'Antigypsyism Does Not Exist' and Other Assessments. Romani History by a Romani Historian Evaluated at the White Academy

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CRS **Critical**
Romani Studies

Abstract

Romani Studies in Spain has yet to reach a satisfactory degree of development and faces many limitations within the Spanish Academy. To demonstrate this issue at hand, we will start with a special case: the challenge of writing the history of Roma as a Romani historian. Reconstructing Romani history and memory are fundamental tasks to encourage inclusion, but carrying out these tasks is challenging due to the negative views of a non-Romani scientific society weighed down by a legacy of stereotypes, epistemological limits, and scientific racism. Roma naively have been scrutinised from a colonial point of view – where both conscious and unconscious objectives knit together to excuse negative representations associated with Romani populations. Starting from the author's recent experience as a Romani historian, this article aims to account for racism within the Spanish academy. It also intends to discuss benefits in the social and human sciences of situating Romani thought within a larger creation and dissemination of knowledge.

Introduction

This article aims to reflect on the dichotomy between Romani representation and Romani self-representation in the Spanish Academy (the latter being understood as the scientific society, mainly universities and their humanities departments).[1] The case analysed in this article is based on the experiences of the author, a Spanish Romani historian, during two different evaluation processes in the early stages of his research career: one committee evaluating a final undergraduate degree project and another committee evaluating a master's dissertation. Both committees had been presented with earlier studies related to the history of the Spanish Roma. In both processes, committee members unconnected to Romani Studies constructed part of their critiques based on stereotypical representations of Roma or "Gitanos".[2] Furthermore, the figure of a professor-to-be as a citizen affected by such racism elicited unreflective opinions from the committee, a product not only of antigypsyism but also due to a historiographical gap and the limited development of Romani Studies in Spain. The present text aims to critically characterise a Spanish academic ecosystem, mainly humanities and memory projects, "focused" on the study of Romani communities. This critical point of view allows for an exploration of both how the self-representation of a Romani academic – who focuses on the critique of these representations – works and what kind of interactions this research generates across the Spanish Academy.

The contribution here is organised around three main points. First, it will critically characterise the Spanish academic ecosystem that works on the history of Roma – distant from Romani Studies and even more distant from Critical Romani Studies. Many projects that have tried to address the "Roma question" in Spain usually do not include Romani researchers or do so anecdotally and are criticised by social activists focused on the defence of Romani people. Such projects, in turn, are related more closely to old structures of knowledge production about Roma, usually anchored in folklore or in fieldwork with non-representative samples. All this, in turn, can be approached in relation to the emergence and development of voices located within the Academy itself that, being members of the communities studied, debate the benefits and needs related to the author's subjectivity.

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1 When we speak of "representation" as applied to this case, we refer to the set of images, narratives and discourses on Roma that were elaborated by non-Roma with academic pretensions. The main problem is that these types of representations, validated by scientific society, in turn justify and argue for other representations already established by folklore, colonial discourses, or the contributions of scientific racism prior to the twentieth century. "Self-representation" refers to the exercise of combating misrepresentations of Roma that have reinforced white normativity (Matache 2016).

2 Throughout this article, reference will be made to Romani Studies and Critical Romani Studies. The term Romani Studies will be used here to refer to the field of studies that became professionalised especially during the second half of the twentieth century and which brought together a majority of non-Romani academics, in which approaches normally associated with folklore studies, epistemologically limit the various disciplines that addressed the subject. It also refers to a first stage of development of Romani academics who participated in the already established structures from which they had traditionally been excluded. Critical Romani Studies, on the other hand, refers to the approach and academic spaces that, since the creation of the *Critical Romani Studies Journal* in 2018, have made possible a new stage in the development and consolidation of Romani thought in social and human sciences (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2018).

Second, the two evaluation experiences will be approached by organising some of the committee's comments into modules and analysing them to expose the roots and contradictions of their expressions. For example, the assessment that "antigypsyism does not exist," and the contradiction between "the desire to see a history of the marginalised" and "the duty not to make a history of victimhood" will be addressed.

Finally, a small amount of space will be dedicated to evaluating self-representations of researchers of the community of belonging itself. This has a positive influence on the construction and dissemination of situated Romani thought but also – which is not so positive for the Romani scholar – on the discovery of the tension between power-taking and representation. The latter is fundamentally due to the danger of pigeonholing researchers as simple quotas at the mercy of groups and projects led by non-Roma.

In conclusion, this contribution is based on an ongoing dialogue among young Romani researchers, whose initial analyses ideally should start from a kind of "egohistory" or "embodied anthropology" to explore the interactions between representation and self-representation. In additions, such academic and personal reflection may prevent new forms of academic racism based on the tradition of denial and invisibility.

1. Spanish Historiography Prior to Romani Studies: Theoretical Gaps and Bureaucratic Obstacles?

Romani Studies in Spain is underdeveloped and has remained so to the present-day. Since the 1960s, interest has increased in some sectors, but this growth was linked to certain topics such as art or representations. Thus, beyond the first writings on Roma in Spain from the nineteenth century by travellers and folklorists such as George Borrow (Galletti 2021), only a few twentieth-century attempts – also from folklore – were made to define their life and customs from an academic perspective. These early reports regurgitated common themes, such as their mysterious origin, the exoticism of Romani femininity, witchcraft, the picaresque, criminality, or art as their sole virtue.

Here, we can cite the contributions of Domingo Manfredi Cano (1959), José Carlos de Luna (1951), or the anthropologist Julio Caro Baroja (1985), all of whom published during Franco's dictatorship, a time when Roma were exploited as a brand of Spanish national tourism (Rothea 2014; Holguín 2019). From 1960 onwards, other types of studies arose, mainly sociology, which included Roma in the category of marginalised people and approached their social status from stereotypes and imaginaries not found in previous folklorist studies. These studies never investigated much beyond basic assumptions and justified them with limited analyses based on general health, housing, literacy or population data (Buhigas 2024). These works were followed by some of the first anthropological studies of Roma in Spain, especially communities in large cities like Madrid and Barcelona, the most significant being the work of Teresa San Román (1976, 1984), which was not exempt from general and categorical statements about Roma from the romantic imaginary. When we say that these studies persisted with these approaches, we refer,

for example, to the consideration of Roma as nomads or with natural tendencies towards nature (a euphemism for barbarism or social disorder).[3] It is also worth mentioning the contribution of early researchers in the creation of categories that were later transferred to society-at-large as new stereotypes or adjectives that carried a deeply negative charge for interactions between Roma and non-Roma, such as the words "patriarch", "clan", "endogamy", "ghetto", and so on.[4] Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the results of such research came from data obtained in highly specific areas, representative of a single reality – usually associated with urban degradation or rural poverty – and translated colonially by academics from outside the community.[5]

Later, more studies emerged in the field of anthropology which, if not directed by early researchers such as San Román, in most cases saw their fieldwork made possible thanks to being in or near her "field". This generated a significant intertextuality and a large number of reciprocal references among those academics, who were in turn influenced by that folklorist past.[6] However, although all these studies are valuable, especially from the perspective of the time in which they were published and the stage of development of Romani Studies, they focused above all on "discovering" and explaining to non-Roma the social organisation and "customs" that Roma apparently taught them. They translated these without regard to the "cultural ontology" or "Romani perspectivism" of these Spanish Romani communities.[7]

A renewed interest in Roma, often expressed through oral history projects related to the Spanish Civil War or the Franco dictatorship, relates Roma to key issues associated with other social groups. Indeed, today's political context is more interested in the traumatic past and also holds a more friendly view about Roma. Nonetheless, academics who have never worked on the subject but are showing renewed interest continue to fumble with the same questions. For example, Carmen Cañete Quesada argued: "How can academics interact with a still-alienated ethnic group without their approach being perceived as an act

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3 At the same time as San Román, between the 1970s and the 1990s, the anthropologist Tomás Calvo Buezas (1980) also suffered from the above-mentioned tendencies. However, further study would be pertinent to rescue, analyse, and evidence in all its complexity the set of narratives, methods, and conclusions formulated in the colonial text of these researchers.

4 In Spanish: "patriarcado", "clan", "endogamia", "gueto".

5 This refers to what the Roma anthropologist Iván Periáñez defines as "an ill-intentioned dismemory that implies the exercise of denying, displacing, disidentifying or suppressing; and discards in its discourses, representations and narratives, any possibility of recognising other plural worlds enunciated in the exterior of its criteria" (Periáñez 2023, 44). In short, these early studies only defined "marginal Gypsies", without addressing the reasons why these processes of marginalisation took place outside the community and renouncing the possibility of explaining the Roma reality beyond the epistemological limits imposed by the research led by non-Roma experts.

6 For example, the thesis supervised by San Román of Carmen Méndez López (2005), as well as the book resulting from the doctoral thesis of Paloma Gay y Blasco (1999) whose author notes that "Teresa San Román facilitated my stay in the Madrid ghetto of Plata y Castañar". (See https://congresoantropologiavalencia.com/programa/ponentes-invitadasos/paloma-gay/. By intertextuality we refer to Edward Said's concern about the intention of researchers to be more coherent with other previously published studies than with the reality they were analysing (Said 1976). Here, we could also mention the work of Juan F. Gamella (1999).

7 "Cultural ontology" or "Roma perspectivism" are some of the concepts used by Romani researchers to situate the *Romanipen* and the independence of Roma situated thinking in a global context focused only on the non-Romani majority society (Motos 2020; Periañez 2023).

of exoticism, snobbism, or even opportunism?" (Cañete 2020, 41). Such a question could perhaps be answered by more questions: Which Romani ethnic group is still alienated? Do Roma constitute a single group? Would not exoticism and opportunism be solved by opening the way for Romani researchers who have freed themselves from the supposed yoke of alienation simply by incorporating their approaches? The truth is that all these questions are already answered and knowledge about them has been produced with some assiduity (Taba, Ryder, and Bogdán 2015). In this sense, one should note the absence or anecdotal citation of academic works elaborated by Roma both inside and outside Spain and interaction with the dated and critiqued studies cited above.

A few years after the first anthropological studies were published, so too were the contributions of some historians such as José Moreno Casado (1969), María Helena Sánchez Ortega (1988), and Antonio Gómez Alfaro (1993). These added to the style of historical studies on Roma based on very specific sources like the judiciary to examine the legislative repression of this population within the framework of the monarchy and the power of the Catholic Church. Thus, a first wave was characterised by political history and the handling of primary sources mainly connected to legislation. This wave lasted almost two decades, until the 1980s, and a detailed reading indicates that there has been no progress made in the field, despite some efforts to incorporate the analysis of Romani presence in the literature as well (Leblon 1987; Martínez-Dhier 2007). All these early studies approached their sources with a somewhat positivist approach that excluded Roma from the narrative because the way in which Roma were punished, disciplined, or expelled based on the provisions of legal texts remained the subject of analysis. Roma only were characterised on the basis of their mysterious origin and their condition as victims of laws that judged their ethnicity in relation to their occupation, mobility, or residence, issues that have been represented satirically, humorously, or hyperbolically in literature since Miguel de Cervantes' "La Gitanilla" (1613). In other words, the complexity of the "cultural ontology" of Roma was not studied, thus raising questions such as those proposed by the Romani historian Adrian Marsh: "Do origins matter? Or are they just a narrativisation, a projection backwards of current ideologies of identity?" (Marsh 2010, 27). But that well-trodden path of revisiting origins and laws continued to be followed at the turn of the century, even by those who came from outside Spain to research the subject (Pym 2007).

However, a break can be noted in second wave of (proto) Romani Studies in Spain. Although the interest was still to analyse repression inspired by the laws, it also intended to delve into the matter from a social history perspective concerned with the subjects who suffered from those laws. We speak here, for example, of historians such as Manuel Martínez (2013) and David Martín Sánchez (2017) who began to work on issues such as deportations to the colonies or the Great Spanish Raid (previously studied by Antonio Gómez Alfaro – avoiding the social consequences of the conflict on the material life of the Romani population). It is true that both authors, joined by others, continued to work along the lines of a political history that emulated British, French, and Germans in their treatment of "anti-Roma persecution". But their studies were inscribed in a social history that renewed approaches to the interpretation of the past and that even made use of new approaches such as microhistory and gender history. Other similar studies considered the Great Raid of 1743 (Martínez 2018), the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) (Fernández and Rodríguez 2010; Bustamante 2016), Francoism (1939–1975), or simply everyday life through orality (Doncel 2018).

Finally, a third and recent scholarly wave has been devoted to urban history, cultural history, and the history of emotions. These innovative proposals at the historiographical level pay greater and more complex attention to the field of representations as well as to other forms of repression beyond the law, such as segregation in cities, control devices (police, surveillance groups, and so on), and political participation among others (García 2019; Sierra 2019; Buhigas 2021). Many of these studies, moreover, have been elaborated by Romani anthropologists and historians in Spain who, with an interdisciplinary approach, examine their objects of study from the perspective of Critical Romani Studies (Cisneros 2023; Vargas 2023).

In short, all these contributions lay the foundations on which to rethink the place of Spanish Roma in history and their involvement in processes of cultural, economic, political, and social transformation in different periods. However, if we had to point out a pending challenge, it would be to overcome the discrediting of Romani Studies, both because of its segregation within the academic world and its general rejection among the vanguard of Romani political activism.[8] In relation to the latter, the debate on authorial subjectivity can be seen as having much to do with how "located thought" is valued both in the Academy and in social movements (Britos and Zurbriggen 2022). For this reason, the present article aspires to situate itself within conversations already undertaken in other fields of scholarship such as Black or indigenous production. Several commonalities stand out in these fields, but three issues should be highlighted: first, the recognition of epistemological limits by racialized communities themselves; second, the need to recognise and avoid erasure and exclusion; and third, something that has yet to be brought more forcefully into the debate, as Karina J. Vernon (2008 and 2020) points out, for example, like the possibility of turning Archives into sites for the recovery of memory and counter-history.

Approaching Archives and History from these epistemological limits contributes to sustaining and creating new approaches to understanding the categories used in social analysis. For example, "Negritude" – a concept that could also apply to "Gypsyism" – is approached from an essentialised, monolithic, and impermeable subjectivity. In this sense, the aim should be to break down and transform historical meanings and dimensions because of the innate diversity offered by the experiences of adaptation, change, and subversion of the oppressed. These are analysed by members of these communities themselves as scholars with direct access to other tools of interpretation and research for materials (Stevens et al. 2017). The above is followed by the emergence and valorisation of a cultural ontology connected to racialized communities; here would be inscribed, for example, in the clearest Gitano-Spanish case, the work of Romani anthropologist Iván Periáñez Bolaño (2023). For her part, Izaballe Monteiro (2023), a Tremembé indigenous scholar, points out that indigenous knowledge – as we could also point out for Black or Roma – is not only in itself a decolonial contribution. That is, by simply appearing in spaces traditionally restricted to privileged voices, but that such indigenous knowledge allows us to understand how the practices of imposing knowledge on the oppressed and subalternised acted from resistance. As a result of this resistance, intergenerational memories and practices have materialised that transcend the territory and form an agency of thought in their own right.

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8 With "Romani political activism" we refer, in the Spanish case, to activism that takes the form of associations or individuals who fight for the visibility of Roma and their rights.

The last part of this sequence would be an increasingly established approach to the creation of a colonial critique. This is related to disruption and subversion of those Other cultural ontologies that transgress knowledge from new pluridiverse and autochthonous approaches, without taking for granted that the mere alternative to hegemonic epistemological models already implies a fair and real ascertainment of the functioning of the world (Chipato and Chandler 2022). That is to say, the aim of these conversations situated at the margins is noting these margins and exposing their complex relationship with a centre also situated at the margin from the point of view of those forced into marginalisation. Doing so is to contribute to the effort to recover "the human", as Khanyile Mlotshwa (2021) wrote, and/or to create a cognitive justice useful to lead thought to the creation of liberating policies that require a prior intellectual framework (De Sousa 2021).

In summary, this article adds to the idea proposed by the Afro-Brazilian researcher Jéssica Nogueira (2022) from her work in Europe, which uniquely synthesises the need to situate oneself intentionally as an author, to take into account colonial legacies of exploitation and location in the processes of academic writing, and to distance oneself from what has been studied, but at the same time to enunciate the difficulty of not burdening discourse with values. Therefore, autoethnography is a responsible approach to the study of oppressed groups that have also been epistemologically oppressed in the narratives about their existence. This is something that is also expressed in much other research, especially related to Black autoethnographies in university spaces, most recently by Deanne Bell et al. (2020), Toyin Falola (2022), Mtisunge Isabel Kamlongera (2023), and Brandi Stone (2023), among others. To this can be added autoethnographies produced predominantly by indigenous women academics, such as those of Tayse Campos (2021) or Mariany Martins (2023). Thus, autoethnography – and also "embodied anthropology" or "egohistory" – articulated as places of enunciation from decolonial thought in the university – and that also can be understood as a primary sources of analysis – allow, as the Aboriginal Gamilaroi scholar Michelle Bishop (2021) points out, a creation of new spaces to combat the colonialism of the Academy and discuss normativity in the research process that also affect the academic careers of indigenous, Black, or Romani researchers.

For all these reasons, this article has a dual purpose of presenting an unpublished place of enunciation in the Romani-Spanish case in a contesting and disruptive way with respect to the limits pointed out at the beginning of this section. It is by no means the first contribution in this respect. On the one hand, there are already several studies that address anti-Roma racism within the production of knowledge and the Academy, such as the works of Ethel Brooks (2015), Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka (2015, 2023), Marius Taba (2015), Angéla Kóczé (2021), Dezso Mate (2021, 2023), and Iulius Rostas (2021), among others. They all share the idea that the crystallisation of Critical Romani Studies not only confronts scientific racism but also contributes to re-constructing, re-naming, and re-signifying Romani histories around the world by achieving the justice and reparation that usually has been denied to our communities. On the other hand, in the Spanish case, contributions elaborated by Romani scholars have already begun to be disseminated, for example, on anti-Roma racism and its influence on education or social work as investigated by Cayetano Fernández (2021) and Sebijan Fejzula (2022); the analysis of Romani academic-epistemological contributions by Iván Periáñez Bolaño (2021); the Romani perspectivism of Isaac Motos (2020) discussing ways of understanding the past; Sarah Carmona's (2012) critique of the denial of identity in academia; or reflections on epistemic violence in the press and politics by

Ismael Cortés (2020), among others (Buhigas 2023). All these contributions, which are only a sample of a broader panorama, confirm that in the last decade a common vision has emerged regarding the place of Romani researchers in the academy, and it is now – when we are beginning to occupy these spaces backed by employment contracts and institutional guarantees – that new analyses, concerns, and experiences are coming under scrutiny. All this has contributed to the fact that the history of Roma, elaborated or not by Romani historians, finds limitations in all the schools of the world, where the problem they represent has also already been raised (Belton 2005; Marsh 2007; Matthews 2015; Sabino 2021; Fernández 2021; Lee 2022; Ostendorf 2024).

2. My Experience, My Field. An Example of (Anti)gypsy Representation in the Spanish Academy

In 2016 a group of researchers connected to this subject assembled at the University of Seville for the first workshop of the "History of the Gypsies Research Group". At that time, I was still an undergraduate, and I attended as a speaker to talk about the dissemination of Romani history at the university radio of Madrid. The conference flowed relatively normally, until the main axis of the discussion began to pick apart differences between Romani and non-Romani academics and activists. There, I took advantage of the space allowed by my paper to reflect critically on overcoming this debate: including new methodological perspectives would embolden thinking about Roma beyond their subalternised position in new historical studies from contributions of Romani intellectuals that had not been translated into Spanish. However, I was disappointed when the issues that I raised were ignored and pushed aside. Perhaps it had to do with my youth or that I was not yet a university graduate. In any case, I now believe that one reason why the debate was avoided on the terms that I proposed is the same reason why, years later, a hopeful nucleus of co-participatory work has faded away again. Undoubtedly, non-Romani academics who lead this work see it as successful, but it fails from the point of view of collective, pluridiverse, and intergenerational discussion. Notably, the reason for this failure is that scientific vocation of "Romology" focuses more on the reproduction of symbolic capital than any subsequent transfer of knowledge to accelerate the inclusion of Romani people. This has led a large number of Romani political activists to look askance at Romani scholars in the Academy, including Romani researchers themselves. Therefore, Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka is correct when she points out the conflict caused by "the emergence of scholars who have typically been treated as objects of study" (Mirga-Kruszelnicka 2015, 44). Although according to this anthropologist, this "does not necessarily have to be confrontational" (*Ibid.*), the truth is that the personal contributes to so much in what is apparently free of political and emotional implications, and it is presupposed that academic research must be so, that one cannot, and should not, fail to position oneself. Interestingly, such a statement usually results in: "I am not Roma, but". However, we must ask what follows "but" once the study is presented, the project ends, or the "informants" are no longer needed? These brief notes speak for themselves in deducing why many Roma, even those closest to Romani researchers, do not want to be concerned with in the interest of the affairs of the Academy.

This autobiographical excursus is important if one wants to understand the status of Romani Studies in Spain, which, in my view, for all that has been said, does not exist. Or, minimally, the work that does exist might be understood as a prelude to its creation, since it does little more than repeat the dilemmas

of the last century. For example, my own circumstances did not allow me to move from Madrid to Seville to join a specialised research group, which conditioned my decision to continue my graduate studies at Complutense University where I received my doctorate nested within urban history. Here, making Romani Studies visible did not take root for many reasons, including disagreement about the idea that Roma should be studied within a field of their own. For all these reasons, an outstanding need exists to set up a body of scientific production in Spain that has Romani Studies at its centre. It should bring together diverse experts in the field with two clear criteria: (1) a methodology that ensures intellectual honesty, in which what matters is the production of knowledge to transform the reality of this oppressed population and not to obtain symbolic capital, and (2) it should unravel how structural antigypsyism affects the production of knowledge and the organisation of Roma within the Academy, specifically those who dedicate themselves to self-representation. Moreover, in Spain's case, the generation gap is very important, since a significant number of Roma, who all identify the same contradictions, are entering graduate schools from different social positions.

In short, Spanish scientists of all stripes, Roma and non-Roma, have a task: to address this contradiction and generate a new space to produce knowledge under the guidelines of scientific ethics that understand the plurality of the Romani subject and his or her condition as subaltern. Thus, we must allow new studies that are concerned with the behaviours, discourses, perceptions, practices, and values of the members of Romani communities who, from another position, bring us closer to answering what and who are Roma (without silencing our voices). At this point in Spain, it is not possible to raise, beyond highly specific circles, the vision offered by Critical Romani Studies; in some spaces Romani Studies does not even have a presence, and in many cases its relevance as a field of study is denied.

2.1. Context of the Undergraduate Degree Project and Master's Thesis

Two academic committees defined my career during the defence of my undergraduate and graduate history degrees in 2017 and 2018, respectively. The first committee reviewing my final work was composed of five members, each a historian who specialised in a specific historical period. For my master's degree in contemporary history, the second committee was composed of evaluators specialised in different areas within that chronology. Interestingly, none of the members of either committee had been involved in the study of Roma nor issues related to ethnic minorities and racial discrimination. Some, however, were experts from social and cultural history.

Each defence session consisted of a classic fifteen-minute presentation, pointing out the methodology, sources and results of the research. Both committees then proceeded to critique the respective degree projects based on the presented text, presumably read by all the members of the committee. These works were titled "Los gitanos en la historia. Un estado de la cuestión transnacional hasta la actualidad" and "Los gitanos de Madrid (1880–1936). Representación y realidad en los bajos fondos de la ciudad moderna" (Buhigas 2018a, 2018b, 2018c).[9]

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9 "The Roma in History. A transnational state of the issue to the present day" and "The Roma of Madrid (1880-1936). Representation and reality in the underworld of the modern city".

My first work consisted of a critical review of the existing bibliography on Romani history around the world based on chronological, geographical, and thematic organisation, and my second work was constituted of research focused on archives holding primary sources where the state of the question was again problematised. I had studied the daily life of Roma in the Spanish capital, the city of Madrid, between the late nineteenth century and the Civil War (1936–1939). It attended to the dichotomy between the representation of Roma and the "reality" of their social fit in the urban world by combining sources and incorporating an interdisciplinary approach which investigated history from the point of view of anthropology and vice versa.

Although both research papers were awarded the highest grade and, in the case of the first one, even an honorary distinction, during the committee proceedings, debates took place based on several shared comments made by most committee members. These comments fundamentally questioned anti-Roma racism as a cause of persecution. In doing so, Roma were held responsible for the social consequences of racism against them. In response, I confronted the academic power hierarchy and my possible inclusion in the department where I eventually finished my PhD thesis. My response was conditioned by (1) the need to argue methodologically some questions without any previous theoretical route in Spain and with (2) the handicap of having to deal with structural and normalised anti-Roma racism. The latter was witnessed by Romani family and friends who attended the reviews as observers.

The most relevant comments can be organised into three interrelated modules. The modules began with a phase of denial, followed by a central phase of substitution and/or appropriation, and ended with an offensive phase. While the denial phase occurred as part of the corrections made by the committee, the next two phases were part of the recommendation section. What follows next is an explanation of each of these modules and an observation of how the comments contribute to a representation of Roma within the Academy and more specifically to the production of knowledge that is intimately related to the representation of Roma in a society strongly affected by antigypsyism. In Spain, antigypsyism only become evident after the 1978 Constitution, which for the first-time recognised Roma as full citizens. It was not until 2022 that anti-Roma racism was introduced into the law as a hate crime.

2.2. Analysis of Modules

2.2.1. Denial: 'Antigypsyism does not exist.'

The first phase of denial refers precisely to the denial of racism materialised in this specific case in academic evaluation, which is used as an excuse and under a pretended theoretical critique. The denial of racism not only has implications in the political and institutional articulation of a contradictory discourse that leads to its elimination (Nelson 2013). It also has repercussions on the production of knowledge itself since the very denial of racism comes from ignorance of history, as Nelson, Adams, and Salter (2013) have pointed out for the African-American case in the United States. The latter indicate how less historical knowledge – by not discriminating between historical fact and fiction – amplifies racism. Applied to our specific case of antigypsyism, this hypothesis

seems to be operative and is expressed with greater severity when taking place in an academic court formed by professionals of history. Thus, there is, for example, a complete lack of knowledge in the Spanish educational curriculum (also at the university level) of phenomena such as the Great Raid or extermination project against the Spanish Roma (1749–1763) or the *Porrajmos* (Roma genocide) during the Nazi regime, to cite just two relevant examples that do not do justice to the extensive local history of persecution. This lack of knowledge does not only materialise as a curricular or individual training gap but is supplemented by the fiction of a long tradition of anti-Roma representations based on negative stereotypes – or positive discrimination through art – especially promoted in Spain during the forty years of Franco's dictatorship (1939–1978). All the above conditions, as we will see in the following modules, allow for the survival of analyses anchored in a racist perspective – "unclean" as the Spanish Romani intellectual José Heredia Maya (2000) said – and influence suggestions or recommendations on the type of study that should be carried out on Roma.

Before going into this in this phase of denial, the most obvious examples during both committees were statements that "antigypsyism does not exist" when referring to past histories under investigation – without entering a discussion about their opinions about the present. This does not only constitute a type of epistemic violence towards the student but also towards those Romani observers (family and friends) confronted by a denial of real racism suffered individually. By virtue of occupying a space presumably reserved only for non-Romani white society, they are indirectly made invisible by not being treated or read as Roma by both committees. Without further argument the evaluators themselves ultimately enable an uncomplicated discourse by suggesting that antigypsyism does not exist with insensitive comments like "Institutional violence cannot be suffered by those who do not belong to the State," "There can be no systematic racism towards those who had no fixed residence and whose whereabouts were unknown," or "Being marginalised, they suffer from aporophobia but not from antigypsyism."[10] Except for the last statement, which could be discussed because of the debate on the contradiction between class and ethnicity – without one excluding the other – the first two statements were based precisely on historical ignorance and the filling of this gap with the fiction of Roma as an eternally wandering group, anarchists without conscience who were also foreignised. For all these reasons, stating in a committee that "antigypsyism does not exist" is part of what some authors such as Aidan McGarry have defined as "the last acceptable form of racism", that is, a historically rooted discrimination that nevertheless survives and is rooted in the system by means of very specific mechanisms (McGarry 2017). This example also reinforces the approach to antigypsyism as a type of structural racism that contributes to the racialization of Roma (Kóczé 2021). This is expressed paradoxically in the statement that antigypsyism does not exist, since the racial character of persecution is denied, while at the same time the racialization of Roma is incurred to disassociate them from the relationship of power with the state. In short, we are not trying here to enter into a conceptual debate on these issues, but the mere problematisation of these issues justifies the fact that historical ignorance and antigypsyism adhered to the perspectives of the evaluators, giving rise to a tension – which needs to be resolved – between the representation of Roma and self-

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10 All the statements in quotes were collected in my correction notebook during the evaluation courts and in some way, it became a field notebook with the perspective of analysing the experiences.

representation within the Academy. Added to this is also the fact that the evaluators not only lacked any historical knowledge about Spanish Roma but also seemed to lack knowledge about what racism is and how it works.

2.2.2. Substitution/Appropriation: 'What about the history of the marginalised?'

This second module of substitution or appropriation refers to the critical recommendations made by some evaluators about what they thought it would be interesting to address and/or what they expected to find when reading the work. The most obvious example in this case, because of its relevance to the conceptual debate and to the methodological assumptions that have traditionally been used as a starting point, is the statement that in reading the work one expected to "find a history of the marginalised" and that "it seems more interesting to make a history of the marginalised". These suggestions start from a functionalist perspective, and it is no coincidence that the sociological functionalism of Talcott Parsons and company were the reference for a generation of Spanish scholars (Pecourt 2014) who published the first reflections on Roma in Spain relating them as social outcasts.[11] They were alien to the class system itself and were disassociated from society by a supposed "Gypsy psychology", which referred mainly to the lack of morals in a context where the national-Catholicism of the Franco's dictatorship prevailed. This type of sociology influenced political and media discourse both in his time (1940–1970) and in subsequent decades and was also influential as a methodological reference for the first historians who approached the history of Roma in Spain, such as María Helena Sánchez Ortega (1979) and Antonio Gómez Alfaro (1982). In this way, the persecution, exclusion, and power relations between Roma and majority society were explained by taking as a reference the marginalised condition of Roma – marginalisation that in some way they fostered themselves with their apparent "unadaptability". In this way, in an exercise of intertextuality, historians and other social researchers have reproduced the same narratives with an absence of critique and without complexifying the historical marginalisation of Roma as a conglomerate of social factors related to the diverse political experiences of each specific time and space.

In this sense, expecting to find a history of the marginalised reveals an intuition and a prejudiced view of what constitutes Roma in their representation within the Academy. The researchers, like society in general, do not expect to find a different history that, as was the case in my master's thesis, did not refer to social outcasts but to Roma inserted in the labour movement of the new industrial city who, in addition to their condition as factory labourers, had to face the social stigma of being Roma and being treated differently from their counterparts, non-Romani workers. This did not mean that they represented a separate class or group, in that their marginalised status set them against the State and historical processes taking place at a particular time. In the face of this approach, which formed part of the defence to these comments, it was also argued that at the time, "We were not talking about Gypsies" or that, without a source that explicitly identified them as such (usually a census), it did not seem prudent to "assure that they are Gypsies". "Gypsy" became over time an operative sociological category to designate

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11 As for Spanish scholars who published works on marginalisation and Roma, we refer, for example, to Juan J. Ruiz and Julio Iglesias (1980), Jesús Gutiérrez (1984); Teresa San Román (1986); and Aurelio Cebrián (1992).

that which fell within the representation of what should apparently constitute a Romani person (that is, the racialization of Roma). In this way, anyone that fell outside this category, such an industrial worker, sedentary, Catholic, and with school-going children, could not be designated as a Roma. This denotes an aggravating factor that goes beyond conditioning the phenomenon of *passing* to have a place in society but rather influences the denial of identity and, therefore, once again, the denial of antigypsyism when some of these Romani industrial labourers, to continue with the example, received a lower salary or were dismissed for no reason when their ethnicity was known.

Finally, the proposal to make a history of the marginalised follows the same steps as the previous one, so this proposal leads to two questions. On the one hand, pretending to make a history of the marginalised already situates Roma as such, given that the archival work or fieldwork will be developed only with this objective of justifying their marginality. On the other hand, by excluding a broader and more complex history, we continue to reproduce those old narratives about Roma to which we alluded at the beginning of the article and stimulate representations about them under the pretext of historical science. This ultimately leads to the dissemination of stereotypes within Academy and society in general. In conclusion, in discussing the two statements that came to light, the tension between the representation of Roma or the desirable representation of Roma versus the denial of self-representation is once again evident, no matter whether in the past, which did not leave a trace due to the inaccessibility of communication channels, or in the present, in the face of the denial of Romani identities outside the sociological category with which the dominant power defines what a Roma is.

2.2.3. Offensive: 'Don't make a victimhood story'

The third offensive phase is based on harsh "criticism" that is ideologically charged. In this case, the mass media has conditioned and contributed to feeding antigypsyism into general society, for example, when highlighting ethnicity when reporting crimes and fights (Ramírez-Heredia 2004). Nevertheless, in recent years there has been an increasing political articulation of Roma in different platforms while their presence in institutional public life within newspapers, political formations, and universities has increased. At the same time, self-representation within social networks has allowed numerous Spanish Romani activists to create content for thousands of followers. Such examples are read from an anti-Roma perspective as a victimhood narrative by Roma who not only enjoy the "benefits of their self-marginalisation", to paraphrase the headline of a Spanish newspaper in the 1980s, but also victimise themselves.[12]

In the same way, in both committees, the final comments pointed out that subjectivity was dangerous. Being a "Romani historian" seems antagonise academic committees, thesis directors, and researchers in general, who warn that one should avoid doing a "militant history", something they presumably would not say to another historian who works, for example, on the monarchy while being a monarchist. This may seem strange, but it is the order of the day in Spanish universities. We Romani historians face multiple discriminations, including the marginalisation of Romani Studies and prejudices about the type of history we produce, especially because a critical post-colonial approach is still largely unknown in Spain.

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12 The newspaper in question is *El País,* 28 December1980.

Therefore, more specifically, those final comments warning about the dangers of subjectivity suggest "not to make a victimised story". This is interesting for two reasons. First, the "dangerous subjectivity" came from my defence of not pursuing a history of the marginalised because there was also a part of the Romani population that was not marginalised or should not be read as such. Second, in relation to the above, this defence was interpreted as "victimhood" for wanting to remove Roma from a framework of negative representations in which they have been confined without exception. Paradoxically, however, they did not interpret that the real victimhood perspective was to force them to see Roma as marginalised people who organised their daily lives and their social strategies from this exclusive position.

In conclusion, it appears that antigypsyism in the eyes of the evaluators first judges a historian who enunciates history by the fact of being Roma and then judges the content's access with an interpretation loaded with prejudice because, remember from previous points, Roma cannot be Roma if they are not marginalised.

3. Romani Self-representation in the Academy – Opportunity and Tension

To review our progress so far, tension between the representation of Roma and self-representation in the Academy has been underlined through a concrete example, the evaluation committees of works on Romani history done by a Romani historian. However, this is only one materialisation of this tension. In the following, based on the Spanish case, two ways of resolving this tension are proposed: a theoretical justification and a practical one.

3.1. Positioning the Thinking, Broadening the Results

Over the last few years, several Romani authors have been emerging in Spain who, indirectly and based on specific cases, have been articulating a way of thinking that leads to taking Roma out of their isolation as an object of study and granting them the category of active subjects in the treatment and use of their own memory (Motos 2009; Carmona 2010; Garcés 2016; Fernández 2021). This has been interpreted by the Romani anthropologist Iván Periáñez (2021) as a process of recovery and repair of historical narratives about Roma that inevitably lead to the formulation of a Romani-situated thought, that is, the conscious production of knowledge from their own places of enunciation that allow visiting and revisiting, constructing, and reconstructing Romani memories.

In this sense, thus situating one's thinking makes it possible to broaden results precisely because a Romani researcher can access places of memory that are difficult to perceive and understand for non-Romani; moreover, they also possess tools such as the recognition of being Roma before the object of study itself, trust inherent to belonging to the community, and bonds of solidarity already established by family. In short, doing history or anthropology of Roma while being Roma turns your own social, spatial, and temporal context into fieldwork (Buhigas 2023). In this way, Romani-situated thinking can allow us not only to go beyond the classic history of the marginalised but also to think beyond and

even start from Romani microhistories that are unknown to general society due to a lack of written documentation and communication due to rejection. This can lead to revealing unstudied enclaves of memory and avoid the notion that Roma have not taken part in different historical processes, for example, with a historical analysis of how they fit into political formations and war conflicts in different time periods. In short, making history as a Roma does not necessarily lead to a story of victimisation or victimhood. Instead, by assuming critical approaches from the social sciences, it is, on the contrary, a methodological stimulus with which to access new information and give another meaning to interpretations far from the narrow margins in which the way of "investigating by representing" Roma has been pigeonholed.

3.2. From Quota to Leadership: Critical Romani Studies and the Romani Scholars International Solidarity Network in Spain

Throughout 2023 an initiative for Critical Romani Studies in Spain emerged, led by the author here. Critical Romani Studies in Spain aims at the incorporation of this current of study and methodology in the country. In this way, it intends to contribute to the Spanish-speaking Ibero-American space but also to the international framework. Although the creation and development of this approach had been developing since the situated thinking of the first Romani researchers in Europe who critically approached the production of knowledge about Romani communities, it was not until a few years ago when it began taking shape with the launch of the journal *Critical Romani Studies* (Central European University) in 2018. The editorial team, formed mainly by Romani women researchers, set out to address racial oppressions, different forms of exclusion, inequalities, and human rights abuses of Roma from a critical stance. That is, without leaving aside scientific traditions and procedures, we wanted to build a space dedicated to the production of knowledge that would bypass the dilemmas and limitations of the primitive niches in which the study of Romani population still operates today, mainly by using and leaving the latter as a mere object of study, without its own agency and on which to continue pouring an accumulation of representations – legitimised under the umbrella of science – often based on speculative approaches and the result of the study of non-representative samples. In this sense, anthropology, artistic studies, educational theory, history, and sociology are some of the areas most affected by the above. In turn, the rise of interest – both academic and cultural – in Roma and the Romani question is leading to the reproduction of practices that, which in many cases are incorporating innovative tendencies and free of some of the most obvious prejudices, may still be compromised both in their theoretical approaches and in the actual management of projects and field or archival work.

As in its matrix, this proposal advocates the enrichment of Romani Studies in its intersection with other areas of research on the colony, critical race, critical politics, decolonisation, diasporas, gender and sexuality, and the post-colony. There is also a perceived need to contemplate Romani participation, either within the academy or from collaboration with broader societal actors (for example, associations and social leaders). Thus, it is expected to (re)think the ways of understanding and developing research on traditionally marginalised communities and on which the narrative of marginalisation and the prejudices associated with them also involve relationships in research centres and research careers of Romani social scientists themselves. However, at present this proposal does

not take concrete form through any research project and/or university department – a desirable aim in the future – responding only to individual efforts of the research team to incorporate this current in Spain and create a network of researchers based on these assumptions.[13]

This initiative aims to overcome the incorporation of Romani researchers as a quota within research projects undertaken by non-Romani academics who, for a short period of time (duration of the project), focus on Roma as an object of study: not only in the face of the existing gap in history but also with respect to obtaining state and institutional financing. In these few, scattered projects there is a strong tendency to have some Romani researchers included in the form of a quota, with no program or strategy to close the gap in the unequal incorporation of Roma and minority groups into the Spanish Academy. On the contrary, it is another expression of antigypsyism where research groups or projects seek to legitimise themselves through quotas – without the researchers in question, in most cases, benefiting from the privileges of the group or project.[14] In all these projects and groups based in Spain over the last few years, the same discussion has taken place, pointing out those responsible for them. But the problem of epistemological and ontological legitimacy when producing discourses from the point of view of the decolonisation of knowledge has never been recognised. To make matters worse, to mention just one case, in Spain the first and only Chair of Gypsy Culture was created at the University of Alicante. The position did not consider numerous Romani experts in the field, beyond an associative corporatism that does not fit the real needs of Roma, as the Romani sociologist Nicolás Jiménez (2018) has insisted on denouncing. Moreover, once the initial funding was extinguished, the chair position was eliminated in 2024 without any positive benefit for Romani Studies or Romani academics.[15]

The seriousness of the matter also lies in a repeated accusation that if such academic projects do not prosper with a common dialogue, it is the fault of Roma. To move forward, we must stop playing a blame game and assume that this recurring tension between social science and fierce activism deserves criticism. The contradictions within Romani Studies must be exposed. On the one hand, academic projects must come to terms with the coloniality of their reason and, on the other hand, Roma should not disdain Romani Studies for its genesis – positivist and folkloric traditions since the Gypsy Lore Society. In both cases, the problem must be faced from the point of view of scientific ethics, firmly placed at the helm of production.

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13 Some of the members, in addition to the author, are Romani researchers Iván Periáñez Bolaño, Fernando Macías Aranda, Miguel Ángel Vargas, Rafael Silva Veigas, Carmen Heredia, Noelia Cortés, María García, Sarah Carmona et al.

14 It is not intended here to provide information, data, and names in this regard, which would allow for a detailed investigation of this issue with other tools. What is intended is to account for the problem and reflect on the critical terms that have been raised throughout the text.

15 "La Cátedra de Cultura Gitana de la UA cierra este lunes su proyecto, que arrancó en 2017, al suprimir la Generalitat la línea de financiación con la que contaban", Cadena Ser. See online: https://cadenaser.com/comunitat-valenciana/2023/12/17/la-catedra-de-cultura-gitana-de-la-ua-cierra-este-lunes-su-proyecto-que-arranco-en-2017-al-suprimir-la-generalitat-la-linea-de-financiacion-con-la-que-contaban-radio-alicante/.

In this sense, as an exercise in self-representation, in addition to the Critical Romani Studies group in Spain, a network called Romani Scholars International Solidarity Network has been proposed, originally designed by the Romani pedagogue Fernando Macías Aranda (2017), an expert in the development of educational plans and projects with a Romani perspective. Macías, who in turn coordinates the Campus Rom de Barcelona, an entity aimed at facilitating the transit of Romani people between secondary education and universities, has included this proposal within the group.

The purpose of the network is to channel the concerns of those Romani students who, in the stages prior to university postgraduate studies, are planning to pursue a PhD and to serve as a reference point for those who are not yet thinking about such a career. In this way, especially with those students who want to undertake research on the Romani population, they can count on the support of the Critical Romani Studies group and establish contact with other researchers through conferences, seminars, and workshops. In the future, they will be able to form part of the work team and join forces in the construction of curricula and the development of projects and publications that support the independence of Romani researchers in an Academy in which antigypsyism persists and leads Romani researchers to positions of subalternity in the form of quotas. In this way, both Critical Romani Studies in Spain as a group and the Romani Scholars International Solidarity Network intend to be a spearhead for Romani self-representation within the Academy from the institutional point of view and also for those results produced within the Academy and its members in recent years.

Conclusions

This text's revelation of what happens in academic evaluation committees is indicative of a phenomenon that extends across the educational journey, from tutoring during degree preparation and to other stages prior to the completion of a doctoral thesis where Romani students begin to relate to the academic system. All of this can condition novice Romani researchers' abandonment of their studies as they cannot find support spaces within the Academy. In addition, the world of representations about Roma created from above by majority society has been added a new attribute in other spheres, that of victim. As the Romani historian Sarah Carmona points out, it is true that there is a risk of "creating an identity based on victimhood, the memory of suffering is woven and imposed on history. Emotion surpasses comprehension. Suffering becomes edifying and predominates over the fundamental elements that form the idiosyncrasy" (Carmona 2012, 28). The lives of the past are commodified, and the monopoly of suffering is mediated, reducing Roma to a mere history of persecution that hides the daily lives of the communities and the ability to understand their role in society. The assumption of victimhood places the subjects on the margins of history and creates archetypes within the investigation itself. This prevents us from seeing beyond what is wanted to be told and what is understood as official memory, since it is built from "gadyicentric perspectives [that give] shape to an image [that] had the perverse effect of being assimilated by Roma themselves" (Carmona 2012, 27). The pressure to make a history of the marginalised and to marginalise Romani Studies as a field of study with its own entity contributes to the latter. This is not the case with the gaze of the Romani researchers who are paradoxically blamed for assuming a victimising narrative.

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