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# Fernando Ruiz Molina: Antigypsism, Resistance, and Cultural Memory: A Critical Perspective from Spain



Fernando Ruiz Molina

2025

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European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC)

**ERIAC**  
EUROPEAN ROMA  
INSTITUTE FOR ARTS  
AND CULTURE



**JEKHIPE**  
RECLAIMING OUR PAST, REBUILDING OUR FUTURE:  
NEW APPROACHES TO FIGHTING ANTIGYPSISM

## The JEKHIPE Project

The JEKHIPE project *Reclaiming our past, rebuilding our future: new approaches to fighting antigypsyism against Roma* is a CERV-funded project aimed at improving the lives of Roma by addressing systemic and institutional antigypsyism, promoting transitional justice, fostering knowledge-building and awareness, and strengthening Roma identity and participation.

It is a follow-up to *CHACHIPEN*, an earlier CERV project, officially titled *Paving the way for a Truth and Reconciliation Process to address antigypsyism in Europe. Remembrance, Recognition, Justice and Trust-Building*. Concluded in 2023, CHACHIPEN introduced an innovative transitional justice-based approach to raising awareness of systemic injustice and ongoing antigypsyism in policymaking, while advocating for a comprehensive truth and reconciliation strategy.

JEKHIPE focuses on multiple levels of policy-making, including research, monitoring, advocacy, networking, alliances building, awareness raising, capacity building, and empowerment. It aims to engage with national and European institutions, academia, politicians, justice mechanisms, state authorities, civil society, and Roma communities themselves to challenge the status quo on approaching Roma issues, particularly antigypsyism, and propose mechanisms for increased accountability by national governments.

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## Abstract

This report, developed within the framework of the JEKHIPE project: Joining Efforts for Knowledge, Memory and Justice, analyses antigypsyism in Spain as a long-standing structural ideology. Through a historical-critical approach, it examines the succession of laws and decrees since 1499, the attempt at social extermination in the Great Round-up of 1749, cultural and administrative repression under Francoism, and the persistence of legal inequalities during the democratic transition. The study highlights both the mechanisms of persecution—from the use of prisons and galleys to school segregation—and the forms of political and cultural resistance deployed by the Romani people. Special attention is given to the associative movement since 1978, as well as the leading role of women in the creation of Romani feminist organisations. Finally, the report examines contemporary manifestations of antigypsyism, the ambivalence of public policies and tensions surrounding cultural heritage, proposing a critical and emancipatory memory as a condition for justice.

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## 1. Introduction

The JEKHIPE project: Joining Efforts for Knowledge, Memory and Justice was born out of the urgent need to address a historical wound that runs through Europe: the secular persecution of the Romani people. For centuries, Romani people have been subjected to discriminatory laws, expulsions, stigmatisation and violence that cannot be understood as isolated events, but rather as part of a structural system of hatred and exclusion. This report aims to restore dignity, generate knowledge and open paths to justice by combining memory, research and political action.

In this context, the Spanish case is particularly revealing. Spain has one of the most extensive anti-Roma legislative repertoires in Europe, with more than two hundred edicts and pragmatic laws that, since 1499, have sought to regulate, prohibit or eradicate Roma ways of life. Here, a large-scale attempt at social extermination was planned—the Great Round-up of 1749—which marked generations. Here, in the middle of the 20th century, Franco's regime imposed specific police regulations to monitor Roma and consolidated exclusionary measures such as bridge schools. Moreover, now, in a democracy, the Roma people continue to face forms of legal and social inequality that persist to this day.

The interest in focusing this report on Spain is not limited to its particular history. The Spanish case offers a privileged window for thinking about antigypsyism as a structural ideology that articulates repressive practices, cultural discourses and legal mechanisms. Over six centuries, Spain has been a laboratory for observation, alternating between attempts at expulsion, forced assimilation, labour exploitation and cultural erasure. This historical density makes the Spanish case an essential reference point for understanding European antigypsyism.

Today, the relevance of the Spanish context is also evident in the present. In recent years, unprecedented advances have been made: the reform of the Penal Code, which introduces for the first time the term antigypsyism as a punishable motive in hate crimes; the approval of Law 15/2022 on Equal Treatment; the adoption of the National Strategy 2021–2030; and the State Pact against Antigypsyism, endorsed by Parliament in 2023. Added to this is the declaration of 2025 as the Year of the Roma People, coinciding with the 600th anniversary of the documented arrival of the Roma on the peninsula. However, practices of school segregation, residential marginalisation and media criminalisation persist. The contrast between legislative advances and the reality of exclusion raises a central question: to what extent do gestures of recognition succeed in transforming the daily lives of the Roma people?

This report addresses three primary objectives. First, to document and critically analyse the historical construction of antigypsyism in Spain, paying attention not only to legal texts, but also to specific practices of repression, gender-differentiated punishments and attempts to erase the Romani language, trades and culture. Second, to examine contemporary manifestations of antigypsyism, analysing housing, education, employment, health, justice, collective violence and public discourse, as well as recent policies that seek to address it. Third, to explore the forms of resistance deployed by the Romani people, from daily survival to associative movements, political participation, cultural creation and the leading role of Romani women.

These objectives give rise to the questions that guide the research: How has antigypsyism been constructed in Spain, and what mechanisms have sustained it in each period? What forms of resistance have developed, and how have they been transformed in democracy and in contemporary times? What are the expressions of structural antigypsyism today, and what responses do institutions offer? How is Roma cultural heritage recognised and what tensions exist between appropriation, invisibility and community preservation?

The structure of the report follows this logic. Chapter 2 examines the historical development of antigypsyism in Spain, from the legal foundations of the 15th to the 18th centuries, to the democratic transition. Chapter 3 analyses its current manifestations and recent public policies, with special attention to criminal law, national strategy and the parliamentary pact. Chapter 4 is devoted to Roma action and political, cultural and community resistance, from associationism and political participation to Roma feminism and cultural expressions. Finally, the report concludes with a reflection on memory, justice and future scenarios for recognition and transformation.

The memory of the Roma people has been silenced for too long. The JEKHIPE project reminds us that memory is neither neutral nor spontaneous: it is a battleground. Recognising the history of persecution and resistance of the Roma people is not only an act of retrospective justice, but a necessary condition for imagining a future in which dignity, equality and recognition cease to be unfulfilled promises and become tangible realities.

## 2. The Historical Construction of Antigypsyism in Spain

### 2.1. Legal and ideological foundations (15th–18th centuries)

The persecution of the Romani people in early modern Spain cannot be explained as an isolated sequence of measures, but rather as the construction of a veritable legal regime of exception that placed them under permanent suspicion for more than three centuries. From the Pragmatic Sanction of the Catholic Monarchs in 1499 to the decree of Charles III in 1783, the monarchy promoted legislative overproduction, generating a unique body of persecutory legislation in Europe. Historiography has identified more than 270 laws directed against the Roma during this period, evidencing an unprecedented reiteration of legislation. As Martínez Martínez summarises, 'never has so much been legislated for so few' (2007, p. 368). The persecution consisted of both this torrent of regulations and the material translation of the laws into specific, differentiated, and systematic punishments.

The Pragmatic Decree of 1499, enacted in Madrid, laid the foundations for this exceptional legal regime. The provision prohibited the wandering lifestyle and forced the Roma to settle in a fixed location and practise known trades, under threat of one hundred lashes and perpetual exile for the first offence, cutting off the ears and sixty days in chains for the second, and perpetual slavery in the event of a repeat offence (Martínez Martínez, 2007, pp. 368–369; Sánchez Ortega, 2005, pp. 87–91). From then on, mobility ceased to be a tolerated practice and became a persecuted behaviour: itinerant life came to be considered a crime and the condition of being a Romani person was punishable in itself (Martínez Martínez, 2007, p. 368; Gómez Alfaro, 2010).

During the reign of Charles I, a new Pragmatic Sanction promulgated in Toledo in 1539 introduced a penalty of six years' galley service for men between the ages of twenty and fifty who contravened the rule (Martínez Martínez, 2007, p. 368). In the following years, repressive measures intensified: the 1560 provision reiterated the previous Pragmatics and extended the penalties to women, consolidating the persecution of families; and that of 1566, under Philip II, assigned Roma to the group of "vagabonds, thieves, blasphemers, ruffians, false witnesses, instigators and twice-married persons", equating them with the criminal categories of marginality of the time (Martínez Martínez, 2003–2004, p. 404). As Gómez Alfaro (2010, pp. 12–13) points out, these legislative reiterations continued uninterrupted from 1499, with 250 persecutory provisions having been enacted by 1785, forming a unique corpus of persecutory laws in Europe (*ibid.*).

By the 17th century, the pragmatic laws continued to refine control and repression. In 1611, Roma were prohibited from practising any trade other than agriculture, and in 1619, the Pragmatic Decree of Belén offered them the choice of leaving Spain or

residing in towns with fewer than a thousand inhabitants, prohibiting them from trading at fairs, using their Roma name, language and dress, all under penalty of death (Martínez Martínez, 2007, p. 369; Gómez Alfaro, 2010). In 1633, the restrictions remained in place: the word "Gypsy" was declared offensive, the use of Caló, traditional dress and mobility were prohibited, and slavery was established for anyone who left their home and galleys for anyone found armed (Martínez Martínez, 2007, p. 369).

During the reign of Charles II, the pragmatic laws of 1692 and 1695 renewed the previous provisions and further specified the prohibitions. The 1692 law-maintained prohibitions on residing in neighbourhoods with fewer than a thousand residents, the use of Romani clothing and language, and the performance of trades other than agriculture. In addition, it required each family to provide a notarised statement certifying that they had raised the animals they owned in their homes, under penalty of eight years in the galleys. It commissioned the courts to carry out periodic inspections of Roma homes to verify that they did not possess firearms (Martínez Martínez, 2007, p. 369, note 1091). The new Pragmatic Decree of 1695, which was more precise and severe, reiterated these rules and extended the penalties. It was ordered that if a Roma was found not to be engaged in agriculture, they could lose their residency and be banished, with a penalty of eight years in the galleys if they violated the banishment. They were prohibited from owning horses, except those necessary for agricultural work, as well as from possessing firearms, all under penalty of two hundred lashes and eight years on the galleys. The provision also prohibited attending fairs, leaving the neighbourhood without a licence, trading or selling animals, several Roma living together in the same neighbourhood, or three or more travelling armed on roads and in unpopulated areas. It established financial penalties for those who provided them with help or shelter (Martínez Martínez, 2007, p. 369, note 1092).

These repeated provisions closed the cycle of the Habsburg monarchy, consolidating a policy of forced assimilation and systematic criminalisation of the Roma way of life, which kept the community under suspicion for more than three centuries.

Throughout the 18th century, the Bourbon dynasty maintained and perfected its control over the Roma population through censuses, restrictions on mobility, and policies of forced sedentarisation and, culminating in the Great Round-up of 1749, the largest repressive operation against Roma in modern Spanish history (Martínez Martínez, 2007, p. 246; Gómez Alfaro, 2010, pp. 25–26) aimed at "extinguishing a human group" (Gómez Alfaro, 1993, p. 25). Far from representing change, these measures consolidated the continuity of the punitive model inherited from the Habsburgs and extended its logic of exclusion under a new discourse of order and public utility.



These provisions did not target specific crimes, but rather criminalised entire ways of life. The law became a tool to attack language, dress, trades and mobility. Manuel Martínez recalls that the pragmatic laws did not punish criminal behaviour, but rather identities and ways of life (2007, p. 21). This process led to the creation of a criminal law of status: a legal framework in which the condition of being a *gypsy*, beyond any specific act, became illegal (ibid). The result was a state of structural illegality: even those who managed to settle down and work in recognised trades remained under threat of expulsion, flogging or slavery simply because they were Roma.

The pragmatic measures were often applied summarily, "without trial," in the words of Gómez Alfaro (2010, pp. 298-300), with the suspicion of a mayor or magistrate being sufficient to order punishment. The almost obsessive repetition of the same measures reveals both the failure of assimilation and the state's willingness to maintain persecution as a constant policy. As Gómez Alfaro observed, anti-Roma legislation formed a persecutory corpus in which Roma always appeared as criminals by definition (1993, p. 25). In this sense, the law did not describe a social reality, but instead produced it: it turned Roma into a political problem that justified new pragmatic measures, in a vicious circle of criminalisation.

Among the many punishments provided for, the galleys became the central instrument of repression, being "one of the most severe punishments to which any man could be condemned" (Sánchez Ortega, 2005, p. 88). From the beginning of the 16th century, Roma men were sent to row for periods of four, six or eight years, often not for crimes committed, but for repeated mobility or for not being able to prove their residence. Sánchez Ortega explained that the galley sentence became the commutation of any corporal punishment (2005, p. 90). He points out that during the 16th and 17th centuries, there was always a percentage of Roma among the galley enslaved people, despite being "an extremely small minority" (2005, p. 98). Manuel Martínez demonstrated the real scope of this measure. According to his research, in the first half of the 18th century, Roma came to represent more than six per cent of galley enslaved people, with peaks of 10.8 per cent between 1740 and 1748, 18.4 per cent in 1741, and even close to 30 per cent in 1745 after a specific conscription (2007, p. 246). This data reveals that the persecution was not merely symbolic: thousands of men were torn from their families and sent to row until they died.

The punishment of galley slavery also responded to the specific needs of the state. The Spanish Navy suffered from a chronic shortage of rowers, and, since the 16th century, Roma were used as a forced labour force to make up for this shortage. In the words of Manuel Martínez, the Bourbons supplied the arsenals and ships with Roma, who were turned into slave labour (2007, p. 342). Legal persecution was therefore utilitarian in nature: it was not only a matter of exclusion or punishment, but also of exploitation. The

state turned the Roma condition into a permanent reserve of labour for the Navy and arsenals. They were not punished simply for being who they were; their condition was used to sustain the military apparatus.

The brutality of this system becomes even clearer when we look at the age at which boys were sent to galleys or arsenals. During the Great Round-up of 1749, it was decreed that "boys aged seven and above" were to be sent to the Navy's workshops and arsenals (Gómez Alfaro, 1993, p. 28). The mere condition of being a Romani boy, from the age of seven, was equivalent to being considered a valuable force for the state. In this sense, anti-Romani legislation represented one of the most extreme cases of criminalisation of childhood in modern Europe.

The persecution also had a marked gender dimension. From the 16th century onwards, the pragmatic laws explicitly differentiated between penalties for men and women. As Gómez Alfaro noted, "whenever the law provides for the sending of men to the galleys, it should be understood that for women the penalty is flogging and exile" (2010, p. 572). This distinction constituted a legal novelty: anti-Roma legislation was the first in Spain to establish a criminal regime that systematically differentiated between the sexes (2010, pp. 572-583). In this way, persecution took the form not only of a criminal law of status, but also of a criminal law of gender.

In the 16th century, women were punished mainly with public flogging and banishment. These punishments were intended to serve as an example: flogging was carried out in squares or markets, exposing their bodies as a collective lesson. Over time, however, the regulations changed. From the 18th century onwards, their internment in houses of mercy and spinning mills was institutionalised, spaces that Alfaro and Gómez Urdáñez have described as authentic "female galleys" (Gómez Alfaro, 2010, pp. 578-580; Gómez Urdáñez, 2004). After the 1749 raid, hundreds of women were taken to the Casa de Misericordia in Zaragoza, where they were confined to their own wing, subjected to forced labour and exposed to extremely high mortality rates due to disease and unsanitary conditions. This shift from public floggings and exile to prolonged imprisonment reveals the consolidation of a regime of persecution that also targeted women's bodies, aimed at preventing the social reproduction of the community.

The ideology of the time reinforced this differentiation. Roma women were described as witches, fortune tellers and child abductors, justifying their specific criminalisation. Juan de Quiñones' Discourse against the Roma, from 1631, was key in this regard. The memorial argued that there was no such thing as a Roma people, but rather a "sect" of disguised Spanish criminals, describing them as "monsters" and "cannibals" (Quiñones, 1631, cited in Cañadas, n.d., pp. 11-17). As Araceli Cañadas has shown, this text became a "scholarly apparatus" for legitimising violence, which was cited and reproduced for

centuries (Cañadas, n.d., p. 4). In practice, the law and discourse fed into each other: the pragmatic measures reinforced the stereotypes, and the stereotypes legitimised new pragmatic measures.

The result of this intertwining was a persecutory regime that combined normative obsession with economic exploitation and gender differentiation. Legislative overproduction, although often ineffective in its own terms, generated a permanent state of emergency that criminalised Roma life. The galleys and arsenals turned thousands of men and boys into forced labour, to the point where at times they represented almost a third of the state's rowers. Women, first punished with public floggings and exile, were later confined to institutions that functioned as "female galleys," seeking to break the social reproduction of the group. All of this was sustained by an ideological apparatus that dehumanised the Roma and turned them into internal enemies.

The Great Round-up of 1749 cannot be understood without this legacy. It was the logical culmination of a centuries-long process in which the monarchy had tried every means of persecution: from the pragmatic decree of 1499 to mass internment in arsenals and houses of mercy, to the construction of a cultural discourse of hatred. In short, between the 15th and 18th centuries, a legal, criminal and cultural regime was consolidated that sought to erase the Romani people from the history of Spain.

## 2.2. The Great Round-up (1749): an attempt at extermination

The Great Round-up of 1749 was the most brutal episode in the historical persecution of the Romani people in modern Spain. Planned under the reign of Ferdinand VI, with the Marquis of Ensenada as chief minister, it was conceived as a simultaneous military and administrative operation that sought to arrest and separate all the Romani people in the kingdom by sex and age. Antonio Gómez Alfaro has shown that the objective was unequivocal: to implement a plan to eliminate the group entirely, not only to disperse or punish it, but to suppress the very existence of the community through mass imprisonment (Gómez Alfaro, 1993, p. 25). The Council of Castile itself, in its order of July 1749, spoke of the need to "exterminate them once and for all" (Martínez Martínez, 2007, p. 377), using language that reveals the intention to wipe out the Romani people as such.

The operation was part of Bourbon reformism, which combined the discourse of order and utility with the desire for social homogenisation. As Manuel Martínez points out, the Round-up was the culmination of a secular process of criminalising the Roma way of life (1993, p. 34). If the pragmatic measures had turned Roma into criminals by definition,

the Round-up attempted to apply the final solution: to dismantle any possibility of community reproduction. To this end, the order provided for immediate separation by sex and age: adult men to the arsenals of Cartagena, Cádiz and Ferrol, women to houses of mercy or spinning mills, boys from the age of seven to arsenals and workshops as apprentices, and children under that age with their mothers in guarded depots (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 202). The measure was clearly biopolitical in nature, as it fragmented the population according to its productive usefulness and gender status, weakening family ties.

The violence of separation reached particularly traumatic levels in the case of children. Various documents refer to the fact that even infants were taken from their mothers, to the point that attempts were made to take children away after breastfeeding, and in many cases even before, to transfer them to foundling homes or hospices, with the justification of raising them "Christianly" (Gómez Alfaro, 2010, p. 370). In 1751, a group of 21 Roma children, aged 11 to 14, was sent from Málaga to Cartagena, and in 1755, another 40 children, aged 7 or 8, were sent from Valencia to the same arsenal (Gómez Alfaro, 2010, p. 357). The aim was precise: to break the generational transmission, remove the minors from their community and transform them into a subordinate workforce.

The overall figures are difficult to calculate, but the most reliable estimates range between 9,000 and 12,000 people affected (Gómez Alfaro, 2010, p. 19). The scope was national: coordinated raids were carried out in Seville, Granada, Murcia, Cartagena, Cádiz, Zaragoza and Málaga, among many other cities. The magnitude of the operation makes the Great Round-up one of the largest planned attempts at extermination of a minority in 18th-century Europe.

The execution was carried out with extreme harshness. The men were sent to the arsenals, and in Cartagena, it is documented that many were housed in an old galley, sleeping in the open air, "as in the previous stage of galleys," with barely a cloak to cover themselves (Martínez, 2007, p. 321). The overcrowding was such that the quartermasters themselves described the treatment as "too cruel", describing prisoners in chains and without bedding, which led to constant hospital admissions (Martínez, 2007, pp. 448–450). In El Ferrol, the boys slept on a "platform... and blanket" (Martínez, 2007, p. 321), a minimal relief that highlights the precariousness of the situation. The situation in Cartagena and La Graña illustrates the extent to which the project was a deliberate operation of degradation.

The women were transported in equally brutal conditions. In Málaga, more than a thousand Roma women with children arrived in August 1749. As there were no suitable facilities, accommodation was improvised in the Alcazaba, the royal prison, private

houses and even a street outside the city walls that was closed for this purpose (Gómez Alfaro, 2010, pp. 459–460; Gómez Urdáñez, 2018, p. 14). Shortly afterwards, many of them were shipped to Tortosa and taken to the Casa de Misericordia in Zaragoza. There, a separate pavilion was built to lock them up, where they suffered from hunger, overcrowding and disease (Gómez Alfaro, 2010, p. 510). In 1753, an outbreak of scabies affected more than 100 inmates, necessitating collective treatment in the infirmary (Gómez Urdáñez, 2004, p. 18). Escapes were frequent, leading to increased surveillance, and their transfer to damp basements was considered "safer" (Gómez Urdáñez, 2004, p. 19). La Misericordia became a veritable women's galley, where women were forced to spin and sew during exhausting days in subhuman conditions.

The miserable conditions had already been denounced in previous galley houses, where prisoners had only "a poor mattress and a blanket, and the floor for a bed, sleeping two or three together, and sometimes, because there were so many, there were not enough mattresses for everyone and they gathered on the floor wrapped in their poor rags" (Martínez, 2007, p. 81). The continuity between these punishments for women and the Misericordia de Zaragoza shows the consolidation of a repressive system specifically targeting Romani women.

Material dispossession was another central theme. Roma had their houses, animals, tools and pantries confiscated. In Priego de Córdoba, for example, homes and livestock belonging to Roma families were publicly auctioned off (Gómez Alfaro, 2010, pp. 464–484). Although the instruction of October 1749 provided for the return of property to those who were released, in practice, the town councils and magistrates delayed or blocked the restitution. In many cases, only the poorest were released, as the municipalities had nothing to return to them because they had no property (Gómez Alfaro, 1993, p. 92). Thus, the Round-up also served an economic purpose: to transfer Roma wealth into the hands of local elites, consolidating exclusion through expropriation.

The repression had a specific gender dimension. In La Misericordia de Zaragoza, Roma women led riots and escape attempts, which were suppressed with stocks and imprisonment in dungeons (Gómez Urdáñez, 2004, p. 19). However, their resistance was not limited to the prison environment. Many women went to court to demand the release of their husbands or the return of their property. Manuel Martínez reports that the authorities even banned Romani women from going to court, given the volume of claims filed (Martínez, 2018, p. 47). This judicial resistance, combined with riots and escapes, demonstrates that women played a central role in the fight against general imprisonment.

The pardon process was slow and biased. Partial releases began in 1763 and accelerated in 1765, but many remained imprisoned until 1767 (Martínez, 2007, pp. 463-466). The class logic was evident: the poorest were released first, because there were no assets to return to them, while those who owned property saw their estates fall into the hands of third parties (Gómez Alfaro, 1993, p. 92).

The outcome of the Great Round-up was devastating. Hundreds died in the early years, victims of hunger, disease, exhaustion, and suicide, the result of the "hell" they endured (Martínez, 2007, pp. 328-331). In La Misericordia in Zaragoza, outbreaks of scabies and mortality reached extremely high levels (Gómez Urdáñez, 2004, p. 18). In the arsenals, hospital records show constant admissions of Roma who were ill due to unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, physical exploitation and the circumstances of captivity – "tied with thick chains" – (Martínez, 2007, pp. 328-331). The intention to exterminate resulted in a massive deterioration in living conditions, the destruction of families and a collective wound that is still part of the memory of the Romani people.

### 2.3. Continuities of repression and surveillance (19th–20th centuries)

The release of the last prisoners of the Great Round-up between 1763 and 1767 did not mean the end of the persecution of the Romani people, but rather its reconfiguration. The shift at the end of the 18th and 19th centuries was articulated less through large-scale raids and more through policies of forced assimilation, nominal erasure, and permanent surveillance. The Pragmatic Decree of 1783 (Charles III) is decisive: it starts by denying specificity—it refers to "those formerly known as Roma" and now known as "new Castilians"—and formats the mandate of assimilation by demanding that they "abandon their language, dress and manners" in order to be treated "like other vassals" (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 206, p.316). The articles themselves define the price of this supposed equality: "the abandonment of language, dress and manners, the whole edifice supported by progressive punishment according to the degree of acculturation achieved" (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 315). In short, the law erases the name and punishes the signs.

This erasure is combined with a singular form of identification punishment: branding with the seal of Castile. The pragmatic mandate is to "imprint with a hot iron on the backs of those who do not abandon their dress, language or manners a small seal with the arms of Castile" (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 301). The text even regulates the severity of the punishment: "I commute this penalty of branding for now and for the first offence to death... and cutting off the ears" (art. 15); and it culminates with the lethal threshold: "once the branding has been verified... in the event of a repeat offence, the death penalty shall be imposed without fail; and thus it shall be carried out only with the

recognition of the seal and proof of having returned to their previous life" (art. 20) (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 316). This provision converts cultural persistence (language, dress, manners) into a corporal offence and, in the extreme, into a capital offence.

In terms of gender, the design did not exclude women ("in principle, Roma women were not excluded... from this type of branding"). However, Council resolutions gave rise to a practice of exemption "due to the delicacy of their sex", based on cases such as that of Estremera, which "will give rise to case law favouring the general exclusion of women" from branding (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 301). Repressive paternalism does not abolish punishment, but it does alter its form on the female body.

At the turn of the 19th century, even as progress was made in abolishing stigmatising marks, the Roma remained an exception: a circular in Barcelona (25 November 1807) "abolished... the mark in general", but maintained it as an exception for the Roma (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 309). The mark thus became a reserved punishment that singled out and stigmatised.

The pragmatic measure was not limited to branding: it also established the grammar of assimilation. Article 10 established that those who "abandoned their language, dress and manners, taking up residence and applying themselves to a trade" would be "prosecuted and punished like other vassals" (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 315). This passage crystallises the regulatory objective of the period: to legally confuse the general population with cultural denial. In terms of territorial control, a regime of neighbourhood and settlement is maintained with criteria of population size and surveillance of movements inherited from 17th-century regulations (stable residence, trades and registers), documented in compilations from that century and in subsequent case law; thus, the regulation pushes towards larger centres under the control of local authorities, restricting mobility and dispersion in small villages (Archivo Municipal de Málaga, n.d., pp. 2–6).

While the legal discourse speaks of "equality" and "confusion" ("like other vassals"), administrative and judicial practice continues to name and persecute the Roma. The documentation offers clear examples: the Council orders the enlistment of a teenager, "with the warning that he should not be named or insulted with the label of gypsy, vagrant, or any other offensive term" (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 303). In Girona, a family is arrested "speaking gibberish and wearing the clothes and manners formerly used by those who called themselves Roma", with minors being sent to the hospice (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 303). Furthermore, in Almería, a man is condemned to the seal "for having been a gypsy, or new Castilian", a formula that combines the prohibition of the name with its operational persistence (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 303). These three documents demonstrate the dual language: erasing the name in the norm, while preserving the difference in the files.



This double language is reinforced in the 19th-century registers and files. Bernard Leblon records how, in municipal lists and police files, 'Gypsy/Gitano' was formally replaced by 'new Castilians' or 'new countrymen', but coexisted with the everyday use of 'Gypsy/Gitano' in notes and controls (Leblon, 1993, pp. 12–14). In other words, archival technology operates by both erasing and pointing out.

In the punitive sphere, the mark survives in combination with other penalties (branding + imprisonment/labour), with a plasticity reminiscent of the logic of dangerousness in the late 19th century: for example, the Royal Court of Aragon ( ) reported in 1787 on several cases in which the "penalty of branding" had been carried out; and the Court in Catalonia also ordered that the issuance of passports to "such classes of people" be tightened (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, p. 303). The Royal Court of Seville clarified that it did not apply the mark 'solely' for going to fairs and markets, but did so when it was 'combined with crimes of theft', making 'Gypsyism' an aggravating factor (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, pp. 303-305). These flexible practices sustained a long-standing criminal profile: cultural identity = suspicion.

The 19th century did not dissolve this repertoire: it administered it. Control of settlements, the requirement of neighbourhood and trade, limitations on mobility through passports, and monitoring in registers of "new Castilians" as a label of forced integration were maintained (Archivo Municipal de Málaga, n.d., pp. 2–6; Leblon, 1993, pp. 12–14). The aim was not so much to recognise a difference as to absorb it into the abstract category of "vassal" or "citizen", punishing any persistence of language, dress or trade.

By the first third of the 20th century, the doctrinal garb had changed, but not the logic behind it. The *Revista Técnica de la Guardia Civil* (1910–1933) updated old clichés using criminological language, such as "Roma criminality," which referred to dangerousness and vagrancy, thereby legitimising raids and controls at fairs and on roads (Buhigas Jiménez, 2024). With the Vagrancy and Delinquency Act (1933), the state had an instrument that allowed it to punish individuals labelled as antisocial for being "dangerous", with Roma appearing as the preferred target of internment and displacement measures. Thus, modern criminal law did not dismantle the legacy of 1633/1783, but rather translated it into a law of dangerousness: the prohibition of the name, the mark and the mandate to "blend in" with others persisted in the form of surveillance and profiling.

In short, the sequence 1633–1783–19th/20th centuries reveals a repressive continuity that oscillates between erasing the name (denying that they are a distinct people) and marking the body (through stamps, brands, and traces in files). After the Great Round-



up, the mechanism did not cease: it was recalibrated to conceal persecution under the promise of legal equality, on the impossible condition of renouncing the language, dress and trades that sustained collective life (Gómez Alfaro, 2005, pp. 303–305, 316–318; Leblon, 1993, pp. 12–14; Municipal Archive of Malaga, n.d., pp. 2–6; Buhigas Jiménez, 2024).

## 2.4. Francoism: cultural repression and administrative disappearance

Francoism inherited centuries of anti-Roma legislation and 19th-century police mechanisms, rearticulating them under a new language: that of "social defence", National Catholicism and an obsession with national homogeneity. The dictatorship constructed a dual mechanism: on the one hand, the systematic criminalisation of real Roma; on the other, the folklorisation and appropriation of their cultural symbols as part of the "Marca España" (Spain Brand). This duality—social repression and symbolic exaltation—defined the regime's relationship with the Roma people.

As Buhigas Jiménez (2024, pp. 15–28) recalls, early 20th-century police publications had already established the "Gypsy" as a subject of permanent suspicion and an enemy of social order. This narrative, centred on a supposed natural inclination towards crime and the need for constant surveillance, fuelled the repressive imagery that Francoism institutionalised decades later. The discursive continuities between the "Roma criminality" of the 19th-century Civil Guard and the "social dangerousness" of the Franco regime show that institutional racism was a long-standing construct.

Legally, the regime relied on instruments inherited from the Republic and late liberalism. The Vagrancy and Delinquency Act of 1933, already used against Roma, was reformed in 1954 and applied more harshly. Later, the Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation Act of 1970 formally replaced the Vagrancy and Delinquency Act, but maintained the same logic of criminalising "dangerousness" before crime. As García Sanz explains, both laws functioned as a *quasi-criminal* framework that prolonged ethnicised control under the guise of prevention (2018, pp. 130–133, 137–140). As Río-Ruiz points out, the LVM and the LPRS functioned as a 'paracriminal' framework that allowed for the internment, eviction and transfer of Romani families in the 1960s and 1970s (Río-Ruiz, 2020, p. 125). Along the same lines, García Sanz demonstrates that Franco's courts for *vagrants and thugs* applied a *racialised* jurisdiction, where the category "Gypsy" operated as a presumed criminal identity, legitimising deprivation of liberty for alleged social dangerousness rather than for specific crimes (2019, pp. 145–146).

The most explicit mechanism was the 1943 Civil Guard Regulations, which in articles 4 to 6 ordered officers to "scrupulously monitor Roma, checking their documents, clothing, and way of life and gathering all necessary information about them" (García Sanz, 2018, p. 129). This mandate, which remained in force until its repeal in 1978 (ibid), made the mere status of being a Romani person sufficient grounds for police surveillance. It was the most clear continuation of the original function of the Civil Guard in the 19th century: the control of roads, fairs and itinerant trades.

This surveillance took concrete forms. Río-Ruiz documents that in Valladolid, in 1968, the safe-conduct passes that Roma needed to travel were officially abolished. However, in 1976, following rumours about the presence of *El Lute*, the police arrested and remanded in custody all the adult Roma in a shanty town settlement (2020, pp. 124–125). These episodes show how, despite cosmetic reforms, ethnic surveillance remained the norm until the end of the regime.

Francoism also deployed urban policies that reinforced spatial segregation. The rehousing of Roma families evicted from caves or shacks was not directed towards integrated housing, but towards segregated peripheral neighbourhoods. In Cartagena, the neighbourhoods of Lo Campano and Los Mateos are paradigmatic examples: concentrated rehousing areas, lacking adequate facilities and burdened with stigma, the product of late Francoist housing policies (Río-Ruiz, 2020, pp. 116–152; Viedma Guiard & Álvarez de Andrés, 2023, pp. 25 and 30–31). In these cases, urban policy functioned as an extension of repression: families were removed from central areas and relocated to spaces of exclusion.

Cultural repression operated in parallel. National Catholicism prohibited or restricted itinerant trades, nomadic practices, selling at fairs, and any cultural expression considered dissident. Roma were made invisible in official statistics—there were no specific categories in censuses or registers—and any reference to them appeared under euphemisms such as "vagrants" or "habitual criminals." Franco's policy consisted of making them administratively invisible and hyper visible to the police (García Sanz, 2019, pp. 148–156; García Sanz, 2018, p. 129).

The most obvious contradiction of the regime was that, while it repressed real Roma life, it appropriated their cultural symbols as national symbols. As María Sierra explains, the cliché of "Gypsyism", born in the Romantic era, intensified in the second half of the 20th century, when the cultural apparatus of Francoism was used to the full to capitalise on this source of national 'essences' previously invented by Western tourism (Sierra, 2018a, p. 21).

Flamenco, traditionally associated with Andalusian Roma, was elevated to "national art" and turned into a tourist emblem. Sierra emphasises that the dictatorship exported abroad the image of the Roma woman dancing flamenco, which became a stereotype of exoticism and national vitality (2018b, pp. 110–112).

Along these lines, Xavier Rothea has documented how Francoism constructed the figure of the domesticated "good gypsy" who embodied the essence of Spanishness at festivals, fairs and official shows. This process involved the appropriation of Roma costume, dance and music, which were incorporated into the repertoire of *Marca España* (2014, pp. 7–22).

The paradox was evident: while real Roma families were harassed at fairs and in neighbourhoods with evictions, internments and raids, their cultural symbols were exploited to reinforce the myth of a joyful and authentic Spain (ibid). Roma culture became an advertising resource, but not a subject of rights.

Franco's repression also had a gender dimension. The Patronato de Protección a la Mujer (1941–1985), responsible for disciplining women considered "wayward", included Roma women among its primary targets. Recent research revealed a letter from 1970 in which, following the escape of a young Roma woman, the director justified herself by stating that "she is a Roma and that is enough", adding that Roma women were "beings beyond redemption" (*La Vanguardia*, 2025). This example shows how Francoism intersected sexism and racism, constructing Roma women as doubly dangerous and irredeemable and reinforcing the breakdown of family ties through forced internment.

In short, Francoism did not invent antigypsyism, but it modernised it: it replaced the old pragmatic measures with laws on social danger, exile with segregated rehousing, the seal of Castile with police lists, and galleys with controlled shanty towns. Under the guise of formal equality, it erased Roma from official records while making them a priority target for the police. It instrumentalised their cultural symbols—flamenco, traditional dress and dance—as signs of national identity. Franco's Spain presented itself to the world with a Roma face, while keeping real Roma on the margins, criminalised and excluded.

## 2.5. Democratic transition and legal inequality

The end of the dictatorship and the adoption of the 1978 Constitution seemed to open up a horizon of equality for all citizens. However, in the case of the Roma people, the democratic transition consolidated more continuities than ruptures. Although particularly discriminatory provisions were repealed—such as Articles 4 to 6 of the 1943

Civil Guard Regulations, which ordered officers to "scrupulously monitor Roma," controlling their movements and way of life—the structure of legal and social inequality remained virtually intact.

The first symbolic victory came in the political arena. In 1977, Juan de Dios Ramírez-Heredia became the first Romani MP in the Spanish Parliament, elected on the UCD ticket. From his seat, he openly denounced legal discrimination, especially that contained in the aforementioned regulations, whose repeal was published in the Official State Gazette in July 1978 following his non-legislative proposal (Buhigas Jiménez, 2024, p. 6; García Sanz, 2018, pp. 129–130). Parliamentary pressure soon bore fruit with the elimination of clauses that expressly criminalised Roma people. The transition, therefore, removed the direct reference, but not the practices of selective surveillance.

Criminal law regarding dangerousness continued to operate as a direct legacy of the Franco regime. The 1970 Law on Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation, successor to the Vagrancy and Delinquency Law, remained in force until 1995, and during the years of the transition, it continued to be applied to Roma considered "maladjusted or antisocial" (García Sanz, 2018, p. 137). This legislation permitted internment, control measures, and evictions under the principle of prevention, without requiring proof of criminality (García Sanz, 2018, pp. 130–134). The 1978 Constitution proclaimed formal equality but did not recognise Roma as a minority or offer measures to protect them from structural discrimination. In censuses, Roma still did not appear as a recognisable category, prolonging their administrative invisibility.

Education became a central arena where formal equality clashed with practices of segregation. From the mid-1970s onwards, so-called bridge schools were promoted, designed to educate Roma children in separate classrooms with the promise of subsequent integration (Río Ruiz, 2018, p. 191). In practice, these measures institutionalised exclusion and reinforced stereotypes of "backwardness" or "inability" to share classrooms with non-Roma. During the 1980s, neighbourhood resistance revealed the harshness of social antigypsyism. As Molina (2020) points out, the bridge school model did not emerge as an inclusive policy, but rather as an extension of the segregating mechanisms of the Franco regime, now presented under new administrative language. Created in the late 1960s through an agreement between the Ministry of Education and Cáritas, this programme remained in force until 1986, when it was declared unconstitutional. During its implementation, bridge schools functioned as devices for "deferred integration", concentrating Roma children in single classrooms and reproducing a pedagogy based on assumptions of cultural deficit and eugenics inherited from Francoist discourse. Their replacement by "compensatory education" policies did not mean the end of segregation, but rather its transformation into a model

of conditional integration within a formally egalitarian education system (Molina, 2020, pp. 16–17, 21).

The most paradigmatic case was that of the Severo Ochoa school in Leganés in January 1985, when 35 Roma children were escorted by the police in order to gain access to the school. For weeks, non-Roma families blocked the entrance, demonstrations took place, and even a bomb threat forced the school to close (Río Ruiz, 2018, pp. 181–183). Nogués Sáez has reconstructed the immediate origin in Vicálvaro (1984), where the expansion of a Roma settlement provoked a reaction from the neighbourhood: racist pamphlets circulated in the neighbourhood, signatures were collected, and traffic blockades were organised in protest against the enrolment of 34 Roma children in the same school (Nogués Sáez, 2010, pp. 150–155). Rafael Buhigas situates this episode within a broader cycle of urban harassment, where institutions ultimately supported the non-Roma protesters instead of promoting integration. In Vicálvaro, a three-metre-wide and one-metre-deep perimeter trench was even dug around the Roma settlement, with a single exit guarded by the municipal police, a literal symbol of spatial segregation (Buhigas Jiménez, 2024, pp. 19–20).

These episodes in the 1980s were not exceptional, but rather a continuation of the collective violence that had already erupted in the late Franco era and persisted during the transition to democracy. As Río Ruiz has documented, there were recurrent riots in Andalusia that led to permanent expulsions, including those in Torredelcampo (1971), Torredonjimeno (1984), Martos (1986), and Mancha Real (1991) (Río Ruiz, 2005, pp. 37–76). In most cases, Roma were expelled from their homes, their houses were set on fire, and they were prevented from returning, while the courts dismissed the cases and the police barely intervened (Río Ruiz, 2005, pp. 44–47). Anti-Roma violence was carried out with impunity, and democracy did not substantially change this pattern.

At the same time, housing policy continued to reproduce inequalities. Rehousing in peripheral industrial estates, inherited from the plans of the late Franco era, consolidated spatial segregation. In Madrid, Vicálvaro and El Pozo del Tío Raimundo became enclaves of Roma poverty, as Nogués Sáez has shown in his study on residential exclusion (2010, pp. 166–173). Roma families moved from shanty towns to peripheral blocks of flats without any improvement in their marginalised conditions.

Faced with this reality, the first forms of resistance and collective organisation emerged. In the 1980s, local and national Roma associations were established, including the Unión Romaní (1986), which highlighted school segregation and employment discrimination. There were also demonstrations in defence of equal schooling conditions, such as the protests against bridge schools in Burjassot (1986) and Campanillas (1988–1989) (Río Ruiz, 2018, pp. 196–198). Ramírez-Heredia's presence in

Parliament provided a political reference point, but the daily struggle took place mainly in neighbourhoods and schools.

In short, the transition opened up spaces for participation and eliminated the most crude legal remnants, such as the Civil Guard Regulations, but left the structures of inequality intact. The lack of recognition as an ethnic minority, the persistence of dangerousness laws, school segregation and urban violence reveal that Roma continued to be marginalised from citizenship. The myth of democracy as a break with the past is nuanced here: for Roma, it was more a continuation with new languages. Administrative invisibility and social repression coexisted with the symbolic appropriation of Roma culture in the national imagination, consolidating a contradiction that still weighs heavily on effective equality today.

### 3. Contemporary manifestations of antigypsyism

Any analysis of antigypsyism in today's Spain must start from a straightforward premise: we are not dealing with a mere set of prejudices or isolated incidents, but with a specific form of racism that is structural and ideological in nature. Literature has defined it as a persistent system, deeply rooted in European history, which combines institutional practices, cultural narratives and social dynamics to keep the Romani community in a position of subordination (End, 2014; End, 2015; Tremlett, 2014; Cortés, Caro & Motos, 2019).

Far from being a marginal expression, antigypsyism operates as an ideology of hatred: a framework that classifies Roma as an essentially problematic group and legitimises their exclusion (Matache, 2017; Rövid, 2011; Molina & James, forthcoming).

As we have argued elsewhere, antigypsyism must be understood in two interconnected dimensions: (1) as a structural system that organises relations between the majority and the Roma minority through laws, policies and institutional practices; and (2) as a cultural and symbolic logic that legitimises this exclusion through historical narratives of criminalisation, exoticisation or paternalism (Molina & James, forthcoming). This dual condition makes it a unique ideology: it cannot be described simply as racism, as it incorporates elements of radical othering—the construction of the Roma as an incompatible other—and historical exceptionalism, which differentiate it from other racist systems in Europe (Molina & James, forthcoming; Nicolae, 2007, pp. 22–27).

The European Parliament recognises it as "a specific form of racism, deeply rooted in social structures and manifested in institutional, social and everyday life" (European Parliament, 2017, cons. C). This recognition shifts the focus from individual prejudices to the structures that produce and reproduce them. In the case of Spain, the legacy of antigypsyism—after centuries of persecutory legislation—is reflected today in school segregation (around 28% of Roma pupils attend segregated schools) and early school leaving (around 70%), as well as persistent residential segregation, which explains disproportionate rates of poverty, segregation and discrimination (Roma Civil Monitor, 2022).

This section addresses precisely these current manifestations. In the following sections, we will examine housing, education, employment, health, justice and the public sphere, as well as phenomena of collective violence and the differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These areas do not function independently: they form a network of mutually reinforcing mechanisms that consolidate a regime of persistent inequality (Roma Civil Monitor, 2022; FRA, 2021). Analysing them is a necessary step in understanding the

prevalence of antigypsyism as an ideology of hate and laying the foundations for its dismantling.

### 3.1. Contemporary structural manifestations

Contemporary antigypsyism in Spain is not the sum of isolated incidents, but rather a system of domination that is reproduced over time through institutions, norms and social practices. It is expressed in the city—through residential segregation—, in schools—with low expectations and early dropout rates—, in the labour market—through ethnic filters and precarious employment—in health—through a combination of poverty and institutional racism—in justice—through underreporting and biased jurisprudence—and in the public sphere—where narratives associating Romani identity with marginality persist.

The European Union has recognised antigypsyism as a specific form of racism, deeply rooted in social structures and manifested in institutional, social and everyday life (European Parliament, 2017). Recent data confirm this structural nature: FRA surveys on the Roma population show poverty and exclusion rates well above the European average, with Spain among the countries with the highest proportion of Roma people at risk of poverty (98%) and high levels of discrimination in key areas such as housing, employment, education and health (FRA, 2022; Roma Civil Monitor, 2022). In the case of Spain, studies on Roma students indicate that the majority of young people leave the education system before obtaining their secondary school diploma, which shows a pattern of persistent educational exclusion (FSG, 2023). We are therefore not dealing with isolated failures, but with a network that produces and legitimises inequality.

#### Housing and residential segregation

Housing is a privileged field for observing the materiality of antigypsyism. Although classic shanty towns have been reduced and there are rehousing programmes, renewed forms of segregation persist: poorly connected suburbs, concentrated social housing estates and environments with poor services. Numerous rehousing programmes have generated what neighbours and experts refer to as "vertical shanty towns": stigmatised blocks with high turnover, poor maintenance and limited opportunities (Cortés, Caro & Motos, 2019, pp. 122-124; Roma Civil Monitor, 2022, pp. 17-18). The geography of stigma operates like a labelling postcode: the address acts as a social and, often, ethnic marker. (Ministry of Health, 2015, pp.78-84; Cortés, Caro & Motos, 2019, pp. 48 and 51; Laparra & García, 2011, p. 82; FSG 2022, pp.274-277).



Direct discrimination in access to rental housing is superimposed on this structural basis. Landlords and agencies reject Roma families without always hiding it; in other cases, they use formally neutral excuses that mask their bias. The result is a vicious circle that restricts residential mobility, concentrates poverty and fuels the stigmatisation of the neighbourhood. Public policy has tended to measure progress by the reduction of substandard housing. However, the key lies in the quality of the environment, including connectivity, social mix, services, safety, and symbolic recognition. Without these elements, segregation is reproduced even if the building materials change. (FSG, 2022, pp. 224-239; Ministry of Equality, 2024, pp. 107-115; Cortés, Caro & Motos, 2019).

Residential segregation also has knock-on effects: it increases transportation costs for employment, reduces relational capital through mixed networks, and penalises educational continuity. Stigmatised neighbourhoods act as a preliminary filter in recruitment and as a justification for segregation practices in schools, closing the circle of disadvantage. (Laparra & García, 2011; Cortés, Caro & Motos, 2019; FSG, 2022).

#### *Education: mechanisms of segregation and dropout*

Education clearly illustrates the structural logic: almost universal primary schooling, but a sharp drop in continuity as students progress through their academic careers. The gap is not circumstantial or attributable to individual "cultural choices"; it responds to mechanisms of segregation that operate on three levels. (FSG, 2023, pp.7-23; ISEAK & FSG, 2019, pp. 16-18; Molina, 2020).

First, inter-school segregation: the concentration of Roma pupils in certain public schools—often located in peripheral neighbourhoods with fewer resources—creates educational environments with high teacher turnover rates and low expectations as the norm. Academic research describes these spaces as 'ghetto schools', directly linked to residential segregation (Molina, 2020, pp. 5-8). This pattern is reinforced by white flight dynamics, in which non-Roma families opt for subsidised private schools or residential/administrative mobility when they perceive a high Roma presence (Molina, 2020, pp. 7-8; Laparra & García, 2011, pp. 110-113, 118-119).

Second, intra-school segregation: Roma students are overrepresented in measures such as compensatory classrooms, curricular diversification, or low-level programmes. These programmes—even under the guise of adaptation—consolidate devalued pathways, reduced curricula, and diminished expectations (Molina, 2020, pp. 6-7). Rather than correcting inequalities, they institutionalise a parallel system that limits academic progression and reinforces separation.

Thirdly, intra-class segregation, which is less visible but equally effective, involves differentiation of tasks, assessments that do not facilitate real progression, reduced participation, and interaction dynamics mediated by stereotypes. The literature demonstrates how invisible barriers within the classroom construct symbolic hierarchies, assigning Roma students a subordinate place in the educational space. Segregation not only distributes students; it teaches hierarchies. (Molina, 2020, pp. 5-8; Molina & James, forthcoming).

Teachers' low expectations, fuelled by normalised prejudices, operate as an additional mechanism of inequality, affecting the assessment of academic potential, opportunities for participation and the transition to post-compulsory education (Molina, 2020, pp. 18–21; Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2023, pp. 5–17). It is therefore not surprising that the vast majority of Roma students leave the system without obtaining their secondary school certificate.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this structure of inequality. The lack of devices, connectivity, and adequate study spaces led to prolonged disconnections, cumulative learning losses, and a greater distance from educational standards (FSG 2020, pp. 5–7; Ministry of Health, 2021, pp. 14–16). Where schools were already operating with low expectations, recovery was slower. Similar patterns were observed at the European level, with deep digital divides and inequalities in access to education (FRA, 2022, pp. 16, 35–41). Although some institutional responses—curricular materials on Roma history and culture, school support programmes—had positive effects, they are insufficient without decisive school desegregation policies focused on admission criteria aimed at social mixing, rebalancing of resources, school transport and structural partnerships with families (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2021, pp. 5–8; Roma Civil Monitor, 2022, pp. 21–27).

The gender dimension adds further layers of inequality. Many Romani girls take on caregiving responsibilities at an early age and experience role pressures that hinder their academic continuity, in addition to suffering intersectional discrimination in school settings (Fakali, 2022, pp. 28–34). An intersectional approach—gender, class, ethnicity, territory—is essential to understanding why female dropout rates can be higher in specific contexts and, at the same time, why new generations of Roma women are emerging who are breaking through barriers, often facing simultaneous resistance both within and outside the community (ibid).

Employment: ethnic filters and precariousness

The labour market exhibits a consistent pattern: unemployment rates are well above average, with low stability and an intense concentration in temporary, informal, or survival occupations.

The usual explanation – "lack of qualifications" – is only part of the story. Training does play a role, but antigypsyism in recruitment acts as a preliminary filter that invalidates comparable merits, reproducing structural inequalities (ISEAK & Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2019, pp. 12–18).

Two mechanisms stand out.

On the one hand, identity markers: surnames associated with the Roma community and addresses located in stigmatised neighbourhoods trigger biases during the initial screening process. The CEDRE Survey on the Perception of Discrimination based on Racial or Ethnic Origin documents that many people are rejected because of their "origin", "surname" or because they are perceived negatively in the workplace, even when they meet the formal requirements of the position (CEDRE, 2023, p. 165). This is silent discrimination, which leaves no documentary trace and appears neutral, but operates along racial lines.

On the other hand, there is spatial penalisation: living in segregated neighbourhoods—with poor connectivity and a bad reputation—reduces the effective radius of job search, increases travel costs and increases the likelihood of exclusion from the selection phase (Cortés, Caro & Motos, 2019). Various analyses highlight how territorial stigma functions as a social and ethnic marker that precedes the candidate themselves.

The consequence is forced occupational specialisation. Activities such as street vending, material recovery, seasonal agricultural work, or specific services with high turnover do not express a "cultural preference", but rather adaptive strategies in the face of a labour market that restricts options on racial grounds (Del Pozo, 2006, pp. 43–47; ISEAK & Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2019, pp. 25–27). Even when formal employment is secured, glass ceilings persist, as evidenced by underpromotion, unwanted part-time contracts, limited internal training opportunities, and stigma during interactions with customers and colleagues (ISEAK & Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2019, pp. 28–32).

Roma women face double discrimination. In addition to racialisation in the labour market, there is gender inequality: lower activity rates, greater presence in unstable jobs, difficulty in reconciling rigid schedules, and repeated experiences of rejection or microaggressions during selection processes. The Fakali report illustrates how the

intersection of gender and ethnicity creates additional barriers that impact access, stability, and promotion (Fakali, 2022, pp. 28–34).

Active community-focused policies—such as labour mediation, contextualised training, and corporate awareness—have had positive, albeit limited, impacts. The Acceder programme has resulted in more than 30,000 hires, demonstrating that employment support reduces access gaps (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2020, pp. 4–7). However, these advances are insufficient without a robust anti-discrimination policy, which includes practical inspection and sanctions, positive action, monitoring of gaps in promotion and wages, and recognition of markers that produce indirect discrimination, such as surnames and addresses. The European Commission stresses in its evaluations of the EU Roma Strategic Framework that employment must be a priority for structural intervention in all Member States (European Commission, 2023).

Without these guarantees, employment continues to function as a mechanism for reproducing poverty and as a factor that limits related rights—such as housing, health, and education—generating profound intergenerational impacts.

#### *Health: poverty, institutional racism and violated bodies*

The health gap summarises the human cost of structural antigypsyism. Lower income and poorer housing conditions lead to poorer health: more comorbidities, earlier onset of chronic diseases and lower life expectancy. Overcrowding increases respiratory and infectious risks; chronic stress associated with precariousness and stigma deteriorates mental health; malnutrition and unsafe work multiply vulnerabilities.

The difference in life expectancy is one of the most striking indicators of disparity. Official studies estimate a gap of 8 to 15 years less for the Roma population compared to the Spanish average (Plataforma Kethane, 2019). In Galicia, SERGAS itself acknowledged in 2024 that Roma people live between 8 and 10 years less than the rest of the population (Europa Press, 2024a). These figures place the situation of the Roma community at levels comparable to those of countries with lower socio-economic development within Europe, showing how structural racism translates into a "biopolitics of inequality": Roma bodies pay for precariousness and exclusion with years of their lives.

Added to this material dimension is institutional racism in healthcare. The Roma population uses fewer preventive services and visits emergency rooms more often, not because of ignorance, but because of mistrust: repeated experiences of unequal treatment, lack of understandable information, biased communication and stereotypes during clinical contact (Ministry of Health, 2014; ERTF, 2016, p. 7–8). The field of

obstetrics is a prime example: Roma women have reported paternalistic or outright dehumanising practices—from denial of support to racist remarks—as documented by Silvia Agüero Fernández, revealing intersections of anti-Roma sentiment and obstetric violence (Agüero, 2017; El Salto, 2017).

The pandemic amplified this equation. Living and working conditions exposed the Roma community to greater risk, with worse outcomes due to pre-existing comorbidities, and at the same time, narratives spread that presented Roma neighbourhoods as hotspots for infection (Rodríguez, 2021; El Salto, 2020). In some municipalities, selective lockdowns were imposed before general measures were implemented, justified as an exceptional health risk (Rodríguez, 2021). These dynamics fit into the racial securitisation described at the European level, where sectors of the Roma population were treated as vectors of risk (Valero et al., 2021).

Some health mediation initiatives have shown partial effectiveness. A recent example is Galicia, where in 2024, seven Roma health promoters were hired to improve adherence and communication between users and the system (Europa Press, 2024b). However, these remain pilot projects. The key lies in institutionalising the intercultural perspective: mandatory training on bias, quality indicators with a focus on equity, community participation in the design of mechanisms, and genuine accessibility (including schedules, language, and transportation).

#### Justice: legal recognition without adequate protection

In the judicial sphere, regulatory advances coexist with deficits in protection. Antigypsism has been included in the law as a specific category (Law 15/2022), and since 2019, incidents have been recorded as hate crimes (Ministry of the Interior, 2019). However, underreporting remains structural. Although 18.2% of people who reported having suffered discrimination filed some complaint or report, only 10.4% did so with the police or courts; the majority chose not to report (CEDRE, 2023, p. 213).

The reasons identified are qualitative in nature: the belief that "it would be pointless", the normalisation of racism, a lack of information on how to report incidents, and fear of reprisals (CEDRE, 2023, pp. 213–215).

Unequal access to justice is exacerbated by a lack of resources. Much of the community depends on legal aid, which limits the possibility of choosing a defence or sustaining lengthy proceedings (CEDRE, 2022). This asymmetry reinforces the perception that it is not worth litigating.

At the same time, case law shows serious shortcomings. Although official reports show an increase in cases—22 incidents classified as anti-Roma in 2022, 22% more than in 2021 (Ministry of the Interior, 2023, p. 13)—the number is misleading: many are treated as disorderly conduct or threats without recognising the racist motivation. The lack of firm sentences for antigypsyism fuels impunity.

Worse still, some courts reproduce racist stereotypes. The case of the Provincial Court of León (2024) is paradigmatic: the sentence for the continued sexual abuse of a Roma minor was reduced on the grounds that early marriages are common in "Roma culture" (RTVE, 2024; El Salto, 2024). This interpretation not only leaves the victim unprotected, but also creates a parallel law that relativises violence when it affects Roma girls. The campaign #LasNiñasGitanasNiñasSon (Roma girls are girls), promoted by activists and lawyers, denounced this bias, emphasising that such rulings legitimise violence (Vargas, 2024).

These rulings reinforce the cycle of mistrust: if going to court does not guarantee protection, the community chooses not to report; and by not reporting, the institutional idea that there are "no" cases of antigypsyism is reinforced. The literature on institutional racism reminds us that it is enough to apply seemingly neutral rules from positions steeped in prejudice to generate inequality (Mbote & Jiménez-Sánchez, 2020).

Some measures seek to reverse this dynamic: Law 15/2022, the reactivation of CEDRE, and the revision of judicial training criteria following the controversial León ruling (El Español, 2025). However, without clear protocols or mandatory training for judges and prosecutors, regulatory advances risk remaining a dead letter. Breaking this cycle requires educational jurisprudence that recognises antigypsyism as an autonomous and punishable category, as well as resources so that victims perceive justice not as a space for revictimisation, but for adequate protection.

#### *Pogroms and collective violence: ethnic punishment in democracy*

Collective violence against Roma families—neighbourhood attacks, house fires, expulsions—is not a relic of the past. From time to time, it reappears as a "local conflict" following a criminal act attributed to members of the community. The pattern repeats itself: rumour or trigger, neighbourhood mobilisation, violence against property and homes, forced displacement and delayed or insufficient institutional response. The disciplinary message is clear: collective punishment for identity. (Río Ruiz, 2003; Jiménez & Sánchez, 2010).

These episodes are part of a longer genealogy that associates "defence of the people" with the expulsion of Roma. The contemporary novelty is its articulation with digital

environments: audio recordings and messages in local chains calling for lynching or pointing out addresses. When the institutional response is not immediate and forceful—public condemnation, protection of victims, investigation and classification as a collective hate crime—impunity reinforces the possibility of repetition. (Andalusian Protocol against Antigypsyism, 2024).

Pogroms represent the extreme end of a continuum: from stigmatising jokes and headlines to attacks and displacement. They serve as a reminder that a democratic legal framework is not enough if there are no adequate guarantees on the ground and if political and media discourse fuels the climate that legitimises them (Cârstocea, 2020).

### Media, political and digital discourse

The public sphere continues to be a central vector for the reproduction of anti-Roma stereotypes. Although openly racist language has become less acceptable, systematic associations linking Roma identity with criminality, dependency or disorder persist. Various reports indicate that certain sensationalist television and entertainment formats reproduce narratives of marginality which, under the guise of "realism", consolidate imaginaries of insurmountable difference (ECRI, 2018; Fakali, 2021).

At the political level, the discourse of the far right—and, in certain municipalities, also of local actors from other parties—resorts to classic frameworks of stigmatisation: "subsidies", "lack of integration", "failure to comply with rules". These discourses legitimise increased police controls in Roma neighbourhoods and the adoption of selective measures which, although presented as neutral, have discriminatory effects.

The digital environment amplifies these dynamics. Hoaxes, hate messages and campaigns of stigmatisation circulate, associating the Roma people with crime or supposed privileges. At the same time, counter-discourses are emerging, promoted by Roma organisations and allies who challenge these narratives. They highlight achievements, debunk falsehoods, and document everyday discrimination. These initiatives are most effective when they combine communication, legal support and institutional alliances (FSG, 2022; European Commission, 2022).

### COVID-19: multiplier and mirror

The pandemic served as an amplifier of inequalities and a genuine "stress test" for the system. Economically, it paralysed subsistence activities essential to many Roma households—street vending, markets, fairs, material recovery—and left many families without income, with delayed or difficult access to aid due to formal requirements that



did not take into account the realities of the informal economy (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2020).

In education, the digital divide temporarily excluded thousands of students from the learning process, deepening inequalities that already existed due to segregated practices and low academic expectations (Ministry of Health, 2021). The inability to access devices, connectivity or adequate spaces to study led to cumulative learning losses.

In health, greater exposure—due to living and working conditions—was compounded by structural barriers to access. Added to this was stigma: various media reports and narratives portrayed Roma neighbourhoods as hotspots for infection, legitimising intensified police checks or selective lockdowns before general measures were adopted (Rodríguez, 2021). These dynamics fit in with the racial securitisation described at the European level, where sectors of the Roma population were presented as vectors of risk during the health crisis (Valero et al., 2021).

In terms of information, media coverage frequently reproduced the idea of "non-compliance" or "poor hygiene," ignoring the material conditions that made compliance with the measures difficult. At the institutional level, disproportionate actions were documented in stigmatised neighbourhoods, reinforcing the perception of selective surveillance (El Salto, 2020).

The community response, however, provided substantial lessons: neighbourhood support networks, social and health mediation initiatives, and collective articulation of demands. Where administrations involved Roma actors in the design of measures, communication, adherence, and results improved. A recent example is Galicia, where Roma health promoters were recruited to enhance intermediation between the health system and Roma communities (Europa Press, 2024b).

The overview of housing, education, employment, health, justice, collective violence, public discourse and the pandemic leads to an unequivocal conclusion: antigypsyism in today's Spain is structural and systemic. It operates through mutually reinforcing mechanisms: residential segregation reduces educational and employment opportunities; discrimination in employment limits access to housing and social rights; unequal treatment in health care deepens vulnerabilities; judicial practice, when it minimises the racist dimension, consolidates impunity; public discourse legitimises prejudices that are reflected in selective policies; and episodes of collective violence sanction ethnicity as a risk.



The thread connecting these areas is collective responsibility, that is, attributing the cause of their own situation to the Roma population — "they do not value school," "they do not want to work," "they do not take care of themselves," "they do not comply." This narrative shift obscures the structures that produce inequality and undermines public responsibility to combat it (Mbote & Jiménez-Sánchez, 2020).

There have been significant regulatory and programmatic advances—the legal recognition of antigypsyism, regional protocols, educational and employment support programmes, and health mediation experiences—but their impact will be limited if they do not translate into operational changes on a large scale and with high standards:

- Residential and school desegregation: social mixing plans, school mobility and transport, rebalancing of resources, rehabilitation with neighbourhood participation, and admission criteria that avoid the concentration of vulnerability. (Government of Spain, 2021; Andalusian Protocol against Antigypsyism, 2024).

- Anti-discriminatory labour policy: effective inspection and sanctions, positive action, monitoring of gaps and internal promotion, and explicit recognition of markers of indirect discrimination (surnames, addresses). (European Commission, 2022; CEDRE, 2023).

- Health with a focus on equity: mandatory training on bias, quality indicators with protected ethnic variables and stable community participation mechanisms; consolidation of health mediation. (ERTF, 2016; Europa Press, 2024).

- Guaranteed justice: protocols to identify and classify antigypsyism, training for legal practitioners, specialised units and the production of case law that sets standards. (Law 15/2022; Ministry of the Interior, 2019).

- Responsible public sphere: commitment by the media and administrations to combat sensationalism, support for counter-narrative campaigns and rapid response to hoaxes and hate speech; early intervention in response to calls for violence, including in digital environments. (ECRI, 2018; European Commission, 2022; FSG, 2022).

Only through these transformations will the legal recognition of antigypsyism cease to be a symbolic label and become an operational interpretative category capable of guiding concrete decisions. The aim is not to "integrate" the Roma community into structures that continue to reproduce inequality, but to transform those structures so that equality is substantive and not merely formal.

This diagnosis sets the stage for section 3.2, which is devoted to the legal and political framework. There, we will assess the consistency between the commitments of the State and European institutions and the policies actually implemented, identifying the turning points necessary to deactivate the system of antigypsyism described in this report.

### 3.2. Recent regulatory and political advances: from the Zero Law to the Pact against Antigypsyism

Recent years have seen a change of cycle in the way the Spanish state addresses antigypsyism. After centuries of institutional invisibility – and decades of public policies focused exclusively on 'social integration' – this racism has been named as a structural problem for the first time, and specific legal and political instruments have been designed to combat it. Three milestones mark this process: the approval of the Zero Law (2022), the National Strategy 2021–2030 and the State Pact against Antigypsyism.

The Comprehensive Law for Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination (Law 15/2022, of 12 July) responded to the need to harmonise the Spanish framework with European regulations, expressly prohibiting any form of discrimination and establishing an independent supervisory authority. However, the most significant advance came with the simultaneous approval of Organic Law 6/2022, which reformed the Criminal Code to include, for the first time, the term *antigypsyism* as a punishable motive in hate crimes. Since then, Articles 22.4 and 510 of the Criminal Code explicitly recognise that hatred against Roma constitutes a specific form of racism. The measure, approved by a broad consensus, symbolised—in the words of Beatriz Carrillo—that "antigypsyism will no longer go unpunished in this country" (Congress of Deputies, 2023b, p. 15). For Sara Giménez, naming antigypsyism in criminal law meant recognising "a history of hatred that has spanned centuries" (Congress of Deputies, 2023b, p. 7). It was not, therefore, a mere technical adjustment, but a political gesture with a reparative dimension that broke with decades of institutional omission.

In November 2021, the Government approved the National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of the Roma People 2021–2030, in compliance with the European framework. Its development was participatory: for a week, thematic round tables were organised with Romani entities and specialised organisations—Unión Romaní, Presencia Gitana, FAGIC, FAKALI, KAMIRA, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, among others—which formulated proposals on education, employment, health, housing, culture, gender and the fight against anti-Romani sentiment. The Strategy articulates three axes—social inclusion, equal treatment and participation—and sets measurable goals, such as halving the discrimination perceived by the Roma population by 2030. The political and conceptual novelty was the explicit recognition that without eradicating structural antigypsyism, there can be no real inclusion. However, the

document was received with caution: the organisations denounced the absence of a specific budget and the lack of a robust monitoring and evaluation system, which was reminiscent of previous experiences of plans that remained on paper (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2023).

The most ambitious step was taken in May 2021 with the creation of a parliamentary subcommittee for a State Pact against Antigypsyism and for Roma Inclusion. Between February and June 2022, six sessions were held with representatives from the Roma associative movement, academia, and institutional authorities. It was an unprecedented exercise in institutional listening. Pedro Aguilera (FAGIC) denounced the persistence of school segregation and demanded an urgent plan to combat educational failure among Roma (Congress of Deputies, 2022a). María del Carmen Filigrana (FAKALI) emphasised the importance of establishing a High Commissioner for the Roma People and noted that "without a budget, recognition remains on paper" (Congress of Deputies, 2022b). Juan de Dios Ramírez-Heredia called for the solemn repeal of anti-Roma royal decrees as an act of remembrance and reparation (Congress of Deputies, 2022a).

The final report of the Pact, approved in February 2023 and endorsed by the Plenary in March, included these proposals in 158 measures. Among the most notable are: the symbolic repeal of historical anti-Roma legislation; the creation of a Memory Commission; an educational plan against school segregation; the institutionalisation of the intersectional gender perspective; the establishment of a High Commissioner for the Roma People; transparency in the management of European funds; and the creation of a Permanent Monitoring Commission. The Parliament thus recognised, for the first time, that antigypsyism is a specific form of racism that requires structural responses (Congress of Deputies, 2023a).

However, the Pact also revealed its limitations. The Khetane Platform (2023) denounced the absence of a binding budget, warning that without resources "the pact is nothing more than a catalogue of good intentions". The Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2023) criticised the lack of deadlines and indicators in the National Strategy, which leaves implementation subject to the political will of the moment. In addition, there was still operational ambiguity regarding the 2021–2030 National Strategy: how are the two frameworks coordinated? Which measures belong to each one? The criticism thus reflects the tension between symbolic progress—the inclusion of antigypsyism on the parliamentary agenda—and the material debt that still remains.

In short, the cycle between 2021 and 2023 represented a genuine institutional and symbolic revolution: antigypsyism was included in the Criminal Code, in a national strategy and in a pact endorsed by Parliament. However, the challenge remains to transform formal recognition into real implementation. As Sara Giménez recalled,

"recognition is a first step, but the Romani people cannot live on recognition alone" (Congress of Deputies, 2023b, p. 7). The accurate measure of success will not be the passing of laws or agreements, but their ability to bring about concrete changes in classrooms, in the labour market, in public services and in the daily lives of Romani communities.

### 3.3. The Year of the Roma People (2025): between institutional visibility and social criticism

The Spanish Government's declaration of 2025 as the Year of the Roma People was presented as a gesture of high symbolic and historical value. On 7 January, the Council of Ministers approved an institutional declaration linking the anniversary to the 600th anniversary of the documented presence of the Roma people in Spain. The official text conceived it as an opportunity to highlight historical injustices, recognise cultural contributions and reaffirm the democratic commitment to equality and diversity (Ministry of Social Rights, 2025a). The narrative was based on the safe conduct granted in 1425 by Alfonso V of Aragon to Juan and Tomás de Egipto Menor, considered the first documented trace of the Roma presence on the peninsula.

The primary manifestation of this declaration was channelled through an official portal of the Ministry of Social Rights, which offers three basic elements: (a) the institutional declaration, (b) an information sheet on the history of the Roma people in Spain, and (c) a calendar of activities that brings together national, regional and local events (Ministry de Social Rights, 2025b). The historical fact sheet provides an informative summary of the history of the Romani people in the country, highlighting episodes of persecution and resistance alongside their significant cultural contributions.

The calendar of activities was presented as the backbone of the commemoration, but its design has significant limitations. As can be seen from a review, the list is not a specific programme created for the 600th anniversary, but rather a heterogeneous collection of events. It combines some ad hoc initiatives, such as conferences or exhibitions linked to the anniversary, with a considerable number of events held annually that are unrelated to the anniversary, including local fairs, cultural galas, and international days (e.g., International Roma Day, 8 April). This Strategy, although it increases visibility, dilutes the distinctive character of the commemoration and makes it difficult to measure the actual outputs that derive from the 600th anniversary. Criticism of the calendar, therefore, arises from an analytical review of the official outputs, which reveals the absence of clear criteria for distinguishing between what is new and what is routine.

The commemoration also featured the direct participation of the monarchy, which gave the event the highest institutional status. In April, King Felipe VI presided over a solemn ceremony at the Zarzuela Palace alongside representatives of Roma organisations, where he highlighted the "decisive contribution of the Roma people to Spanish culture" and the need to combat racism. Shortly afterwards, in a speech broadcast on Radio Exterior de España, the monarch again referred to the 600th anniversary as a moment of shared memory and reinforcement of democratic coexistence (RTVE, 2025).

However, a closer look at this speech reveals significant gaps. In his speech entitled "The history of the Roma in Spain is largely unknown," Felipe VI opened with words in Caló — "fetén" as a greeting and "camelarme" as a linguistic nod — and evoked the figure of Juan de Egipto Menor to symbolically link to the documented origins of the Roma people (RTVE, 2025). He acknowledged contemporary discrimination, alluding to the "rejection, discrimination and negative stereotypes" that Roma still suffer, and mentioned in general terms a "history of persecution and resistance" (RTVE, 2025).

However, after this initial gesture, the speech shifted towards abstract acknowledgements: the "social, cultural and linguistic footprint" of the Romani people and the need to make progress in housing, education and employment. He did not mention specific historical episodes, such as the Great Round-up of 1749, nor did he acknowledge the Crown's responsibility in enacting pragmatic and prohibitive measures that sustained the persecution. Nor did he offer an institutional apology. It should also be noted that the King was named patron of the Year of the Roma People, which reinforces the paradox: the institution historically involved in repression now occupies the position of symbolic guarantor without assuming responsibility or addressing grievances. Even in the linguistic sphere, he celebrated the Roma contribution to Spanish. However, he failed to mention the historical prohibition of Caló as an example of cultural violence exercised by those in power. The result is a discourse that conveys goodwill and cultural recognition, but avoids institutional self-criticism and shies away from commitments to reparation.

The gap between the institutional narrative and the expectations of civil society has been widely highlighted in public debate. In El Salto, Ismael Cortés (2025) argues that the 600th anniversary should serve not only to commemorate the documented arrival of the Roma on the peninsula, but also to "take a serious look at the history of marginalisation and institutionalised violence, persistent stigmatisation and normalised exclusion by the state". The anniversary risks becoming an empty gesture if it does not translate into public policies equipped with resources, indicators and evaluation mechanisms capable of transforming structural antigypsism.

Also in El Salto, Luis Moreno Campos (2025) interprets the commemoration as a symptom of the continuity of six centuries of denial of the other. According to his reading, the official narrative emphasises cultural recognition while overlooking the systematic nature of historical persecution. His article warns against the danger of whitewashing centuries of repression through a commemoration devoid of material measures, and insists on the need for a decolonial approach that places Romani memory at the centre as a tool for political transformation.

In an even more critical tone, the collective column published in Pikara Magazine (2025), signed by a group of Roma activists, academics and leaders, denounces the fact that the institutional declaration was adopted without a real participatory process or a specific budget allocation. The text argues that the anniversary has become trapped in a celebratory framework dominated by institutions, with no space for Roma voices to be heard. With bitter irony, it asks whether it might not rather be "the year of the payas and payos", alluding to how the state's prominence can displace those who should be the central subject of the commemoration. From a feminist and decolonial perspective, the article asserts that any commemoration without historical reparation and structural measures lacks legitimacy.

The balance that emerges from the combination of official results, institutional interventions and social criticism is ambivalent. On the one hand, the declaration and associated events have generated an unprecedented level of media and political visibility for the Romani people. The King's speech and media coverage have placed the 600th anniversary prominently on the public agenda.

On the other hand, the absence of a state plan with clear objectives, indicators and a separate budget drastically limits the scope of the commemoration. The dilution of the calendar into an amalgam of new and recurring events detracts from the specificity of the anniversary, making it difficult to evaluate. Furthermore, the lack of Roma participation in the governance of the process weakens the legitimacy of the commemoration, reinforcing the perception that it is an anniversary designed from above.

In short, the Year of the Roma People 2025 has served to open up a space for memory and symbolic recognition, but without a solid state roadmap, a separate budget and mechanisms for participation and evaluation, it runs the risk of becoming a commemorative mirage. As critics argue, the challenge is to ensure that the 600th anniversary does not end in a celebratory narrative, but rather serves as a starting point for an agenda of historical justice and structural policies that address persistent inequalities and the accumulated debts owed to the Romani people.

## 4. Roma action: political, cultural and community resistance

### 4.1. From silencing to mobilisation: the Roma Associative Movement (1970s–2000s)

Francoism left behind a prolonged period of political silence regarding the Romani people. For four decades, there were no legally recognised Romani associations, no visible leaders in the public sphere, and no possibility of articulating collective demands. The regime erased Romani people from official statistics, making them legally invisible, while reinforcing their hypervisibility by the police through specific regulations and surveillance files. The 1943 Civil Guard Regulations, for example, ordered "scrupulous surveillance of the Roma, checking their documents, clothing, and way of life and gathering all necessary information" (García Sanz, 2018, p. 129). The Romani community was caught between the denial of its existence as a minority and its stigmatisation as a permanent object of suspicion.

The democratic transition opened a crack in this silence. The arrival of Juan de Dios Ramírez-Heredia in Congress in 1977 as the first Romani MP represented a landmark moment. His election on the UCD ticket had enormous symbolic value: it showed that Romani people could represent themselves in institutions. However, it was not just a symbolic gesture. From his seat in Parliament, Ramírez-Heredia denounced the validity of Articles 4–6 of the 1943 Civil Guard Regulations and, in 1978, he promoted a non-binding motion that led to their elimination. This parliamentary victory became one of the first milestones of Roma political action in democracy and marked a turning point: for the first time, a Roma voice in Parliament had succeeded in removing a central piece of Franco's control apparatus.

A parallel episode, less well known but equally decisive, was the first legal demonstration by the Roma people in Spain, held in Madrid on 6 June 1978. Organised by the Roma Development Association, it brought together hundreds of street vendors to protest against municipal restrictions on street vending and denounce discrimination. The press described it as a historic event: "the first time that the Romani people publicly exercised their right to demonstrate in a democracy" (El País, 1978). RTVE would revisit this memory in 1992 and 2009, presenting it as the "first Romani strike" (RTVE, 2009). However, this episode has not been integrated into academic historiography, revealing the extent to which the Romani political memory of the transition remains under-documented. The absence of studies on this protest contrasts with its enormous symbolic value, as it marked the entry of the Romani people into the democratic repertoire of collective mobilisation.



From the late 1970s onwards, local associations emerged in different cities. In Madrid, Presencia Gitana established itself as a pioneering space that linked cultural activism and academic production, thanks to figures such as Antonio Gómez Alfaro.

The emergence of the first Roma women's associations, such as Romí (Granada, 1990) and the election of Pilar Clavería as president of the Asociación de Promoción Gitana de Zaragoza (Roma Promotion Association of Zaragoza), marked the beginning of a process of autonomous female organisation within the Roma movement (Esparcia Ortega, 2009, pp. 217–218). Roma women began to lead projects, form associations, and participate socially, driving change within the community and expanding the repertoire of collective action (Esparcia Ortega, 2009, pp. 220–221).

In the 1980s, the Unión Romaní was founded in 1986. Its objective was twofold: to articulate the collective at the state level and to become an interlocutor with the state and European institutions in the context of Spain's entry into the European Economic Community. In 1991, the creation of the Federation of Roma Associations of Catalonia (FAGIC) extended this model to the regional level, federating local associations and adopting a combative stance against discrimination. The associative map thus began to take shape as a multi-level network of local, regional and State organisations.

However, associationism was not without its tensions. As Ana Mirga warns, "state funding facilitated the creation of associations, but at the same time limited their political autonomy" (2018). Many associations were created in connection with welfare programmes run by local councils or religious organisations, which guaranteed resources but imposed frameworks for action defined from outside. This turned associations into managers of social projects, reinforcing dependencies rather than dismantling them. This paradox defined much of the movement: democracy opened up spaces for association, but under conditions of structural inequality.

The very design of the so-called "Spanish model" of policies towards the Roma population placed specific organisations in the privileged position of intermediaries between the State and the communities. Werner Boada shows how the State's policy towards the Kalé minority has been presented at the European level as a "model" of inclusion, combining a universal welfare system with specific programmes managed by subsidised entities, in particular the Fundación Secretariado Gitano, which directly administers a large part of the structural funds allocated to "inclusion projects" (Werner Boada, 2021, pp. 24–25). This framework reinforces a logic of projects and outsourcing of functions that conditions the scope of action of organisations and places "inclusion" within a highly supervised framework.



Associationism was also a response to everyday discrimination. The 1980s were marked by neighbourhood boycotts of the schooling of Romani children, as in Leganés and Vicálvaro. Pedro Aguilera recalls it this way: the transition was experienced "with enthusiasm, because spaces were opening up, but also with frustration, because the changes were slow and social hostility persisted" (RomArchive, 2019). In his words, "many associations emerged in direct response to racist attacks in schools and neighbourhoods" (RomArchive, 2019). Collective organisation, therefore, was a form of defence against exclusion.

The role of Romani women proved crucial. Pilar Clavería's career in Zaragoza is an early example of female leadership in Spain. In the 1990s, associations led exclusively by women emerged, such as Romí in Granada (1990) and Kamira in Córdoba (1999), which focused on girls' education, health and the fight against structural violence. As Mirga points out, Spanish Roma feminism "does not arise from academic theories, but from the concrete experience of women who face the double oppression of being Roma and women" (2018).

The creation of FAKALI (Federation of Roma Women's Associations) in the late 1990s and its consolidation in the 2000s marked a qualitative leap: for the first time, Roma women organised themselves as a collective actor with a national presence. As Mirga summarises, these organisations were created to demand "dignity, recognition and memory" (2018). Roma feminism transformed the associative movement, broadening its agenda and contesting political space both within and outside the community.

In terms of repertoires of action, there was tension between more institutionalised associations and others that were more militant, between those who prioritised dialogue with the authorities and those who conceived the struggle as a confrontation with everyday racism. Among the latter, experiences of labour and urban protest stand out. The aforementioned 1978 demonstration in Madrid paved the way. Years later, RTVE documented another mobilisation of street vendors, remembered as "the first Roma strike" (RTVE, 2009). Although academic historiography has not yet incorporated these episodes, their relevance is undeniable: they showed Roma exercising their right to protest and appropriating a repertoire that had previously been forbidden to them.

The movement also spread to Europe in the late 1990s. Spain participated in transnational networks of Roma associations, sharing experiences with organisations in Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria. Werner Boada shows how many of the interventions aimed at Kalé women were articulated through programmes outsourced to third sector entities, presented as "gender empowerment" but designed and implemented from institutional frameworks that maintained subtle forms of control and dependence: programmes designed to "activate employment" that devalued the economic activities

of Roma women and, at the same time, placed them in an infantilised and tutelaged position (Werner Boada, 2021, p. 209). European inclusion brought resources and opened up spaces for dialogue, but it did not deactivate the dynamics of dependency or the deficient frameworks with which Roma communities were often represented.

In short, between 1970 and 2000, the Roma people in Spain underwent a radical transformation: from forced silence under Franco to collective mobilisation in democracy. The first legal demonstration in 1978, the parliamentary presence of Ramírez-Heredia, the creation of local associations such as Presencia Gitana, the founding of the Unión Romaní and the FAGIC, and the emergence of Romani feminism through Romí, Kamira and FAKALI marked a turning point. As Mirga summarises, the goal was clear: "dignity, recognition and memory" (2018).

The Romani associative movement was born with limitations—economic dependence, lack of legal recognition as a minority, persistent racism—but it paved an irreversible path. The shift from silence to mobilisation marked a point of no return in the contemporary history of the Romani people in Spain.

#### 4.2. Institutional political participation: from Ramírez-Heredia to plural representation

The entry of Juan de Dios Ramírez-Heredia into Congress in 1977 marked the beginning of a new era for the Roma people in Spain. His election was not only a symbolic milestone: from his seat, he denounced the validity of articles of the 1943 Civil Guard Regulations that ordered the "scrupulous" surveillance of Roma and succeeded in having them repealed in 1978 (García Sanz, 2018, p. 129). That inaugural gesture showed that political representation could translate into concrete legislative changes and that Spanish democracy could not be consolidated. At the same time, it maintained rules that criminalised Roma for their mere existence. As he himself emphasised years later, this was a founding act for the Romani political movement (Cañete Quesada, 2020). Ramírez-Heredia's subsequent career, which saw him serve as a Member of the European Parliament between 1986 and 1999, marked the first time a Romani person was represented in the European Parliament, bringing the voice of the Romani people to a transnational space.

Forty years later, history reached a climax. After the 2019 elections, the Congress of Deputies had four Roma representatives simultaneously: Sara Giménez (Ciudadanos, Madrid), Beatriz Carrillo (PSOE, Seville), Ismael Cortés (En Comú Podem, Tarragona) and Juan José Cortés (PP, Huelva). Never before had Roma representation been so visible or so ideologically diverse. This plurality was crucial, as it allowed the Roma issue to be

introduced into different parliamentary groups and placed debates on the agenda regarding the Equal Treatment Act, the recognition of anti-Roma sentiment as a specific form of racism, and the need for historical memory and reparation policies (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2019). For the first time, the Roma people ceased to be merely the subject of debate and became active political actors within the Chamber.

The Roma presence has also spread to other institutional levels. In Catalonia, economist Susana Martínez Heredia (PSC) became the first Roma member of the Parliament in 2024, an event celebrated as a historic advance by the associative movement and documented in the Parliament's own institutional file (Instituto de Cultura Gitana, 2024). In Andalusia, activist Sandra Heredia Fernández serves as a councillor in the Seville City Council, defending proposals on housing, memory and the fight against discrimination (Plataforma Khetane, 2021). In the Madrid Assembly, Samuel Escudero León took a seat with the Más Madrid group, strengthening the institutional Roma presence at the regional level (Instituto de Cultura Gitana, 2021). At the municipal level, other notable councillors include Rocío Heredia Carmona in La Línea de la Concepción (Cádiz), who set a precedent in her town, and María Hernández Pérez in León, who has brought her experience as a feminist activist to the local institution.

*Why is it important to have Roma people in politics?*

Roma participation in politics matters because it transforms the agenda. First, it enables historical demands to be translated into legal reforms, as Ramírez-Heredia demonstrated in 1978 and as Giménez and Carrillo have continued to do with initiatives on equality and memory. Secondly, it guarantees a mechanism for institutional pressure and oversight: with Roma MPs in different parties, anti-Roma sentiment ceases to be invisible. It becomes a subject of debate, supervision and control. Moreover, thirdly, it has a symbolic and educational effect: the visibility of Roma people in public office — from Congress to local councils — breaks centuries of exclusion and provides role models for new generations.

The cycle that began in 2019 was undoubtedly an unprecedented milestone. However, after the 2023 elections, Congress once again found itself without any Romani MPs. This setback highlights the fragility of institutional representation and its dependence on electoral circumstances. Meanwhile, Romani representation in local councils and regional parliaments is showing an upward trend, albeit an insufficient one. The paradox is evident: the Roma people have shown that they can reach the highest institutions of the State, but this achievement is not yet secure over time. The challenge remains to build stable, cross-cutting and lasting political representation capable of keeping the rights, memory and demands of the Roma people on the democratic agenda.

### 4.3. Roma contributions to Spain: from invisibility to self-creation

The contributions of the Romani people to Spain's culture, economy, and social life have been fundamental. However, they have been systematically denied, stigmatised, or appropriated by the dominant discourse. Reconstructing this history means recognising that the Romani presence has not been marginal, but rather constitutive of cultural, commercial and artistic practices that form part of the common heritage. This section addresses three central dimensions: language, trade and fairs, and artistic expressions, with a special focus on flamenco and contemporary creation.

#### Language and persecution: from the prohibition of Caló to its revitalisation

Caló, a mixed variety that combines Romani vocabulary and Castilian structure, was historically the subject of persecution. Various pragmatic measures prohibited it and reduced it to the status of "criminal jargon", denying its character as a language in its own right and using it as an instrument of criminalisation (Gamella, Fernández & Adiego, 2015). This linguistic denial is part of the broader framework of anti-Roma legal provisions, which, from the 16th century until well into the 20th century, sought to control, fragment and assimilate the Roma population (Periáñez-Bolaño, 2020).

Despite this repression, Caló survived as an intimate and familiar language, transmitted orally in many homes through expressions, verbal turns of phrase and everyday vocabulary. As documented by Gamella et al. (2015), although knowledge of the language is fragmentary and uneven, it constitutes a linguistic memory that is resistant to oblivion. Currently, revitalisation projects are being developed by universities (such as the Autonomous University of Madrid), Romani associations and foundations such as Punjab, which seek to compile vocabulary, promote its teaching and restore legitimacy to the language. The rescue of Caló is not only a cultural effort, but also a political act of reparation and dignification.

#### Trade and fairs: from marginalisation to cultural centrality

Historically, the exclusion of Roma from guilds through royal decrees led them towards itinerant trades, such as cattle dealing, street vending, and craftsmanship (Mena Cabezas, 2006). Although often described as marginal activities, these were in fact fundamental economic practices that sustained local markets and shaped forms of organisation based on trust and reciprocity.

A paradigmatic case is the Seville Fair, whose origins lie in the buying and selling of livestock. The so-called *pena del sello*, which punished unlicensed trade, was suspended at fairs, allowing Roma to find a space for integration there (Carmona, 2019). After the transactions, families would prolong the day with music and dancing, laying the foundations for the festive character that has characterised the fair to this day. According to the Unión del Pueblo Romaní (2017), the April Fair is "a living symbol of Roma culture, of romipen".

The Romani contribution is also evident in aesthetics: the flamenco dress originated from the clothing worn by Romani women at livestock fairs, later transformed into a national icon and officially recognised in 1929 on the occasion of the Ibero-American Exposition in Seville (Seville City Council, 2023). Various popular and informative chronicles emphasise that it was Roma women who established this style of dress, which was later appropriated by mainstream society (Tu Guía de Sevilla, 2024; El Flamenco en Sevilla, 2024).

This prominence is not limited to Seville. Historical chronicles document the significance of Roma participation at fairs such as the Zafra Fair or the "Feria Chica" in Mérida, also known as the "Roma fair" (Carmona, 2019). These sources show that the fair, rather than being a simple market, was a space where Roma forged economic and cultural relationships that are still alive today in street vending, a direct heir to those practices (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2007).

#### Art, flamenco and literature: from appropriation to a voice of their own

Roma art has been the subject of external representation and cultural appropriation. From Cervantes' *La gitanilla* to 19th-century costumbrista paintings and Francoist cinema, the Roma figure has been presented as exotic or marginal (Borja & Borja, 2019). At the same time, some authors recognised their symbolic density. Federico García Lorca, in his *Romancero gitano* (1928), turned the Roma into a poetic metaphor for freedom and tragedy, albeit from a mythical perspective (García Lorca, 2002).

Flamenco is the most influential and yet most denied cultural contribution. Roma families have passed down fundamental styles, such as soleá, tangos, and bulería, for generations, but their authorship has been erased under the label of "universal Andalusian art" (Periáñez-Bolaño, 2020). During the Franco regime, flamenco was instrumentalised as part of the "Spain brand" and exploited for tourism, while the discrimination suffered by its performers was rendered invisible. A similar phenomenon occurred with the Roma costume, which was appropriated as a national icon after its Roma origins in fairground settings (Mena Cabezas, 2006).

However, flamenco has also been a space for protest. The lyrics conveyed persecution, poverty and resistance, becoming a collective oral memory. Among the contemporary singers who have made their voices an instrument of protest, Camarón de la Isla and Juan Peña, known as "El Lebrijano," stand out. Camarón, in his song "Soy Gitano" (1989), transformed ethnic belonging into a public affirmation in the face of stigma, presenting lyrics that proudly proclaimed his Romani identity (Gamboa & Núñez, 2003). For his part, El Lebrijano elevated this dimension to a historical level with the album *Persecución* (1976), conceived in collaboration with the poet Félix Grande. In this album, he alternates recitations and songs to narrate the royal decrees, legal repression, and historical suffering of the Romani people (Grande & Peña, 1976).

Alongside these repertoires of protest, other performers such as La Niña de los Peines, Antonio Mairena, Manzanita and the duo Lole y Manuel developed a more lyrical and traditional flamenco, addressing love, family sorrows, spirituality and everyday life, showing that Roma singing not only narrated persecution, but also the richness of everyday experience.

Today, we are witnessing an explosion of contemporary Roma creators who narrate from their own voice. The writer Noelia Cortés, with *La higuera de las gitanas* (The Roma Women's Fig Tree), reflects on antigypsyism, literature and Romani feminism (Cortés, 2021). In cinema, Pilar Távora has recovered the memory of the Great Round-up of 1749, and her work has been studied as an example of Romani resistance cinema (Moya Jorge, 2022). Documentary filmmaker about Carmen Fernández Molina focuses her work on the voices of Romani women (*Carmen, sin miedo a la libertad*, 2023), while in the visual arts, Lita Cabellut has achieved international recognition by placing Romani identity at the centre of her artistic production (El País, 2022).

These contributions demonstrate that the Romani people have been and continue to be protagonists of Spanish culture. From being the object of external representation, Romani people have become subjects who narrate, create and redefine their own history.

#### 4.4. Invisible figures

The history of the Romani people in Spain cannot be understood solely in terms of victimisation or marginalisation. However, also in terms of the many forms of resistance they displayed in the face of attempts at annihilation, authoritarian regimes and cultural narratives that sought to silence them. However, these acts of resistance have been systematically ignored in the official narrative, which has favoured accounts in which Romani people barely appear as political or cultural subjects.

This section recovers three paradigmatic examples. First, the Roma women of the Great Round-up of 1749, who not only endured captivity, but also confronted what can be considered the first European extermination project, resisting with escapes, pleas and bureaucratic disobedience that forced the Bourbon power to react against them. Secondly, Helios Gómez and Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez, "Marianet", whose careers in communism and anarcho-syndicalism placed them at the forefront of the anti-fascist struggle in the Civil War and under Franco's dictatorship, although official memory has silenced them. Finally, the play "Camelamos Naquerar" (1976), created by José Heredia Maya and Mario Maya, opened up an unprecedented cultural and political space for Roma people to "break their silence" and denounce centuries of persecution.

Making these figures visible means challenging the dominant narrative and recognising that, in the face of exclusion and violence, the Romani people have produced individuals and expressions that should occupy a central place in democratic memory and in the history of resistance in Spain.

#### 4.4.1. Roma women during the Great Round-up (1749): guardians of life, strategies for freedom

The Great Round-up of 1749 was a project of mass repression unprecedented in modern Europe. As documented by Gómez Alfaro (1993), its purpose was to carry out a "general imprisonment of Roma" aimed at preventing the social and cultural regeneration of the Roma people through the total separation of men, women and children. The plan envisioned that males over the age of seven who were deemed valid would be sent to arsenals such as Cartagena or La Carraca. At the same time, women, girls, and young children would be confined in specific depots scattered throughout the kingdoms of Valencia and Murcia.

In this arrangement, the castle of Dénia was designated as one of the leading centres of female imprisonment, intended to receive all women and children under the age of seven from both kingdoms (Martínez, 2021, pp. 97–100). The first contingent arrived on 15 August 1749 and, just three weeks later, the number of people detained had risen to 928, well above initial forecasts, creating a critical situation of overcrowding, material deprivation and high morbidity and mortality (Martínez, 2021, pp. 98–101). Preserved parish records show the deaths of five women and eighteen minors in the first months of confinement as a result of epidemics of "fever" and smallpox, aggravated by the unsanitary conditions of the enclosure (Martínez, 2021, p. 100).

The displacement of women and children to Dénia, Gandía, Oliva or the city of Valencia was part of a strategy of control and territorial dispersion designed to prevent escapes



and facilitate internal discipline. However, sources show that these women did not simply passively endure their confinement. As Martínez (2018, cited in Martínez, 2021) points out, the experience of the Round-up was a journey of desolation, misery, hunger, disease, and death, but also one of hope, as manifested in their rebellion. From the outset, there were escapes, negotiations with local authorities, pleas and memorials addressed to magistrates and courts in defence of their relatives, as well as multiple attempts to communicate with those who had been taken to the arsenals. The pressure they exerted even prompted the Council of Castile to issue instructions to prevent them from interceding in the lawsuits of their husbands or sons, a prohibition that, as Martínez explains, was not part of the original design of the operation, but rather a reaction to the insistence and effectiveness of these actions (Martínez, 2018, cited in Martínez, 2021, pp. 27–36).

The precarious nature of the confinement and the repeated complaints of the Captain General of the Kingdom of Valencia finally led to a reconsideration of the measure. The Royal Order of 28 November 1749 ordered the release of those who demonstrated "good behaviour" according to the pragmatic rules, and the transfer of the rest to new detention centres in Gandía, Oliva and Valencia (Martínez, 2021, pp. 103–107). In the capital, where a large number of women were concentrated—573 in March 1751—an attempt was made to employ them in spinning hemp for the Cartagena canvas factory; however, the project did not materialise due to technical infeasibility (Martínez, 2021, pp. 108–109).

The imprisoned women became central figures in the survival of the Roma community during their confinement. They were entrusted with the daily care of hundreds of children in extreme conditions: epidemics, hunger, forced stripping after arrest, deprivation of resources and separation from their adult relatives. The documentation from the castle of Dénia—preserved and systematised in the lists reconstructed by Martínez (2015, 2021)—provides a detailed record of these realities and evidence of the massive and structural nature of the repressive operation.

Despite the harshness of the measures, many women persisted in employing various strategies of resistance, including escape attempts, memorials, petitions for freedom, acts of insubordination or disobedience, and collective care mechanisms. Their actions, although silenced in traditional historiography, were decisive. They maintained—at enormous cost—family and community cohesion, and through insistent pleas, fuelled the chain of decisions that would lead to the general pardon of 1765. As the sources show, these women not only survived the project of social annihilation, but also kept community organisation alive and defended, from fortresses, houses of mercy and hospitals, the continuity of their people in the face of one of the most violent episodes of European antigypsism.



#### 4.4.2. Fighters against the dictatorship: Helios Gómez and Marianet

The public memory of the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship has tended to favour official accounts that have overshadowed numerous Romani actors linked to the anti-fascist resistance. As Demetrio Gómez (2013) points out, the beatification of Ceferino Giménez Maya by John Paul II—in a context of "express beatifications" aimed at consolidating a national-Catholic imaginary—has contributed to establishing as the only Romani reference point of the period a figure who fits into a conservative framework, rendering invisible trajectories linked to the labour and revolutionary struggle (p. 13).

One of these was Helios Gómez (1905–1956), painter, poet and communist activist. His graphic work—particularly his posters from the 1930s—became an instrument of mobilisation in defence of the Republic. After the defeat, he was imprisoned several times. During a stay in Barcelona's Modelo prison, he painted the Roma Chapel (1950–1952), a series of murals that combined religious iconography with elements of Roma culture. Hidden under layers of paint since 1998, the Generalitat de Catalunya announced its restoration in 2025 and declared it part of the heritage of Roma memory and the anti-Franco struggle, emphasising that it "restores the dignity of those whom Francoism silenced" (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2025). His figure embodies art, commitment, and militancy, making his work a unique testimony to cultural anti-fascism.

Another overlooked figure is Mariano Rodríguez Vázquez, "Marianet" (1908–1939). A bricklayer of humble origins, he was introduced to libertarian ideas in prison. He went on to become a prominent member of the CNT, eventually serving as secretary general from 1936 to 1939. During July 1936, he participated in the creation of the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias in Catalonia, the body that coordinated the immediate response to the military coup. As Demetrio Gómez (2013) recalls, "it was at this point that 'Marianet' entered the scene with full force" (p. 15). His leadership was characterised by the search for a balance between the continuity of the social revolution and the need to win the war against fascism, in a context marked by internal tensions and strategic dilemmas within anarcho-syndicalism. In the words of Manuel Martínez (2021), Marianet was literally "a Roma at the head of the CNT" (p. 111), and he played a key role in preserving the organisation's archives, ensuring their transfer into exile in 1939 to prevent their destruction by Franco's regime. He died that same year in tragic circumstances, drowned in France, which cut short a political career marked by war, exile and repression. The figures of Helios Gómez and Marianet allow us to understand that the anti-fascist resistance in Spain was more diverse than official memory has conveyed. Recognising them does not mean constructing a closed identity narrative,

but rather broadening the horizon of democratic history and integrating voices and trajectories that, although silenced, form an inseparable part of the struggle against fascism.

#### 4.4.3. *Camelamos Naquerar* (1976): When the Roma broke their silence

The premiere of **Camelamos Naquerar** in Granada in February 1976, a few months after Franco's death, was a cultural and political event of enormous significance. The work—created by **José Heredia Maya**, poet, playwright and one of the first university-educated Roma in Spain, and by the dancer **Mario Maya**, a central figure in Andalusian Roma dance—was received as an innovative flamenco show that transcended aesthetic boundaries to become a public intervention on the historical persecution of the Roma people.

As Guijarro (1976) documents, *Camelamos Naquerar* was a "product so genuinely Roma, so authentically created by Roma from Granada" (p. 28), which gave it a unique character in the theatrical landscape of the time. The play was constructed around an entirely Romani cast, including artists such as Concha Vargas, Antonio Cuevas, "El Piki", Gómez de Jerez, Paco Cortés and Pedro Escalona. The production combined flamenco singing, dancing and guitar playing with dramatic readings of royal decrees and institutional provisions that had historically legitimised the oppression of Roma. These readings—performed "with the intonation of the best fascist era" (Guijarro, 1976, p. 28)—included texts signed by Philip IV in 1633 and Philip V in the 18th century, as well as police regulations from 1942 that were still in force at the time of the performance (pp. 28–29).

The play thus emphasised the historical continuity of antigypsyism: from the orders authorising "the hunting of Roma by iron and fire" (Guijarro, 1976, p. 28) to the contemporary mechanisms of police control that required "scrupulous surveillance of Roma, checking their particular characteristics and ascertaining the purpose of their travels" (p. 29). This juxtaposition turned the performance into an act of political memory, far removed from the folkloric stereotypes or exoticism with which the Roma community had historically been represented.

Guijarro highlighted the expressive power of the production, describing it as "a spectacle unlike any other in terms of its scope of memory" and as a "radically concise expression" of the suffering and marginalisation accumulated over centuries (1976, p. 28). A particularly significant passage occurs when, after reading one of the pragmatic texts, the singers attempt to break into song but only manage to utter "clumsy ay", a

poignant metaphor for the violence that silences and the difficulty of articulating one's own history.

The title—*Camelamos Naquerar*, 'we want to speak' in Caló—summarised the political intent of the work. For Guijarro (1976), the show represented 'the success of a people who for centuries have suffered cruel oppression breaking out to speak with their purest words' (p. 29). In a country transitioning to democracy under a tacit pact of silence about multiple past acts of violence, the production affirmed the right of Roma people to narrate their historical experience in the first person.

The cultural impact was immediate. In Granada, Madrid and Zaragoza, the play was sold out, receiving praise from critics. Guijarro emphasised that its success was not due to technical prowess, but instead to the "honesty of the purest popular and Romani roots" (1976, p. 29), which enabled it to transform the university stage into a space for denunciation and vindication. Through flamenco, poetry and historical documents, *Camelamos Naquerar* articulated a long-silenced collective memory.

Its legacy remains fundamental. At the height of the transition, the work opened up a space for autonomous and politicised Roma expression, anticipating contemporary debates on memory, racism and self-representation. In a context in which Roma had been subject to folklorisation or stigmatisation, *Camelamos Naquerar* marked a turning point: for the first time, a Roma group spoke out about its own history and publicly denounced the secular persecution of its people.

## 5. Conclusions

The historical and contemporary overview presented in this report confirms that antigypsyism in Spain has not been a succession of isolated episodes, but rather a long-standing structural ideology. From the Pragmatic Decree of 1499 to the practices of segregation and school n democracy, the mechanisms of persecution have operated under a logic of continuity: criminalising Roma ways of life, restricting mobility and trades, erasing language and culture, and producing a regime of permanent inequality. The Great Round-up of 1749 is the most extreme example of this project of social extermination. However, it is not the only one: Francoism, with its police regulations and segregated rehousing policies, prolonged repression under new guises. Even democracy, despite eliminating explicitly discriminatory provisions, maintained structures of exclusion that reveal the persistence of institutional racism.

Analysis of contemporary manifestations shows that this legacy remains in force. Residential segregation, school concentration, job insecurity, the health gap and under-reporting to the justice system are not simply deficits in public policy, but expressions of a structural framework that places the Romani people on the margins of citizenship. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for these inequalities and as a mirror of structural racism, which, in times of crisis, reappears with force under the guise of security or public health discourse.

The report also confirms that the Roma people have not only been the object of repression, but also active subjects of resistance. From the women who interceded in court during the Great Round-up to the mobilisation of associations during the transition, through to Roma feminism, parliamentary participation and cultural expressions—from protest flamenco to contemporary literature and cinema—the community has deployed strategies of survival, confrontation and creation that form an inseparable part of Spanish democratic history. This resistance belies the narrative of passivity and forces us to recognise Romani agency as a driver of social and cultural change.

Recent advances—the inclusion of the term 'antigypsyism' in the Penal Code, Law 15/2022, the National Strategy 2021–2030, and the State Pact against Antigypsyism—mark a turning point. For the first time, the Spanish State officially recognises this racism as a specific category and makes commitments to combat it. The commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the arrival of the Roma people in Spain has reinforced this visibility. However, these advances coexist with notable limitations: a lack of budget, absence of compliance indicators, weak evaluation mechanisms, and a gap between

symbolic recognition and fundamental transformation in neighbourhoods, schools, hospitals, and courts.

Four main conclusions can be drawn from this diagnosis:

- Historical continuity of antigypsyism: the persecution of the Roma people cannot be understood as an anomaly or mistake of the past, but as an integral part of the modern State and Spanish democracy, which have sustained mechanisms of exclusion for six centuries.
- Roma resistance and creativity: in the face of every project of assimilation or extermination, the Roma community has deployed various forms of resistance, from political action and associationism to cultural production. Recognising these trajectories is essential to challenging the narrative that reduces the Roma people to objects of victimisation.
- Insufficient recognition of individual rights: although the law prohibits antigypsyism, judicial practice reveals serious shortcomings. Underreporting, the lack of final judgments, and the reproduction of stereotypes in court rulings show that the guarantee of defence and the enjoyment of individual rights of Roma people remains unsecured. The right to equality and adequate judicial protection remains an unfulfilled promise.
- Collective rights and recognition as a national minority: the recognition of the Roma people cannot be limited to the cultural or symbolic sphere. It requires stable mechanisms of political representation, adequate protection of Roma cultural heritage and real participation in the design of public policies. Without these collective rights, memory runs the risk of being instrumentalised, and the inclusion of the remaining population is limited to the management of inequalities. Added to this is a fundamental deficit: unlike other peoples in Europe, Roma in Spain are not recognised as a national minority, which limits legal protection, guaranteed representation and the full exercise of their collective rights. This institutional invisibility perpetuates structural inequality and constitutes one of the main remaining democratic deficits.

The immediate challenge is to transform recognition into substantive equality. This involves implementing residential and school desegregation plans, ensuring effective judicial protocols against antigypsyism, consolidating mechanisms for Roma participation in decision-making, recognising the Roma people as a national minority, and protecting their cultural heritage as an integral part of shared history.

The JEKHIPE project reminds us that memory is neither neutral nor spontaneous: it is a field of dispute. Accepting Roma memory in all its complexity—persecution, resistance, and contribution—is a necessary condition for advancing toward a democracy that fulfils its promise of equality and justice. Only when the individual rights of Roma people and the collective rights of the Roma community—including their recognition as a national minority—are fully respected can we speak of real reparation and a shared future based on dignity, recognition, and freedom.

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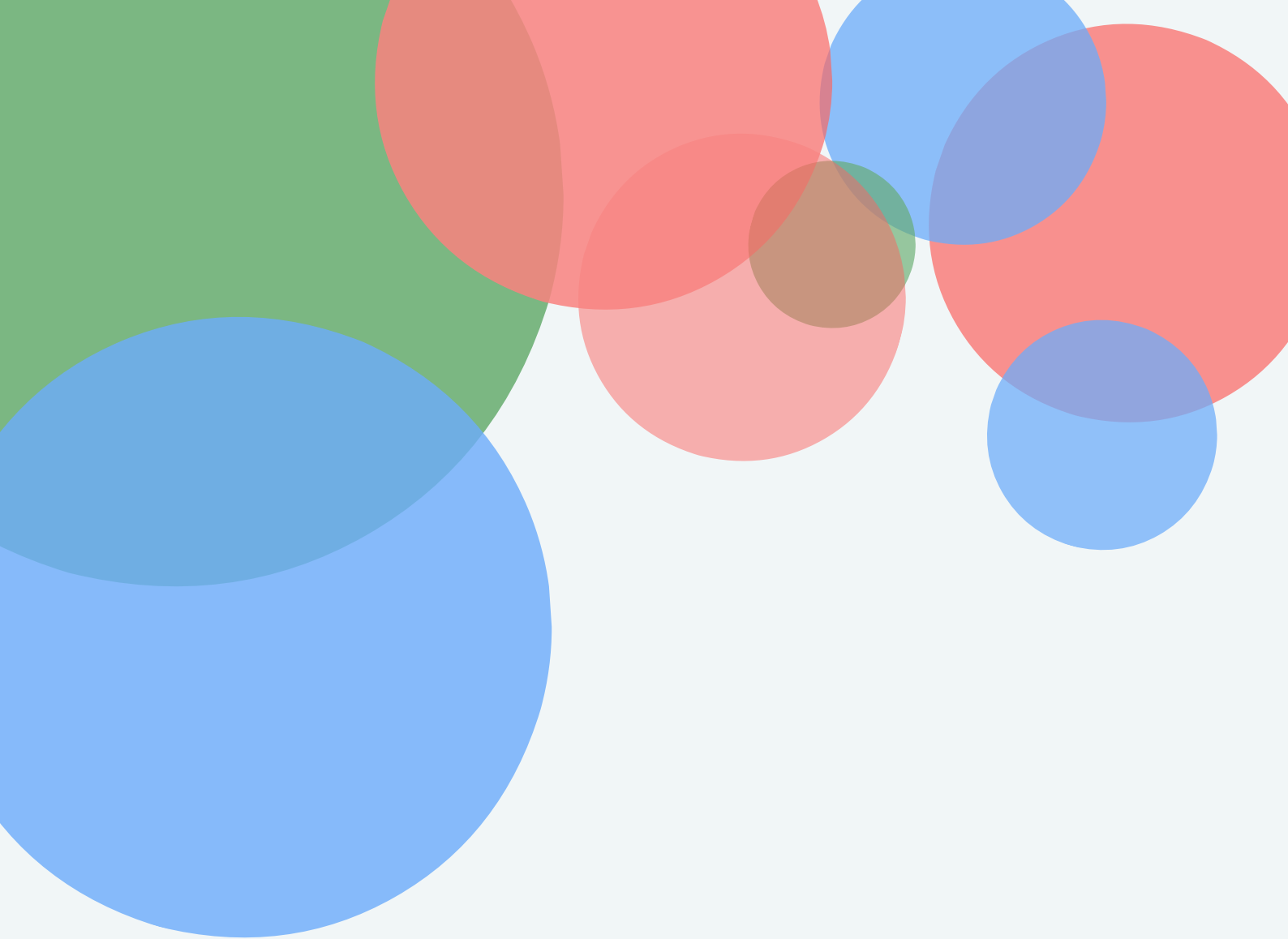
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**JEKHIPE**

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