

INTRODUCTION



CHRONICLES OF A TRAGEDY FORETOLD

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Under COVID I have noticed a horrible neglect of these people in this neighborhood. This neighborhood is excluded from society, it is always under lockdown because it is isolated; even in normal times, if you don't have a car, there is no way to get in or out. Ambulances don't go in, or firefighters—nothing. And to this situation of isolation in which they always live, now is added the experience of the pandemic, lockdown, fear, dread, ignorance. *If I get sick, what will happen to my dear ones? How can my family support themselves?*

They called me with anguish, with fear, fears, crying, *I can't, I don't have anything in the fridge, I don't have food*. Because in normal times, you go calling for scrap, you go to sell some socks, you make ends meet as we say, and you bring the daily bread to your house. But all this was no longer possible during lockdown. They reach such desperation that, as they don't have enough, within families they blame each other.

—Dulce Flores Torres, Chapter 2, this volume

This book brings together the voices of thirty-seven chroniclers who narrate the ongoing impact of the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic on Romanies in five countries: Spain, Brazil, Slovakia, Poland, and Czechia. Twenty-four of these chroniclers are Romani, and thirteen non-Romani, and they speak from a wide diversity of positions: as affected individuals, NGO workers, health practitioners, policy makers, community mediators, activists and academics living and working among or alongside Romani communities. Often, they occupy more than one of these roles at once. Out of this multiplicity of voices emerges the conversational character of this book, with each chron-

icler addressing each other and the readers in ways that foreground their individual story, experience, and perspective. Whilst the chroniclers from Brazil, Poland, Spain, and Slovakia write primarily about the spring and summer of 2020 (now commonly referred to as the first wave), the Czech contributors tend to focus on the winter of 2020/21 (the second wave).

The project emerged in April 2020, when it became obvious to us that the incipient pandemic was already having devastating effects on Romani groups in many countries, and that, because of their extreme marginalization and historical demonization, these effects risked being disregarded by decision makers. While in the first months there was a glut of online activity by pro-Romani actors, with webinars, newspaper articles and reports on the impact of the pandemic appearing almost daily, during the second half of 2020 their number decreased significantly. To start with, we shared the same sense of urgency and hoped to publish these chronicles rapidly, possibly even within 2020. But bringing such a complex project together took much longer than we anticipated, and we came to appreciate that the slowness of traditional academic publishing can be a boon.

As the pandemic went on, the book became a task of testimony, not just to the initial shock and confusion, but also to how individuals, families and communities have been affected by consecutive waves and lulls, and by successive governmental directives. Whilst working on the book, we have seen policies emerge and harden into established practices and infrastructure (relating to public health, security, borders, data), as well as into taken-for-granted worldviews and dispositions (to do with threat, bodies, citizenship, choice). The chroniclers evidence how, as a result of these processes, the vulnerability of Romani communities has increased in ways that will shape Romani lives for many years to come. This book documents and analyses this increase, and so labors against its normalization.

From the start, we conceived the book as a vehicle for witnessing as well as analysis, reflection, and debate. Chronicles are firsthand accounts, and chroniclers are witnesses who document what happens around them. Chronicles are written from within the entanglements of life, not from outside. Unlike ethnographers or journalists, for whom participation is a choice, a strategy to make observation possible, chroniclers are enmeshed in the situations they describe, and they cannot but take part. They are guides who take the reader down the singular paths that they necessarily traverse in their everyday lives. Chroniclers record those details of existence that impose themselves forcefully, that cannot be shrugged off or avoided. Their authority and strength come not from neutrality or detachment but from involvement, partiality, and experience. We value them precisely because they are individual, situated, and partisan.¹ It is important to emphasize that the chroniclers present contrasting viewpoints on policy, practice and pub-

lic discussion. They engage in debates around the pandemic with each other, but also with actors outside this volume. These debates overflow the boundaries of this book, and in fact, as editors, we sometimes cannot grasp their nuances or implications fully.

It is from within the crisis that these *Romani Chronicles of COVID-19* explore the interplay between the one-off, concrete and singular, on the one hand, and the larger dynamics that give it shape, on the other. The chroniclers address questions of crucial social and scholarly relevance: How is the enormity of the global pandemic crystallizing within Romani communities at local level? And how is it unfolding individually, within the singularity of changing and diverse Romani lives? How has the crisis intersected with pre-existing inequalities, health disparities and antigypsyism? And what new inequalities and forms of marginalization is the pandemic seeding? What do the different ways in which Romani individuals are living the pandemic tell us about the nature of oppression and exclusion in the contemporary world, and about how they are and could be challenged? Finally, what does the post-pandemic future look like for Romanies?

In the *Chronicles*, these multiple levels and arenas are important. The focus on the crisis—unprecedented, traumatic, demanding immediate attention—does not distract us from the long-term, routinary, ongoing inequalities and power disparities. Crucially, the personal is not erased or subordinated to the general, and individuals and their stories are never just examples or illustrations of wider trends. In fact, by foregrounding such diverse ways of being and knowing, we hope that the *Chronicles* will help challenge the stereotyping, homogenizing depictions of Romanies under which Romani individuals labor.

We take as our starting point the awareness that experience can be at once forceful and elusive, that it cannot always be adequately captured or analyzed, and that academic concepts and approaches are not always adequate or sufficient for this task. This is why we have encouraged the chroniclers to write in a plurality of styles and registers: you will find memoir, fiction, and diary extracts alongside single- and multi-authored scholarly accounts. This diversity is important: it has enabled authors to convey their complex knowledge, identities, and experiences in nuanced ways; and it reveals the critical and analytical strength of ways of knowing that are often disregarded as non-academic, non-analytical, or non-rigorous. This diversity also reflects the distinctive position that each chronicler, whether Romani or non-Romani, occupies vis-à-vis the Romani communities they write about—as family member, activist, or engaged professional. These different ways of knowing and writing are offered as contrasting avenues through which to approach the multifaceted and shifting realities of the pandemic. Gathering these voices and outputs in one single volume makes it evident that aca-

demia, still very much the preserve of non-Romani scholars such as the two of us, provides one set of questions and methods whose role and value need to be contextualized and evidenced.

Although all the contributors are witnesses in one way or another, their witnessing is far from uniform or monolithic. Some contributors write about their daily lives during the pandemic, often looking back on harrowing experiences and events. Other writers, particularly professionals and activists who have been attempting to ameliorate the impact of the crisis on local communities, blend descriptions of personal experience with different kinds of critical social analysis. For instance, the team who have written the Polish chronicles, have taken a similar approach. Lastly, there are academic contributors, such as the two of us, whose role has primarily been that of facilitators, coordinators, editors, and analysts. If we are witnesses at all, it is to the hardships of others.

Each contributor occupies a different position vis-à-vis the multiple frameworks of hierarchy and inequality that shape Romani lives, and these positions are foregrounded in the chronicles. For many of our authors, official indifference, racism, deprivation, structural violence, necropolitics and slow harm are not just concepts but immediate, embodied, relentless experiences. By contrast, the two of us are non-Romani academics who have spent the last two years far away from our field sites in Brazil and Spain. Throughout our careers we have attempted to bring to light the mechanisms through which our Romani interlocutors build meaningful lives in the context of continued social marginalization. Increasingly, we are becoming aware of some of the ways in which our work itself may strengthen the very inequalities that we hope to uncover. While we value university-based research for the space and time it allows us to learn deeply, through prolonged listening, documentation, and analysis, we believe that these resources should help facilitate social transformation.² On the one hand, the material infrastructure of academia has enabled us to steer the common effort of chronicling in this book. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that, want it or not, we risk being complicit in the reproduction of Romani disempowerment. As middle-class, non-Romani editors of a book about the impact of the pandemic on Romani communities, we know that our task now is to help facilitate the inclusion of as wide a variety of critical Romani voices as possible into academic and public debate.

We hope that this book, in which we have gathered texts by people from many walks of life—not just intellectuals or those with formal education—, will stimulate discussion about the kinds of voices that academia should open to, and about how best to achieve this opening in practice. Romani-related scholarship, most visibly through the work loosely described as “critical Romani studies,” has witnessed a growing demand to decolonize

academic knowledge. Our aim is to help create arenas where traditionally marginalized speakers will be listened to attentively. This is always urgent, but particularly so at a time of global upheaval. It is also, at its core, a practical process that involves working with authors, publishers, and audiences to shift taken-for-granted understandings of what a text of academic value should look like.

So, whilst in content this book deals with COVID-19, in approach and form it raises questions about how knowledge about Romani lives is and can be produced and deployed, and about the future of research on Romani issues. Key concerns underlying this book are: Who benefits from this kind of volume, written as it is in English? What do we hope to achieve with this work? Who are our audiences? Once again, the responses of the chroniclers are not monolithic, and each writer addresses these questions differently in their texts.

Lastly, we are very aware of the effects of time on our work. When we started planning and writing this book, back in the spring of 2020, it seemed to us that the pandemic would soon be over. Our book proposals were all written in the past tense: we took it for granted that, by the time of publication, COVID-19 would be a thing of the past. In fact, almost two years on, the effects of the pandemic continue to proliferate. These *Romani Chronicles of COVID-19*, then, are presented also as a historical document, a glimpse of a moment in the constantly evolving production of knowledge. If anything has become obvious to us working on this book it is that, as scholars and as humans too, we only ever really know provisionally. Individually and as a collection, the chronicles make this provisionality visible.

This book thus offers to the shifting field of research on Romani issues, and to the growing field of research on COVID-19, the proposal of chronicles as method. Chronicles as we conceive them, in the plural, are multiple, positioned, and partisan. They are collaborative and conversational, yet also singular and irreducible. They are timely but also time bound. In the pages of this book, readers will find examples of collaborative recording, writing, editing, debating, and co-theorizing, developed jointly by contributors with contrasting competences and backgrounds. Many of the contributions strive the boundary between the testimonial and the analytic, and between the personal and the deliberately detached. They demonstrate that authors with widely diverse skills can address scholarly audiences and, crucially, choose the terms on which to do so.

Segregation, Containment, and Control

Folk antigypsyism is characteristic for its focus on the body: Romani bodies are commonly viewed as dirty, smelly, unruly, diseased, and contami-

nating, indexing the environment to which they are assumed to belong. This has justified, for example, the ongoing segregation of Gitano children in special schools and classrooms in Spain,³ and of Romani women in the maternity wards of some hospitals in Slovakia.⁴ The history of modern European antigypsyism is also a history of continued isolation, exclusion, and confinement of Romanies within specific places—slums, state-built ghettos, designated rural settlements, *mahalas*, orphanages, special schools—often through deliberate planning and forceful relocation.⁵ These spaces are consistently presented by planners and policy makers as exceptional and temporary, and they are frequently refused the same services and legal standing as comparable neighborhoods and institutions. They are often sites of punitive intervention, and they confirm in the popular imagination the status of the Romanies who live there—and by extension, all Romanies—as outsiders and non-citizens who must eventually disappear.

These places are imagined as best for “them,” the abject, who have been evicted from other locales or are seen as inherently incapable of adapting to societal norms. They are also feared as spaces of resistance to the social order, areas from which contamination, deprivation and anomie will spread. Alongside the Romani people who occupy them, they are conceptualized as stickily delinquent and transgressive. Although described as provisional, like other marginal spaces such as inner-city ghettos or refugee camps, they have become a permanent and constitutive feature of our societies.⁶ These spaces point us to the pre-existing geographies of racialization that have directed the course of the pandemic and exacerbated its effects.⁷

Under COVID-19, long-established forms of punitive containment of Romanies across areas as diverse as housing, health management, education, and employment have combined with new measures aimed at controlling the virus, some targeted at the whole of society but others at Romani groups specifically. Even before European states started to impose lockdown measures during the spring of 2020, in many areas Romanies as a collective were singled out as potential vectors of infection.⁸ There, public authorities resorted to the policing of Romani neighborhoods, arguing the need to protect the health and safety of all citizens from Romani irresponsibility: checkpoints were established around Romani neighborhoods, camps were quarantined or cordoned off to prevent the spread of the virus, and nomadic groups were expelled or not allowed to stop. In March 2020 in the north of Spain, for example, the regional government dispatched the militarized police to the town of Haro, arguing that Gitanos who had contracted COVID-19 might not respect the compulsory quarantine. Towards the end of the same month, Bulgarian mayors contained tens of thousands of Roma in urban neighborhoods, imposing police controls of access and exit, as well as bans on group gatherings, even though no cases of infection had yet been

reported.⁹ Whilst these actions were not universal, and not all Romanies across the five countries in this book experienced them directly, similar steps were not taken against non-Romani groups. It is through these processes—often small-scale and local—that the distinctiveness of Romanies as racialized, disruptive collectives is routinely produced, even during such an exceptional and globalized event as the COVID-19 pandemic. And, as chroniclers Jurina Rusnáková and Zuzana Kumanová explain, these processes harden and perpetuate interethnic distrust and fear.

These actions were neither accidental nor isolated: they emerged from widespread antigypsyist assumptions and reveal taken-for-granted forms of everyday harm. In the spring of 2020, fake news, hoaxes, and false accusations proliferated on social media, framing Romanies as responsible for spreading the virus or suggesting that they refused to follow guidelines that should apply to all. It was often asserted that Romanies were inherently asocial and inadaptible, and so had to be forcefully controlled or, better still, expelled. Entrenched stereotypes depicting Romanies as unable to self-regulate were once again deployed to argue their unfitness for citizenship. Meanwhile, mainstream media offered analyses of how Romani “culture,” poor living conditions or movement patterns (for example, as migrants within the European Union) would make it impossible for them to follow social distancing guidelines or would increase the likelihood that they would import the virus from abroad, implicitly or explicitly justifying securitization and scapegoating.¹⁰

Crucially, throughout the pandemic it has been Romanies’ assumed inability to behave properly *as a group* that has been stressed—particularly but not only by the right-wing media. Whereas non-Romanies who crowd parks and beaches or who attend clandestine parties are portrayed as selfish individualists, Romanies have been described as collectively primitive or animal-like, “non-human,”¹¹ and therefore as collectively threatening. When the Spanish broadsheet *ABC* reported that Gitano Evangelicals had gathered to pray in the streets of one of the poorest neighborhoods of Seville, it also characterized them as belonging to “unstructured clans unused to public order and discipline,” and described their songs as “healing chants.”¹² Without naming Romanies directly, but singling them out in terms familiar to his audience, one Romanian mayor referred to “a group of people with kinship ties” who neglected the rules by organizing “kinship gatherings”—with kinship marking Romani “culture” and standing in for antisocial gregariousness.¹³ Similarly, media reports claimed that nomadic Ciganos, being led from Spain into Portugal by a police escort, had not known about the pandemic because they did not have phones or computers—that is, because they were backward and primitive, existing outside of time.

Portrayed as an anonymous, undifferentiated, threatening mass “living outside the rule of law,”¹⁴ Romanies are denied the individuality that is con-

sidered the hallmark of modernity—even when this individuality is depicted as dysfunctional as under COVID-19. Instead, their “culture,” “traditional behaviors” and “customs” are foregrounded as potential relay points for infection, with these terms used to refer to supposed shared, unchanging, Romani-specific behaviors such as nomadism, overintensive sociability, or lack of personal hygiene. And, as was already common before the pandemic, under COVID-19 these depictions of Romanies as a threat to others have intertwined in complex ways with narratives and actions that emphasize their vulnerabilities and their need for additional protection.

Official discourse frequently recognized the likelihood that the pandemic would have a disproportionate impact on Romani groups—whether because of their poorer health, poverty and overcrowding, their cultural specificities, or their assumed reluctance to adhere to emergency regulations. As a consequence, during the pandemic as before, care and restraint have gone hand in hand. Disciplinary measures aimed at Romanies were presented as benevolent and as emerging from the protective actions taken by state authorities.

These coercive dimensions of state care are discussed in particularly revealing ways by the Slovak chroniclers: they scrutinize the decision taken by the Slovak authorities in March 2020 to forcefully quarantine five Roma settlements before any other lockdown measures were established, and to test their inhabitants for COVID-19. This was justified by arguing that COVID-19 would decimate Romani communities, whose health was considerably poorer than that of non-Romanies, and also that Romanies would act as vectors of contagion into the wider society, overwhelming the fragile local healthcare system. The Slovak contributors—some of whom were themselves involved in the design and implementation of this policy—unpack the various strands of debate around this action and its outcomes. Reflecting with candor on their own complex positions, these chroniclers demonstrate how state interventions regarding Romanies are often molded by paternalism, racism, and bureaucratic indifference.

Gypsiness and Its Effects

The belief that during the pandemic Romanies will resist shared standards of adequate behavior goes hand in hand with a second entrenched expectation: that they will unavoidably and naturally suffer and die more, just as they do in non-pandemic times. Because policy makers, state representatives at all levels, and the media often approach Romanies through the master symbol of “Gypsiness”—as disorderly, primitive, willfully transgressive—Romani suffering is often constructed as unfortunate but predictable, rather than as

intolerable and avoidable. Whilst factors such as poverty, antigypsyism, and underemployment appear in popular and governmental narratives as likely to increase the vulnerability of Romanies to COVID-19, it is also generally accepted and expected that Romanies will inevitably be poor and underemployed, that their lives are simply more vulnerable and precarious, and that this is bound to become more visible during this most globalized and unprecedented crisis.¹⁵ Structural inequalities are then downplayed because, so the story often goes, Romanies are ultimately responsible for their own predicament. As Beatriz Aragón Martín explains for the Gitano families who live in the slum of Cañada Real in Madrid, “it is as if living in an informal settlement was the Gitanos’ cultural choice,” their preference.

The chroniclers describe how, in the context of the pandemic in the five countries studied, Romanies struggle under the impact of ideologies that naturalize their marginality. The trope of Gypsiness legitimates the punitive treatment of Romanies across multiple arenas, from routine and apparently unremarkable encounters—such as at a Madrid hospital in Dulce Flores Torres’ piece—to exceptional events, like the quarantining of Romani settlements in the Slovak chronicles. Through visceral accounts of firsthand experience, the chroniclers challenge abstract proclamations of the universal and extraordinary character of the pandemic, which asserted that “we are all in it together”, that “the virus doesn’t discriminate” and that “this is an unprecedented crisis.” Instead, the contributors reveal how the pandemic has generated a magnification of ongoing Romani experiences of marginalization, separation, and slow harm.

In the eyes of non-Romanies, the arrival of COVID-19 was remarkable precisely because it was unprecedented; it was unlike anything they had ever experienced before. People struggled to find words and frameworks of comparison, and spoke of sci-fi films and dystopic novels to convey their disorientation. For Romanies, on the other hand, the novelty was entangled with an awareness of earlier harms, with a deeply embodied history of harassment and tribulation. The collective remembrance of past events, and the resulting distrust towards state actions, give meaning to the present crisis. So Jurina Rusnáková and Zuzana Kumanová explain how rumors spread among Slovak Romanies that a planned quarantine center at a military airport would serve as a concentration camp, and that the large-scale testing of Romani communities for COVID-19 in Slovakia was in fact a hidden attempt at experimenting on Roma. We argue that these interpretations were not misguided or ignorant, but perceptive, experience-driven commentaries on the relationship between Romanies and the state, and between Romanies and the dominant society.

In the five countries discussed in this book, Romanies have been expected to comply with the very measures that proclaim their incapacity to behave

as responsible citizens, or indeed as proper humans. In places such as Žehra in Slovakia and Cañada Real in Spain, Romanies were asked to accept and cooperate with the additional invigilation and testing for their own good and that of others, understanding that this differential treatment was for the benefit of society as a whole. As captured by Tomáš Hrustič, this has demanded very specific kinds of labor from Romani professionals. He explains how, when police and the army were called upon to prevent the spread of the virus in Slovakia by enforcing social distancing measures, Roma community health workers and social fieldworkers prevented the escalation of tensions between the inhabitants of the segregated settlements and the police.

Romani segregated neighborhoods, settlements, and slums across Europe are most often the result of evictions or relocations from areas considered to be more civilized—materializing expulsion and reminding Romanies that they are not welcome elsewhere. It is therefore not surprising that, as the chroniclers document, their inhabitants sometimes experience state biomedical policies as dangerous and punitive, even when they are presented as caring and protective. Those subjected to these policies see through these claims, apprehending the measures as indifferent to their needs and even threatening to their individual and family lives. For Brazil, Aluizio Silva Júnior is adamant: the mismanagement of the pandemic by the Bolsonaro government, which has put Ciganos and other ethnic minorities in Brazil disproportionately into harm's way, “does not represent the appearance of some accidental event, but instead [is] an uninterrupted continuation of power relations that have existed since colonial times.”

At an individual, subjective level, this intertwining of past and present harm involves the routinary awareness that distrust will most likely frame one's behavior: time and again the Romani chroniclers describe having to anticipate the effects of prejudice. Tellingly, many contributors to this book have felt the need to stress that Romanies have indeed complied with pandemic rules, that they have behaved as responsible citizens. “The Romani population endured the lockdown like the rest of society,” states Manuela Mayoral Silva in her contribution, but adds “I would say maybe with even more fear and more caution.” Her statement is a complex affirmation of belonging and a rejection of widespread racist suggestions of Romani incompetence and disregard for their own and others' health. Likewise Gory Carmona, writing with Antonio Montañés Jiménez, emphasizes that “contrary to what people think, Gitanos take great care and try not to catch COVID.” And he goes on to point out how “almost no Gitano family” celebrated on 31 December 2020, but that in a bar next to his house “dozens of Payos (non-Gitanos) celebrated the new year by drinking alcohol, and they were not wearing masks.” These statements have a double edge: by asserting Romani compliance, these chroniclers object to antigypsyism but help reinforce the

notion that to be a citizen one should not behave as a “Gypsy,” and in so doing, they put their own behavior under additional scrutiny.

Like Manuela and Gory, other chroniclers strive to claim a space for Romanies within the nation-state as proactive, responsible, and responsive citizens on a par with others. Yet they also describe a multitude of catch-22 situations whereby their attempts at compliance with citizenship ideals have simultaneously worked to reinforce their marginality. As Dulce Flores Torres reveals in her account of her repeated attempts to get schools to send learning materials to Gitano children during lockdown, Romani lives are shadowed by the specter of Gypsiness with state representatives at all levels acting on the basis that Romanies will simply suffer more, and that this suffering is unpreventable because Romanies will unavoidably behave as “Gypsies.” During the crisis, just as before, the majority have “known” that Romanies are bound to fail and have expected nothing less: after all, knowledge is not only a question of discipline but of desire.¹⁶ The result is the perceived need for containment and control both in one-to-one encounters—for example, between social workers and Romani mothers struggling to feed their families—and at larger scales—as with the enclosing of Romani areas even before infections were confirmed. The *Chronicles* evidence that, for Romanies, this interplay between compliance and exclusion unfolds as recurring, deeply felt, embodied experiences of individual and collective trauma. In the context of generalized vulnerability and fear created by COVID-19, these experiences gain additional force.

Violence and Vulnerability

For the Romani people whose lives are discussed in the *Chronicles*, there is no pandemic without the experience of pre-existing routinised crisis—an experience that the contributors document with care. Whilst shared in many aspects, this experience is molded also by specific national and transnational trajectories. In Brazil, for example, Romanies are inserted into a long history of colonial oppression of Indigenous and racialized minorities. As the Brazilian chroniclers emphasize in their joint introduction, analyzing the unfolding of the pandemic among Brazilian Romanies demands that we examine the proliferation of unashamedly explicit state violence against minorities under Bolsonaro. They draw on Achille Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics¹⁷ to demonstrate that the relationship between Romanies and the Brazilian state is not just one of punitive regulation à la Foucault, but one of deliberate (or deliberately neglectful) exposure to death, with the state dictating through action and inaction which groups deserve to live and which must die under the pandemic.

In the Spanish chronicles, on the other hand, the emphasis lies on the effects of austerity policies in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. By the time the pandemic erupted in early 2020, Spanish Romanies had been battered by twelve years of relentless cuts to all kinds of essential services, affecting in particular the working classes and the urban poor. At the core of the Spanish chronicles is the statement by UN Special Rapporteur Philip Alston, issued in February 2020 just before the outbreak, that an entrenched “lack of urgency and resignation”¹⁸ directed the responses of state representatives to the deep crisis that already engulfed the Gitano community. As the chroniclers describe, this lack of urgency has been magnified under COVID-19 by the expectation that, during the pandemic, services and support will unavoidably be reduced or stopped. We read the acceptance that Romanies will suffer and even die more than non-Romanies—for example, because they are unable to earn the most basic living under lockdown—as complicit. As the people of Cañada Real told Beatriz Aragón Martín, “If the virus doesn’t kill us, hunger will.” Just like the Brazilian chroniclers, the inhabitants of Cañada know that by forcing poor people, including Romanies, to choose between hunger or infection in the name of protecting society at large, state representatives decide who should pay for the pandemic.

The chroniclers identify a key problem in documenting these processes in all the countries covered in the book: the normalized, taken-for-granted character of structural harm, and the effects of its invisibility on the course of the pandemic. Debates around data and its uses are particularly relevant here. It may seem obvious that numerical information about the impact of the pandemic on Romani communities is a basic precondition for an objective assessment, yet legislation in many countries prohibits the collection of ethnically disaggregated data.¹⁹ This absence is interpreted differently by different chroniclers. Edilma Souza, speaking from her position as a Black Brazilian anthropologist working with Romanies, emphasizes how important it is to acknowledge that the pandemic does not affect all groups in the same way. She calls for statistics to be disaggregated according to race/ethnicity as a first step towards the development of much-needed targeted protective measures for ethnic minorities. By contrast, in Slovakia, where policies aimed at shielding the segregated Romani settlements were put in place at the start of the crisis, Romani activists worried that the collection of ethnic data and the development of targeted measures would unavoidably be shaped by and lead to stigmatization. Andrej Belák, who was involved in the planning and implementation of these policies throughout 2020 and 2021, describes his growing unease as he saw measures such as community quarantines and tests come to be permeated by institutional racism, bureaucratic inertia, and populism.

As chroniclers rather than statisticians, the authors in this book provide qualitative, ethnographic, and deeply personal accounts. They unpack the

meanings and effects of pandemic vulnerability, and demonstrate that it is not equally distributed. Their accounts of pre-pandemic life evidence that the environments in which Romanies subsisted before February 2020 were not conducive to the flourishing of individuals or communities, and that Romani vulnerability was bound to be exacerbated by the pandemic, and in turn to exacerbate its effects. Their descriptions can be read through the lens of social science concepts such as “structural violence,”²⁰ “necropolitics,”²¹ “slow death,”²² “structural vulnerability,”²³ or even “syndemics,”²⁴ as in Yasar Abu Ghosh’s text. Yet their chronicles also ask us to step beyond these theoretical frameworks and to confront the irreducible texture of singular encounters and individual lives.

Acts and Spaces of Care

The contributors document the complex understandings about affect and responsibility that have guided the actions of Romani individuals and groups as they have attempted to avoid the virus, support themselves and others, and make ends meet. They reveal acts and spaces of care—some well-established, others new or improvised, which have often been disregarded by the non-Romani majority, treated as irrelevant or misguided. So, for example, in Spain in March 2020, Gitano Evangelical leaders, keenly aware of the health and economic vulnerability of their congregants, ordered all churches to close their doors several days before the government prohibited large gatherings. Across Brazil throughout the first months of the pandemic, nomadic Calon Romanies abandoned larger towns and began avoiding urban centers. They moved into the interior, fearing variously contagion, the crumbling healthcare infrastructure, and limited possibilities for economic survival after street commerce had been shut down. “This is no time for us to be far from our people, from our family,” Maria José “Zeza” Silva told chronicler Edilma Souza as the latter was trying to make her way across Brazil, still at the beginning of the tragedy that would engulf the country in the months to come. Meanwhile, Polish and Slovak Roma living in the UK undertook complex journeys to return to their countries of origin.

Seeing that social distancing and mask wearing were being adopted earlier at home than in Britain, a Polish Roma man summarized for Sonia Styrkacz, Michał Garapich and Kamila Fiałkowska the skepticism that many in his community felt about Boris Johnson’s policies: “Half of the people are going to die here.” As these chroniclers argue, this distrust was magnified by the uncertainties surrounding Brexit, and it propelled many Central and East European Roma to abandon the UK. One of these returnees was chronicler Albín Peter, who drove together with his extended family across Eu-

rope in March 2020, and who recorded in his diary the journey and days spent in a state quarantine facility upon arrival in Slovakia. He narrates the good humor, ingenuity, and resilience with which relatives cared for each other through weeks of uncertainty and powerlessness.

Across the five countries, extended families have been the center of the response to the crisis, with relatives attempting to help each other emotionally, practically, and economically. The strong reliance on the support of kin was already essential to Romani survival and mutual protection before the pandemic, as a response to generalized marginalization and to institutional strategies of indifference and deliberate harm. As Liria Hernández explains, “We are taught to be together as much as possible, and above all to support each other with our presence when there is some misfortune.” Coming together to care for the sick and their families, she says, takes precedence “above any problem, any difficulty; even jobs are abandoned if necessary, even if that means that no money will come into the house that day, or that the family will have serious financial difficulties.”

The chroniclers describe two key processes shaping family and community bonds during the pandemic. On the one hand, they identify an intensification of caregiving, an active reinforcing of kinship attachments, and they interpret it as a continuation of pre-pandemic efforts to make a good life for oneself with others amidst adverse circumstances.²⁵ The Polish chroniclers in particular document the inventiveness and ingenuity with which Roma migrants, dispersed across Europe, have used social media to share information about the pandemic, reassure each other, and reinforce shared expectations of individual and collective behavior around Romanipen, the Romani way. The physical separation first caused by migration and then by the pandemic has been a challenge to the intensive endosociability that is essential to Polish Roma life. Yet it has also been a motor for the intensification of care and the renewal of waning ties. Monika Szewczyk, Elżbieta Mirga-Wójtowicz, and Ignacy Józwiak speak about the “digitalization of everyday life,” and describe their Romani interlocutors as “pioneers in digital kinning.” Social media has provided Polish Roma with a safe arena where they can strengthen their kinship ties, use their own language, and preserve and transform traditions. These chroniclers interpret social media as an opportunity for self-creation, at individual and collective levels, in the midst of the tremendous challenges for everyday survival posed by the pandemic.

On the other hand, the centrality of kinship bonds to Romani survival, both individual and communal, means that the impossibility of physically coming together to care for each other has created enormous practical difficulties and emotional anguish. Liria Hernández, who was very ill as a result of COVID-19 throughout 2020, explains that “what hurt me the most was not that I was alone and sick, but that in the midst of the pandemic I could

not accompany my relatives in their illnesses and needs. . . This virus stole this right from us, which is our law.” For Liria this was an onslaught on ties of love and also on the essence of Gitano life, family unity, and on her sense of herself as a Gitana woman.

Like not being able physically to care for each other, not being able to mourn together has been lived as an assault on the essential link between persons and their communities. For Romanies across the five countries, accompanying the dying and mourning jointly confirms the continuation of shared life in the context of dispersal among a hostile majority. Elaborate mourning rituals embed a person within their family and community, enabling their continuation and reconstruction in the face of adversity. Thus, while across the world countless people have been unable to mourn properly and bury their dead, this inability has been felt in very specific ways by Romanies. For them, the dismantling of social relations generated by the biopolitics of pandemic management carried a very real threat to both individual and collective survival. It was lived through the awareness of necropolitics—through the embodied knowledge that dominant majorities and governments would rather Romanies did not exist, or at least not nearby.

At the same time, families and communities are not homogeneous wholes. Pre-existing patterns of gendered division of labor, including affective labor, as well as gendered hierarchies and inequalities, have also shaped how the pandemic has been lived. Our contributors emphasize how, from the start of the pandemic, women’s affective and practical work has become even more central to family and community protection and survival: women have carried the burden of keeping households fed and clean at a time when basic subsistence has become extremely challenging for so many Romanies. With everybody around the world being instructed to be extra-vigilant with regards handwashing, air circulation, and the disinfection of surfaces, these requirements demand much additional effort from those living in poorer conditions, and often without running water.

In Spain, Gitana women tend to be the ones who act as mediators with the institutions of the state, from social workers to teachers. Manuela Mayoral Silva explains how, when the first lockdown started in March 2020, women were expected and expected themselves to manage to obtain help, and they struggled deeply against the slowness and indifference of the state response, as mentioned earlier. She says, “I do not want this book to leave no record of those women, brave women, who have done everything possible to overcome their challenges, who have had to call a mediator twenty times to ask for help, searching everywhere, queueing at the Red Cross or *Cáritas*.” The compelling account of Fernanda Montaña García, also in the Spanish chronicles, reveals her distress about her inability to provide for her children whilst going through the illness and self-isolating in a small flat. For

Fernanda, fear of the virus and of death carried with it a dread that her children would be left destitute. This intertwined with the deep anxiety generated by the knowledge that there was very little food in the house, and that her husband had no means to earn a living under lockdown.

María Félix Rodríguez Camacho describes how Gitana women in Alicante used social media to express their dismay at the paucity of Red Cross relief packages, but also to attempt to set up swaps and share advice about how to feed large families “on milk and biscuits.” Indeed, the support of extended families could only go so far among the poor who, throughout the national lockdowns at the start of the pandemic, lost their income and had no savings to fall back on, who were confined to small apartments and to neighborhoods without the most basic amenities, and whose children had no access to computers for online education. Like the Spanish Gitana women, many other Romanies were rightly anxious about physical survival, looking for solutions and not knowing to whom to turn.

When the pandemic hit, Romanies were repeatedly told that everybody was in the same situation and that it was difficult for all. As the chroniclers explain, Romani grassroots organizations saw through these assertions, acutely aware of the devastating impact that lockdown and social distancing measures would have on the ability of large numbers of Romani families to survive. They knew also that state support processes are, even in the most favorable of normal circumstances, slowed down by bureaucracy and by entrenched expectations about the unruliness, anomie, and childishness of Romanies. And, indeed, once the pandemic hit, authorities across the five countries were often inattentive or slow to recognize the very specific challenges that Romanies faced. Several chroniclers, such as Juliana Campos and Valdinalva dos Santos Caldas, describe how Romani NGOs and associations worked to compensate for the lack of official assistance. Initially, their pleas and their denunciations of racism were often treated as exaggerated—as if Romanies had not noticed that the whole world was facing an unprecedented public health and economic crisis—or as evidence of a Romani tendency to want to hog resources or jump the queue. In their contributions, both Estrella Iglesias Pérez and Manuela Mayoral Silva document the slowness and ineffectiveness of the institutions, and the enormous emotional toll that attempting to obtain help for desperate families took on Romani grassroots workers.

Return to Normal

Only a few weeks into the COVID-19 crisis, pundits, academics, and public intellectuals began reflecting on the post-pandemic future. Many portrayed

the pandemic as a moment of undoing, one that could go two ways: it could radically worsen existing social inequalities, environmental degradation, and the authoritarian leanings of governments; or it could usher in a new era in which the opposite tendencies would prevail. They described the pandemic as a game changer for humanity, one way or another: “We will always be marking time with respect to our lives BC (Before COVID) and AC (After COVID),” wrote sociologist David Fasenfest.²⁶ As we finish this introduction at the end of 2021, all we know for certain is that the pandemic has not yet delivered a beautiful, better world.

These time-bound imaginaries also underly *Romani Chronicles of COVID-19*. When we set out on this project in the early summer of 2020, like many around the world we wondered whether we would ever return to normal, and what “the new normal” would look like. As ethnographers, we thought that our task was to document how this momentous event was transforming Romani communities, and to communicate whatever we learnt. During the prolonged process of preparing this volume—while writers dropped out of or joined the project, public concerns and debates shifted, and the countries in which we live had their diverse experiences with the virus and its management—we became increasingly aware of the undesirability of attempting to provide a comprehensive account that would fix the meaning of the pandemic for Romanies. We realized that, as a global event that sediments into institutions and shapes our positions as writers, the pandemic is not just inescapable but elusive: in the words of Maurice Blanchot, “[t]here is no reaching the disaster.”²⁷

This tension pervades this book. There are continuities but also many differences in how the chroniclers have lived through and depicted the crisis, and this diversity itself challenges the homogenizing depictions of Romanies whose marginalizing effects we have outlined above. Moreover, the knowledge of the contributors has evolved throughout the process of writing and rewriting, as their own experiences, understandings, and concerns have shifted. As a result, the chronicles are permeated as much by certainty as by ambiguity and inner conflict. Both individually and as a collection, the essays in this volume embody multiple, changing, and even contradictory meanings, the traces of previous meanings, and the seeds of future ones.

From this perspective, the pandemic cannot be conceptualized as a problem that will be overcome if only we deploy the proper scientific, technological, social, or digital fixes.²⁸ And yet, this is precisely how in the modern world we are encouraged to think about any crisis (economic, ecological, public health), and hence the logic of all the deferrals we have been offered—until the curve is flattened, until the summer, just until Christmas (so we can all enjoy it), until March. . . . Currently, we are being asked to imagine what the world will be like after vaccinations have been successfully rolled out,

as governments present the public with their own versions of the return to normal, of our future lives “AC.”

But future speculation is not only never-ending: it also does not address everybody in the same way. Being invited to participate in these imagined futures is dependent on being seen as part of both society and the state. This future participation requires inclusion in national narratives, in hegemonic stories of the pandemic, and in History itself: it is meant for those who partake in modern citizenship, who are considered rational and must be offered sympathy for their suffering. Romanies are not seen in this light; they are not portrayed as recipients of promises of return to normal, because they were not perceived as existing within the norm to start with. This is why authorities did not think it necessary to tell inhabitants of segregated Romani settlements in Slovakia when their quarantines would be over.

We emphasized above how Romanies are, physically and/or metaphorically, confined to those exceptional spaces that are also routinized as constitutive of our societies—ghettos, “segregated enclaves,” “socially excluded localities,” and so on. This is where their pre-pandemic normality unfolded and where, as the chroniclers explain, the exceptionality of the pandemic also took place as a routinary crisis, a continuation of ongoing struggles. So, if “normal” here refers to the normalization of everyday structural violence, poverty, and neglect, and to the broad societal acceptance of this fact, is this also the normal to which Romanies will return? What, if anything, has COVID-19 changed for them?

Children, Education, and Romani Futures

As the pandemic continues to evolve, and as public debates and policy priorities shift, predictions about how the crisis will shape Romani lives in the coming years inevitably change too, making it unwise for us to define the new Romani normal. Nevertheless, the experiences and events captured by the chroniclers do point to processes already in motion: they show how pre-existing vulnerabilities and racism have amplified the social, economic, mental, and physical health reverberations of the pandemic for individual Romanies, making their lives even more precarious.

Growing numbers of studies are documenting housing insecurity and indebtedness as a result of the pandemic globally, among poor and vulnerable populations.²⁹ And while there are as yet no large quantitative analyses specifically on Romanies, other evidence, including from our chroniclers, suggests severe economic impacts: the pandemic has already led to the further exclusion of marginalized Romanies and to the impoverishment of members of the Romani lower-middle class.³⁰ As Jozef Miker recollected for Yasar Abu

Ghosh, “That was the worst crisis for me. My wife couldn’t go to work, so we went into a lot of debt. . . Like everyone who worked in the hospitality industry, she lost everything from one day to the next. . . We were threatened with living on the street, with having our child taken away. . . Every month that we were locked up at home, our debt grew, and I had to borrow from decent friends.” Here COVID-19 does not work alone: for East European Romanies in particular, it intertwines with Brexit to make transnational circulation harder if not impossible, closing off not just a key survival strategy but one of the very few paths for upward economic mobility available to them.

We are particularly alarmed by the chroniclers’ descriptions of the widening educational gap between Romani children and their non-Romani peers.³¹ The racial segregation of Romani children in schools was widespread across Europe before the pandemic but, unlike the racial segregation of other marginalized children in other areas and periods, it attracted little or no public outrage. Chronicler Yasar Abu Ghosh explains how the education system was a key location for the production of Roma marginalization, and that any efforts in place to challenge these processes were interrupted by the pandemic. The majority of European Romani children were educated in racially segregated classrooms and in classrooms where they followed adapted curriculums that took their intellectual and cultural incapacity for granted.³² For many months in 2020, school closures and the shift to online learning left thousands of Romani children with no or greatly reduced access to their already limited education.³³ The chroniclers document how local education authorities and schools were often slow to react to the lockdowns, or refused to take the specific needs of Romani children into account and to address them:³⁴ decisions were guided by stereotypes that depict Romani children as more likely to fail and as less committed to education than their non-Romani peers.

The Spanish and Slovak chroniclers explain that the education that Romani children have been able to access throughout the pandemic has tended to depend on the inclinations and initiative of individual teachers or on the determination of local community mediators and social workers. Pilar García Bizárraga is scathing in her account of the first lockdown in Cañada Real in Madrid:

The teachers thought it was not worth it, sending homework to children who were not going to do it: *I am not going to bother to send homework to this boy*. The same happened with the distribution of tablets to children so that they could do homework: there wasn’t a single Gitano child on the list to receive a tablet. But these are the children who need it the most because they have the least; maybe in a family of ten they only have one mobile phone and the children cannot download their homework there.

Even when children were offered tablets or computers, the new system of online learning worldwide relied on access to Wi-Fi and on parental educational competence and literacy (digital and otherwise), two additional factors that placed many Romani children at a distinct disadvantage.³⁵

The result is that the pandemic has disrupted early educational support for younger children and has increased rates of educational failure and dropout among older children.³⁶ Francisca Mayoral Silva describes the work that Romani mediators are already doing to try to mitigate this trend. What this educational loss will mean for each individual Romani child will depend on their age, the determination of their parents and teachers, and their ongoing access to digital and other resources. Overall, it is likely that, in combination with growing automation, restrictions on migration, and the precarization of employment, the educational impact of the pandemic will lead to high future income losses within Romani communities at large. As María Félix Rodríguez Camacho puts it, Romani children “now face added challenges that, once again and even more forcefully, push them towards poverty.”

Governance and Leadership

Under the pandemic we have witnessed an unprecedented transformation of democratic governance. During the months captured in the *Chronicles*, from March 2020 to the summer of 2021, democratic governments worldwide invoked states of emergency and ruled by decree in the name of public health and the communal good. Just as has happened within the larger arena of public debate, the contributors too experienced and evaluate these developments differently. For some, such as Gwen Albert, the imposition of countrywide restrictions in Czechia and Slovakia provided reassurance, whilst others, such as Jurina Rusnáková and Zuzana Kumanová, criticized the additional measures aimed at Romanies as racialized and marginalizing. For their part, the Brazilian chroniclers were deeply worried about the lack of action taken by the federal government, which neglected or deliberately harmed vulnerable groups such as Romanies, Indigenous people, and the elderly.

As editors, we believe it is necessary to inquire about the long-term implications of these forms of governance for future Romani lives. We know that Romanies have historically been excluded from the nation and the body politic because they have been perceived as a threat to the health of others; and we also know that the punitive control of Romanies has often taken health-related forms. The chroniclers were witnesses to the instinctual intensification of these approaches in the early months of the pandemic as panic

engulfed the world, revelatory of antigypsyism. As Carlo Caduff warned, the pandemic “risks teaching people to love power and call for its meticulous application.”³⁷ We need to ask what this application of power, with its use of metaphors of war and sacrifice, may mean over the next years for racialized minorities traditionally treated as abject outsiders, and as people whose bodily closeness is to be feared.³⁸

Although now, in late 2021, many restrictions have been lifted, and although economic activity and much-needed mobility have resumed for many Romani groups, we must remain alert to how biosecurity preoccupations might combine with antigypsyism to shape emergent political debate and policy design. We need to question how the vulnerability of particular groups is established and politicized. We need to pay attention to how calling upon worst-case scenarios—which justified the closing off or patrolling of Romani communities in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, and elsewhere—strengthens the racialization of Romanies and dismisses resulting harm as mere externality. And not least, we need to keep investigating what “social distancing” as an organizing principle of social life might mean for Romanies. For instance, as we write, vaccination passes are being introduced across several countries, assuming that citizens are contagious unless proven otherwise. How does the generalized institutionalized suspicion of another’s closeness, with its accompanying forms of surveillance and control, mold lives that are already indelibly marked by segregation and “social distance”?

Whilst the pandemic has led to the emergence of novel kinds of governance, or at the very least to the realization and proliferation of governance potentialities already present in pre-pandemic times, it has also been the ground where new forms of resistance, communal organization and leadership have emerged. In particular, the chronicles document the important roles that committed individuals working locally have played in mitigating the impact of the crisis within their immediate environments. We are speaking here of cultural mediators, health practitioners, school support workers and so on—roles occupied by many of the chroniclers who work either within Romani associations and NGOs, or on their fringes. Mobilizing quickly, and often making huge personal sacrifices, these professionals did their best to step into the void left by social services, and in the process they often emerged as local leaders, to whom others looked for help and guidance during a terrifying time.

These chroniclers take us back to moments when they were confronted with the overwhelming needs of others. Health worker Alžbeta “Hal’ka” Mižigárová, for example, powerfully describes being fully dressed in protective clothing when meeting family and acquaintances who had suddenly found themselves confined in community quarantine:

I don't know how it's possible, because I was as much covered as I could be, but still they recognized me. "Ha'l'ka, will everything be all right? All will be well, won't it? When will they let us go?" they were calling at me. That's when I realized that it's not about the outer appearance but about the people who look at you. They recognize you despite that protective wear. You are one of them. And they keep asking you, they keep telling you how sad they are, how afraid they are.

Several chroniclers tell of their attempts to challenge state directives that deliberately or not slowed down the provision of emergency support during the first lockdowns, as well as to counter the indifference of both central and local government officials. Their carefully documented experiences encourage us to ask about the forms that leadership takes at times of profound disruption, in particular within minority communities. During the pandemic, in the neighborhoods and settlements that the chroniclers write about, leadership has often been ephemeral, and leaders have been individuals whose capacities and positions tend to be disregarded by those in roles of greater power. Leadership has emerged out of despair, and out of the urgent needs of their families and immediate communities. This is leadership as care, by community mediators, school assistants, and health workers, often women. These informal gendered forms of leadership are susceptible of being overlooked and even disavowed, not just by non-Romanies but by established leaders. Although their efforts are crucial at the times of greatest need, they risk being soon forgotten.

In the five countries, the tremendous pressure of the pandemic is also driving a reinvigoration of Romani political activism. For Brazil, Igor Shimura argues that the need to respond to new challenges and hardships has "served to empower Cigano leaders, who have been learning to access public arenas and defend themselves more effectively than before." Activists Gabriela Marques, Aluizio Silva Júnior and Aline Miklos recount how they have developed novel forms of engagement through social media which, crucially, entail the creation of new links among different Romani groups within Brazil and with other social movements, such as Indigenous or Afro-descendant. These emerging connections are transforming Romani politics in the country, and will continue to do so in coming years. They evidence the fact that the period captured in this book has been also characterized by the global awakening to systemic racism in the wake of Black Lives Matter—a fact that is most clearly visible in the accounts of Edilma Souza and Jozef Miker.

In her piece, Souza, a Black anthropologist, thinks through her own embodied experience of racism, interlacing her experiences of the pandemic in Bolsonaro's Brazil with those of her Calon interlocutors. Jozef Miker, a Roma grassroots activist, reflects on his involvement with the family of Stanislav Tomáš, whose death by asphyxiation in police custody on 19 June 2021

drew comparisons with George Floyd's in the United States a year before, and which sparked "Roma Lives Matter" protests across Europe.³⁹ In his conversation with Yasar Abu Ghosh, Miker's attempts to help individuals in poverty and debt, the threat of police violence, and a vaccination campaign blend into one another. For both Souza and Miker, the physical incapacity to breathe when infected by COVID-19 becomes inflected—and is magnified—by the suffocation generated by poverty and racism.

How This Book Was Written

The chapters in this book narrate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Romani individuals, families, and communities by foregrounding singular voices, experiences, and perspectives. Although the narratives are very diverse in format, style, and content, and although many do not fit standard models of scholarly writing, they all provide critical perspectives on the complexity of the pandemic. They present contrasting or even opposing standpoints, beliefs, and conclusions, and it is through this multiplicity that they constitute an effort at dialogue and co-theorizing.

We draw inspiration from a long tradition of collaborative research in anthropology, stretching back to the 1970s if not earlier, that seeks to create conversations between local and academic forms of knowledge and analysis. Western scholarship has most often separated data from analysis, treating the perspectives and lives of non-academic interlocutors as material to be dissected.⁴⁰ These chronicles, by contrast, ask readers to engage with the critical insights of people who are living through the pandemic, and reflecting on it from both scholarly and non-scholarly standpoints. In all these accounts, whether more or less academic, analysis and critique emerge out of experience—sometimes forceful, relentlessly difficult experience—rather than being separated from it. Both experience and analysis are laid out for evaluation.

It is important to emphasize that the texts do not constitute a representative sample of Romani experiences in the five countries, let alone worldwide. When looking for contributions, we did not set out to find exemplars, individuals who would fit our preconceived ideas about whose life, role, or perspective would be most relevant or generalizable. Instead, we invited friends, collaborators, and colleagues to consider taking part in the project, and also encouraged them to invite others who might be interested in participating. As anthropologists we took it for granted that any life, no matter how distinct or how generic, is worth paying attention to. There are also some conclusions and interpretations that we, as editors, have found ourselves disagreeing with.

For each country, one or two people took on the role of coordinators: Kamila Fiałkowska and Elżbieta Mirga-Wójtowicz for Poland, Yasar Abu Ghosh for Czechia, Tomáš Hrustič and Andrej Belák for Slovakia, Martin Fotta for Brazil, and Paloma Gay y Blasco for Spain. The two of us, Martin and Paloma, oversaw and coordinated the whole project, providing also in-depth editorial guidance and advice, as well as English-language help. Each part starts with an introductory chapter where salient features of the Romani experience in that particular country are discussed, before and during the pandemic, and where the method, focus, and contribution of that part of the book is outlined.

Each of the five parts is the result of different collaborative techniques and relationships. Four of them include texts written in several different genres, and there are texts that do not fit into any ready-made, easily recognizable category. Some of the chroniclers have written single-authored texts, whilst others have co-authored their chapters. Some chapters have been produced by teams of collaborators who have jointly planned, carried out, and written up their research. Other texts are the result of dialogues between individual scholars and local interlocutors whose work showcases a wide variety of collaborative methods.

The contributions include memoirs, opinion essays, transcriptions of conversations or interviews, ethnographic analyses and a compelling short story by Romani writer Iveta Kokyová, as well as pieces that stride the boundaries between one or more of these genres, or that fit into none. This diversity testifies to the willingness of the chroniclers to adapt methods and approach, and creatively to develop ways of working and writing that suit each specific combination of skills as well as each relationship and situation. We gather these texts together as “chronicles” in an attempt to flatten established hierarchies of knowledge.

This book makes a double contribution. It documents and analyses the pandemic and its reverberations, showing how it is molding the lives of Romanies who, even before March 2020, were struggling under the burden of normalized marginalization and oppression. Crucially, it does so by foregrounding voices that do not usually address academic audiences, and by paying attention to analytical and critical insights embodied in non-normative ways of knowing and writing. As editors, we hope that the examples of methodological experimentation, dialogue, and cooperation collected in this book will inspire others, whether working within or outside the field of Romani studies, to develop their own collaborations.

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Liria Hernández, *Writing Friendship: A Reciprocal Ethnography* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

Martin Fotta is a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences. He is the author of *From Itinerant Trade to Moneylending in the Era of Financial Inclusion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). His current work explores transformations across the Romani diaspora of the Lusophone South Atlantic region.

Notes

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1. We acknowledge that chronicles are viewed differently in different literary and scholarly traditions. We have found the following texts helpful when developing our own approach to the concepts of chronicle, witness, and testimony: Angel-Ajani, “Expert Witness;” Marcus, “The Anthropologist as Witness;” Mahieux, *Urban Chroniclers*; Stephen, “Bearing Witness;” Thomas, “Witnessing.”
2. See Welcome, “After the Ash.”
3. Gay y Blasco, “The Best Place.”
4. Center for Reproductive Rights, *Vakeras Zorales*.
5. Picker, “That Neighbourhood.” Picker, *Racial Cities*.
6. Brooks, “Camp.”
7. Whitacre et al., “COVID-19 and the Political Geography.”
8. A report by the European Roma Rights Centre (Rorke and Lee, “Roma Rights”) provides the most systematic overview of human rights violation against Romanies across Europe during the first half of 2020.
9. Nikolov, “Bulgarian Authorities.”
10. Costache, “‘Able to Gas Them;” Rorke and Lee, “Roma Rights;” Matache, Leaning, and Bhabha, “The Shameful Resurgence.”
11. Brooks, “Camp.”
12. Tubio, “Así incumplen la orden;” Tubio, “El confinamiento.”
13. Berta, “Ethnicizing a Pandemic,” 14–15.
14. ABC España, “El barrio de las Tres Mil Viviendas.”
15. Sandset, “The Necropolitics of COVID-19.”
16. Stoler, *Race*.
17. Mbembe, “Necropolitics.”
18. Alston, “Statement.”
19. The only such data were collected for the *Healthy Regions* organisation in Slovakia through a network of community health mediators, including the chronicler Alžbeta “Hal’ka” Mižigárová, discussed in the introduction to *Slovak Chronicles*. These data confirmed higher levels of infection rates in the second wave (winter 2021). While, given the young age profile of inhabitants, infection rates did not lead to high levels of hospitalizations in absolute terms, in relative terms the picture was different: the

rate of mortality within each age groups was higher. than among non-Romanies. This discrepancy has at least two causes: higher prevalence of pre-existing conditions (comorbidities), and delayed hospital admissions when compared to the majority population.

20. Farmer, "On Suffering."
21. Mbembe, "Necropolitics."
22. Berlant, "Slow Death."
23. Quesada, Kain Hart, and Bourgeois, "Structural Vulnerability."
24. Singer et al., "Syndemics."
25. Howarth, "A Life Without Flowers."
26. Fasenfest, "On the Threshold," 961.
27. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 19.
28. Savransky, "Problems."
29. World Bank, *Poverty*.
30. Willis, "Economic Effects."
31. AEGGIT, "Impacto del Covid-19;" Fundación Secretariado Gitano, "Impacto de la Crisis." There is growing evidence that what the chroniclers have observed firsthand in the five countries also happened elsewhere: Hackl and Müller, "Online Teaching;" REF, "Statement on COVID-19;" Friends, Families and Travellers, "Written Evidence."
32. Farkas "Report on Discrimination;" Gay y Blasco, "The Best Place."
33. Fox, "EU Faces Challenge;" Hackl and Müller, "Online Teaching."
34. Tammi, "The Great Divide."
35. Bešter, and Pirc, "Remote Learning."
36. Krumova and Kolev, "The Distance Learning."
37. Caduff, "What Went Wrong," 480.
38. Roy, "Fear of Others."
39. Ryšavý, "Roma Lives Matter Demo;" Benstead, "Europe's Romani population;" BIRN, "Roma Lives Matter."
40. For a recent experiment in collaboration, see the book by Gay y Blasco and Hernández, *Writing Friendship*. For other reflections on collaborative ethnography in Romani studies, see Hrustič and Poduška, *Romano Džaniben*; and Fotta, "Review Article." For a comprehensive review of the development of collaborative methods in anthropology see Lassiter, *Chicago Guide*.

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