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Hate Speech, Symbolic Violence, and Racial Discrimination. Antigypsyism: What Responses for the Next Decade?

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Abstract: This paper aims to fulfill a double objective: on the one hand, to explain how hate speech works as a mechanism of racialization towards the Roma, resulting in a concrete form of symbolic violence. On the other hand, to analyze the most relevant institutional responses to fight against antigypsyism, looking at the new EU Roma Framework 2020–2030 with a special attention on the recent developments in Spain. The paper discusses the fact that a focus on symbolic violence and more concretely on hate speech would produce considerably differing approaches to Roma inclusion policies. The paper is divided into three sections: the first section will conceptually address the notions of “antigypsyism”, “racial discrimination”, “symbolic violence”, and “hate speech”. The second section will present and contextualize a series of illustrative cases of antigypsyist hate speech in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain. The third section will examine the most relevant legislative and policy initiatives adopted to fight against antigypsyism. The paper will wrap up with a discussion and some conclusions on the functioning of hate speech as a symbolic mechanism of racialization; and its capacity to articulate moral hierarchies and social divisions among the Roma and the rest of society.



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1. Introduction: Theoretical Framework

1.1. Symbolic Violence and Hate Speech

Different postcolonial authors have reported that in the post-apartheid period, and in the resulting globalization of anti-racist laws, new processes of racialization became predominantly symbolic, thereby (re)articulating a new hierarchy of peoples, social divisions, and economic inequalities (Bhabha 2011; Mbembe 2017; Carty and Mohanty 2018). Thus, in the fight for racial equality new approaches to use symbolic power are crucial to (re)think and (re)formulate anti-racist policies.

According to Bourdieu, symbolic power establishes a gnoseological order of social divisions, in which logical integration is the precondition of moral integration (Bourdieu 1979). Symbolic power is present in virtually all social relations, though this kind of power is frequently veiled. Yet there are some groups that concentrate the symbolic resources and the technical and institutional tools to construct the social perception of reality. Social perception refers to identifying and utilizing social cues to make judgments about social roles, rules, relationships, context, or the characteristics of others (i.e., trustworthiness) (McCleery 2014).

Meanwhile symbolic violence concerns the oppression of people who seemingly have come with their position as symbolically diminished (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In contrast to hegemony, which rests on consent, symbolic violence rests on misrecognition and asymmetric access to fields where social perception is constructed (Burawoy 2019; Rowlands 2015). The exercise of symbolic violence has been conceptualized in overtly unidirectional terms as “a kind of violence being perpetuated on those not belonging to the dominant social groups” (Grenfell 2012, p. 267).

To the purpose of this paper, we may ask the following question: Can hate speech be considered as a form of symbolic violence? *Prima facie*, there is a common element that connects them: hate speech is always directed towards those subjects categorized as protected groups by law (minorities and other vulnerable groups) (Daunis and Lorenzo 2021). Though there is enormous variation in the definition of hate speech (and the subsequent protected groups), legislation to ban hate speech exists in a wide range of democracies including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, India, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, among many others (Waldron 2012). From another legal tradition, the USA holds uncompromisingly that laws perpetrating discrimination on the basis of viewpoint (Godwin 2003), especially those that suppress the expression of certain moral and political convictions, violate the First Amendment¹.

At the theoretical level, there is an irresolvable dilemma between either banning hate speech or protecting freedom of expression without restrictions: security vs. freedom. Hypothetically, in an equal society the preferability of counter-speech over coercion would prevent us from any potential abuse of state power (Howard 2019). Nonetheless, in a society where all individuals and communities have no equal access to symbolic power, the unlimited production and distribution of any kind of discourse (including hate speech) will reinforce the vulnerability of certain groups. This dilemma is nothing new: in the classical liberal debate on freedom of expression, Mill (1859) advocated for absolute freedom of opinion and feeling on any subject. However, he introduced a limit to absolute freedom: the “principle of harm”. According to this principle, free speech should be limited in those cases when it could imply a direct violation of the fundamental rights of any person. Thus, the central liberal value—the state’s commitment not to interfere in the lives of citizens—is sometimes nullified (Riley 1998). Of all the possible types of hurtful speech mentioned by Mill (1859), including defamation, offense, harassment or threat, we could agree that hate speech is the most serious category because it can evolve into incitement to violence (Bilgrami 2015).

In the European context, there is a common agreement on the need to ban hate speech tracking from the incendiary power of Nazi propaganda and the tragic experience of the World War II and the Holocaust.² In fact, the European Union (EU) has been very active in addressing hate speech in coherence with article 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon:

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the member states in a society with pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality. (European Union 2007)

The Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, approved by the Council of the European Union, affirms that

racism and xenophobia are direct violations of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, principles upon which the European Union is founded and which are common to the Member States. (European Union 2008)

This decision obliges each member state of the EU to take the necessary measures to ensure that public inciting to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, color, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin, as well as publicly condoning, denying, or grossly trivializing crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes are punishable. The Framework Decision is silent, however, about incitement to discrimination (Pejchal 2020). On this matter, the Recommendation No. 15 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) goes beyond the Framework Decision and it defends that

hate speech is based on the unjustified assumption that one person or group of people is superior to others; incites acts of violence or discrimination, which undermines respect for minority groups and damages social cohesion. (ECRI 2015)

In the case of Spain, freedom of speech is limited by the Penal Code, which characterizes several criminal offenses related to hate speech:

Art 510:

- a. *They will be punished with a prison sentence of one to four years and a fine of six to twelve months: a. Those who publicly encourage, promote, or directly or indirectly incite hatred, hostility, discrimination, or violence against a group, a part of there, or against a person determined by reason of their membership, for racist, anti-Semitic or other reasons related to ideology, religion or beliefs, family situation, the belonging of its members to an ethnic group, race or nation, national origin, sex, or sexual orientation or identity, for reasons of gender, illness, or disability.*
- b. *Those who produce, elaborate, possess for the purpose of distributing, provide access to third parties, distribute, disseminate, or sell written documents or any other kind of material or media that, due to their content, are suitable to encourage, promote, or incite direct or indirectly to hatred, hostility, discrimination, or violence against a group, a part of it, or against a person determined by reason of their belonging to it, for racist, anti-Semitic, or other reasons related to ideology, religion or beliefs, family situation, the belonging of its members to an ethnic group, race or nation, their national origin, sex, or sexual orientation or identity, for reasons of gender, illness, or disability.*
- c. *Those who publicly deny, seriously trivialize or extol the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity or against persons and property protected in the event of armed conflict, or extol their perpetrators, when they have been committed against a group or part of it, or against a person determined by reason of their belonging to it, for racist, anti-Semitic or other reasons related to ideology, religion or beliefs, family situation or the membership of its members to an ethnic group, race or nation, their national origin, their sex, sexual orientation or identity, for reasons of gender, illness or disability, when in this way a climate of violence, hostility, hatred or discrimination against them is promoted or favored (Código Penal 2015).*

1.2. What Is Antigypsyism All About?

The fight against antigypsyism is part of a wider fight against racial discrimination. According to the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination:

racial discrimination shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin, which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. (UN/ICERD 1965)

Following the last developments of the United Nations on this matter, I support that the study of situations of exclusion and discrimination should not only describe a certain state of deprivation of fundamental rights, but it should also include an analysis of the cultural, political, and economic processes that led to that state and sustain it (UN/OHCHR 2021; UN/ECOSOC 2018). In the EU context, the understanding of racial or ethnic discrimination includes the unequal access or treatment of certain groups in areas such as employment, education, security, healthcare, housing, and the supply of goods and services (European Union 2000, Directive 2000/43/EC).

In recent years, the notion of “antigypsyism” has received increasing attention in the political and scholarly fields across Europe (Agarin 2014; End and Selling 2015; European Parliament 2015, 2017; Carrera et al. 2017, 2019; EUFRA 2016, 2018; Cortés 2018; Cortés and End 2019). The following different definitions have been proposed at the institutional and civil societal levels:

- *Antigypsyism is a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, and a form of dehumanization and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed through, among other things, violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatization, and the most blatant kind of discrimination (ECRI 2011).*
- *Antigypsyism is a specific nature of racism directed towards Roma, on par with anti-Semitism. It is persistent both historically and geographically (permanent and not decreasing), systematic (accepted by virtually all the community), and often accompanied by acts of violence and discrimination (Council of Europe 2012).*
- *Antigypsyism is a historically constructed, persistent complex of customary racism against social groups identified under the stigmatized label of “Gypsy”, or other related terms. It includes the homogenizing and essentializing perception and description of these groups, the attribution of specific characteristics to them, and discriminatory social structures and violent practices that emerge against this background, and which have a degrading and ostracizing effect, and reproduce structural disadvantages (Alliance against Antigypsyism 2017).*

Different studies have approached the notion of “antigypsyism” through the analysis of material processes of exclusion. Picker (2017) considers urban segregation to be the fundamental matrix of racial exclusion. He has reported that segregated urban areas, which are partially or completely occupied by Roma households, can be observed across Europe. These are regularly marked by higher rates of unemployment than other areas, with few or no public services, substandard housing, low-quality education, and unsuitable sanitary infrastructure. Ryder and Taba (2018) focus on the effect of economic intervention and redistribution on diminishing antigypsyism. They recommend active welfare state measures and special efforts for job creation. Rostas (2019) emphasizes the role of an active Roma citizenship. He claims that the rise of Roma participation in decision-making processes may be a crucial element in bringing about systemic transformations and eliminating discrimination. There have been also recent studies that pointed to the power of symbolism to construct mechanisms of othering towards the Roma people (Kóczé and Rövid 2019; End 2019; Mladenova 2019). Complementary to all the cited studies, this paper aims to explain how hate speech constitutes a core mechanism of racialization directed towards the Roma, which results in a concrete form of antigypsyism that must be combatted by institutional means.

2. Case Study: Analysis of Antigypsyist Hate Speech

Committed with my double role as a policy analyst and a policy maker, I have been watching very closely the rapid spread of anti-Roma messages across Europe since the World Health Organization (WHO 2020) declared the state of pandemic caused by COVID-19 (11 March 2020). The immediate response of the European Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, who called on the EU member states “to do everything possible to prevent national or ethnic minorities, particularly Roma, from becoming scapegoats” (European Commission 2020a), should be underlined. A special mention is also deserved for the statement by Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, calling on governments to ensure equal protection and care for Roma during the COVID-19 (Council of Europe 2020a).

In Spain, I have been in a constant dialogue with the main national Roma NGOs (Khetane, Unión Romani, FAGIC, and Fundación Secretariado Gitano). Dozens of cases were reported early, alerting the use of racist discourses that portrayed Roma communities as a threat to public health. The social climate of panic that prevails in times of pandemic is crucial to assessing the possible effects of this type of accusatory speech, which can generate an intimidating and hostile, if not directly violent, climate of public opinion against Roma communities and individuals. According to data collected by the Victim Assistance and Orientation Service on Racial or Ethnic Discrimination, at the request of the General Directorate for Equal Treatment and Ethnic-Racial Diversity, as of 8 May 2020, 53 cases of hate speech were detected within the context of the pandemic in Spain. Of these cases, 46 directly affected Roma people (Fundación Secretariado Gitano 2021).

Next, I will present three cases of hate speech produced by political, social, and media actors. These cases illustrate how liquid the functioning of antigypsism is. It equally operates through the speech of daily common citizens, the editorial of a well established newspapers, or the mayor of a little village. In all cases, the use of racist expressions is once and again normalized and the Roma communities are subjected to stereotypes and fake accusations based on moral divisions: those who follow the rules and those who do not (good and bad citizens).

Case 1. In the Cantabrian municipality of Santoña, at an early stage of the pandemic, the mayor of the town explained in an interview that

Of the six deaths registered in Santoña, five would be from the Gypsy community ... It is very likely that this contagion that has been spreading in Santoña, could have been brought by the Gypsy community because of some event, celebration or funeral that took place outside of our province on dates prior to declaring the state of alarm ... We must be vigilant because the Gypsy community is suffering particularly from these infections. It is a significant number, much higher than the rest of the population, and we must be especially vigilant. (Eldiario.es 2020a)

In the next days, the Spanish Roma rights' organization Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) compiled a series of Whatsapp messages distributed among the neighbors of non-Roma districts that would have been triggered by the mayor's words. One of these Whatsapp chats contained the following message:

Let catch them all and take them to prison ... and let have them there, inside the walls, let them sing and dance locked up like in a concentration camp until they all die... They are infecting everyone... Let see if all those sons of the great whore, little ones, children, grandparents and their fucking mother die. (Eldiario.es 2020b)

Case 2. The Commissioner for the Polígono Sur (a Roma district in Seville) requested the entry of the Army into the Three Thousand Homes, a neighborhood where most of the residents are Roma. The Commissioner declared to the media, "We cannot allow a minority to do what they want." This statement came after the publication of some images in which around ten persons (supposed to be Roma) appeared praying in the street ignoring the state of alarm. The Commissioner explained that these were "unstructured family clans" and that "they are not used to public order, discipline". He ended up declaring that the Administration must "impose the law". The day after the Commissioner's statement, the deputy editor of the newspaper *ABC de Sevilla*, blamed the residents of the Three Thousand Homes for its own situation of marginalization and exclusion. The deputy director's column concluded as follows:

When everything returns to normal, they will ask us for help and accuse us of letting them in abandonment. Let's not fall into the trap of good-naturedness again. Either we isolate ourselves from them, or they will contaminate us with their misery. (ABC 2020)

Case 3. A neighbor from Karrantza (Bizkaia) threatens to "set on fire" a Roma family falsely accused of being a source of contagion. After receiving several threats in their own building, the Roma family found out that an accusatory message was circulating via Whatsapp among the residents of the town:

I'm fucking upset! My daughter went for a run this morning and she found seven Gypsies walking together and they told her that a family of Gypsies from Santoña, whose relatives are infected with the virus, had come to this town. It turns out that they arrived by train to Karrantza. The City Council spoke with the Ertzaintza (local police) and they cannot do anything. What can we do as citizens? We all must go and take the streets in protest. Or go and set them on fire. I am a bad host and will make them go out or burn them out. Those fucking Gypsies. Holy shit! (Amuge and SOS Racismo Bizkaia 2020)

As an MP, I supported the Spanish government's efforts to recognize the vulnerability of Roma to the social effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 crisis, the government has been taking urgent measures to strengthen the public health system and to provide medical and social care to those who need it (Cortés 2020a). However, this is not enough. We must be also vigilant to prevent any violation of fundamental rights. The pandemic activated the old archetype of the "Gypsy menace" (Stewart 2012). In fact, racism manifests in a more acute manner in critical junctures of crisis, when social anxiety and discontent search for available channels of expression. And the Roma have historically proved to be an easy target, due to a sense of impunity linked to a widely accepted form of racism.

As I have explained in previous studies (Cortés 2020b, 2021), the social imaginary of (historically rooted) antigypsyist stereotypes nurtures racist narratives with three main effects for the Roma: damaging the reputation of an entire ethnic group; creating a fear-based public opinion; and ultimately legitimizing the social and economic gap they face. In this regard, as an MP, I have said in different forums that all socio-economic policies directed at Roma will prove fruitless if they are not backed up by a commitment to stop racism and its manifestations, including hate speech. Roma inclusion—understood as equal participation in all areas of society—seems unlikely to happen when harsh stigmatization of and hatred against Roma communities continue to be allowed.

3. Institutional Responses to Fight against Antigypsyism

The making of the new EU Roma strategic framework came out in the first wave of the pandemic (European Commission 2020b). The COVID-19 crisis accelerated the worsening trend toward more catastrophic figures of Roma for being at risk of poverty (Jovanovic and Korunovska 2020; OSCE 2020). On the other hand, across Europe, local and national newspapers have waged a racist, hateful, and life-threatening campaign of anti-Roma propaganda (Matache and Bhabha 2020; European Roma Rights Centre 2020). Parallel to that, social media platforms were used to spread racist hate speech and deeply offensive fake accusations against Roma. This highly hostile scenario made even clearer the need to adopt a comprehensive approach towards a new EU Roma Strategy integrating the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The previous framework ended in 2020 and focused primarily on socio-economic integration (European Commission 2011). Meanwhile, the new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion, and participation 2020–2030 (European Commission 2020b) introduced a specific focus on non-discrimination by tackling antigypsyism. In this regard, the last recommendation on Roma equality of the Council of the European Union acknowledged the dynamics of racist discrimination and social and economic exclusion as intimately intertwined (European Union 2021). The in-depth evaluation of the last EU Roma Framework and the conclusions drawn from it by the Council, the European Parliament, and several Europe-wide and national civil society organizations show the need for a renewed and stronger commitment to Roma inclusion and anti-discrimination policies. Next, I will examine the genesis of policy initiatives that seek to offer institutional responses to structural antigypsyism: looking at past and new trends from a European and a Spanish perspective.

3.1. European Initiatives

On 8 April 2015, on the occasion of the International Roma Day, the European Parliament approved the resolution on "Anti-Gypsyism in Europe and recognition by the EU of the day of commemoration of the genocide of the Roma people during the Second World War" (European Parliament 2015). This resolution recognizes that antigypsyism is the root-cause of the historical exclusion suffered by Roma in Europe. The resolution sets a milestone, expressing a deep concern about the non-decreasing antigypsyist rhetoric. This resolution emphasizes that social exclusion is never due to an inherent weakness of

specific individuals or communities; rather, it is derived above all from the inability of state institutions to ensure full access to fundamental rights of all members of society.

On 25 October 2017, the European Parliament adopted the resolution “On fundamental rights aspects of Roma integration in the Union: combating anti-Gypsyism” ([European Parliament 2017](#)). This resolution emphasizes the urgency of combatting stereotypes and any use of antigypsyist language. In particular, the resolution emphasizes that the prohibition of racial discrimination forms an integral part of fundamental rights, and that, as such, falls within the scope of the Union’s values. With regard to hate speech, this resolution calls on the Member States to:

Art. 16. Strongly condemn and sanction incitement to hatred and the search for scape-goats by politicians and public officials at all levels and in all social media, given that they directly reinforce anti-Gypsyism in society, take additional measures to prevent, condemn and combat incitement to hatred against Roma, also making use of cultural dialogue. (European Parliament 2017)

On 17 September 2020, the European Parliament approved the resolution on the “Implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies: fighting negative attitudes towards people of Roma origin in Europe” ([European Parliament 2020](#)). This resolution recognizes that the Roma population suffers from an increasing level of hate speech. It calls on the member states to officially recognize antigypsyism as a specific form of racism against the Roma population. It also calls on member States to:

Art. 22. Redouble their efforts to combat discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes within the framework of national and European anti-discrimination legislation, especially in relation to monitoring the situation of affected Roma victims and the provision of assistance judicial. (European Parliament 2020)

3.2. Spanish Initiatives

On 26 October 2020, in the Spanish Congress of Deputies, the Home Affairs Committee approved an initiative that urged the Government to adopt the necessary measures aimed at preventing the spread of hate speech in the digital space. This initiative relied on the Code of Conduct published by the European Commission, in 2016, to counter illegal hate speech online ([European Commission 2016](#)). This parliamentary initiative calls on ICT companies for simplifying available mechanisms to report hate speech, as well as for accelerating the process to denounce racial or ethnic discriminatory contents. It also calls on the state to increase cooperation between the operators of ICT companies with the competent police authorities:

ICT operators will have the obligation to temporarily store the reported content and make it available to the judicial authority in order to investigate, identify and prosecute criminal offenses. (Congreso de los Diputados 2020a)

On 14 December 2020, in the Spanish Congress of Deputies, the Social Rights Committee approved an initiative that urged the adoption of a State Pact on fighting against antigypsyism ([Congreso de los Diputados 2020b](#)). On 20 May 2021, after a debate, the plenary session of the Congress of Deputies approved the creation of a Subcommittee to draw a State Pact against antigypsyism. This parliamentary initiative calls for the development of awareness-raising narratives to counter anti-Roma prejudices and stereotypes in the fields of arts, culture, media, and education. This initiative expresses too the need to monitor, collect, and report, from governmental and non-governmental organizations, cases of hate speech or discriminatory language targeting Roma in social media. It also calls for a legal evaluation to include antigypsyism, as a specific category, in the Penal Code following the recommendation of the Council of Europe on October 2020 ([Congreso de los Diputados 2021](#); [Council of Europe 2020b](#)).

To elaborate this Pact, the new ad hoc Subcommittee will count on the assessment of competent authorities, legitimate representatives of the third sector and the private sector, as well as experts from the university field. This Pact defines the operative policy

framework that will develop the Spanish transposition of the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion, and participation 2020–2030 ([European Commission 2020b](#); [Congreso de los Diputados 2021](#)). Beyond the state projects, this new and ambitious policy process may influence the local and regional governments that might apply to state funds for projects on combatting antigypsyism. On the other hand, civil society movements are already advocating for getting through similar policy processes at different levels, aiming to spread the State Pact on antigypsyism to each and any autonomous community of Spain.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

By doing a grounded analysis on three concrete cases, this article has shown how antigypsyist hate speech operated as a symbolic mechanism of racial discrimination in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The Roma were portrayed as diverging from common norms and were presented as a social threat to public health. In all three analyzed cases, the common denominator of antigypsyist hate speech was the presumption of fundamental moral differences between “them” and “us” (bad and good citizens); which symbolically (re)activated inherited group divisions among Roma and non Roma: those who follow the rules and those who break the rules; those who deserve state protection and those who deserve being prosecuted by the state; those who deserve social solidarity and those who deserve social exclusion; those who deserve democratic justice and those who deserve popular justice.

In the act of “othering”, the function of the analyzed discourses was to establish the “otherness” of the Roma, labeled as “Gypsies”, to evoke a moral division on the basis of ethnicity. The analyzed discourses intentionally highlighted the ethnic affiliation of some individuals and communities perceived as “dangerous Gypsies”. Thus, as an effect of the discourses studied here, the common belonging to the civic community was symbolically torn apart through an ethnic and moral grouping. Another function of the analyzed discourses was to make a call for action on active discrimination or even on violent attacks against Roma; which have a degrading and ostracizing effect on an entire ethnic group and spark latent inter-ethnic conflicts.

This paper has not eluded the responsibility of democratic institutions to combat antigypsyism. The initiatives presented here still require concrete programmatic and legislative translation. Undoubtedly, new developments will need further coordination and dialogue among the political, the academic, and the citizenship spheres. The road to justice is long, but steps are being taken, and every day more lights are turning on to illuminate this grim historical problem. In the case of the ongoing State Pact against antigypsyism, in the Spanish Congress of Deputies, along with the areas of residential and labor inclusion, a set of new measures have been considered for approval:

- Awareness-raising narratives to counter anti-Roma prejudices and stereotypes in the fields of arts, culture, media, and education.
- To monitor, collect, and report, from governmental and non-governmental organizations, the phenomena of hate speech or discriminatory language targeting Roma people in social media.
- A call for a legal evaluation to include antigypsyism, as a specific category, in the Penal Code.

The persistence of Roma exclusion in virtually all European societies requires an analysis that goes beyond the dynamic aggregation of individuals competing for economic opportunities. We need to look at social dynamics of group formation, hierarchies of peoples, and social divisions to understand long lasting economic inequalities. On this matter, a decade ago the World Bank (WB) recognized that Roma exclusion cannot be understood by merely looking at economic decision-making criteria. In fact, the exclusion of Roma causes significant economic losses ([World Bank 2010](#)). Some activists have defended that the Roma, as a young, vibrant, and fast-growing segment of Europe’s population, might be a crucial contributor to face the present and future challenges of European economies to aging populations and other negative demographic trends ([Jovanovic and Korunovska 2020](#)). However, all this

potential will not be profited from unless the EU and its member states do in advance their homework on symbolical deconstruction and reconstruction of the social imaginaries on the Roma as peer trustable and respected citizens.

The new Roma policy trends presented here, articulated both at EU and national levels, spotlight the symbolic dimension of group formation and social divisions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2013; Wacquant 2013). This approach to policy making assumes that material relations of exclusion, such as those analyzed by Picker (2017) on housing or by Ryder and Taba (2018) on labor, cannot be sustained over time without the effect of social distinctions which operate through perceived status and reputation. The desirable goal of an equal participation of Roma in all areas of society cannot be fulfilled in a climate of misrecognition, distrust, fear, or hatred against them. To achieve full inclusion of Roma in the abovementioned areas of quality (and non-segregated) housing or decent job, or even in the arena of politics (Rostas 2019), we need to build a new shared schema of perception and appreciation towards the Roma. In the realistic utopia of a Europe united in its diversity, the Roma must be seen as an asset by the majority, not as a burden or a threat.

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Abbreviations

ACFC	Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
AMUGE	Asociación de Mujeres Gitanas de Euskadi
CD	Congreso de los Diputados
CEPS	Centre for European Policy Studies
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CoE	Council of Europe
EC	European Commission
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic & Social Council
ENAR	European Network against Racism
ERGO	European Roma Grassroots Organizations
ERRC	European Roma Rights Centre
EU	European Union
EUC	Council of the European Union
FAGIC	Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Cataluña
FCNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
FRA	Fundamental Rights Agency
FSG	Fundación Secretariado Gitano
Kh	Khetane
IRU	International Romani Union
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSF	Open Society Foundations
RIO	Roma Initiatives Office
UN	United Nations
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization

Notes

- ¹ The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects the right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression from government interference. It prohibits any laws that establish a national religion, impede the free exercise of religion, abridge the freedom of speech, infringe upon the freedom of the press, interfere with the right to peaceably assemble, or prohibit citizens from petitioning for a governmental redress of grievances. It was adopted into the Bill of Rights in 1791. The Supreme Court interprets the extent of the protection afforded to these rights. The First Amendment has been interpreted by the Court as applying to the entire federal government even though it is only expressly applicable to Congress. Furthermore, the Court has interpreted the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment as protecting the rights in the First Amendment from interference by state governments (Vile et al. 2009).
- ² In today's Europe, the question is no longer whether hate speech should be banned but the following: How to define hate speech? What sorts of protected groups are its paradigmatic targets? (Laurenzo 2021).

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