

ANTI-ROMA RACISM, SOCIAL WORK AND THE WHITE CIVILISATORY MISSION¹

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Introduction

For us, as Roma militants, to be invited to reflect on Antigypsyism and social service interventions with Roma is not an easy task. This philosophical, analytical and theoretical difficulty occurs mostly because we come from the other side, from those neighbourhoods and collectives that are considered as “the intervened”, the ones who are in constant need of interventions. This is because of the dominant understanding that we, as Roma people, are incapable of organising ourselves politically, hence unable to govern ourselves. This position, as argued by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), centres on the idea of a subaltern who cannot speak, and has a colonial ideology that oppressed groups find categorically with the powerful; they have no valuable explanation of their own political situation – and thus, are incapable of speaking for themselves and/or there is a constant questioning of the colonised knowledge. In other words, there is *policing* of knowledge production by the colonised and minoritised (Araújo & Maeso, 2015). Furthermore, the idea of the *silent subaltern* involves a colonial myth that Roma people, as a subordinated group, are less human than white people and are not human enough, and are therefore less capable of speaking from the centre (Kourova & Webb, 2020). As vividly pointed out by Tuhiwai Smith (2012), this racist approach has enforced colonised peoples “to define what it means to be human because there is a deep understanding of what it has meant to be considered not fully human, to be *savage*” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012 [1999]: 28; original emphasis). Both claims, as noted by Grada Kilomba, “encounter the common suggestion that oppressed groups lack motivation for political activism because of a flawed consciousness of their own subordination” (2008: 24–25). Therefore, our approach and understanding cannot escape from such an imposition of racial hierarchy, used as a political tool by the racial system to justify political exploitation, while simultaneously “asserting the

rhetorical principles of freedom, democracy, and equality under the law" (Moore, 2007: 14). Furthermore, due to the general lack of understanding about structural racism in the academic sphere, this task might become a trap.

For many years, Antigypsyism was neither seen nor reflected as a significant theoretical and political problem in academic discourses; consequently, this has constitutively incapacitated Roma subjects' ability to confront hegemonic understandings of not only Antigypsyism as a structural form of racism, but even more worrying, it has systematised the figure of the white man as the synonym of humanity. In other words, as previously argued (Fejzula, 2019), the layered interconnectedness of political violence, racialisation and the human (Weheliye, 2014: 1) has come to represent not only a structural global power; these intersections in conjunction also neglect the very basic possibility of agency. In this sense, because of its structural component, Antigypsyism excludes Roma existence as an alternative mode of life; it eliminates possibilities of thinking and being human in other ways that are not that of the white human. Consequently, there is a *permanent* reproduction of whiteness as referential for humanity, while reproducing Roma's ontological impossibility. Very often, when we are invited into white spaces, such as academia, to reflect, share and think together about anti-Roma racism, we feel that some people are expecting us to propose magical solutions; however, there are no easy ways out of 500 years of structural racism. We are pointing out these issues in case readers are expecting any concrete, particular and again easy solutions to the racial abyss that separates public policy and social intervention designed for the Roma from the real problems faced by Roma, as a collective who have been depicted as incapable people that are unable to confront and overcome the political position that European Modernity has allocated them. Even if it is not possible to find easy and smooth solutions, with this chapter, we believe that our contribution becomes relevant when we shift positions. Hence, we look at social work as a perfect space to explore and understand the many faces of violence and oppressions, sometimes presented with "a nice face", that produce and maintain the structural system of domination that we define as Antigypsyism.

Let us first clarify from where we think, for what we write and what we intend to answer in this chapter. More concretely, while this chapter does not intend to establish a dialogue with social services, its aim is to put into analysis the questions of "race" and racism, while discussing and analysing interventions targeted to the Roma population. In this light, the aim of this chapter is not to discuss the specifics of social work per se, but rather to understand and analyse what are the conditions, politics and ideologies behind those social interventions. In other words, the idea of the chapter is to analyse the dominant orientations in social work with Roma communities, as part of the mechanisms of legitimisation and maintenance of Antigypsyism in today's democratic society. In doing so, we argue that the conditions to which Roma are exposed, and which makes them politically vulnerable, are in fact consequences of political discourses, practices and racial ideologies that are central to understanding the politics of modern states, because "racism is inherently political, thus relies on particular political conditions in order to function"

(Lentin, 2012: 10). Hence, in this chapter, we situate social services interventions within the broader political dimension of “race”. Antigypsyism, both as a political notion and an exercise, affects policymaking. While the label of “social work” is known as a caring profession, whose work and aim are to meet the needs of the citizens, the dominant understanding of social work is that it is dominated by “political correctness” and emphasises “disproportionally on issues of class, ‘race’ and gender” (Lavalette & Penketh, 2013: 1). We suggest that these interventions are uniquely located to reproduce notions of racial dynamics and racial ideologies. In this regard, we argue that Roma are continually racialised, usually in ways that link them to particular “social problems”.

How many problems that social services interventions intend to solve are in fact structural problems produced by the same system they represent? Is it worth rethinking concepts such as “social work” and “social interventions” in an Anti-Roma Europe? Is the Roma body seen as a body worthy of serving and being saved from the racial system? By centring these questions, we intend to explore the muted violence embedded in social service interventions, as part of a larger regime of power that aims to discipline and civilise the “unruly Roma body”. In the next section, the concept of Antigypsyism is discussed, before being used to analyse how public policy approaches, social work interventions and integration policies are in fact European disciplinary devices and civilising missions aiming to “make Roma human enough”.

Structural dimensions of anti-Roma state racism

In Europe, Antigypsyism is a phenomenon historically rooted in colonial power relations that have constructed the “Other/non-human” body, the Roma body, as disposable flesh that feeds notions and practices of (un)governability that necessitate control and discipline. The unequal access that Roma people are exposed to, what makes them the so-called “social beneficiaries”, are in fact inequalities produced by the racial states; therefore, issues such as poverty, inequalities in the labour market, practices of racial police profiling, cases of police brutality, school and urban segregations, among others, cannot be dislocated from the analysis of racism. Following Lentin’s argument, that “racism is political in the sense that it has become inherent in the structures of our political apparatus: the nation-state” (Lentin, 2012: 10), we note that one cannot understand the characteristics of social services intervention with Roma, without understanding the apparatuses of Antigypsyism as a dynamic process and set of political practices aimed at dehumanising the Roma. As Neil MacMaster (2001) reminds us:

Racism is always a dynamic process, a set of beliefs and practices that is embedded in a particular historical context, a particular social formation, and is thus continuously undergoing change, a plastic or chameleon-like phenomenon which constantly finds new forms of political, social, cultural or linguistic expression.

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Situated within the context of this institutional history, the minimisation of Antigypsyism seems to be part of a broader white construct of the issues Roma people face; therefore, we argue that the challenge for those interested in working with Roma is indeed to understand Antigypsyism and its forms of producing processes of racialisation. Racialisation in this chapter is defined as a process that “involves endowing the characteristics, appearances, traditions, and lifestyles attributed to groups of different ‘others’ with negative signifiers that are deemed to be natural and insurmountable” (Lentin, 2012: 12). Henceforth, the challenge regarding Antigypsyism is to consider how a racialised practice, notion and ideology appear to be natural and non-political, when it is in fact, as argued by Lentin, the contrary (*ibid.*).

The duality of social intervention vs Roma people is an enduring dynamic in Europe, driven by policy-centred approaches to the so-called “Roma issues”. Such social interventions precede the establishment of the Roma Decade (2005–2015), appearing even more with the establishment of the National Policies for Roma Inclusion, whereby various European States became involved in policies for social inclusion of Roma. What is defined today as a “social” problem has historical-political roots in the formation of European Modernity. In other words, “modernity is racial” (Hesse, 2007: 643), and Roma, constructed as (non)Europeans, are placed below the line of being (Fanon, 1967) or below the “abyssal line” (Santos, 2007). Boaventura de Sousa Santos has characterised modern thinking as “abyssal thinking”, consisting of “a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones” (*ibid.* 45). Hence, the marginalisation of Antigypsyism as a structural racism affecting Roma people in Europe within social policies, on the one hand, has permitted a *constant* perpetuation of racism, while, on the other hand, has allowed and justified political interpretation and intervention to conceptualise Antigypsyism as a “problem of the Roma”. We argue that within these European policies, there has been little explicit discussion on how Antigypsyism impacts the lives of Roma people. In concrete terms, we argue that they have failed to address interconnections of “race” and Antigypsyism, while these relations interact in the “matrix of domination” with the aim of shaping power relations. Such denials of racism happen when the phenomenon reduces racial discrimination to an isolated and intersubjective account. Furthermore, it does so because of the imaginary construction of Western countries as non-racist (Lentin et al., 2011); thus, there is no place to deal with the racial issues. After all, under democracy and rule of law, everyone is purportedly equal before the law (Almeida, 2019). In this sense, we suggest that it is crucial to centre “race” and Antigypsyism in our analysis as an essential axis of domination and oppression, shaped by political and institutional elements that operate in a relational way. Furthermore, we urgently point out the importance of questioning the construction of the European nation-states as non-racist while reproducing racial classifications. In this light, we argue that the construction of Western states is tightly linked to their white sovereignties. Within this context, Barnor Hesse argues that, while thinking about the political construction of whiteness as liberal and democratically oriented, one can note “denials by whiteness that it has a

political constitution” (Hesse, 2017: 591). Consequently, “while white democracy is opened democratically in its universality, it is closed in its racial performativity” (ibid. 600). Thereupon, it has placed and violated racialised populations “both inside and outside the Western rule of law” (ibid. 601). To provide some examples, in the report *Life Sentence: Romani Children in Institutional Care* (2011) produced by the European Roma Rights Centre, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the Milan Šimečka Foundation and osservAzione, the research points out the following alarming numbers:

One of the most damaging forms of discrimination experienced by Romani children is the segregation of non-disabled Romani children in special schools and classes intended for children with mental disabilities. In the Czech Republic 26.7% of all Romani pupils are educated in special schools and classes for children with mental disabilities whereas only 2.17% of non-Romani pupils are educated in this environment.² In Romania, data from a 2001 report indicated that Roma make up as many as 80% of the children in special schools in Romania.³ In Slovakia, sources indicate that the proportion of Romani children in special schools is between 80 to 100%.⁴ The spatial segregation of Romani pupils in education is also pervasive: in Bulgaria there are at least 65 schools in Romani neighbourhoods, exclusively attended by Romani children.⁵ Approximately 30% of Romani children attend completely segregated schools while 10% do not attend school at all.⁶ In Hungary, the schools are segregated in 170 towns and villages; separate Roma-only classes persist in 700 more communities.⁷

(Jovanović et al., 2011: 17)

Despite these alarming data, the hegemonic approach regarding the education of Roma remains centred on pointing out “the failure of Roma in education”, instead of questioning and analysing the conditions Roma students are placed in. The so-called “Roma failure” should not be seen as a random factor; rather, the above data is due to an institutional *academic routinisation of Antigypsyism*; thus, they cannot be analysed and appraised without understanding their historical circumstances and relation to present conditions. This conceptual framework calls for a critical analysis of academia as an institution that has an enduring role in shaping a “Eurocentric paradigm that disregards race as a power struggle” (Khiari cited in Araújo & Maeso, 2015: 18), while Roma’s voices have always been questioned and/or denied. Hence, academia is a space of power that reproduces power relations; it has forged and preserved the privileges of whiteness fundamental to the racial system. Consequently, the production of the so-called “Roma question” has fuelled the engine for systems that created the Roma body as (un)governable, hence subjected to justified violence. For instance, in the *Practical Guide for Police Services to Prevent Discrimination against the Roma Communities* (2014) developed by the Net-Kard Project, a survey about relations between Roma and the police and perceived discrimination was conducted and results showed the following:

- Between 65% and 100% of Roma, depending on the country surveyed, failed to report their experiences of personal victimisation to the police.
- The main reason given by Roma for not reporting their experiences of criminal victimisation to the police was that they did not feel that the police would be able to do anything about it.
- On average, one in three Roma respondents were stopped by the police in the previous 12 months, half of whom indicated that they believed they were stopped specifically because they were Roma.
- Roma who were stopped by the police were stopped four times on average over a 12-month period.
- On average, one in four Roma respondents who were stopped by customs or border control over the previous 12 months when returning to their country believed that they were stopped specifically because they were Roma.

(Sáez et al., 2014: 10)

In addition, a survey carried out by the University of Valencia in Spain called *Identificación policial por perfil étnico en España* (2013) indicates that “Roma people in Spain are stopped by the police 10 times more frequently than non-Roma” (cited in Sáez et al., 2014: 14). This data reveals that the relationship between institutions and the Roma is based on control and processes of racialisation. Nonetheless, the problematic approach to the above-mentioned issues occurs when they are still framed as matters of “discriminatory practice” or are defined as consequences of stereotypical attitudes from police organisations towards the Roma. In other words, such hegemonic discourses are denying that the existence of brutality against the Roma body is a consequence of political violence, and/or they understand such violence as the exceptional, isolated misbehaviour of individual actions. This is also a result of the classification of Roma as an “ethnic” group, which not only avoids the debate on race and racism, but also prevents us from discussing Antigypsyism as a matter of socio-political organisation, thus excluding “race” as a crucial category. There is no possibility of discussing racial issues in Europe because, as Goldberg (2006) argued, “racial Europeanisation has rendered race unmentionable, unspeakable” (339). In other words, race is a thing of the past. Such exclusion of Antigypsyism as political violence has also led to its naturalisation; hence, there is almost no discussion regarding its relationality to security or any other policy. Consequently, the state acts as a disciplinary agent: through court sentences, police brutality, school and urban segregations, etc. This is precisely how racism is produced, as Goldberg has theorised:

The routinisation of race silently in social life is reproduced also through criminalisation, taxation, retirement, death, burial, and inheritance formalities, all factors the state regulates or oversees, manages and mediates. In short, the modern state has come to enact racial configuration in virtually all, or at least all significant, social practices and conditions, markers and indices from birth to death and burial, from the personal to the institutional. The more

penetrating racial categories are in a state's lexicon and bureaucratic practice, the more such practices routinise racial reference and social shaping.

(Goldberg, 2002: 117)

Structural Antigypsyism has been one of the most continual race-based systems of domination that has historical roots in modernity, and which obeys the construction of the European white man as the model of humanity, thus dehumanising all others. Within this framework, if racialisation is understood through Weheliye's (2014) definition, as a "conglomerate of socio-political relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite humans, and nonhumans" (Weheliye, 2014: 3), then Antigypsyism is deployed in the realm of "exception" and the Roma are constructed as a threat to the state (Fejzula, 2019). As argued elsewhere (Fejzula, in press), the notion of danger has been historically related to the definition of the Roma as uncivilised people or, following John Keane's commentary on the notion of "uncivility", as "the ghost that permanently haunted civil society, its permanent enemy" (Goldberg, 2009: 44). Consequently, as Roma, we are considered as not human enough and, hence, are denied the political capacity of self-determination and, at the same time, to close the circle, this serves as justification for the implementation of an "ideology of integration" that seeks to "civilise" Roma within what white people consider civilisation. Within such racial classification, we define Antigypsyism as a social and political construction that is reproduced and maintained in society through processes of racialisation. The processes of racialisation that Roma are exposed to have political and material consequences (e.g., hyper-criminalisation of the Roma social body, urban and school segregations and vandalism by right-wing groups). Therefore, these racial processes cannot be dislocated from analysis of state racism because, as Goldberg (2002) warns us, racialisation needs to be understood within a specific nation-state context, as it "operates simultaneously as the nomos and matrix of modern politics" (Weheliye, 2014: 56).

The analysis of racism as a matter of structural power not only questions social work, because of its normalisation and/or marginalisation within policy, but also questions how Roma needs are not met, and more importantly, the ways social service interventions perpetuate racism. In this regard, racism plays a crucial role when dealing with Roma people in Europe; it is therefore crucial to understand the role played by social workers in its reproduction, even when it is not made explicitly. In other words, institutional racism affects the representation and treatment of Roma people within a range of state institutions; accordingly, social workers are just part of a higher racist institution that belongs to the power structure. As argued by Araújo (2016),

at the local level, teachers and social workers involved in integration programmes reproduced racism not only through the re-making of stereotypes drawing in their everyday practices, but also by inertia: i.e. not questioning or even pointing to institutional structures, regulations and procedures that helped to maintain racism and school segregation out of the spotlight – despite having professional knowledge on the situation.

(Araújo, 2016: 317)

Therefore, in this chapter, we suggest that not only do social policy interventions need to be challenged, so does the entire system of politics, policies and practices directed to Roma people, and their relationship with institutional racism.

Assembled system of domination for the sake of “civilisation”

Due to the deliberated political will to banish racism from the mainstream understanding of the relationship between the state, its institution and the Roma people, it is quite hard to find reliable literature to illustrate our analysis. Therefore, in order to provide practical examples of how the white order operates to ensure control and contention over Roma bodies, and the role played by social services in this matter, we will rely on our own embodied experiences based on previous engagements with the education system, social services work and NGOs' mediation between them. As pointed out above, the relationship between institutions and Roma people has been framed under a “civilisatory” mission, that goes from the most evident practices of police brutality and judicial harassment to the most subtle and covert controls, exercised under paternalist and essentialist practices of NGOs and other organisations. Anti-Roma racism as a structural system of dominance, in its complexity, has achieved a political framework where the discussions of these matters are constrained by many sub-systems of legitimation that work in conjunction to keep reproducing the mechanism of racial dominance.

These racial dominance patterns become evident when conditioning and subordinating access to social benefits of Roma families and the school attendance of their children, a very common practice in the Spanish or Portuguese context. In a brief overview, the way these mechanisms function follows a similar pattern: state administration provides funding to NGOs to prevent school absenteeism, mostly in education centres allocated in ghettos and neighbourhoods predominantly inhabited by Roma people, among other racialised minorities. To develop such missions, NGOs provide a number of “mediators” that are supposed to serve as a link between the school and the families. At the same time, the administration creates specific commissions to tackle school absenteeism formed by school staff, administration members, social workers and even police officers, where eventually NGO mediators are included. These commissions, created originally to control school absenteeism in neighbourhoods considered “sensitive areas” (mostly inhabited by Roma and non-white populations), usually end up enlarging their remit when assembling different systems, working in collaboration, to develop the “integratory” agenda. This is the case with conditioning family access to basic social benefit – as the so-called “social salary”⁸ in Spain – to the school attendance of their children. Based on our own experiences in the field of public education,⁹ this protocol is often used in the commissions against school absenteeism of Roma children, for instance, as stated by one Portuguese teacher, “the Gypsy community, they don't have a culture of schooling, they aren't interested, they were there because they had to be, or because somebody told them that if they didn't go to school the Social Inclusion Income could be cut” (Dora, teacher, cited in Araújo, 2016: 312). This is just an illustrative example of how Roma's racialisation is achieved in order to

maintain white structural dominance; creating narratives of supposed inclusion, whereby social services, alongside other systems, plays an important role in not only legitimising, but also reinforcing the racial ontologisation of Roma lives.

Even though these kinds of strategies might seem neutral, or even beneficial, one must look deeper to understand that the final motivation of those policies is the “integratory” imposition, in order to detect that the objective of these operations is nothing less than a reproduction of the same racial mechanism of domination, control and “civilisation” of the Roma. As Alana Lentin underlines, “integration is not perceived as neutral by immigrants and minorities because it is unilateral, always signifying an inward process, rather than an outward one that it is transformative of society as a whole. (...) Integration is hence always only a promise” (Lentin et al., 2011: 3). In short, and as discussed by Araújo (2016), “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 culturalisation of social relations and political conflict” (Araújo, 2016: 316). In addition, all these political discussions are usually developed under a conceptual framework that points out Roma as a “social problem”, considered as a kind of “social parasite”, abusers of social benefits and a collective that have developed a kind of “irrational reluctance” to schooling and the formal education system. Besides the high level of attention given to the so-called “Roma failure in education”, the structural construction of the education system and its deep roots in whiteness are mostly ignored and almost never questioned, thus cementing their lack of accountability.

Several studies over the last decades have researched, from different angles, the issue of education in regard to Roma students, showing a huge gap between the Roma minority and general white society, in terms of educational achievement and standard of success (Alcalde, 1997; Choi de Mendizábal & Calero Martínez, 2013; CREA, 2012; García Guzmán, 2005; Laparra, 2011; Márquez & Padua, 2016). One of the most recent pieces of research conducted at the national level in Spain (FSG, 2013) underlines the alarming figure of Roma failure rate: 64.4%, compared with 13.3% of the mainstream white population. These figures make the existence of a deep problem in regard to the Roma path through the national education system undeniable. However, for the focused interest of this chapter, what is even more alarming is the way this question has been addressed by educational institutions, experts of education and policymakers. The constant appeals to the so-called “Roma failure” in education, that have become a kind of mantra in this discussion, are obviously not immune to the discursive and historical construction of “the Gypsy-other” (Fernández, 2021). In particular, this can be considered as an unquestioned ideology that sustains and legitimates the structural Antigypsyism practised in educational institutions. This manifests in a double dimension: on the one hand by “*marking Roma as inadequate for schooling*” (Araújo, 2016) and on the other hand “*blaming the victim*” (Fényes, 2016; Troyna, 1993).

One after another, research and expert reports are repeating themselves, doing nearly the same diagnosis and making the same recommendations, which mostly focus on trying to change Roma’s perception about education, while almost none reflect on the need to transform a system that has systematically excluded our

people at all levels, from the subject studied to the daily routine inside the classroom. To provide an example, the next two quotations are from two different researchers published two years apart, but both making almost the same analysis that the perception of Roma families towards education is “improving”, but still needs to be changed:

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 generalised schooling of Roma children and *a more positive view of education and school by the Roma community* have made it possible for Roma youth to reach “higher levels of education than those of the previous generation”

(FSG, 2013: 30, *emphasis added*)¹⁰

(...) 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. *What is complicated is to establish to what extent the change in the attitudes and values of the gypsy community has had an impact on these processes.* Although still far from the majority society, the rise in the levels of completed studies, which in principle presupposes a greater openness towards 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: 114, *emphasis added*)¹¹

This semantic operation of targeting Roma students and families as the cause of their educative failure has an extra outcome: the act of leaving aside any possible questioning of the system itself as a producer of this blatant failure, as well as the very convenient lack of urgency to identify and demand accountability from the responsible bodies for such deficiency. However, when analysing the construction of the Spanish educational system, it is not difficult to realise the absolute lack of inclusion of Roma history and culture within the official curricula dictated by the Ministry of Education and applied by the regional governments. This overt absence in epistemological terms, along with the structural violence faced by Roma people enrolled in educational institutions, under the form of segregation or moral undermining, has created the perfect conditions to understand school and other educational institutions as legitimated antigypsy 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 educational system towards Roma communities.

These types of biased, “well-intentioned” and “integrationist” analyses are very much present in both social services and education systems. As Araújo (2016)

points out, “these perceptions are not held by deviant racist individuals: the idea that the ‘Gypsy culture’ rejects the value of education actually pervades much academic work, even when disclaiming intentions to generalise” (Araújo, 2016: 312). As noted by Araújo’s analysis, these perceptions are not a matter of racist individuals, rather, a systematic, structural and political will of domination. In fact, the key element that makes possible and perfectly compatible the assembling of the education system, social services and NGOs is precisely the fact that all of them work to achieve the same long-term objective: the civilisation of the Roma, under the umbrella of “for their own good”, or as Silvia Maeso (2015) stressed “to save Roma from themselves”, under the ideological conception of integration, inclusion, multiculturalism or any other euphemism used to undercover the political will behind such social operations.

Conclusion: breaking with the mythology of integrationism and anti-Roma politics

As stated from the outset, the aim of this chapter is to analyse social work interventions in Roma communities from the broader context and political motivation held, which we define as the “ideology of integration”. To fully understand the impact of these practices and be able to rethink and to redirect them is an inevitable step to transforming the epistemological and political setting from where intervention policies that target Roma people have been designed. To the extent that the social work mission is deeply connected to the broader political system, shaped by anti-Roma racism, it is necessary to understand the conflict created between some social work interventions and Roma families, not as a matter of individual racist attitudes, but as symptoms of a long-ignored political and structural problem, which ends up creating the Roma as an object of permanent intervention and “civilisation”.

The previously discussed matters, along with the co-implication of the “ideology of integration”, have created the dominant analytical framework towards the issue of education in relation to the Roma population. This dominant epistemology of the “Gypsy-other” (Fernández, 2021) ends up legitimising a “narrative of innocence”, by understanding social work intervention (from the most traumatic episodes related to child custody to the most subtle ways of intervention through economic control, via social benefit access, for instance) and other forms of violence exercised by institutional racism as unwilling, correctable failings. Failing to address this issue as a reproduction and legitimatisation of structural racism is not only analytically mistaken; it is also representing a convenient epistemological tension of the reality faced by thousands of Roma families. From this biased epistemological departure, there is no room for accountability for the damages created by social service institutions and the white political system itself, which, as racist structures, reinforce the view that the problem lies solely on that one side: that of 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 people targeted by this political engineering; rather, as Maeso

(2015) points out, those very policies are designed under the ideological project of “civilising the Roma”.

As we have shown throughout this chapter, whiteness and its political apparatus work multilaterally by putting together different systems that work with the aim of ensuring the white socio-political order. In this regard, social work in relation to Roma cannot be analysed in isolation, but rather, in relation to the wider socio-political system, one that constructs and legitimises anti-Roma racism across the entire socio-political spectrum, from education to judicial systems. Coherently, it is key to question and challenge the knowledge produced to orient and sustain social intervention on Roma communities, mostly produced by NGO-related researchers and institutions, that creates a narrative based on “white innocent” and on approaches that deliberately ignore and banish political and structural Antigypsyism, as the cornerstone that conditions and shapes everyday Roma lives. Only in this way would it be possible to start envisioning an emancipatory future that leaves behind the civilisatory ambitions of whiteness and the racial dominance where it lies. Only then can we begin to create a solid path to a transformative society which recognises the injustices and can remedy the urgent need for historical reparations for the Roma people.

Notes

- 1 This chapter results from the research project POLITICS – the politics of anti-racism in Europe and Latin America: knowledge production, policymaking and collective struggles. This project receives funding by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, Horizon 2020 (grant agreement no. ERC-2016-COG-725402).
- 2 Institute for Information in Education (Ústav pro informace a vzdělávání), Monitoring of Framework Educational Programmes (2009), available (in Czech original) at: <http://spolecnedoskoly.cz/wp-content/uploads/monitoring-uiv.pdf>
- 3 Save the Children, Denied a Future? The right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children, Volume 1: South-eastern Europe (December 2001), available at: http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/54_2317.htm, p. 325.
- 4 Roma Education Fund, Advancing Education of Roma in Slovakia (2007), 38–44, available at: http://demo.itent.hu/roma/portal/downloads/Education%20Resources/Slovakia_report.pdf.
- 5 Council of Europe, Second Report Submitted by Bulgaria Pursuant to Chapter 25, Paragraph 1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (23 November 2007), available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_2nd_SR_Bulgaria_en.pdf.
- 6 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2008 Human Rights Report: Bulgaria (25 February 2009), available at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119072.htm>.
- 7 29 Chance for Children Foundation, available at: <http://www.cfcf.hu/celok-feladatok-hu.html>.
- 8 As the Spanish state is politically conformed by several autonomous regions that have its own regional government and usually social services are ruled by these regional governments, one can find different denomination for this kind of basic social benefits like social salary, social inclusion rent and so on, as well as it is quite common to transform the name of these benefits whenever there are changes in the ruling of the administration.

- 9 Our experience in the field of educative mediation and high school teaching was opened in a dozen different public education centres in several regions of southern between 2007 and 2017.
- 10 En líneas generales, este estudio indica que el nivel educativo de la población gitana mejorado “progresivamente” durante las últimas décadas y destaca que la escolarización generalizada de las niñas y niños gitanos y una visión más positiva de la educación y de la escuela parte de la comunidad gitana han posibilitado que la juventud gitana esté alcanzando “niveles de instrucción superiores a los de la generación anterior” (FSG, 2013: 30, emphasis added).
- 11 (...) la permanencia en las aulas de los chicos gitanos es superior a la de sus homólogos 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 mejores niveles de éxito que los hombres. Lo complicado es establecer en qué medida el cambio de actitudes y valores de la comunidad gitana ha incidido en estos procesos. Aunque todavía de la sociedad mayoritaria, el ascenso en los niveles de estudios terminados, lo cual en principio presupone una mayor apertura hacia estructuras de pensamiento más modernas, y haber iniciado un tímido avance en lo que a la educación de los menores se refiere bien es cierto que todavía existen ciertas contradicciones en algunos sectores que no terminan adecuando su discurso a la realidad actual (Laparra, 2011: 114, emphasis added).

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