

Everyday Antigypsyism and Structural Discrimination: How the Normalisation of Racism Shapes Social Exclusion

Antigitanismo cotidiano y discriminación estructural: cómo la normalización del racismo condiciona la exclusión social

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In this article, we focus on antigypsyism to inquire how structural racism operates and is reproduced through everyday interaction, being normalised both by Roma and non-Roma people. We link the notion of structural racism to another central concept in migration and diversity studies that is often treated separately, namely the contested idea of “integration.” Social exclusion is, in our framework, largely understood as a consequence of structural racism. We apply this conceptual framework to analyse the deeply rooted, normalised racism and discrimination that Gitanos (Spanish Roma) continuously face in Spain, and that we have denominated “everyday antigypsyism.” We use ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2017-2024, including 185 in-depth interviews, to explore how rejection and discrimination shape the exclusion of Gitanos from “mainstream society,” impeding their “integration,” and normalising the racialised inequalities between Roma and non-Roma Spanish citizens.



Abstract

En este artículo nos centramos en el antigitanismo para indagar cómo opera y se reproduce el racismo estructural a través de la interacción cotidiana, siendo normalizado tanto por las personas gitanas como por las no gitanas. Vinculamos la noción de racismo estructural a otro concepto central en los estudios migratorios que a menudo se trata por separado: la controvertida idea de “integración”. En nuestro marco conceptual, la exclusión social se entiende en gran medida como una consecuencia del racismo estructural. Aplicamos este marco para analizar el racismo y la discriminación profundamente arraigados y normalizados que enfrentan continuamente las personas gitanas en España, y que hemos denominado antigitanismo cotidiano. Utilizamos el trabajo de campo etnográfico realizado entre 2017 y 2024, incluidas 185 entrevistas en profun-

didad, para explorar cómo el rechazo y la discriminación condicionan la exclusión y la normalización de las desigualdades racializadas entre los ciudadanos españoles gitanos y no gitanos.

Antigypsyism; structural discrimination; everyday racism; racialisation; social exclusion

Antigitanismo; discriminación estructural; racismo cotidiano; racialización; exclusión social



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1. Introduction

In May 2020 in the village of Rociana del Condado (Huelva), a Gitano¹ man who was on his way with his son to pick some broad beans was shot in the face with a hunting rifle by a landowner and died. In July the same year, in Peal de Becerro (Jaén) there was an anti-Gitano pogrom with group attacks on the Gitano population after the murder of a 27-years-old man supposedly by a Gitano person. In this occasion, a large group of rioters went to the houses where Gitano families lived shouting “murderers”, overturned some of their vehicles and burned down one of their houses. In August 2024, in Burgos, a man armed with an axe attacked a Gitano family with several children sitting at a table in a park.

These are only a few examples of violent racist attacks and hate crimes committed against Gitano people in Spain during the last few years. Several reports also indicate that anti-Gitano hatred is increasingly spreading on social networks and that racist biases are still present in the media (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2022; Romani Pativ, 2021). However, antigypsyism also takes a much subtler and less visible daily form, so internalised in Spanish society that it is normalised to a great extent. Growing up in Spain being identified as a Gitano means being forced from an early age to deal with prejudice, discrimination, negative expectations and often overt rejection from the rest of society. Formally, Spanish Gitanos nowadays have equal rights to those of any other Spanish citizens, but they are much more affected by social exclusion in all its dimensions, as well as by educational failure, than non-Gitano citizens and any migrant groups.

In the specific context of this study, the autonomous Spanish region of Catalonia, Gitano people arguably suffer more from social exclusion and discrimination than any other ethnic group. Life expectancy is at least 10 years lower; unemployment among Gitanos is three times higher than among non-Gitanos. Inequalities are deep also in terms of housing conditions, poverty, and health. Gitano youth more than double the (indeed high) school failure rate of migrant children with an alarming 65% not completing compulsory education (Fundación

¹ The Spanish term *Gitano* literally means Gypsy, and is widely used both by Spanish Roma and non-Roma people. While it is arguably less pejorative than the equivalent words in other languages, also in Spain it is a loaded term that often has negative connotations when used by non-Roma to generalize about “Gitano” ways of being and acting. Yet, we have chosen to use this term since it is the one that Spanish Roma, the Gitanos, use to refer to themselves.

Secretariado Gitano, 2022, 2018; Cortés, 2021). Nevertheless, there is still a lack of research on the links between their structural disadvantage and social exclusion, and systematic racism and discrimination against Gitano people in Spain. In this context, we consider it necessary to conceptually link the study of structural racism and discrimination of Gitanos, as a national minoritised group, with the structural racism affecting people with a migrant background. There are numerous similarities regarding the ways in which discrimination is experienced and its consequences for wellbeing, opportunities and “integration” for both Gitanos and migrants/post-migrants² (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a).

We conceive of everyday antigypsyism as inherent in the social relations between Gitano and non-Gitano “mainstream” society³. Studying racism and discrimination toward Gitano people in Spain allows us to understand how racialisation and structural racism operate, both in intersection with other drivers of inequality such as class and socioeconomic level, gender, or migrant status, and alone. For Gitano people, the rejection that they often suffer in their relationships with the non-Gitano majority produces limitations that prevent them from feeling comfortable in various areas of society, which in turn reinforces their own exclusion and lack of identification with the mainstream society and its institutions. At the same time, these reactions are interpreted by the non-Gitano majority as a confirmation of their previous prejudices—“Gitano people do not want to integrate”, for example—further reinforcing anti-Gitano attitudes and behaviours and, therefore, aggravating their social exclusion.

Comparably subtle forms of discrimination are sometimes defined as “micro-racism” or racial micro-aggressions (Fleras, 2016; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2014). Nevertheless, the accumulation of discriminatory experiences throughout many Gitano people’s lifetime means that the consequences are not limited to the micro level, but contribute to shape and reproduce patterns of structural racism and inequalities at the macro level. The normalisation of antigypsyism by both non-Gitano and Gitano people directly affects Gitano children and youth’s identity-making and persists throughout the life course (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2024). Antigypsyist attitudes translate into social limitations and discriminatory treatment in a wide range of everyday situations: in interaction with other people in public spaces; at school; at the workplace or when applying for jobs; in the contacts with public institutions such as the social services, tax authorities, health-care institutions, or the police, among others. To understand how individual behaviours acquire the form of patterns and compose/reproduce structures

2 In the local context of Catalonia/Barcelona, migrants and Gitanos are increasingly approached in the same (anti-racist) framework also by public authorities, such as the Barcelona City Council (Barcelona Antiracista, 2025). We are dealing here with the forms of rejection that affect people based on racialisation, regardless of their legal status and their citizenship. Moreover, the category of migrant or immigrant is complex in itself, in practice often referring to the “second generation” or to nationalized foreigners who have Spanish citizenship, for instance. The post-migrants of today are the ethnic minorities of tomorrow, and the risk is that the structural racism they face at present persists over the generations, as happened with the Spanish Roma population.

3 In this article we use the terms “non-Gitano”, “mainstream”, “majority”, or “white” society as synonyms to refer to the part of the society that produce and reproduce racialised categories and more or less conscious and intentional acts of antigypsyism. The dichotomy suggested between the Gitano and non-Gitano, white, mainstream population is not applied to reproduce cultural essentialism or the non-recognition of in-group diversity and mixtivity among Spanish Gitanos. Instead, it is related to the purpose of the article, namely to analyse how structural racism is upheld by the boundary-making and normalisation of prejudices against Gitanos by the “mainstream” (non-Gitano) society. We consider this dichotomy between who “racialises” and who is racialised as essential for our analytical purposes.

is essential for the interpretation of racism and discrimination as structural phenomena in the broadest possible sense: as social systems encompassing both institutional norms and procedures, and the attitudes, practices and (more or less unconscious) biases of the non-Gitano majority society. By analysing how discrimination operates at the micro level, we can improve our understanding of how structures are reproduced and reinforced and potentially also how they can be transformed.

The present study is guided by the following research question:

How is the normalisation of racism expressed in the everyday interaction between Spanish Gitano and non-Gitano women and men, and how does it contribute to reproducing their social exclusion?

The empirical analysis is based on data collected in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, from January 2017 to June 2024. We conducted research on the racism and discrimination affecting Gitano people with the intention of expanding our knowledge about how structural racism and discrimination operate and what damage they cause both at the personal and societal level. From a social and political point of view, our ambition is that this knowledge will be useful to enhance anti-racist awareness and measures.

In the next session, we first present the theoretical framework, where we define our conceptualisation of “everyday antigypsyism” and antigypsyism as a particular—yet typical— form of racism. Furthermore, we discuss racialisation and the reproduction of structural racism, as well as how we conceive of intersectionality in our studies. Then we present our methodology, concentrating on Participatory Action Research (PAR) as a useful tool to study injustice with the purpose of promoting social transformation. Finally, we discuss the results of our analysis on Gitano people’s experiences of everyday antigypsyism and the reproduction of social boundaries by non-Gitanos.

2. Context: The history and present of antigypsyism in Spain

The Spanish Gitano population has a documented history as a (non-recognised) national minority since they first appeared in Spain in the 15th century (Martín Sánchez, 2018), and has suffered from oppression and marginalization throughout the centuries. In Spain, the semantisation of the Gitano issue has been built through different means, legislation being one of the most powerful. Laws and other legal instruments specifically targeted Gitano people from 1499 until 1978, when the last Francoist law of “the lazy and criminal” (*Ley de vagos y maleantes*) targeting Gitanos was repealed. Through legislation, the stereotyping of Gitano people has been moulded, originating all the archetypes and prejudices that have shaped and still deeply impact the general imagery of Gitano people in the country. Gitano people are repeatedly cast as thieves, dishonest, untrustworthy, dirty, violent and primitive people, among other racist stereotypes (Motos Pérez, 2009). Moreover, Gitano people were banned from talking their own language (which has been practically lost in Spain) and to undertake certain professions. Among other reasons, this practice aimed at steering the Gitano labour force towards certain needy sectors, especially after the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 and of the Moors between 1609 and 1613 (Vázquez García, 2009). Among all the forms of institutional oppression against the Gitano people, the Great Round-up (*La gran redada*), officially known as the “General Prison of Gypsies”, stands out. On the 30th of July 1749, most Gitano

men, women and children in Spain were separated from each other and arrested in an attempt to exterminate the Gypsies living in Spain. They remained imprisoned until 1763, leading to the genocide of 12,000 Gitano people (Martínez, 2014).

Nowadays, Spanish Gitanos are racialised citizens with *de jure* formal equality of rights, but *de facto* systematically marginalised (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a and b). Gitanos are often worse off in terms of social exclusion and discrimination than any other ethnic group (Cortés & End, 2019). Time and again, they are alleged as the ethnic group that people have the strongest negative opinions about (Andújar et al., 2022; Spanish government, 2020). This rejection is widely normalised both by Gitanos and non-Gitanos and persists over the generations, though anti-racist awareness and Gitano activism has intensified in recent years⁴ (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2022; Filigrana, 2020). It is important to highlight that antigypsyism in Spain is not explicitly institutionalised the way it is in some Eastern European countries where, for instance, Gitano children are automatically segregated in the school system (Martín Sánchez, 2018; O'Hanlon, 2016). Formal equality of rights implies that we need to look for patterns of informal and less visible discrimination in order to accurately understand all the forms that antigypsyism take in the Spanish context.

It is also worth noting that many Gitano people in Spain live in mixed neighbourhoods—and households—or neighbourhoods with mainly ethnic majority population. Their Gitano identity may not even be known in public, at the workplace for instance. For some Gitano people it is easier to be perceived as non-Gitano if they wish, based on their physical characteristics and behaviour (not having “too” dark skin or “too gitano” facial features, ways of dressing or speaking), as well as their socioeconomic level. However, we consider this phenomenon in itself as a clear manifestation of antigypsyism, made visible here through the logic “the less Gitano someone appears, the more acceptance and opportunities they receive” (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2024). One Gitano woman who we interviewed expressed this clearly: “They always tell me “oh, but you don’t look like a *Gitana* as if it were a compliment, without understanding that it is actually an insult”. Several scholars have also highlighted the mutually enforcing interrelation between racialisation/racism, poverty and social exclusion as central to understand how contemporary antigypsyism operates and what are its consequences (Vitale, 2021; Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a; Cretan et al., 2021; Vincze, 2019; van Baar, 2011). In the next section, we will develop our theoretical framework, establishing links between expressions of racism in everyday interactions between Gitanos and non-Gitanos at the micro level, and the reproduction of racist structures that cement the social exclusion of Gitano people.

⁴ The presence of Roma activist, scholar and politician Ismael Cortés in the Spanish Congress for instance contributed to including antigypsyism in the new law against discrimination approved in 2022 (BOE 2022; Cortés 2021).

3. Theoretical framework: Conceptualising everyday antigypsyism

3.1. The normalisation and reproduction of structural racism

What structural understandings of racism and discrimination share is that they conceive of discriminatory actions not as isolated events by biased individuals, but as expressions of deeply rooted ethno-racial power structures that were shaped by colonialism and continue to define inequalities in contemporary societies (Simon, 2022; Banaji, Fiske & Massey, 2021; Lentin, 2020, 2008; Warmington, 2020). Some societies, in history and present, have been more explicitly racist than others. Structural racism takes different configurations depending on the historical period and the political context, but permeates also the pro-diversity, intercultural policy frameworks that are salient in contemporary Spanish diversity policies. A deeper understanding of how structural racism operates may facilitate the analysis of why racism and discrimination prevail and even increase also in officially anti-racist societal contexts (Hellgren, 2025).

Racialised and racist structures permeate societies so deeply that they become normalised both by those who discriminate and by the persons who are systematically affected by discrimination, further cementing their social exclusion. Social exclusion, in turn, is both accentuated by and enforces discrimination, since it is taken as a confirmation of existing prejudices. This generates a vicious circle by which prejudice is constantly fuelled, and discriminatory patterns are reproduced. Lamont et al. (2015) and Lamont and Molnár (2002) provide an analysis of social boundaries that is useful to understand how the rejection of Gitano people by non-Gitano in a wide range of everyday circumstances contributes to sustain deep existing inequalities. Individual behaviours at the micro level are translated into social patterns and ultimately converted and consolidated as social structures at the macro level. As subtle differentiations that include some people and exclude others become generalised, they form patterns that shape the power structures of a society:

Only when symbolic boundaries are widely agreed upon can they take on a constraining character and pattern social interaction in important ways. Moreover, only then can they become social boundaries, i.e. translate, for instance, into identifiable patterns of social exclusion or class and racial segregation. (Lamont & Molnár 2002, pp. 168-169)

Hence, the distinctions individuals make at an interpersonal level, granting or denying others access based on implicitly agreed-upon criteria (such as whiteness) that assign different social statuses to different ethnic groups, translate into structures of inequality. We understand these distinctions as oftentimes unintentional, even unaware. The notion of unconscious bias is therefore relevant to our analysis, but there is reason to be cautious when applying this concept. Bourne (2019) identifies a risk that it contributes to psychologize racism and make it an individual, not structural, problem. We instead argue that the lens of unconscious bias allows linking the individual and the structural dimensions. Like Banaji et al. (2021), we view discrimination as to a great extent based on individual biases shaped by (and shaping) racialised social systems: societies where whiteness is systematically privileged. Banaji et al. (2021) for instance describe how non-black Americans systematically associate black Americans with negative phenomena such as criminality, generating racialised interactions that, ultimately, uphold systemic racism. Applying this broad, structural/systemic understanding of racism

and discrimination makes evident how there can be “racism without racists” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), which is essential for the reproduction of structural discrimination at the micro level. This approach is crucial for our study of how both “victims” and “perpetrators” contribute to the translation of discriminations in social interaction at the micro level—manifested as myriad, everyday, subtle, intentional and unintentional attitudes and behaviours—into patterns of negative differentiation, that is, structures of discrimination.

Racialisation is considered here as a political and social process of differentiation (Burgett & Hendler, 2014, pp. 212; Dalal, 2002) or boundary creation (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) based on physical markers, most typically skin colour, but also on other characteristics that are attributed to ethnicity, culture or religion (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a). This process of racialisation marks limits between people, often in the shape of negative stereotypes that affect those who are defined as different from the “norm” of a Western society, which entails having white skin (Gans, 2017).

3.2. Antigypsyism as a particular—yet typical—form of racism

Following the discussion by Cortés and End about the definition of antigypsyism, and based on the main definitions proposed by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the Council of Europe and the Alliance against Antigypsyism, we consider “antigypsyism” as a specific form of racism including these characteristics: It is a) historically constructed and temporally persistent; b) systematic and customary, in the sense that it is widely accepted, almost by the entire community; c) founded on a notion of racial superiority; d) homogenising and essentialising perceptions and descriptions of social groups identified under the stigma of the “gypsy”, and attributing specific characteristics to them. It can be expressed by hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation, acts of discrimination, discriminatory social structures and institutional practices, as well as recurrent acts of violence and violent practices. These forms of antigypsyism have a “degrading and ostracising effect and reproduce structural disadvantages” (2019, pp. 21ss).

When approaching the study of social dynamics by targeting Gitano people, it is essential to carefully choose what conceptual framework to apply. “Roma integration” is, for instance, a common frame in research and politics when addressing poverty and social marginalisation among the Roma people, both at the national and supranational level (Magazzini, 2020; Pasca, 2014). Nevertheless, we consider that the “integration frame” implicitly places the responsibility for their social exclusion on the Roma/Gitano people themselves, overemphasizing the causality of a supposed insurmountable cultural difference. Indeed, integration is an increasingly contested concept in the field of migration studies, where several scholars place the main responsibility for “successful integration” on the majority society (Favell, 2022; Saharso, 2019; Garcés-Mascreñas & Penninx, 2016; Wieworka, 2014). The idea of “integration” appears even more problematic in the study of national minorities and racialised groups, where the subjects are not newcomers, are national citizens, and enjoy a *de jure* (even if not a *de facto*) equality of rights. In the case of Spanish Gitanos, their “different culture” is often taken to explain (and justify) their social exclusion. The idea of cultural incompatibility represents a simplistic frame, supposing at the same time a fictitious cultural homogeneity of the mainstream population and of the Gitano people, as well as an irreconcilable difference between the two groups (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2024, 2021b).

We apply an intersectional approach and suggest that the racial dimension interacts with class and gender in defining the specific configuration of everyday forms of discrimination that Gitano people suffer from the non-Gitano majority⁵. While there are specificities of antigypsyism compared to other forms of racism, we argue for the relevance of analysing the situation of Spanish Gitanos through the same lens as non-white migrants. We have previously argued, based on our empirical research, that antigypsyism as a concept and as a social and political practice has two main dimensions: it consists of the intersection between racialisation and aporophobia (Cortina, 2017), referring to the often subtle forms of aversion and rejection of the poor and marginalized that affect Gitano people as well as people of other ethnicities who belong to the most disadvantaged groups. Similar to what happens to other racialised groups (Afro-descendants, Muslims, etc.), Gitano people are negatively stereotyped as culturally incompatible with the majority society and, at the same time, as undeserving poor (Vázquez García, 2009; Cortés & End, 2019; Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a).

This broader analytical framework allows us to better understand the mechanisms of minoritisation, racialisation and othering in Spanish society. From this perspective, racism and discrimination are understood as key components to explain the social exclusion of Gitano people. Recently, Cortés and End (2019) highlighted the need to go beyond the common understanding of the “Roma problem” in Europe that focuses on their marginalisation as the problem *per se*, and increasingly understand racism and discrimination as drivers of their social exclusion:

The socio-economic situation of deprivation faced by many Roma has been explained on the basis of “deviant” gypsy traditions or as a mere matter of “social emergency,” without any mention of anti-gypsyism as a deeply rooted, persistent and structural force of exclusion. A focus on combating anti-gypsyism would produce considerably different approaches to Gitano inclusion. (Cortés & End, 2019, p. 23).

Cortés and End’s analysis is central to our interpretation of everyday antigypsyism and its consequences. Racism and discrimination are deeply rooted, structural phenomena that, as Bonilla-Silva (1997) puts it, are grounded in the social relations among different ethnic/racial groups. Like other critical race theorists, Bonilla-Silva defends a structural theory in which racism is considered a foundational component of racialised social systems. These racialised social systems (typically defined by phenotype, but not only) are, in turn, embedded in other structurations, such as class (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Viewing antigypsyism through the lens of critical race theory renders inappropriate the lens of “integration” (as an imaginary pattern of confluence of minoritised and racialised groups into a supposedly homogeneous and vaguely defined mainstream society) and instead places (unequal) racial relations at the centre.

When we talk about everyday antigypsyism, we are referring to a whole spectrum of racialised forms of negative differentiation, from very subtle forms of rejection (such as simply not choosing Gitano people in different situations, or expecting a certain behaviour from them based on their ethnicity), to more overt forms of devaluation (such as insensitive jokes or insults). Direct hate crimes, including racist violence against Gitano people, are exceptional in

5 It should be noted that our research does not address the issue of gender roles and relations within Gitano communities, but only the ways in which Gitano women and men experienced gender as influencing the forms of antigypsyism to which they are exposed.

our empirical studies. Based on our structural analysis, they are considered extreme expressions of the antigypsyist inferiorisation of Gitano people that is systematically normalised and internalised among broad layers of the population, implicitly transmitting that “Gitano lives matter” a little bit less than white, ethnic majority lives.

4. Methodology: Participatory Action Research—Studying injustice to promote social transformation

The present article is based on qualitative research largely applying a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. This essentially means that the researchers and participants work together to understand a problematic situation and aim to accomplish change for the better (e.g. McIntyre, 2008; Kindon et al., 2007). The overarching aim of our studies was to identify how the discrimination and exclusion affecting Gitano people operate in everyday situations, and work together with the participants to foster more inclusive practices. The respective studies were carried out between January 2017 and November 2024 in the frameworks of four different but interrelated EU-funded research projects⁶. In this section, we will describe how the fieldwork was conducted and what PAR means for our data collection and analysis.

Table 1. Characteristics of our sample of respondents

Total	Male	Female	Age 14-25	Age 26-40	Age 41-55	Age 56-80
130	54	76	18	80	23	9

Different methods were employed for the data collection: we performed participant and non-participant observations in training, workshops, meetings and joint activities with Gitano people and stakeholders. Altogether 185 in-depth interviews were conducted: 130 with people identifying as Spanish Gitanos (76 women and 54 men aged between 14-80) about their everyday experiences of discrimination, and 55 with actors who contribute to define institutional practices. These include teachers, headmasters, politicians, policy-makers, NGO representatives, and police officers of different ranks, in the metropolitan area of Barcelona.

The Gitano respondents live in different neighbourhoods with different shares of Gitano population and impact of socio-economic deprivation and social stigmatisation. In accordance with our PAR approach, we dedicated substantial time to access the participants and define the research problems in an inductive manner, arising from the empirical work performed with them and our Gitano partner organisations. A continuous dialogue was main-

⁶ We refer to: i) REACT: Research-Action against Antigypsyism and Anti-Muslim Discrimination: An Intersectional Approach to Deconstruct Institutional Racism in Schools, funded by the EU's CERV programme (Citizens, Equality, Rights, Values), Grant Agreement: PREUR02922EC-CERV-REACT-101084345 (2022-2024); ii) “AGREP: Action program for effective reporting of anti-gypsyism and discrimination”, funded by the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Program, Grant Agreement 881875 (2020–2022); iii) “REPCAT: The Role of the Ethnic Majority in Integration Processes: Attitudes and Practices toward Immigrants in Catalan Institutions”, funded by a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship, Grant Agreement: 747075—REPCAT—H2020-MSCA-IF-2016/H2020-MSCA-IF-2016 (2018-2020); and iv) “VAKERIPEN: Roma inclusion in education: fostering Constructive attitudes and good practices in the Barcelona area”, funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the EU, Grant Agreement JUST/2015/RDIS/AG/DISC/9372 (2017-2018).

tained to guarantee that our interpretation of how the discrimination that these women and men experienced operates (*when, where, what, with what consequences*) was faithful to their own perceptions. The sampling strategies applied were defined by the research-action character of the projects, in which the practical implementation of activities (such as workshops in schools and awareness-raising meetings in the neighbourhoods) guided the selection of participants. We strived to maximize the diversification of the sample in several ways, for instance by selecting schools with different ethnic composition (with dissimilar shares of Gitano, non-Gitano and students with immigration background), and different types of neighbourhoods (in terms of ethnic composition and socio-economic level). Though the only pre-established selection criterion in these projects was to strive for gender balance among the Gitano participants, we were attentive also to the significance of other personal characteristics such as age, education and income level for the experiences of discrimination and inclusion/exclusion in different contexts. These dimensions of our studies have been addressed in several of our earlier publications based on these projects (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2024, 2022, 2021a and b, 2018a and b).

What we found, throughout the studies, was that the experiences of repeatedly being defined as Gitano in daily interactions with the majority society strongly shaped the sentiments of belonging, identification and opportunities among young and old, male and female project participants, as well as among those with a university degree and those who never finished primary school. (It should however be noted that most of the respondents never completed compulsory school, which is representative for the Spanish Roma population at large [Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2022]). Our previous findings related to the centrality of everyday antigypsyism in the lives of our respondents guided the framing and analysis applied in the present article.

The data were first thematically coded and analysed within the framework of the respective projects, and then again for the purpose of this article. The overall objective for this second, purposive analysis was to identify links between the individual and interpersonal levels, as well as the institutional dimensions where discrimination occurs, and the cementing of unequal power structures through the normalisation of discrimination both by those who perform it and those who are exposed to it. Since three of the projects focused on self-perceived discrimination (in the education context, and in everyday situations in general, respectively), there was much information that had already been analysed in relation to the publications generated so far. In addition, the stakeholder narratives were analysed through the lens of normalisation of prejudice.

Before proceeding to discuss the results of our studies, some reflections on the risks with focusing on Gitano women and men as “victims” of discrimination appear necessary. Indeed, empowering Gitano people rather than contributing to their victimization was a central aim of our participatory research. One objective of our research-action was also to provide the Gitanos with means to learn about discrimination and identify situations where they are exposed to aggressions, and what can be done about it (for instance, through formal reporting). This was complemented by meetings with institutional actors to define the problem from their points of view, and search for channels to improve the communication between Gitanos and non-Gitanos in different contexts. Yet, we found that the problems our participants experienced with everyday antigypsyism were often perceived as overwhelming. Reporting discrimination was largely considered pointless, and the general sentiment was that the majority society would never fully accept them. Therefore, our analytical focus lies on revealing prac-

tices and experiences of discrimination that continue to harm the prospects and wellbeing of Gitanos, with the overarching aim to increase awareness of biases that most, if not all, of us carry. The following section will analyse in detail how prejudices are materialised in everyday racism and discrimination affecting Gitano people, and how their disadvantage is normalised both by themselves and by the ethnic majority society.

4.1. Positionality and limitations

The fact that neither one of the authors are of Gitano ethnicity calls for some reflections about our positionality and the limitations that this potentially represents. We are aware of our privileges as white, non-Gitano, and highly educated, and of the risks that our own and the Gitano participants' unequal positions would limit the possibilities to perform PAR. In our projects, we have strived to avoid the risk that this would compromise our research in two principal ways. First, to integrate project team members of Gitano ethnicity was necessary both to facilitate access to the field and to build trust among the project participants. A central element in PAR is to define the research problem together with the affected people. Consistent with this principle, our projects on Roma inclusion and antigypsyism were designed jointly with the collaborating Gitano organisations, in consultation with their constituencies. These organisations participated as fully funded partners, which we considered important to empower them by providing resources and establish an egalitarian instead of a top-down consortium.

Second, our role as researchers during the numerous project activities with the participants mainly consisted of collecting data, leaving the role as activity leaders to our Gitano partners. Another way to overcome the distance was to build connections around “common denominators” that all of us could relate to during the meetings, such as parenthood, for instance. We are both experienced scholars who have worked extensively with ethnographic and participatory methods, and with vulnerable populations and racialised groups. To engage in self-reflexive processes through which we gain awareness of our own privileges and challenge our own potential biases is a central part of our research.

5. Results: The normalisation of racism as a driver of social exclusion

In this section, we analyse our primary data to answer our research question. Focus lies on the ways in which the Gitanos' experiences of discrimination and the stakeholders' often subtle forms of boundary-making, respectively, constitute patterns by which racism is normalised and reproduced on an everyday basis, maintaining structures of disadvantage that simultaneously reinforce this normalisation.

5.1. Everyday racism experienced by Gitano people

The interviewed Gitanos' self-experienced discrimination covers a wide range of everyday situations. Being identified as Gitano generates assumptions and reactions among the non-Gitano population that permeate their lives on a daily basis. The respondents define the reactions they encounter from others in terms of fear (Gitanos are expected to be dangerous and vengeful), disgust (Gitanos are supposed to be dirty and untidy), suspiciousness (Gitanos are assumed to be unreliable; thieves and cheaters), or a mix of paternalism and contempt (Gi-

tanos are considered to be welfare dependent, illiterate, unable to educate their children, lacking ambitions and work ethos). These prejudices and negative expectations shape the everyday experiences of Gitano people in their interactions with non-Gitano. Ultimately, this affects their whole lives to a considerable degree: being forced to deal with antigypsyism is an inevitable component of everyday life for the vast majority of the respondents.

Earlier research has documented that healthcare and welfare services are spheres where Gitano people suffer much discrimination. They may be treated with a mix of contempt and paternalism, similar to what happens with other institutions such as tax or unemployment authorities, banks, and so on (Werner-Boada, 2019). Among our respondents, there are several examples of this experience in relation to maternal care and childbearing, where Gitano women experienced disrespect and questioning of their capacity as parents. Similar testimonies refer to being treated with explicit disdain in relations with the social services. At the institutional and structural levels, normalised, subtle, everyday discriminations affect the possibilities of Gitano people to receive equal treatment and ultimately, enjoy their rights as citizens. Several of the respondents describe how their sense of not being allowed to fully form part of society is at the core of the problem:

I think that we integrate in society, but they [the non-Gitano] don't let us. Look, if you and I apply for the same job, with the same CV, I know that they will pick you. And why? Because whenever they mention the Gitano on TV, they say "there is gun fighting between two gypsy clans..." and people are scared of us. And then they get a CV from [Gitano name, Gitano neighbourhood], and they throw it directly in the garbage bin. "María", ID E2, Barcelona 2021

For our respondents, the continuous experiences of discrimination lead to low self-esteem, low expectations and a generalised normalisation of disadvantage that is tangible in the narratives of our respondents and that contributes to the reproduction of structural disadvantage:

We know this since we're children, that as gypsies we are always discriminated against. There has always been persecution. This is something that we transmit from parents to children. If I am going somewhere to look for a job and they discriminate against me for being gypsy... well, that's what I expect, because the same thing happened to my father, to my grandfather and to my great grandfather. "Ismael", ID D1, Barcelona 2021

The interiorised expectation to again and again suffer painful and humiliating treatment in public or private spaces, particularly outside the own neighbourhood, and to "not have a chance to be selected anyway" renders applying for jobs or looking for apartments in more attractive housing areas meaningless. This translates into avoidance of potentially discriminatory situations and thereby further reduction of the actual opportunities.

Many of the interviewed mothers and fathers described how this dynamic is deeply rooted also in the education system, with the lacking support from schools regarding their children's education as a form of invisible discrimination:

I have worked in schools where a majority is not Gitano, and they don't give homework to the Gitano kids, saying "but they wouldn't do it". (...) I experienced this myself as a child, I didn't pass English class, but they never taught me English. I got my high school diploma as an adult, and in adult school the staff made jokes about me and another

Gitano guy, saying “look, gypsies studying, we should make a poster of them” and even if they were joking, I felt bad about it. “Juan”, ID A4, Badalona 2020

Several of the interviewed Gitano parents also stated that their children suffered more discrimination in the more high-achieving schools where a majority is non-Gitano (white middle class). This makes the aspiration for upwards social mobility through educational success come at a high cost for these families. Their children are frequently subject to racist bullying, a form of direct racism that is often normalised by teachers and other adults (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021b). This testimony by a father of one of the four Gitano girls in her school is revealing:

My daughter and three other girls, all gypsies, had an issue with 14 other girls. They picked on them, called them “gitanas” with the intention of humiliating, and played a game: when the Gitano girls touched something as the pencils or the table, they yelled “disinfection, disinfection” as if it were contaminated. We went to the director three times, and she didn't give it much importance: “it's just girls' stuff” she said. “Alberto”, ID B3, Barcelona 2021

By not paying attention to such incidents, the school staff thus normalises racism and discrimination. This results in both Gitano and non-Gitano children receiving the message that it is not really a problem. Several respondents narrate how such experiences finally made their children quit the more “prestigious” schools and return to the “ghetto schools”. This appears yet more serious in light of new Spanish data showing that one of four young Spaniards do not want Gitanos as teachers or police officers, or as neighbours (Andújar et. al, 2022). Structural racism risks becoming further cemented in the new generation.

There is a widely spread idea that Gitanos supposedly do not care about the education of their children. Contrastingly, the vast majority of the families who participated in our projects were highly concerned about the future of their offspring. They are well aware that the few opportunities for upwards social mobility that they have are likely to come through success on the educational ladder.

I don't know any Gitanos who don't care about their children's education. But it is different whether they know how to help them or not. The schools don't teach us how to do, to reach secondary school for instance. Most [Gitano] parents cannot help the children with this, they have no studies themselves. “Baltasar”, ID S3, Sant Adrià de Besòs 2018

Another environment where many respondents claimed to suffer frequent discrimination was in shops and supermarkets. The typical experience was to be followed by security staff or asked to show their purse, while no other clients were.

I went to a shopping mall with my granddaughter, and the security guard was following us the whole time. She asked me, “why is that man following us?” and I said loudly so he would hear, “to protect us, look how safe we are, nobody is going to steal our purse now”. Because I don't want her to learn that they are following us for this reason. “Carmen”, ID A2, Sant Adrià de Besòs 2021

This quote illustrates both a common arena where everyday antigypsyism takes place, and another dimension that was central throughout the narratives: Gitano parents' attempt to protect their children from suffering the same humiliation and exclusion that they themselves have suffered, trying to prevent stigma from being reproduced in the new generation.

Among the many spheres of life where antigypsyism was frequently experienced, the labour market is considered particularly serious by those affected by it. The respondents overall had experienced some of the most overt forms of rejection when applying for jobs, but several had also been fired for being Gitano.

I have been thrown out of every job I had when they found out that I'm a gypsy. "Lucía", ID E3, L'Hospitalet 2020

To avoid losing their jobs, numerous respondents kept their ethnic identity hidden:

My brother works as a street sweeper, and he doesn't want his co-workers to know he's a gypsy. Only one knows, because he doesn't want them to look differently at him. If the contract must be renewed, maybe it wouldn't be, and they wouldn't let him know why, but he would know it. "David", ID A14, Barcelona 2021

The interviews overall reflect how everyday antigypsyism curtails the lives of Gitano people. Several respondents narrate how discrimination affects where they live and who they form families with, contributing to their isolation. The neighbourhood is central for a person's everyday life experiences, networks and social status. The interviewed women and men overall explained that they experience much discrimination in their residential areas, or when trying to move to other neighbourhoods. Numerous respondents described the rejection that they experience, or expect to experience, as the reason why they chose not to move to wealthier neighbourhoods even if they could afford it, or why they often experienced difficulties if they finally did. Consider this narrative by a man who grew up in a prosperous middleclass neighbourhood:

My parents rented an apartment in Poble Nou when I was a child and on the third day, the neighbours had a meeting to find out who they were, if they had squatted the flat, just for being Gitano. If we Gitanos want to move out of our ghettos, we have a hard time. My parents still live there but they don't have much contact with the neighbours, some of them still don't say hi. "Carlos", ID H5, Barcelona 2021

Several respondents experienced how prejudices make it difficult to form mixed relationships and have children with non-Gitanos (something that could potentially reduce racism through increasing levels of mixtity [Rodríguez-García et al., 2021]).

I know what it is like to have a Spanish [non-Gitana] girlfriend and say goodbye to her before she reaches the corner of her house, so her parents won't see that she's with a gypsy. "Isaac", ID H3, Sant Adrià de Besòs 2020

My mother-in-law did not like me for being Gitano. When I got pregnant, she said in front of all our friends and family, "oh, so we're going to have a thief for a grandchild". And then she started to ask people for used clothes, while she bought everything new at *El Corte Inglés* for her other future grandchild. "Isabel", ID C5, L'Hospitalet 2021

Some also explained how they often found personal relationships with people of immigrant origin to be more positive, and egalitarian, than those with ethnic majority Spaniards. Such experiences reflect how discrimination may be a common denominator that unifies people who share the sentiment of not being accepted by the white mainstream society, which largely defines how social boundaries are drawn. This coincides with findings from our earlier research about self-perceptions on inclusion and exclusion among racialised immigrants (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021a; Hellgren, 2019).

5.2. The reproduction of social boundaries by non-Gitanos

A challenge when studying biased attitudes and behaviours by those who discriminate is making them recognize the very existence of structural racism, as well as their own role in its reproduction. This is particularly central when applying PAR to promote social transformation. The interviewed institutional actors (teachers, headmasters, policy-makers, police officers, etc.) would overall not define their own attitudes or behaviours as prejudiced or identify prejudice against Gitano people as the problem. Rather, they talked about the social marginalisation of many Gitanos in terms of self-segregation and Gitano culture (and “collective” way of being and acting), as explanatory of their disadvantaged position. This was somehow predictable and is essential in assessing the difficulties to empirically examine the underlying causes behind prejudices, since people rarely recognize these. In the analysis of the stakeholder narratives, it was therefore central to look for any expressions of negative differentiation affecting the Gitanos. Such expressions were in fact frequent and often in contradiction with self-declared absence of prejudice, coherent with the interculturalist policy framework that defines institutional practices in Catalonia and resonates in the stakeholder interviews and in the documents that were analysed.

The interviewed police officers, for instance, were asked about ethnic profiling, a (formally banned) practice that several Gitano respondents experienced frequently, harming their already limited trust in the police and in societal institutions overall. Some police officers did not recognize that this is unofficially being practiced; others did, although defending it as inevitable given their overall priority to fight crime. Supermarket security staff in turn confirmed that they had a “Gitano code” and specific instructions to follow people identified as Gitanos, justifying this with actual problems with theft. An important dimension here is related to Pincus’ (1996) discussion of “well-intentioned people” carrying out structurally discriminatory practices: even people who are highly aware of problems with racialisation may perceive that they are obliged to uphold discriminatory structures through their professional roles.

It is important to note that many institutional actors were explicit about their good intentions and discomfort with “the way things are” and how Gitano people suffer from it. Few would downplay the actual discrimination that exists, even if many largely attributed the responsibility for it to the Gitano themselves. But feeling pity, for instance, is indeed no guarantee of practicing equal treatment. Rather, it may lead to paternalism and reluctance to recognize one’s own role in drawing exclusionary boundaries.

The ways in which deeply rooted, structural racism operates on the surface through subtle forms of discrimination are clearly identifiable in the data collected in altogether thirteen schools in the Barcelona area where we conducted participatory action research in two of the research projects. Many teachers of Gitano pupils did, in one way or another, deem point-

less to academically support children of this ethnicity, even when they empathized with the youngsters:

We cannot [expect the same achievement from Gitano children as other pupils], that is impossible because they don't have the same habits, or the same family support. They come here because they must, not because they want to go to the university. And because they are happy here and feel well received in this school, but they are very disconnected at the intellectual level. "Ana", Primary school teacher ID 5, 2017

They lack motivation to study, because they believe, or at least that is what they transmit, that they are stuck where they are and have no opportunities to do anything at all. They don't think that they can do any better. "Núria", Secondary school teacher, ID AM1, 2023

Several respondents (teachers, headmasters, support staff) claimed that they wanted to help the children but did not know how, while others expressed more overt forms of prejudice.

We should aspire at making them [the Gitano children] function as citizens, at least. We cannot expect very much. (...) Aspiring at our pupils reaching the university, that is neither realistic nor a guarantee of anything. How many *gitano* children from here continued to high school last year? Nobody. The families say that they cannot live from scrap sales or the marketplace anymore, but when it comes to it, they are not willing to do what it takes. "Enrique", Member of school board 4, Badalona 2018

What these narratives share is that they reflect how school staff generalises based on ethnic stereotyping instead of treating all their students as individuals:

So, at 14 they [the Gitano students] leave school, because they are not convinced that they will achieve anything through education. "María José", Primary school teacher 3, L'Hospitalet, 2018.

Such statements may appear neutral and objective, but indicate an unconscious bias that risks affecting how the teacher views Gitano students regardless of their individual skills and ambitions. The lack of educational support to these students in Catalonia, as in Spain overall, is a widely known problem (Paniagua & Bereményi, 2019; Bereményi & Carrasco, 2015, 2017). A decision-maker in the Catalan education system who we interviewed made a central, self-critical remark: "The problem is that the teachers are white, Catalan, and middle-class. These are the kind of people that go to the university".

6. Concluding discussion

In this article, we took the case of everyday antigypsyism to examine how structural discrimination is reproduced at the level of social interaction. Both Gitano and non-Gitano people are biased by the omnipresent ethnicisation and normalisation of prejudices, which serve to justify discriminatory patterns that are both a consequence of and that simultaneously contribute to reproduce what Bonilla-Silva (1997) defined as a racialised social system. We consider that the racism against Spanish Gitanos is so deeply rooted and widely normalised at the systemic

and institutional levels that it is internalised not only by “perpetrators,” but also by “victims,” further cementing their social exclusion.

Based on our analysis, we conclude that the experiences of antigypsyism and the ways in which they are normalised are central in the lives of our Gitano respondents, strongly affecting their relationship with the non-Gitano part of society and, ultimately, their access to equal treatment as citizens in a wide range of situations (such as work, education, public spaces, consumption, among others). Experiences of being belittled, insulted, and questioned create boundaries with serious effects not only on their real opportunities and quality of life, but also on their sentiments of belonging and self-esteem. Although our respondents give several examples of having been exposed to physical racist attacks or verbal violence, most of the incidents they narrated refer to subtler forms of discrimination and rejection. These experiences of everyday antigypsyism have in common that they could hardly be framed as hate crimes in a legal sense. Also when they may violate anti-discrimination laws in a subtler way, they are difficult to prove and there is a lack of tools and resources available to take actions against them.

Social boundaries are defined by myriad actors in myriad situations and reproduce patterns cementing structures of racialised discrimination, in turn reproducing the “Gitano stigma” through, for instance, exclusion on the labour and housing markets, educational failure, blocked access to private venues (restaurants, amusement parks, etc.) or insults and mistreatment in public spaces. Discriminations in different spheres of society also reinforce each other, contributing to a visible social exclusion that fuels antigypsyism by confirming the non-Gitanos’ prejudices that Gitano people are poor, uneducated, welfare dependent, criminal, and so on. Thus, the rejection that non-Gitano, ethnic majority people express in their everyday relations with Gitano men and women reproduces antigypsyism in the ways we discussed above. Discrimination at an interpersonal level translates into patterns of blocked or limited access (to jobs, housing, education, leisure...) with the serious effect of reproducing or reinforcing inequalities. At the societal level, predominantly negative and highly generalised views of Gitano people resonate at multiple levels: derogatory and stereotypical representations in the media, absence or subordinate positions in public and institutional spheres; and overall, rejection, enforcing the Gitanos’ self-perceptions of being unwanted, in a vicious circle with no easy solution in sight.

We have used our empirical research on antigypsyism to argue that the normalisation of racism is a fundamental driver behind the overrepresentation of Spanish Gitanos in situations of social exclusion. In other words: the many forms of rejection and devaluation experienced by the Gitano participants in our projects ought not to be underestimated as individual, anecdotic experiences, but all in all contribute to reproduce the social boundaries that underlie structural racism.

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