone. This theory, widely debated over time, though rooted in ethics, is based on material assumptions – the scarcity of resources as a consequence of the finiteness of the world system – and spills over into the pragmatic

realm of redistribution policies, welfare, and today, immigration.

Indeed, while Hardin's argument from 1974 pertains to international relations and economic relations among states (recently postcolonial), it is easy to see how it applies to the poor, racialized minorities within the state, and especially to migrants: there is not enough room for everyone on the lifeboat. This approach – Hardin's work being the canonical ethical and academic reference, though not the origin of this narrative nor the only example – has strongly influenced public opinion and political discourse over time, impacting national and international policies significantly. However, when we critically examine this narrative, in light of numerous works dating back to the early 1900s that have exposed the dimension of exploitation of the Global South by the Global North¹, we discover that – even assuming a context of structural scarcity² – the lifeboat seems to keep the latter safe at the expense of the resources of the former.

The idea that immigrants and racialized individuals represent a social burden is widespread in Europe: they are accused of "stealing jobs" from natives and negatively affecting the welfare they benefit from. This is a persistent stereotype that exists in every European state and results in exclusionary and securitarian migration policies.

1. We mention here by way of example the schools of Third World Marxism (Franke, Wallerstein, Amin), anti-colonial Marxism (Cesaire, Cabral, Jaffe), Black Marxism (Williams, Robinson, Gilmore), and contemporary Marxism interested in processes of violent accumulation based on racial and colonial oppression lines (Harvey, Bhattacharyya, Chibber, Virdee).

2. The theme of resource scarcity is widely debated and far from being exhausted. However, it is important to note that - although we inhabit a finite ecosystem - research and technological innovation have repeatedly shown how it is possible to invent alternative and sustainable methods of production. In this sense, the debate is often flawed because the core (political) issue does not concern the resources themselves, but rather the ways in which they are distributed.

However, if we analyze the data and consult sector-specific research, we discover not only that the immigrant population does not compete for the same jobs as the native majority but also that immigration has a positive impact on national finances³. We are, therefore, confronted with a stereotype that does not align with reality but, on the contrary, operates as a reversal of it. This reversal, in turn, conceals the nature of the exploitation relationship, effectively becoming a device (Foucault) aimed at maintaining the status quo. Investigating the function of the stereotype within a context of systemic racism, based on the violent extraction of value from the lives – and deaths (Gilmore 2002; Mbembe 2011) – of subordinate subjectivities, requires examining how the stereotype reinforces this system of dominance.

Numerous studies have shown how the neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state has had repercussions on society, increasing the sense of conflict among its impoverished segments and imposing a discourse that, in the case of migrant presence, has taken on the contours of a "clash of civilizations" (Huntington). This is the so-called "war among the poor," where an ideal competition under conditions of perceived scarcity is translated into a narrative that attributes the source of discontent "below" rather than "above." Thus, the price of neoliberal welfare restructuring is paid in terms of social cohesion by its most vulnerable segments.

1.3 The criminalization of migrations

The criminalization of the migrant body proceeds hand in hand with its exploitation. If taking advantage of the welfare state and negatively impacting resources is considered antisocial behavior, which already leads to the stereotyping of migrants as extra-legal subjects, media, political, and institutional harassment exacerbate the phenomenon through hyper-visibility of migrations in criminal and security terms. This process is strongly linked to the narrowing of welfare, as anticipated by Wacquant when discussing the United States and internal racialized minorities:

America has launched into a social and political experiment without precedent or equivalent in the societies of the postwar West: the gradual replacement of a (semi-)welfare state by a police and penal state for which the criminalization of marginality and the punitive containment of dispossessed categories serve as social policy at the lower end of the class and ethnic order. (Wacquant, 2009:41)

The social insecurity caused by the impoverishment of the middle class is thus met with the production of a police-style security. This process in Italy and Europe occurs through what has been termed the "criminalization of migration," which is a nationalist and exclusionary process historically characterized by a correspondence between the "sacralization of external borders"

3. See:

https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/document/download/eeaa877e-5dfd-4d67-a42b-77bdf2e9461b_en?filename=jrc124744.pdf

<https://integrazionemigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-news/Dettaglio-news/id/2903/Rapporto-annuale-2022-sulleconomia-dellmigragione#:~:text=Impatto%20fiscale%20ancora%20attivo,1%2C4%20miliardi%20di%20euro>

and the dismantling of internal borders within Europe (Schengen).

the “crimmigration” merger has taken place on three fronts: (1) the substance of immigration law and criminal law increasingly overlaps, (2) immigration enforcement has come to resemble criminal law enforcement, and (3) the procedural aspects of prosecuting immigration violations have taken on many of the earmarks of criminal procedure (Moffette 2018).

In literature, we find numerous testimonies of this phenomenon. Thus, we see how the lives of migrant and racialized individuals in Europe unfold at the intersection of exploitation and criminalization.

1.4 The case studies

From this theoretical framework, we decided to investigate three case studies, one for each national context, that could narrate reality by debunking the aforementioned rhetoric. The objective was to intersect life stories, places, and realities that, through their testimony, could make the function of stereotypes evident. We thus identified three contexts: agricultural exploitation in Italy, street vending in Spain, and the condition of Romani women in Hungary. Through the voices of those involved in (anti-racist) struggles and daily survival, it is possible to piece together a picture that reveals the material reality of racialization, shedding new light on the role of racial prejudice in the reproduction of the existing order.



2

The perception of immigrants as social freeloaders: The Case of Rosarno, Italy

As we have seen in the previous sections, there are two fundamental processes affecting migrant individuals: on one hand, their identification as competitors and social freeloaders in a context of scarcity, and on the other hand, their criminalization. At the same time, we have also seen how the migrant component contributes to wealth production without this being recognized both materially and symbolically.

Within the European and Italian markets, we witness a phenomenon that characterizes racial capitalism: the ethnicization - or racial segmentation - of labor. The migrant component is indeed overrepresented in the so-called "triple D" jobs: dirty, dangerous, and demanding. With the necessary gender distinctions, migrant labor is employed in care work, unskilled manual labor, the agricultural sector, and all those jobs that require great effort for little economic return and social recognition. Work thus becomes one of those privileged places to observe how stereotypes and media narratives diverge from material reality. Therefore, we chose to delve into the context of agricultural

exploitation, deemed highly descriptive of the identified social dynamic⁴.

In the Italian landscape, the case of Rosarno and the Plain of Gioia Tauro is particularly noteworthy, where many sub-Saharan migrant individuals are employed in agriculture. We thus decided to visit the area to gather the voices of those who, from there, tell a story that undermines the racist narrative that immigrants take advantage of host countries.

2.1 Rosarno and the Piana di Gioia Tauro

Rosarno is the most well-known municipality in the Plain of Gioia Tauro, a rural area in the vicinity of Reggio Calabria, the provincial capital of the homonymous Italian region. The Plain is renowned for its citrus fruit production, particularly oranges and mandarins (ISMEA 2020). The municipality became the focus of news headlines due to the so-called "Rosarno Revolt": three days of protests and violence that occurred in the town in January 2010, pitting the indigenous population of Rosarno against seasonal workers of sub-Saharan origin⁵.

4. <https://www.openpolis.it/i-lavoratori-stranieri-tra-irregolarita-e-sfruttamento>

5. Depending on the year, the quantity of the harvest, and the season in the Plain of Gioia Tauro, we can find anywhere from a few hundred to over five thousand immigrant agricultural workers from sub-Saharan Africa. The orange sector, being particularly challenging due to the climatic conditions - as it occurs during the winter season - is especially occupied by people from Africa.



Scenes of revolt from Rosarno – source: Rai.it

If the reasons for the clash are to be sought in labor exploitation, daily racism, and the housing discomfort experienced by seasonal workers, the triggering event is undoubtedly the aggression suffered by two sub-Saharan immigrants by unknown Rosarno residents. The two workers are hit by shots from a compressed air rifle, sustaining injuries. However, as Peppe Pugliese from the SOS Rosarno project will tell us, the news that spreads among the laborers in a very short time is that two of them were killed by the gunfire. And the fact is so possible, so anticipated, that this is the version immediately believed, the fact that triggers the revolt.

For three days, Rosarno becomes a battlefield. With the exception of the revolt in Castelvoturno⁶ in 2008, whose circumstances differ somewhat from those

examined here, the one in Rosarno is the first manifestation of migrant anger, violent and spontaneous, in Italy.

The immigrants, all of sub-Saharan origin, rise up in defense of their lives, which they feel are constantly in danger, against exploitation, racism, and the inhumane conditions in which they are forced to live and work. However, a significant portion of the media and political discourse does not focus on the exploitation of labor, which is essential to maintaining the agri-food chain economy, nor on the need to protect the lives of migrant people. Instead, as has happened in other incidents⁷, attention is placed on the presence of migrants, attributing the reasons for the conflict to the excessive concentration of "foreigners" in the Plain of Gioia Tauro, even though this very component is essential for citrus fruit production.

6. Castelvoturno is a town in the province of Caserta, Italy. In September 2008, a riot broke out in Castelvoturno following the murder of six African immigrants. The immigrants were killed by gunfire in what appeared to be a racially motivated attack by a group of individuals linked to organized crime. The incident sparked outrage and led to protests and demonstrations in the area, highlighting issues related to racism and the influence of organized crime in Italy. See: <https://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/libro-bianco/castel-voturno-strage-di-camorra-strage-razzista>; and: Caruso (2015).

7. An example is the statements made by media and politicians in the aftermath of the attempted supremacist massacre in Macerata on February 3, 2018. The then Minister of the Interior Marco Minniti, belonging to the Democratic Party, declared: "I stopped the landings because I had foreseen a Traini case." See: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/02/08/macerata-minniti-ho-fermato-gli-sbarchi-perche-avevo-previsto-traini-accordo-con-la-libia-patrimonio-dellitalia/4145211>



The Dambe So Hostel – from: Italia che cambia; 30/05/2023

The institutional response reflects this perspective. After three days of clashes, the central government instructs law enforcement to evacuate the sub-Saharan migrants from the area. The workers are gathered onto buses and taken to the capital, where they are left at the station without any support, without a place to shelter, or means to sustain themselves⁸.

Years later, the condition of the seasonal workers – referred to in Italy as "braccianti," from "braccia" (arms) – has not changed. At the same time, the revolt, like an ever-present ghost, looms in every account and memory of the people we have met in the Plain, people who still fight for a dignified life and for the recognition of their labor in the citrus fruit sector and beyond.

2.2 Dambe so, the Piana and housing discrimination

We arrive at our destination around 12 o'clock. We have an appointment with Francesco Piobbichi, the project manager of Dambe So, at the hostel bearing its name. Dambe So means "house of dignity" in Bambara, one of the most spoken languages by the workers of the Plain of Gioia Tauro.

In fact, it is a solidarity condominium – inaugurated in 2022, promoted by Mediterranean Hope and supported by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (FCEI) – where there are about fifty beds, divided into autonomous apartments for four people each. The hostel was created with the aim of combating housing distress and dismantling the ghettos where the laborers

8. This same testimony is reported in two separate interviews with individuals involved in solidarity actions towards those removed from Rosarno: Peppe Pugliese of Sos Rosarno, and Francesca di Stefano, from the NGO CRIC, who facilitated the reception of these same individuals at the Roman social center Ex-Snia.



The shantytown of Rosarno - from: *Avvenire*; 16/10/2020

reside, in extremely precarious conditions. These places are unworthy and dangerous; they are often in the headlines due to fires – sometimes arson but often caused by makeshift tools used for heating – and other incidents that undermine the safety of the people living there.

Francesco has been living in the Plain for almost seven years and has been frequenting it for even longer. He guides us with a critical and informed gaze, outlining a scenario of poverty and institutional neglect. Along the way, we pass numerous unfinished projects. Buildings practically completed but never allocated. European projects developed but never activated due to executive negligence. Francesco explains that the authorities have no interest in improving the living conditions of agricultural workers, also because any

attention towards them would be negatively received by the local population. Institutional neglect affects the entire area, and the widespread marginalization creates friction between the Calabrians and the migrants. The social conflict is then exploited both by the 'Ndrangheta and by reactionary political entities like *Forza Nuova*⁹, which Francesco tells us organized a demonstration right in front of the half-finished buildings to prevent their assignment to the migrant agricultural component.

Near Taurianova, Francesco recalls how during the lockdown period caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, a settlement where about twenty people live remained isolated without running water. Moved by the situation, neighbors - locals - had helped the inhabitants of the ghetto connect to the water system.

9. *Forza Nuova* is an extra-parliamentary Italian political party that is directly and explicitly inspired by the historical fascism of Mussolini's twenty years. It is therefore a reactionary and racist party, which on several occasions has fueled and ridden the conflict between natives and migrants.

In response, the municipality had denounced its citizens for the act, leaving the settlement without water again. As we approach the place - which we discover is actually an abandoned farmhouse - Francesco tells us the story of the "Solidarity Village" of Contrada Russo. It is a village made of containers that should accommodate a hundred laborers. The village is located a few meters ahead, on the right side of the settlement.

Work began in 2021 and cost over 500 thousand euros. However, in August 2023, the Village is still uninhabited. The structure cannot yet be opened because they forgot to include the electrical system in the project. What lies before us is a paradigmatic image, which Francesco calls "the Rosarno model."

2.3 SOS Rosarno

Housing discrimination is just one aspect of subalternity in the Piana, reflecting the exploitation of labor, which renders the migrant body expendable. For this reason, while we find projects like Dambe So, aimed at providing an indirect wage through the allocation of dignified and affordable housing, there are also realities like SOS Rosarno that focus on the labor aspect. SOS Rosarno is a cooperative, born in the aftermath of the Rosarno Revolt, with the goal of ensuring a decent wage for workers in the citrus fruit sector. The cooperative achieves this by cutting out distribution channels, as explained by Peppe Pugliese, one of its founders.



The Solidarity Village; Ph. Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau'

Although the narrative on agricultural exploitation often revolves around the criminalization of gangmasters – a phenomenon where irregular labor is recruited by mediators, often of the same nationality as the workers, and engaged in day labor – Peppe Pugliese insists on explaining that the real problem lies not so much with the gangmasters but with the large-scale distribution. "We have fought battles so that retailers display the purchase price of goods on the label." And he continues: "People who go to the supermarket must know that the oranges they pay 3 euros per kilo for were paid up to 10 cents to the producer. With 10 cents, you cannot regularize people; it's the market that leaves no alternative to exploitation, not the gangmaster."

Pugliese's testimony is invaluable for understanding how the system relies on exploitation for its regular functioning. SOS Rosarno was created precisely to generate exchange and economy outside the hegemonic model. This is achieved through direct sales carried out through solidarity purchasing groups and other forms of ethical purchasing with parties (between Italy and

Germany). SOS Rosarno has indeed worked to reach, through independent channels, customers scattered across the national and international territory, thus excluding large-scale distribution from the relationship. The cooperative regularly hires labor, composed of worker members, and purchases product shares from local agricultural businesses. These shares are harvested by worker members and distributed by SOS through its network. Ten years after the project's inception, SOS Rosarno ensures around thirty workers and nearly as many producers the opportunity to operate and live by carving out alternative spaces to the exploitation system. Above all, SOS Rosarno reveals how the problem of exploitation in Rosarno is paradigmatic and systemic: it is not land ownership that determines the conditions of workers reduced to day labor, but the market within which it is embedded. In this sense, Rosarno's oranges become the symbol of an unequal exchange relationship, showing how, contrary to stereotype, it is not migrant people who take advantage of the host country, but the host country that generates wealth at the expense of migrant people.

**la rabbia sembra obsoleta
o forse ridicola, di plastica.
Chi ci insegna a essere libere
nello stesso intento palesa il limite
del corpo, dello spirito e del santo.**

**Il limite che è confine
o accettazione, impotenza.
Il limite che è organica
essenza di sfida allo scontro,
nonostante tutto, per il lutto
che celebro a noi stessi
noi corpo, che se ha un senso,
un peso, la Scelta.**

**Scegliere di fallire
ed essere libere dalla Storia,
dalla Vendetta, dal reale.**

**Noi natura, come frutto di stagione
o come fiore che sta per sbocciare.**

**E che fallire serva, anche solo,
a ripudiare, esorcizzare
i dannati strumenti del padrone.**



From the Piana di Gioia Tauro, San Ferdinando and Rosarno, the days spent there were intense, sandy, sultry, augmented with deep desolation. I felt Italy was very far away, yet Italy always was, but in those places on the margin where we talk of "state neglect," but at the same time the same state is manifested in its most concrete and brutal form, it was like stepping on a distant land.

"One must come to terms with one's own sense of powerlessness," Francesco who led and guided us by presenting the context, says this phrase that rumbles for days and weeks. How one can struggle, resist and at the same time come to terms with one's own sense of powerlessness, seems like a contradiction.

Yes, powerlessness in the Piana di Gioia Tauro becomes a consequence, an implied evil that manifests itself as the shadow of all the findings one can encounter.

Yes, it is one of those places where we start from a basic principle: there is no hope at all.

My recurring question was the same, almost incredulously I repeated the same question to everyone we met: is there a positive narrative about Rosarno?

No. There, no one sees a good side to the Rosarno story, and yet you live there, you struggle and recognize how huge the monster is to fight and how few people are willing to be there to actually do it.

But how is it possible that they do not see the beautiful community that Dambe So – la casa della dignità has created? How is it possible that they do not recognize the insight and great determination to create a (small but real) alternative to the condition of ghettoization and human humiliation in which hundreds of black men and women are forced to live?

I hear "coming to terms with a sense of powerlessness" and I observe a real project, me coming from the centralising Italy, from the hypocritical North where we don't need to see oranges in the fields, we just go down to some supermarket and come to terms with our purchasing power.

How is it possible that they do not see the organisational capacity that gave birth to SOS Rosarno, defying even large-scale distribution, racism, exploitative logics, defining a production system that chapeau, allows dozens of labourers to work as people and not as new-slaves.

The sense of helplessness was proportional, clearly, to what they imagine as a radical system change, in those places I learned anew how to make projections and enchantments fail.

Coming to terms with one's own sense of powerlessness, I have somehow tried to interpret it as starting over from ground zero, reinventing a system from the self, self-determining by rejecting the master's tools, in this sense failing as a strategy to sabotage.

Wissal Houbabi, Rosarno - August 2023



3

Barcelona: the criminalization of the Black migrant body

Barcelona is a city with a complex political and migratory history that has shaped its social and political fabric over the centuries. If, during the 19th century, industrialization processes attracted workers from other regions of Spain, leading to internal migration, in recent decades, immigration to Barcelona has been characterized by the arrival of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Barcelona has become a cosmopolitan and culturally diverse city thanks to the influx of people from diverse backgrounds, in a coastal city with a Mediterranean-style social life. 23.6% of the resident population in Barcelona belongs to another national community¹⁰. If we consider the population born in another country, the figure is even higher: 519,066 people, 31.3% of the total population. The largest groups are Italians, with over 45,000 individuals, followed by Colombians (23,000), Pakistanis (22,800), and Chinese (20,000).

Barcelona is a city that has been narrated – and has narrated itself – over time, as a capital of inclusion and minority rights, whether they are ethno-racial, sexual, or of other kinds. In particular, during the administration of Mayor Ada Colau (2015-2023), belonging to the Barcelona en Comú party, Barcelona became a symbol of the municipalist movement and struggles for

hospitality policies, accrediting itself as "ciutat refugi" (city of refuge).

Barcelona has seen a strong solidarity movement and activism in support of migrants. Non-governmental organizations, activists, and volunteer groups work to ensure access to basic services and promote the rights of migrants. Despite this, in Barcelona as in other European capitals, immigration is often associated with challenges and problems. These include administrative regularity, limited access to services and education for irregular migrants, and police violence, which constitutes institutional racism.

Institutional racism, violence, and police control have been brought to the forefront of the debate by the struggles of the "manteros" and their allies. The "manteros" are street vendors, mostly from sub-Saharan countries such as Senegal, Mali, Nigeria, and Gambia. The presence of "manteros" in Barcelona is a constitutive fact for the city, particularly in areas around La Rambla and the Barceloneta waterfront (Alford, Khotari & Pottinger 2019).

As in the case of agricultural laborers in Rosarno, examining the condition of "manteros," listening to their voices and stories, helps to shift the perspective and disarm stereotypes and racist narratives.

10. <https://www.barcelona.cat/internationalwelcome/en/noticias/record-figure-foreigners-now-account-for-23-6-of-barcelona-s-population-1313513#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20with,31.3%25%20of%20the%20total%20inhabitants>

3.1 The Popular Union of Street Vendors

The "manteros" take their name from the "mantas," the blankets on which they spread their merchandise along the streets. They are often young individuals who have not been immigrants for long and come to Barcelona in search of economic opportunities and a better life in Europe. However, they face two main sets of problems. The first, like all migrants, is administrative irregularity and difficulty accessing goods and services. The second is specifically related to their work, which is informal and heavily targeted by the local police patrolling the city streets. The law enforcement in Barcelona targets them with frequent arrests and confiscation of goods. This repression perpetuates a cycle of marginalization and discrimination. Accusations of racism by the authorities have been widely documented and contested by human rights organizations and local activists.

Despite the challenges, the "manteros" have shown remarkable resilience and determination. They have organized into rights defense groups and conducted

demonstrations and protests to assert their right to earn a living honestly and dignifiedly, demanding recognition of their rights as informal workers and an end to repression by the authorities. Over time, the local community and human rights activists have mobilized to support the "manteros." Non-governmental organizations, associations, and volunteer groups have provided legal assistance, access to essential services, and support in the fight against institutional racism.

In 2015, following the death of street vendor Mor Sylla, the first Spanish Popular Union of Street Vendors was born¹¹. Two years later, in 2017, Top Manta was inaugurated: a social and solidarity clothing brand of the Street Vendors Union of Barcelona. Top Manta is created to improve the living conditions of the "manteros" community, a project conceived with ethical and sustainable criteria aimed at ensuring the future of local communities rather than forcing them to emigrate. It is a project that has led over 120 people to obtain documents and leave the life of street vending in just a few years. Top Manta has two workshops/shops, one for tailoring and one for screen printing, where 25 people work to produce clothing for the brand and take on external orders.

11. <https://manteros.org/>



Top Manta shop; Sources: Google images

3.2 Top Manta: from criminalization to self-organization

When we arrive at the Top Manta store, Mamadou, Samb, and Abdoulaye are waiting for us. After showing us around the store and their creations, they invite us to sit in the back. Here begins a collective narrative of how Top Manta was born, the work of the Union, the injustices suffered, but also the strong political conviction with which the "manteros" responded to the criminalization they faced.

"The first problem is the issue of documents," Mamadou explains, "because when people arrive, it's very complicated to obtain them, and it takes time (...) Without documents, it's impossible to find another job. Taking the blanket is the only thing you can do to survive."

Our hosts open the conversation by emphasizing how their condition is intertwined not only with the historical condition of colonization in Africa but also with the management of migrations in Europe.

"There is social racism and institutional racism. Institutional racism is that of the laws. If a person cannot have documents, how can they rent a house, find a job (...) The European capitalist system operates on us. They portray us as criminals because it's functional to the system, but we [migrants] are the energy that makes it work."

In May 2023, Top Manta was invited to participate in the Venice Biennale¹². The spokesperson, Lamine Sarr, stated: "We are not here to celebrate anything, we are here to take responsibility for being a megaphone for many people who day after day suffer the violence of Fortress Europe, which kicks us out of our homes, kills us at the borders, and punishes us with institutional racism and immigration laws when we manage to arrive."¹³ The line of T-shirts branded "Top Manta - The European Biennale" reinforces this: colonialism, plundering, borders and pushbacks, deaths, racism, suffering, and violence, these are the watchwords that characterize migrant life in Europe. The testimonies of the "manteros" reaffirm this tension.

Mamadou talks about companions who have been made unable to regularize their status, people whose educational qualifications obtained in Africa have not been recognized, and he dwells on the reception system,

12. <https://www.meltingpot.org/2023/05/top-manta-larte-della-resistenza-contro-larte-dellipocrisia>

13. https://twitter.com/sindicatomanter/status/1659567741886496768?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Eetwembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1659567741886496768%7Ctwgr%5Ed7fd5d521c32c94c8aca4fc5608aa3181221c0f1%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.meltingpot.org%2F2023%2F05%2Ftop-manta-larte-della-resistenza-contro-larte-dellipocrisia%2F



which he believes is designed to produce and reproduce crime, penalizing the most vulnerable individuals. "Like our companion Mor Sylla¹⁴, who died while the police were at his house. They entered the house saying he was selling counterfeit goods, and just for that, they entered." "But can't they enter without proper permission?" we ask Mamadou. "But they don't care about the rules when it comes to us."

Mamadou, Samb, and Abdoulaye all emphasize this aspect: "They treat us like criminals, but it's the law enforcement that acts criminally towards us. Who should we call to defend ourselves from crimes against us?" "Even in Madrid, a 'mantero' died. I don't remember his name. They say he had a heart attack. He was also chased by the police."¹⁵

"And the media? Are they ever capable of telling what really happens?" "Never, they never tell what really happened. Yet the truth is there, all it would take is an investigation." In the case of the "manteros," we discover how the experienced criminalization, which responds to the racial stereotyping of otherness, becomes a tool of daily blackmail that literally produces death. Faced with the condition experienced by street vendors, at the intersection of work precarity and institutional racism, the "manteros" react through self-organization, creating a brand capable of bringing them out of invisibility and criticizing the system that produces the marginalization of their lives.



14. See: https://elpais.com/ccaa/2015/08/11/catalunya/1439280730_020063.html

15. See: Kalir 2022



NON SIAMO QUI PER CELEBRARE NIENTE,
SIAMO QUI PER ASSUMERCI LA
RESPONSABILITA' DI FARE DA MEGAFONO
PER MOLTISSIME PERSONE CHE GIORNO
DOPO GIORNO SUBISCONO LA VIOLENZA
DELLA FORTEZZA EUROPA CHE CI CACCIA
DALLE NOSTRE CASE, CHE CI UCCIDE ALLE
FRONTIERE E CI PUNISCE CON IL RAZZISMO
ISTITUZIONALE E LE LEGGI SUGLI
STRANIERI QUANDO RIUSCIAMO AD
ARRIVARE.



"The first impact is the annihilation of one's dreams."

Arriving in Europe is a risk, and those who study a plan to challenge the borders know this well, the risk puts 50/50 life with death, and in the 50% of life if you survive, it may not be worth all the effort and pain suffered.

To accept this challenge means you have a goal, a dream, gasoline that carburets and goes beyond material risks. The dream becomes more important than the possible concrete risks, the symbolic intangible outweighs the tangible.

The dream vanishes as soon as they set foot in Europe. Annihilation, annihilation and subsequent daily dehumanisation as the guilt and price to pay for that historically less and less acceptable act: migrating.

To have dreams in the body, like a thin layer in the pupils and then to feel that lubricating veil explode, drying up the pupils exposing them to opacity and fog. This condemnation will need centuries more to be vaguely recognized. To watch one's human capacity to generate dreams killed, becoming a body and only a body made of organs is an atrocious loss of self that limits one's ability to think of oneself as tomorrow, a master of oneself.

Who is responsible for these intangible murders of a "potential self"?

The manteros in Barcelona start from this simple yet powerful statement. I think back to when as little girls and boys we were told "what do you want to be when you grow up?" To this question we still had opportunities to fantasise, but it is not too long before reality overturns the unconscious and free capacity for projection, we come to terms only with our own patterns and what the community has been able to create as the "potential self."

As the daughter of a housewife and street vendor father, even though I grew up in the West, I have seen my mental elasticity to think of myself as a tomorrow drastically reduced. My community cannot aspire to a job that is not proletarian, the whole system makes sure that the children of immigrants are the base of the social hierarchy: the future working class, exploited and poorly paid.

The annihilation of one's dreams is met with that sneaky question of "what do you want to be when you grow up".

The Manteros have metabolised the mourning of old dreams, illusions that needed the organisational time to define new ones. The Manteros are black men rebuilding new models of resilience and ability to create something out of nothing.

If our models are ourselves and what the community offers us, it is in the organisation of the community that a new and more concrete capacity to imagine a "potential us," a possible tomorrow, can be reconstituted.

Again, coming to terms with dehumanisation, a lesson I learned as a hawker's daughter some time ago is to recognize in the stigmatisation of jobs such as the manteros (in Italy known as Vu Cumprà) a working class that escapes exploitation by the master and bases its survival in recognizing itself as part of a community.

Wissal Houbabi, Barcelona - September 2023



4

Budapest: stereotypes as forced discipline among Roma Women

Budapest, the capital of Hungary, is a complex city with a diverse migratory history, a stratified social reality, and an evolving political landscape.

Hungary has been at the center of the European debate in recent years due to its harsh treatment of migrants - often in transit - and xenophobic and racist policies, embodied in the actions of its Prime Minister, Viktor Mihály Orbán, and Fidesz, the right-wing, nationalist, and populist party to which he belongs. However, ethnic and national diversity in Hungary does not solely revolve around a dichotomy between locals and migrants but also involves historical internal minorities, such as the Romani population.

The presence of Roma people in Hungary dates back at least to the late Middle Ages. The Council of Europe estimates that there are approximately 700,000 Roma people living in Hungary (7.05% of the population)¹⁶. However, it is difficult to determine the exact number due to the country's census policies.

In Budapest, Roma people are particularly present in multiethnic neighborhoods of the city such as Józsefváros, where they make up as much as 50% of the residents (Boros

et al 2016). This data demonstrates how, in line with Barcelona and other European capitals, Budapest reflects urban forms of ethnic segregation, and how the Roma population is part of the marginalized groups in the country.

Reflecting on the condition of Roma people shifts the focus from migrant groups - and the policies that govern their lives - to an indigenous minority. In this sense, it is possible to engage in a dialogue between the governance of internal minorities and the governance of migrations as two aspects of a unique phenomenon, namely racialization¹⁷.

We have chosen to focus on the Roma population to make this reflection on stereotypes and racialization more comprehensive, and we have chosen to speak with women to also interrogate the gender dimension. If indeed the workers in Rosarno and the Manteros are primarily men - because the labor market is racialized but also gender-determined - when examining a specific group rather than a sector of employment, it becomes possible to look at processes of racialization highlighting the specificities related to women's experiences.

16. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu-country/hungary_en#:text=National%20contact%20point-,Facts%20and%20figures,7.05%25%20of%20the%20population

17. Cedric Robinson himself discusses the Romani population as a sort of litmus test for racism in Europe. See, for instance, what he asserts in *Black Marxism* (1983).

4.1 Passing

The need for continuous linguistic mediation led us to choose to interview the women involved in the project through an online platform. While on one hand, this precluded direct experience of urban space, on the other hand, it allowed us to immerse ourselves more deeply in the conversation. The three women interviewed, Anja, Anelka, and Dana¹⁸, have different life experiences, but they are all united by their common origin and the racialization they have experienced. We ask them to introduce themselves, to tell us who they are, and to talk about their lives as Romani women in Hungary. They have different jobs: one is an entrepreneur (owns a hairdressing salon), one is a casual worker, and the other is currently unemployed. Anja, the entrepreneur, talks about the difficulties related to work, acknowledging that she is fortunate to have had her own place for a long time, where she is not forced to submit to other employers. We ask her what she means, what problems there are with work, and she recounts numerous instances where women, because they are Romani, do not have access to certain jobs.

"Once a girl came to the store and complained that she couldn't find a job. So I told her: I'll take care of it. And I made her blonde. I've done it many times. So you can't see that she's Romani. Afterwards, she found a job!" This strategy is called passing. It's a performance: racially connoted characteristics are hidden in order to "pass" as members of the majority group.

Passing characterizes all those contexts where structural racism manifests itself as a group destiny. To escape this destiny, the racialized person simulates belonging to the hegemonic group. We have numerous testimonies of this in American literature, and it is a common form of micro-resistance also among Romani populations in Europe (Pantea 2014).

Anja records discrimination in access to the job market and responds through camouflage. This is a common strategy, as Anelka also tells of how her son hid his origins at work. "He worked in a restaurant, you know, in the kitchen. He had a friend that worked with him. You could tell his friend was Romani [while her son could pass as a white Polish, *ndr*]. And he says they treated him badly, while my son was treated nicely. It's not worth saying you're Romani." The stories reveal a deep-seated and profound racial prejudice against Romani people, experienced by the three since birth. Dana recounts that she had to change schools at elementary level to escape racist bullying from peers. The testimonies show how Romani people, despite being Hungarian citizens for generations, do not enjoy full access to citizenship, understood as that set of rights (material and symbolic) derived from belonging to the nation. This allows us to recognize Romani people as foreigners within the nation. Racialization processes are always processes of alienation and othering of an imagined - and constructed - "race" component.

18. Unlike other interviewees who are socially exposed regarding the topics they address, we have decided here to anonymize the interviewees for privacy and ethical reasons.

4.2 To comply: the politics of respectability

But what is the consequence of all this? How do racial prejudices impact the behavior of Romani people? Passing is one of the tools for emancipating from the experienced marginalization, but it is not always possible to implement it, and it comes at a significant sacrifice, namely, to conceal part of one's identity.

The word that the interviewees most frequently used to describe their disposition towards the violence they have experienced is "to comply." Comply means to obey, to acquiesce. According to Anja, Anelka, and Dana, acquiescing to a system that identifies you as an inferior, unreliable, criminal subject means doing everything in one's power to prove the opposite, to adhere to the norm of the dominant group - a norm to which the group itself is not obliged to adhere. Speaking about work, the women, recounting personal experiences and those of people close to them, talk about always having to prove themselves to be better. To be reliable, to be great workers "to arrive at work first, leave last, earn less than others, not to complain."

This compliance resembles what in literature has been called "respectability politics." The racialized subject is forced to represent not only oneself but the entire group. For this reason, in order to defuse racial prejudice - which affects private existence but also places a responsibility towards one's own group - "you always have to do twice as much as what others do," and in doing so, prove yourself respectable. Racial prejudice and stereotypes here show even more clearly another aspect of their functioning, that of disciplining.

If, on one hand, stereotypes obscure reality, on the other, they create a context in which the vulnerable subject is forced to demonstrate that they do not possess the negative characteristics associated with them. And this demonstration takes the form of self-discipline and self-exploitation, to the benefit of the dominant group.

4.3 Roma's lives as migrants' lives?

In the face of the numerous similarities between the experiences of racialization of Romani people and migrants, and in light of the racist political rhetoric affecting both groups, we ask the interviewees if they perceive a commonality. Anja, in particular, is the president of a promotion association committed to enhancing Romani cultural heritage. She recounts how she has often drawn inspiration for the association's activities from the work of a migrant association, led by a Senegalese man. Furthermore, this testimony leads us to think that the experience of the two groups is so similar that the tools of emancipation turn out to be the same. However, this perception is contradicted by the interviewees.

To the direct question, "do you think there are things in common? Are Romani people treated like migrants?" the women respond with a resounding no. Although expressions of solidarity towards migrants emerge repeatedly, Anja, Anelka, and Dana reiterate a racist narrative, according to which it would be better for migrants to stay in their countries of origin. The interviewees firmly deny that the conditions of the two groups can overlap and make a clear separation between their

Conclusion

The research undertaken aimed to highlight a specific function of stereotypes, which is to maintain and reproduce the status quo. In this sense, we have found that the most prevalent stereotypes about migrant and racialized subjectivities in Europe can be deconstructed through the narratives of those who experience them and the realities that seek to counter racial discrimination.

If we acknowledge that global economic balances are based on an asymmetric colonial relationship, and that racial prejudices differ from racism as a manifestation of the phenomenon, not its origin (Karenga 2003), then we will look at these same stereotypes as indicators of a system, rather than as a polemical target in themselves. As Maulana Karenga reminds us, racism is primarily a violent colonial act, which becomes an ideology only for the maintenance of the power relationship underlying the violent act.

First, it is a violent act of imposition. As a mode of domination, racism is defined above all by its violent character, its disruption and progressive destruction of a people's life - whether it is called colonialism, imperialism, the Holocaust of enslavement, neo-colonialism, settlerism, occupation, or globalization (Fanon, 1968; Césaire, 1972; Cabral, 1969) (...) Secondly, racism expresses itself as ideology or more precisely an ideology of justification of the imposition. It is an ideology which ranges from the rawest of biological, religious and cultural absurdities to elaborate intellectual and pseudo-intellectual projects masquerading as social science (...) Finally, racism expresses itself as institutional arrangement, as structures and processes which promote and perpetuate the imposition and ideology.

What emerges from this approach is that racial prejudice provides support, ideological legitimization, and discursive legitimacy to contemporary racial hierarchies. Exploitation and criminalization are thus two sides of a racial power system that institutionalizes its operation by producing narratives functional to its maintenance. Given these premises, the agricultural workers in Rosarno, as well as the street vendors in Barcelona, are not exceptions or anomalies in an otherwise just system, but rather sites where power becomes visible in all its paradigmatic violence. The farmworkers and the "manteros" thus show us not a distortion, but the real functioning of racial capitalism and institutional racism, and the relationship of stereotypes to racism: a relationship of concealment on one hand and legitimization on the other.

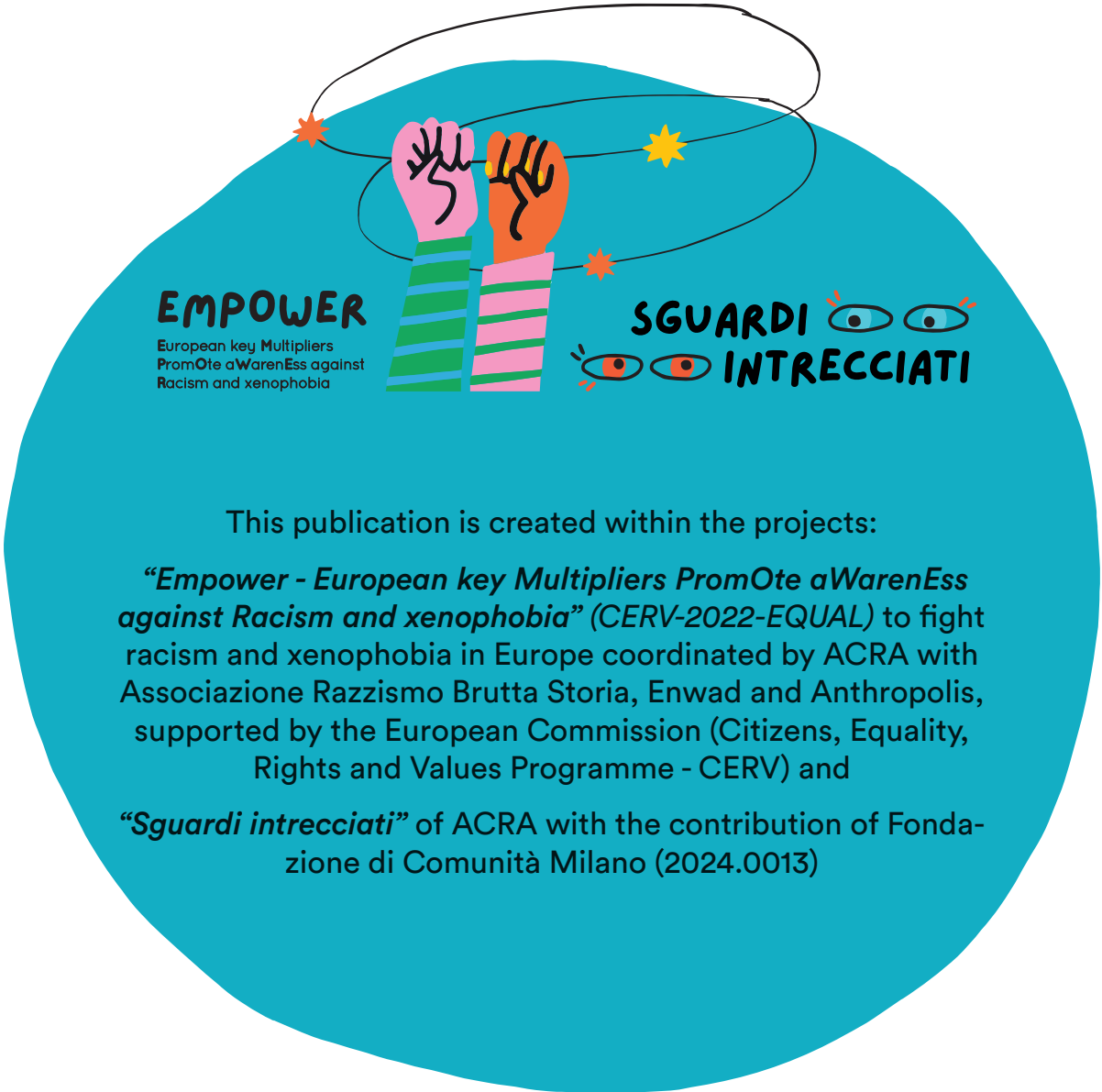
In this sense, the "to comply" of Romani women reveals an additional function of racial prejudice, a function of coercion to obedience, of disciplining the racialized person, forced to adhere to strict behavioral codes to emancipate themselves from the racist projections of the majority.

The research concludes by drawing attention to the same critical elements from which it starts. It is not possible to defuse stereotypes and racial prejudices starting from them. Policies that aim for this goal can, at most, carry out work related to forms of representation and language, a fundamental discourse but insufficient if the material causes that produce racist ideological articulation are not addressed simultaneously. For this reason, it is necessary to place a complex and systemic view of racism at the center of the analysis. Only in this way will it be possible to recognize racial prejudice and stereotype as ideological tools of structural racism and adapt policies to an anti-racist perspective and radical social transformation.

Finally, in every place we have looked, we have found innovative forms of resistance to racialization processes. This confirms the idea that where power is exercised prominently, there are also efforts of emancipation by those subjected to this power. It is precisely from these forms of resistance and emancipation that it is possible to conceive new policies capable of challenging racism from its foundation.







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