Anti-Roma racism and the white academic agenda: hidden blind-spots of the Education System

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Abstract

Education has been depicted as the main "social elevator" to confront the internal inequalities of modern abyssal societies. Roma, as the largest, ancient European minority, are perpetually targeted as a "sensitive" population in regard to access to and success in basic and higher education, creating a framework where Roma themselves, from an early age, are considered a "problem". Academia, scientific research and knowledge production are not isolated from these practices and political/epistemological framework. In this sense, the article unravels its complicity and responsibility in the maintenance of the white order, the modern civilisatory mission toward the racialised bodies and the "ideology of integration" as the only possible political path. This paper discusses the current academic production of evidence-based research in the field of education in regards to Roma, exploring the semantics and conceptual constructions that frame the discussion related to the Roma experience in the educative system. Furthermore, the article discusses how the conceptual codification of such a framework actually serves to condition intellectual and political approaches that attempt to go beyond the complicit "ideology of integration" when addressing public and educative policies.
Keywords: Anti-gypsyism; Roma Self-determination; White Academic Agenda.

Resumo

O racismo contra os Roma e a agenda acadêmica branca: pontos cegos ocultos do sistema educacional

A educação tem sido retratada como o principal "elevador social" para enfrentar as desigualdades internas das sociedades abissais modernas. Os Roma, a maior e mais antiga minoria europeia, são perpetuamente visados como uma população "sensível" no que diz respeito ao acesso e ao sucesso no ensino básico e superior, criando um quadro em que os próprios Roma, desde tenra idade, são considerados um "problema". A academia, a pesquisa científica e a produção do conhecimento não estão isoladas dessas práticas e do arcabouço político/epistemológico. Nesse sentido, o artigo desvenda sua cumplicidade e responsabilidade na manutenção da ordem branca, sua missão civilizatória moderna em relação aos corpos racializados e sua "ideologia da integração" como único caminho político possível. Este artigo discute a produção acadêmica atual de pesquisas baseadas em evidências no campo da educação sobre os Roma, explorando a semântica e as construções conceituais que enquadram a discussão relacionada à experiência dos Roma no sistema educativo. Além disso, o artigo discute como a codificação conceitu-

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al de tal estrutura realmente serve para condicionar as abordagens intelectuais e políticas que tentam ir além da cúmplice "ideologia da integração" ao abordar políticas públicas e educativas.
Palavras-chave: Anticiganismo; Autodeterminação dos Roma; Agenda acadêmica branca.

Note: side text "NÚMERO TEMÁTICO"

Resumen

El racismo antigitano y la agenda académica blanca: Puntos ciegos ocultos del sistema educativo

La educación ha sido descrita como el principal "ascensor social" para hacer frente a las desigualdades internas de las sociedades modernas abisales. Los Roma, como la mayor y más antigua minoría europea, son perpetuamente señalados como una población "sensible" en lo que respecta al acceso y el éxito en la educación básica y superior, creando un marco en el que los propios gitanos, desde una edad temprana, son considerados un "problema". El mundo académico, la investigación científica y la producción de conocimiento no están aislados de estas prácticas y del marco político/epistemológico. En este sentido, el artículo desentraña su complicidad y responsabilidad en el mantenimiento del orden blanco, la misión civilizatoria moderna hacia los cuerpos racializados y la "ideología de la integración" construida como única vía política posible. Este artículo analiza la actual producción académica de investigación basada en pruebas en el ámbito de la educación en relación con los romaníes, explorando la semántica y las construcciones conceptuales que enmarcan el debate relacionado con la experiencia de los romaníes en el sistema educativo. Además, el artículo analiza cómo la codificación conceptual de dicho marco sirve en realidad para condicionar los enfoques intelectuales y políticos que intentan ir más allá de la complicidad con la "ideología de la integración" al abordar las políticas públicas y educativas aplicadas al pueblo Roma.
Palabras clave: Antigitanismo; Autodeterminación Romaní; Agenda académica blanca.

Academia, the white civilising agenda and research on Roma through education

Education has been a major focus of interest for scholarship addressing Roma´s current social and political situation. Education has been considered as the main element to bridge the gap between segregated and excluded communities and increase access to full citizenship, social resources and "integration", precisely because of the central position of mainstream education, it is closely correlated with the causes of anti-gypsyism. Much of the socio-political situation that Roma people face, especially in the Spanish state, is reduced to a simple and often, plainly fatalistic casuistry, devoid of any determined origin or possible end. In other words, in order to understand the current situation of Roma in the Spanish states it is crucial to unravel the political causes that have, historically and currently, condemned the Kale[2] people to: live in

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[2] The word Kale is an ethnonymous term used by Spanish Roma people to refer to themselves and their ancestors. This article avoids referring to the Roma people with the term "gypsy", when I use the term "gypsy" or "gypsy/other" it is only to refer to the narrative fiction constructed by white epistemology. For a more detailed clarification of this terminology see: Fernández, Cayetano. «The Roma collective memory and the epistemological limits of Western historiography». In *The pluriverse of the human: struggles for dignity and human rights,* edited by Boaventura Sousa Santos and Bruno Sena. London; New York: Routledge, 2021.

dirty, overcrowded ghettos within metropolitan hinterlands; fail badly in schools and high-schools (if they even attend); be scandalously poor, afraid of police and public administrations; be overrepresented in prisons of the territory and to become targets of policies aimed at "groups at risk of social exclusion;" become objects of social interventions that, instead of bringing solutions to communities, reproduce the same ideology – to control, discipline and "civilise" the Roma body. Hence, the causes of the injustices experienced by Roma communities are explained, with the main point of focus being the patterns of oppression inaugurated by the modern State. Therefore, if we agree that the form of racism that affects our community has specific historical and ideological roots, we must identify concrete ways to destroy the foundations of this miserable reality, or, if they do not exist, we must create them. This implies allocating the so-called "Roma failure in education" within a broader dimension; one that builds on racial domination and is sustained by deep-rooted structures and assembled systems of dominance. As previously argued, assembled systems of dominance refer to:

> the relationship between institutions and Roma people that has been framed under a 'civilisatory' mission, that goes from the most evident practices of police brutality and judicial harassment to the subtler and covert controls, exercised under paternalist and assitentialist practices of NGOs and other organizations. Anti-Roma racism as a structural system of dominance, in its complexity, has achieved a political framework where the discussion of these matters are constrained by many sub-systems of legitimation that work in conjunction to keep reproducing the mechanism of racial dominance (FEJZULA, FERNÁNDEZ, in press).

It is precisely within this context that the high level of attention given to the performance of Roma within mainstream education systems, that supposedly aims to improve Roma´s status in education, becomes fully understandable. However, anti-Roma experiences have shown that those practices and policies are in fact ideologies tied to the civilising/integratory mission. In other words, for decades the "Roma question" became the permanent object of mainstream diagnosis, whose objective, supposedly, was to improve the situation of Roma. However, because the focus was solely on analysing the Roma and not their wider relationship with the state and its institutions, mainstream diagnoses have ultimately reproduced the same racial hierarchies. These hierarchies aim to civilise the Roma within what Fejzula (2019) has called a "Permanent state of exception", wherein "Antigypsyism is deployed in the realm of 'exception" and the Roma are constructed as a threat to the state" (p. 2097). In this regard, it becomes crucial to understand the functioning

of the state toward the Roma, a relationship based on different processes of racialisation that have placed Roma under the umbrella of social policies, excluding the possibility of discussing its political causes. It means to tackle anti-gypsyism as a product of modernity:

> Anti-Gypsyism is a race-based system of domination that has historical roots in modernity and that obeys the construction of the European white man as the model of humanity, thus dehumanizing all others. As Roma, we are considered as not humans enough, therefore, we are denied this political capacity of self-determination and, at the same time, to close the circle, this serves as a justification for the implementation of an "ideology of integration" that seeks to "civilize" us within what they consider to be civilization (FERNÁNDEZ apud GARCIA, 2019).

Academia, scientific research and knowledge production are not isolated from these practices and their political/epistemological framework. It is therefore necessary to unravel its complicity and responsibility in the maintenance of the white order, the modern civilisatory mission toward the racialised bodies and the "ideology of integration" as the only possible political path. To this aim, the paper discusses the current academic production of evidence-based research in the field of education in regards to Roma, in order to explore the semantics and conceptual constructions that frame dialogue related to the Roma experience in the educative system. Furthermore, the author considers how the conceptual codification of such a framework actually conditions intellectual and political approaches that attempt to go beyond the complicit "ideology of integration", when addressing public and educative policies.

The three tautologies

As implied before, the objective of this paper is not to research Roma in education, but rather, to discuss and analyse the mainstream analytical framework that this debate inhabits, to problematise it and to point out its limitations. In this regard there are three core conceptualisations that we commonly find in the analysis of mainstream research, policies and educational programming when it comes to discussion about Roma students and education: 1) the "Roma failing" in education; 2) the "myth" of education as a "social elevator"; and 3) the "cultural issue". These three notions, spread widely in the vocabulary and political discourses around Roma education, are key elements present in most understandings of contemporary challenges in the field of so-called "multicultural education". They have assumed the role of "tautologies"
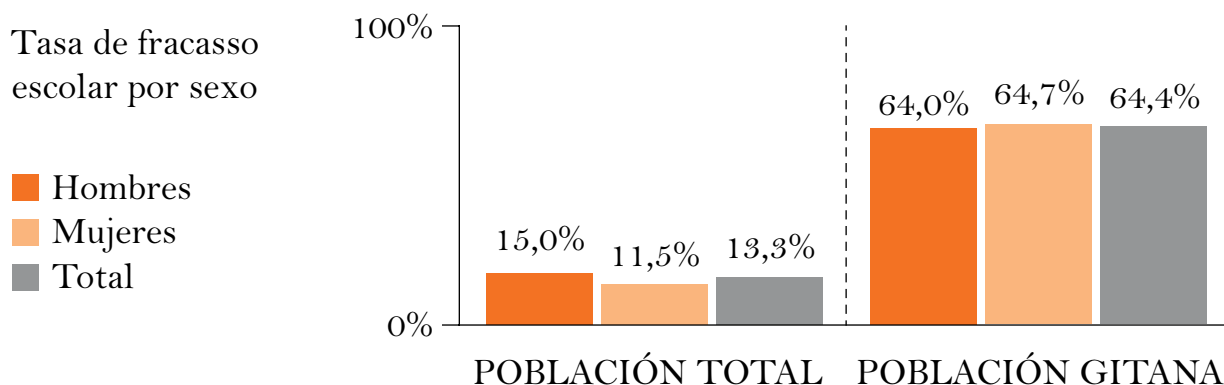
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because, independently of political positioning, pedagogical or analytical approaches, for the vast majority, in one way or another, this three issues will be assumed as correct without any further questioning.

The "Roma failure"

Several studies and academic research projects over the last few decades have researched, from different angles, the issue of education in regards to Roma students and have shown a huge gap between Roma minorities and general white society in term of educative achievement and standard of success (ALCALDE, 1997).

At the national level, one of the most complete pieces of research, conducted in 2013, puts the alarming figure of Roma failure in secondary education at 64.4%, in comparison with 13.3% of the mainstream white population (FSG, 2013). The data shown in Figure, undeniably demonstrates the existence of a deep-rooted problem concerning the Roma path through national education systems. However, this paper is focused on something even more alarming; the way this question has been addressed by educative institutions, educational experts and policy-makers. The constant appeals to the so-called "Roma failure" in education, which have become a kind of mantra in this discussion, are obviously not immune to the discursive and historical construction of "the Gypsy-other" (FERNÁNDEZ, 2019). In particular, this unquestioned ideology that sustains and legitimates structural anti-gypsyism practiced in educative institutions, is exercised in a double dimension: on the one hand by "marking Roma as inadequate for schooling" (ARAÚJO, 2016) and on the other, by "blaming the victim" (TROYNA, 1993).

Figure – FSG (2013).

Tasa de fracasso escolar por sexo

- ▮ Hombres
- ▮ Mujeres
- ▮ Total

POBLACIÓN TOTAL: 15,0% — 11,5% — 13,3%

POBLACIÓN GITANA: 64,0% — 64,7% — 64,4%

The semantic operation of targeting Roma students and families as the cause of their educative failure has an extra outcome: precluding any questioning of the system itself as a producer of this blatant failure, as well as the very convenient lack of demand for accountability of responsible bodies. However, analysing the construction of the Spanish educative system, it is not difficult to recognise the absolute lack of inclusion of Roma history and culture within the official curricula, as dictated by the Ministry of Education and applied by regional government. In epistemological terms, this overt absence, along with the structural violence facing Roma people enrolled in educative institutions in the form of segregation or moral undermining, has created the perfect conditions to understand school and other educative institutions as legitimated anti-gypsy spaces. Therefore, the way to find effective solutions to the problems faced by Roma students in the field of education must focus on the causes of the problem, which starts by acknowledging the failure of the educative system towards Roma communities.

Education as social elevator

A second "mantra", repeated *ad nauseam* in the mainstream approach to Roma and education, as well as in the discourse of project-dealer representatives of NGOs, businesses and their policy-maker allies, is related to the idea that education is the only door to integration and, thus, to full citizenship; a kind of panacea to reach social status. In this sense, a successful pathway through the education system offers the promise of radical change in the future social positioning of Roma. Obviously, the rewards can be very seductive for many Roma students; most of them raised in ghettos and segregated spaces on the periphery of urban centres, which is perhaps the reason why most Roma NGOs have ended up embracing such an ideology. Nonetheless, in crosscutting data about the situation faced by Roma in education and further access to the labour market, there is a noticeable gap, leading us to believe that the capability of education to overcome inequalities, in the case of Roma, is quite limited due to racial boundaries.

The claim that education is a major tool to remove inequalities and transform societies, when it comes to the Roma experience, it always comes with conditions. These conditions are always made in the name of "integration" as the only possible and desirable scenario, yet they represent nothing more than a projection of European modernity and it civilisatory ambition towards the Roma. As Marta Araújo (2016)

claims, "calls for the integration of ethnically marked populations are not neutral" (p. 301), neither is the framework created under the conception of the "Roma failure"; an issue we will revisit further on in this paper.

The "cultural issue"

The third foundational element in this mainstream understanding of education and Roma in current societies is probably the most harmful and the deepest rooted: the essentialisation of a symbolic-cultural clash, based on the dogmatic assumption that depicts Roma culture as an uncivilised product, incapable of fitting harmoniously in modern societies. From academia to mass media and politics, all kinds of explanations have been offered to actually blame our culture as a focus of social maladjustment, and consequently, the origin of "the problem". This provokes a conflicted relationship with white society, who continually misassociate us with: early marriages, high birth rates, idleness, pathological attachments to our families, parental overprotection of our children, lack of respect to authority, educational failure, and so on. What it is important to note in this regard is, as Lentin argues, that there is a mechanism behind this kind of cultural accusation: "The evident outcome of the simple replacement of race with "culture", "ethnicity" or, even more euphemistically, "origins" or "identity" is the consequent banishing of racism" (LENTIN, 2011).

The imbrication of these components, together with policymaking, have created a theoretical framework that shapes hegemonic understandings of the so-called "Roma failing" in education.

And yet, one more diagnosis

In the case of Roma education, as occurs with housing, employment, health and other basic rights, has been intensively research by academics and "experts" of so-called Romani Studies, in order to provide evidence-based studies for policymakers. This has even resulted in a specific field and methodology to research/invent the "Gypsy-other" as an object, called "gypsyology", a very fruitful area of interest since XIX century (FERNÁNDEZ, 2016). One of the main characteristics of this kind of study is the permanent and recurring repetition of social diagnosis about the issues and problematic faced by Roma, in this regard education plays a prominent role, even

though the well-intentioned recommendations that accompany those diagnoses do not seem to come to fruition.

The Spanish Ministry of Education has acted as publisher, collaborator and/or funder of 68 specific monographies about Roma and education since 1977[3]. To illustrate the critique of the dominant epistemological approach of this kind of research, I will analyse the content and methodologies of the national study called "*El alumnado gitano en secundaria: un estudio comparado*"[4], conducted by Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) and published by the Ministry of Education, with a particular focus on the absences that condition its further political transformation. Before moving into the analysis of this volume, I would like to mention that the criticism addressed toward this study should not be taken as a particular critique of the work, but rather as a general critique of the hegemonic way of targeting the objectification of Roma and their social experience in education. In other words, most of the academic research developed on this topic, with the aim of providing sources for education policies under the ideology of integration, has had zero impact on Roma people lives. In fact, in 2010, only 3 years before the aforementioned study was made public, the same Ministry published another study titled *Gitanos: de los mercadillos a la escuela y del instituto al futuro*[5] (CREA, 2010), this time under the direction of Centro de Investigación en Teorías y Prácticas Superadoras de Desigualdades CREA[6] (Universitat de Barcelona). The analysis produced by these two studies are very coincidental, in regard to the academic results achieved by Roma students, in the underlying causes provoking such outcomes. Particularly relevant is the fact that the recommendations made by CREA research team are fully matching in general terms with the recommendations brought by FSG three year later. Both researches were conducted on request of the Ministry of Education and under its supervision, which brings us to a pertinent question: how many more diagnoses are needed before real, effective solutions will be tackled?

The most extensively disseminated data from *El alumnado gitano en secundaria: un estudio comparado"* (FSG, 2013) was the aforementioned difference in school

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[3] The list of publication is available in the library of the Spanish Ministry of Education: http://biblioteca-central.educacion.gob.es/*spi.

[4] The Roma Student in Secondary education: a comparative study.

[5] *Gitanos: from street markets to school and from high-school to the future*

[6] Centre for Research on Theories and Practices to Overcome Inequalities CREA – University of Barcelona.

failure between Roma and non-Roma students (64% for Roma and 13% in the case of general population). A prior methodological issue needs to be addressed here: Which demographic figures are these numbers based on? It is not a naïve question, especially taking into consideration that ethnic data collection and the creation of an ethnic census as a political tool for setting up a policy for the historical reparation, are considered unconstitutional under Spanish law. Even though the ethnic census has been a demand of Roma movement in Spain over the last decade, criticism remains about, the improbability of the official data, which has kept a static number of Spanish Roma at 650,000 since the 80s, up to one million in the recent years.

A second methodological issue concerning this comparative approach relates to the omission of the socio-economic background of the samples compared, as occurs when comparing enrolment rate:

> If we take as an indicator the net schooling rate, which measures the relationship between the number of students enrolled and the total population, it is important to highlight the existing gap between the schooling of the Roma population and the total population. However, it is worth noting that up to the age of 14 the levels of schooling are similar, with no more than a five percentage point difference. At 12 years of age, for example, while for the general population the figures stand at 99.2%, for the Roma population it only drops to 98.6%. It is in the 16 to 20 age bracket that substantial differences are detected between schooling rates, which reach 50.4 percentage points at 18 years of age, since while 71.1% of young people as a whole study, in the case of Roma youth the percentage drops to 20.8%. Therefore, the first conclusion is that Roma youth study to a lesser extent than the average population, at least in terms of formal education[7,8].

It is important to take into consideration the social and economic situation of the families involved in the study; comparing, for instance, the academic result of the Roma students from ghettos, where public education is extremely basic and

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[7] FSG, El alumnado gitano en Secundaria. Un estudio comparado, p. 86. Author translation.

[8] *"Si se toma como indicador la tasa neta de escolarización, que mide la relación entre el alumnado matriculado y el total de población, es importante poner de relieve la brecha existente entre la escolarización de la población gitana y la total. No obstante, cabe resaltar que hasta los 14 años los niveles de escolarización son similares, no llegando a los cinco puntos porcentuales de diferencia. A los 12 años, por ejemplo, mientras para la población general las cifras se sitúan en el 99,2%, para la gitana tan solo desciende al 98,6%. En el tramo de edad entre los 16 y 20 años es cuando se detectan diferencias sustanciales entre las tasas de escolarización, que llegan hasta los 50,4 puntos porcentuales a los 18 años, puesto que mientras que el 71,1% del conjunto de jóvenes estudia, en el caso de la juventud gitana el porcentaje se reduce al 20,8%. Por tanto, la primera conclusión es que las y los jóvenes gitanos estudian en menor medida que la media de la población, al menos en lo que respecta a la educación reglada"* (Ibid).

poor, with Gadje students from rich neighbourhoods. Avoiding such a comparative is equivalent to obfuscating structural racism, whilst reinforcing white privilege and the constructed image of Roma as an uncivilised people, disaffected by education and cultural interest, as produced by European Modernity. I would venture that a deeper analysis of structural racism will centre the accountability and complicity of schools, universities, educative institutions and research agendas as causes and producers of institutional racism, which in turn, would shape a very different picture of the situation of Roma in education and its possible solutions. However, this prolix field of research does not seem to be very persuasive and of a high importance for most of the dominant researches developed on this topic so far.

A diagnosis of the absences

In a nutshell, the main problem besetting this kind of diagnosis, rather than what it is said, is more connected with what is obviated and left aside. As argued by Tom et al. (2017), absences are extremely relevant in order to understand the failure of educative "standardisation" of Roma and non-Roma students in the Spanish education system. One of the most alarming issues hidden by this analysis is violence. The Roma schooling experience is marked by violence, expressed and experienced in many ways. Sometimes it can be symbolic, as the shocking lack of inclusion of Roma history and culture in the official curriculum of compulsory education demonstrates. Curiously, a lot of this diagnostic research (e.g. FSG, 2013, CREA 2010, among others) includes among their recommendations, year after year, issues of: "Incorporation of elements related to the promotion of the knowledge of the gypsy community in the educational centres from an intercultural perspective', or even point out the need for 'Training of the teaching staff in all those aspects related to the attention to the diversity of the students"[9],[10]. However, there is no critical reference as to what conditions have allowed for such a lack of knowledge about Roma people, their history and culture, after more than six centuries of social coexistence.

Unfortunately, the symbolic is not the only kind of violence that Roma youngsters face thought schooling; segregation within the classroom is a forceful

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[9] FSG, El alumnado gitano en Secundaria. Un estudio comparado, p. 30. Author translation.

[10] *"Incorporación de elementos relacionados con el fomento del conocimiento de la comunidad gitana en los centros educativos desde una perspectiva intercultural',* or even point out the need for *'Formación del profesorado en todos aquellos aspectos relacionados con la atención a la diversidad del alumnado"* (Ibid).

experience of exclusion that a lot of Roma youth get to know well from very early ages. The very common practice of removing Roma students from the classroom "for their own good" or to attend "comprehensive education" ("*clases diversificadas*", in the Spanish system) leaves marks, not only in the educational path of these students, but also in their own self-perception and social stigma. Nevertheless, the most violent face of this experience is, by far, being educated in a system that constantly undermines your moral fibre by, explicitly or implicitly, reminding you how unworthy you, your family, your ancestors, your history and culture are. The psychological effects of these experiences in school sometimes run very deep and have a conditioning effect over one´s lifetime, as has been described by the experiment of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) *"Pygmalion in the classroom"*. Furthermore, these factors need to be understood as producers of "internalised racism" and normalisers of social inequalities which leads Roma young people to eventually be affected by recalcitrant messages as "you are the problem", "the one who does not fit", "the guilty one", and other ideological racial constructions upon which their formal education is build.

Even though the concept of stigmatization has been commonly used by NGOs and scholars to represent the situation of Roma, yet, the concept of stigma was hardly discussed in relation to the structural racism. In fact, those institutions until few years ago were reluctant to open speak about anti-Roma racism. Probably this is not a particularity faced only by Roma, but rather a common pattern of the way whiteness functions within academia. When analysing one of the most influential work on stigma studies, the canonical book of Erving Goffman (2009) first published in 1963 "Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity", Tyler (2018) notices those silences and elusive gaze:

> Towards the end of Stigma, he admits that stigmatisation is historically specific in the forms it takes (p. 138), notes that 'shifts have occurred in the kinds of disgrace that arouse concern', and implicitly acknowledges that stigma functions 'as a means of formal social control' (p. 139). However, he expresses little curiosity about where norms come from, what they prescribe, what the effects of these prescriptions might be, or how they might be challenged or transformed. Rather, he is concerned with detailing the more abstract operations of the system within which face-to-face interactions take place, in smooth or disordered ways. (p. 750-1).

In the case of Roma, the situation does not differ much from the experience discussed by Tyler (2018) from a Black epistemology point of view. Dominant research approaches limit the impact of stigmatization suffered by Roma mostly to

individual behaviour of some particular professors, leaving aside the structural component. Usually those academic approaches have not any intention to question the very foundations where the processes of Roma stigma lie because it will then request to understand and confront whiteness as a key epistemological and organizational element of the current education system itself.

The processes analysed here have made schools and universities appear as white spaces in Roma´s eyes, this has made Roma feel these institutions are not their spaces, sometimes even fearing for their children and reluctant to expose them to the aforementioned forms of violence. Yet still, various "experts" on Roma who are thinking of solving the issue of education, instead need to analyse and confront the tentacles of anti-gypsyism in this field, rather than just blaming the victim. By throwing in Roma families' faces that the problem is their lack of care of toward the education of their children and their disaffection for school, for these "experts" and researchers, this matter has become a criteria of achievement for public policies and NGOs´ work, when they assert:

> In general terms, this study indicates that the educational level of the Roma population has "progressively" improved during the last decades and highlights that the generalized schooling of Roma children and a <u>more positive view of education and school by the Roma community</u> have made it possible for Roma youth to reach "higher levels of education than those of the previous generation"[11,12].

These biased criteria become even more glaringly apparent and full of suspicions when gender forms part of the analysis:

> [...] the permanence in the classrooms of gypsy boys is higher than that of their female counterparts, which is not consistent with the current trend in the majority society where schooling and school success of women goes beyond compulsory secondary education. Even so, Roma women who manage to remain in the educational system have higher levels of success than men. <u>What is complicated is to establish to what extent the change in the attitudes and values of the Roma community has had an impact on these processes</u>. Although still far from the majority society, the rise in the levels of completed studies, which in principle <u>presupposes a greater openness to-</u>

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[11] FSG, El alumnado gitano en Secundaria. Un estudio comparado, p. 30. Author translation, emphasis added.

[12] *En líneas generales, este estudio indica que el nivel educativo de la población gitana ha mejorado "progresivamente" durante las últimas décadas y destaca que la escolarización generalizada de las niñas y niños gitanos y* <u>una visión más positiva de la educación y de la escuela por parte de la comunidad gitana</u> *han posibilitado que la juventud gitana esté alcanzando "niveles de instrucción superiores a los de la generación anterior" (Ibid.,* emphasis added).

wards more modern structures of thought, seems to have initiated a timid advance in terms of the education of minors, although it is true that there are still certain contradictions in some sectors that do not quite adapt their discourse to the current reality (LAPARRA, 2011)[13].

Another important absence in the diagnostic is the exclusion of the impact of ghettoisation in the education of Roma. Most of the Roma youngsters in Spain are raised in the ghettos created during the late 70s and early 80s in Spain, through a common process of hollowing-out urban centres for further, peripheral relocation. The same pattern and time period gave rise to "*El Vacie*" in Seville after the removal of Roma from Triana, the case of "*Campo de la Bota*" following the eviction of Somorrostro in Barcelona, or the fabrication of "*Almanjayar*" in Granada after the forced eviction of Sacromonte, among many others. All of these ghettos share the conditions of being racially constructed. Many of them host segregated schools within their geographical limits, ruled by Gadje teachers, well-intentioned cultural mediators led by NGOs, influenced especially by constantly changing education law. The limits of the ghettos are spatially defined by racial boundaries, hence, the experiences of the young Roma who are raised within these geographical boundaries are marked by the same racial limits, which, as José Heredia indicates, inhabits an expression of the fears of mainstream society: "In the case of the Roma ghettos, these neighbourhoods located in the suburbs, literally situated on the margins of cities, geographically translate the collective fear of Spanish society towards an ethnic community that it still continues to look at as an alien culture, despite more than 600 years of coexistence and cultural exchanges" (CORTÉS, 2016)[14].

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[13] *[…] la permanencia en las aulas de los chicos gitanos es superior a la de sus homólogas lo que no concuerda con la tendencia actual de la sociedad mayoritaria donde la escolarización y el éxito escolar de las mujeres va más allá de la secundaria obligatoria. Aun así, las gitanas que consiguen permanecer en el sistema educativo tienen mayores niveles de éxito que los hombres. Lo complicado es establecer en qué medida el cambio en las actitudes y valores de la comunidad gitana ha incidido en estos procesos. Aunque todavía lejos de la sociedad mayoritaria, el ascenso en los niveles de estudios terminados, lo que en principio presupone una mayor apertura hacia estructuras de pensamiento más modernas, parece haber iniciado un tímido avance en lo que a la educación de los menores se refiere, si bien es cierto que todavía existen ciertas contradicciones en algunos sectores que no terminan de adecuar su discurso a la realidad actual (Ibid.,* emphasis added).

[14] *En el caso de los guetos gitanos, estos barrios situados en el extrarradio, literalmente situados en los márgenes de las ciudades, traducen geográficamente el miedo colectivo de la sociedad española hacia una comunidad étnica a la que aún sigue mirando como una cultura extraña, a pesar de los más de 600 años de convivencia e intercambios culturales (Ibid).*

The intention behind all these narratives, the very condition of possibility, is entirely connected to the ideology of integration as a civilising mission based on white privilege. These practices, in fact, not only exclude any possibility of discussing racism, but furthermore, they normalise it.

Narrative of innocence and cosmetic policies

The previously discussed matters, along with their co-implication with the "ideology of integration", have created the dominant analytical framework towards the issue of education in relation to Roma population. The dominant epistemology of the "Gypsy-other" ends up legitimating a "narrative of innocence", by understanding school segregation and other forms of violence exercised by institutional racism as "unwilling correctable failings", instead of addressing this issue as a reproduction and legitimation of structural racism. This is not only analytically mistaken, but also a convenient epistemological torsion of the reality faced by thousands of Roma students and families.

From this epistemological standpoint, there is no room for accountability of the damages created by schools and the education system itself as racist structures; conversely, from this viewpoint, the blame lies only on one side: The Roma. Neither does this hegemonic approach offer space, or is interested in looking for political responsibility, for the harmful impact of public policies on the lives of the very same people targeted by such political engineering; rather, as Maeso (2015) points out those very policies are designed under the ideological project of "civilising the Roma".

Several measures have been taken along the years to create a cosmetic appearance that there are changes in the education system toward Roma students, whilst always leaving untouched the core of the problem: anti-gypsyism. These kinds of initiatives, such as the creation of "bridge schools" for Roma (*escuelas puente*) in the 80s, the current designation of "school centres of hard-discharging" (*centros de difícil desempeño*), where only teachers that manifest their interest to work there are sent to teach. At the same time, learning communities, programmes of social guarantee such as the initiation professional qualification program, or any other socially-oriented programme have only served to remove Roma from classrooms, which in the light of their results, alongside many other likeminded initiatives, need to be evaluated as a complete failing.

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Such a political and conceptual scenario provokes the well-intended will of transforming schools into "inclusive spaces". However, when it comes to Roma, such noble intentions become tools of oppression and perpetuate different types of violence in order to try to achieve some abstract idea of integration, which will never be fully attainable, despite being proffered as the final answer. For Roma people, the outcome of the ideology of integration is very different of what it promises, as Araújo (2016) asserts: "[…] integration as a solution far from succeeded in reversing the racist assumptions at the root of segregation and actually contributed to the legitimation of racism through the culturalization of social relations and political conflict" (p. 316).

Envisioning a way out: Toward a self-determined and autonomous Roma education system

The segregation of Roma students, who share a destiny with the communities from the former colonies, represents an overwhelming reality in hundreds of educational centres from the entire Spanish territory. Without exceptions, it has been denounced by organisations as being anti-systemic, such as the Agency of the European Union of Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2017) or even by the Ombudsman (VILIKOVSKA, 2013). If Roma families are segregated in the public spaces of the city, displaced towards the peripheral neighbourhoods, the ghetto-school represents just another way to strengthen the continuity of a precarious and underdeveloped existence for a human community, whose successful domination depends, fundamentally, on their claudication to a fate of social death that is fabricated by these institutions.

However, what really should take our attention and worry us is not these institutions supposed neutrality, but the fact that there are also schools where the percentage of Roma children and migrants reaches the overwhelming majority. The point is that this is a reality that is far from being harmless and intercultural. The reality experienced by these young people in segregated schools is simply unbearable. Soon, these boys and girls learn that they are inferior, that they do not have the capacity to aspire to their true goals, but that they must content themselves with occupying the subaltern place of their parents: the supposed natural place of Roma in the contemporary European society. It is in this atmosphere of control, of contempt and forgetfulness that they learn the most important and functional lesson about the system that oppresses them: it is not worth fighting.

I would dare to warn that one of the fundamental fronts of the emerging anti-racism of the Spanish State should be the racial segregation of the educational system. As on so many other fronts, the Roma experience can clarify fundamental blind spots of anti-racist analysis and struggle. Obviously, this reality is not only faced by Roma, but rather, is an experience shared with other racialised communities. To gain strength in the denunciation of the harmful fallacy of integration, just look at what has become of us in these territories during the past five centuries. To denounce the perverse institutional dynamics that direct our young people to these segregated centres, to publicly confront their situation and the conditions that make it possible through media campaigns of information and rejection of the *status quo*, is currently consolidated as an urgent need in the anti-racist field. It has been said that the key to our perception on this issue is to stop assuming that young Roma fail in the education system and instead, to go on to denounce that it is the education system that fails them. It is not true; the educational system does not fail. In fact, it successfully achieves its goals year after year: frustrating and subalternating Roma youngsters, as well as other racialised young people. Therefore, this is not a matter of harbouring a naive perspective on the supposed noble intentions and sad failures of the educational system, but rather, to point to it as a key device of control and power, as well as a conveyer belt of institutional racism.

After all the previously discussed arguments, there is one key issue that needs to be addressed: the contemporary history of education policy and educational practices in the Spanish state has proved incapable of bringing any real solution to the structural racism faced by Roma in their educative path. That is to say that there is not space for a particular amendment of educative structures in a society constructed and articulated by racial foundations. Segregation is not desirable for any human collective, however, for us, in most cases segregation is enforced by structural anti-gypsyism. It is within this context that segregation and ghettoisation become political processes, sources of resistance and standpoints for the dignity of our people. They could host the potential for a new form of education, able to confront structural racism and to fairly provide the education that future generations of Roma need – autonomous ruled schools able to provide academic training, political anti-racist consciousness and pride. Only an education system and curriculum able to follow these patterns and ruled by the same people for whom they are addressed will succeed in overcoming the failure of the current education system, which by all means, must be radically decolonised and transformed.

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