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The State and the Roma in Spain

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The publication "The State and the Roma in Spain" summarises the results of research carried out in Spain in the framework of the transnational project "RomPol: The State and the Gypsies", supported by the European Commission and coordinated by Jochen Blaschke (Berliner Institut für Vergleichende Sozialforschung, BIVS). RomPol has been analysing in each of the participating countries the particular state traditions, old and new political measurements as well as mechanisms of exclusion and integration, in which the nation state approaches problems which are considered to be "Gypsy issues". Furthermore, the project has formulated recommendations for politics and for European activities for human rights and anti-discrimination practices. ²

Five hundred years of neighbourhood

In Spain, the Roma, who call themselves "gitanos", look back to a history of more than five hundred years of inter-ethnic coexistence with the non-gitanos, whom they denominate "payos". As in other European countries, during these centuries the Spanish gitanos have been suffering persecution, imprisonment, social exclusion and spatial segregation, forced sedentarisation and assimilation, the prohibition of their language and culture as well as denial of their recognition as an ethnic and cultural minority. These highly contradictory and often shifting processes of exclusion are not only the result of social rejection and stigmatisation by the payo majority society; simultaneously, they are actively promoted and implemented by a wide range of state agencies. Since their arrival in the Spanish Peninsula until the present, gitanos have been forced to maintain a close, surveillance relation with the Spanish nation-state, who often viewed them as their "enemy within".

Nevertheless, and again in comparison with other European countries, in the Spanish case these processes of societal exclusion and governmental surveillance are countered by increasingly important processes of inclusion and integration. At least from the nineteenth century onward, the gitanos are ambiguously included in the national imaginary of Spain. Their culture, their music and their customs are appropriated, instrumentalised and often folklorised by the payo bourgeoisie in their search for national distinctiveness in relation to their trans-Pyrenean European neighbours. On the basis of these commonalities, but deeply committed to their own cultural heritage, a vivid and innovative new generation of young gitanos and gitanas is currently gaining access to the payo society as well as to the policy-making institutions.

In Spain there are no official statistics including ethnicity as a particular item; accordingly, exact numbers of the size of the gitano population do not exist. Most academics and policy-makers, however, estimate that currently there are between 500,000 and 800,000 gitanos who are Spanish citizens. These figures do not include the approximately 40,000 Roma who recently, during the nineties, have been immigrating into Spain and who dwell in shanty-towns mainly in the outskirts of Madrid. As to the regional distribution of the Spanish gitanos, the southern Spanish region of Andalusia is the historically most important Spanish gitano region. Currently, after the huge emigration since the fifties and sixties to central and northern Spain, still nearly half of the gitanos live in Andalusia, both in rural and urban settings. Large communities also exist in Catalonia, Valencia and Madrid, but in these cases nearly exclusively in urban agglomerations.

The project

In order to analyse the historic as well as contemporary relation between the gitanos and the state, in the framework of the transnational project "RomPol: The State and the Gypsies", coordinated by Jochen Blaschke (Berliner Institut für Vergleichende Sozialforschung), the Laboratorio de Estudios Interculturales (LdEI) of the University of Granada has been carrying out an exploratory case

study on the situation in Spain.³ Reflecting both the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of the majority-minority relations, our approach combined the systematic analysis of all available documentary sources on the Spanish gitanos and on the payo-gitano relations throughout history, on the one hand, with an ethnographic fieldwork on the contemporary situation of gitanos in their relation to state agencies and other policy-makers, on the other hand. While the documentary analysis includes different regions and epochs, the ethnographic data recollection has been focussed mainly on the Andalusian gitanos.

The gitanos in academic literature

The existing literature on gitanos has been gathered in several specialised libraries and documentation centres throughout Spain, then has been examined and evaluated in relation to the issue of historical and contemporary state-minority relations. Apart from "grey literature" documents produced by state agencies, by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) dealing with gitanos and by the gitano associations, all of which are used and extensively quoted in our report as "primary sources",⁴ we have been able to rely on the huge academic literature which since the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century has been published on the Spanish gitanos.

Although it has been neither possible nor necessary to provide for this study a detailed analysis of the state of the art in the field of gitano studies in Spain, a short typology of "genres" of academic literature on gitanos will contribute to explain certain bias and obstacles in the analysis:

- A first type of academic studies focuses on the historical "making" of the gitanos as a distinctive category; while some authors emphasize the process of arrival, immigration and step-by-step settlement of "the gitanos" as one particular "race" or "ethnic group", others stress the contribution of the Spanish state authorities and legal mechanism in the process of constructing or even "inventing" the gitanos as a specific category of "others".
- A second genre consists of often merely quasi-academic reconstructions of the gitano "way of life", their traditions, customs and folk cultural elements. Combining some historical evidence and some oral sources such as myths, legends and folk songs, this approach tends to romanticise gitano culture, seeking to present the gitanos as an exotic, but sympathetic remnant of pre-modern times.
- In sharp contrast to this genre, a third approach to the study of gitanos in Spain thematises the "gitano question" in terms of the problems they and their lack of integration pose to the Spanish authorities and their governmental institutions. Often on behalf of these authorities, a huge corpus of "gitano problematisation" literature emerges, in which description, analysis and normative "proposals" are continuously mixed for applied purposes, in order to "solve" the gitano "problem" once and for all.
- The fourth kind of gitano studies is mainly anthropological in its orientation and consequently focuses on gitano culture and ethnicity. These studies often remain rather functionalist in their static presentation of the gitanos as a traditional culture, whose different spheres - demographics, kinship, social organization, religion, education, politics etc. - are separately and monographically analysed through a micro approach and a strong emphasis on folklore and traditions. Inter-ethnic relations and majority-minority asymmetries are seldom thematised.
- Finally, a recent body of literature studies gitano-payo relations and conflicts from a broader, mainly sociological perspective and includes discourse analytic devices to empirically prove not just marginality and excluded-ness, but the very processes of marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination. These studies often include state-gitano interactions in order to suggest concrete changes in governmental policies, often from a political perspective which is sympathetic with the recent gitano movements.

Apart from collecting, revising and analysing these different kinds of literature, simultaneously an intensive and extended ethnographic fieldwork has been conducted mainly in the province of Granada, but also in Sevilla - both in Andalusia - and in the Catalan capital Barcelona. Fortunately, these ethnographic activities have been able to directly build upon prior fieldwork conducted on the same issue of payo-gitano as well as migrant-native interactions and intercultural relations in former projects carried out in the same region of Andalusia.

Collaborative fieldwork in Andalusia

Thus, the main emphasis of our fieldwork has been on slightly pre-structured methods and techniques of data gathering through participant observation, informal and colloquial conversations and interviews. These "informal" procedures have been applied above all to collect information "from below", from the local gitano population and their payo neighbours, from the - supposed or real - beneficiaries of the governmental and non-governmental integration programmes. In the city of Granada, fieldwork has been thus carried out both in the historical

neighbourhoods of the Sacromonte and the Albayzín, where a long tradition of gitano-payo interaction exists, and in the recent gitano settlements in the Almanjáyar and Cartuja neighbourhoods, created through governmental re-settlement measures.

Similar methods of colloquial and informal data gathering have been successfully applied inside the studied pro-gitano NGOs and the gitano self-organisations acting on the local and sub-local neighbourhood level. Due to former collaborations and to a long experience of voluntary action, the researchers have been actively participating in these associations and in their relation with state agencies. Participant observation and informal discussion groups have proven much more successful than explicit and formalised interviewing of “experts” and formal NGO representatives, who tend to limit their statements to officially sanctioned points of view.

On the basis of this collaboration, two extensive “round table” discussions were conducted on the issue of state-gitano relations. Reflecting the most important aspect of contemporary gitano integration policies, one of them, organized in Sevilla, was monographically held on the topic of educational policies. The discussants, representatives of gitano organisations and pro-gitano NGOs as well as teachers, social workers and other institutional representatives of regional educational authorities, analysed past and present experiences with gitano schooling, with “compensatory education” versus “intercultural education” approaches and with first pilot-projects on empowerment and affirmative action policies towards gitanos at school; furthermore, future scenarios and alternative options for schooling and vocational training for gitanos were discussed.

The second roundtable discussion, held in Granada, focused monographically on intercultural and inter-ethnic relations both inside organizations and associations and between state institutions and gitanos. Several local payo and gitano, organisations as well as an immigrant association attended the meeting, in which starting with an intercultural “role play” experiences of misunderstanding, discrimination and stigmatisation were discussed on a personal as well as institutional level. Strategies of empowerment and anti-discrimination policies were designed for intra-organisational and inter-institutional purposes.

Finally, extensive and formalised ethnographic interviews have been conducted with three kinds of key informants and experts:

- with representatives of gitano associations and of the Roma movement, in Granada, Sevilla and Barcelona;
- with political representatives, civil servants, social workers, teachers and other state representatives dealing with gitano communities, again in Barcelona, Sevilla and Granada;
- and with leaders and staff of payo NGOs - both Catholic and non-confessional ones - providing social, educational and labour market-related services to gitano beneficiaries, in Granada and Sevilla.

Achievements of the gitano movement

Apart from the real impact and effectiveness which the first generation of gitano and/or Roma activists and politicians has had on the gitanos' living conditions in general - which cannot be evaluated in the course of this project -, the basic achievement obtained jointly by the local neighbourhood leaders, the pan-Roma politicians and the gitano counterparts of the regional governments consists in having put the “gitano question” on the political agenda - not any longer as a “problem” of criminal law or social integration, but as an issue of recognition and of citizenship rights. In the course of this process, old attitudes of assistentialism and paternalism, which are not limited to church-run organisations, but are also reproduced by governmental welfare programmes on the national, regional and municipal level, are increasingly questioned during the nineties.

As a result, many of the welfare programmes and projects designed to integrate marginalised gitano communities and families and to overcome settlement and labour market segregation are currently “multiculturalised”. Specific “gitano integration and development programmes” combine the struggle against poverty and marginalisation with the explicit promotion of gitano culture and ethnicity.

Mapping actors, organizations and programmes

Currently, four different kinds of actors are influencing this agenda, sometimes jointly, but often competing with each other and even duplicating programmes, projects and services:

- As analysed in detail in our report, the oldest and still most experienced kind of actor is made up of institutions and organisations linked to the Catholic Church. Many NGOs provide social, educational, labour market and housing services for gitano neighbourhoods above all in urban contexts. Despite their focus on gitano beneficiaries and their struggle for multiculturalising the arena of service provision, they still often fail to integrate gitanos into their organisations and their

personnel. Professional experience and an assistentialist legacy are thus combined inside this kind of actor.

- Secondly, governmental actors appear first as a mere supplement of, but now already as a competitor for the NGOs working with gitano beneficiaries. While the central government is privatising and outsourcing large parts of its social services, in the course of decentralisation and devolution the regional governments are substituting the central state as actors of social policies. They mostly offer “generalist” social and educational services indistinctively to both gitanos and payos, but due to the mentioned pressure to “multiculturalise” their activities, many regional and municipal governments have started channeling their resources through particularistic “gitano integration programmes”.

- A rather new, but very successful social actor has emerged from below in the most marginalised urban and semi-urban gitano neighbourhoods: Protestant Pentecostal churches have combined re-evangelisation activities and religious dissidence to the Catholic Church with an active agenda of bottom-up community services. This movement has been particularly active among the impoverished, but upward-striving and entrepreneurial sectors of the gitano neighbourhoods and polígonos, high-density residential units for low-income families. Although often criticised for their supposed promotion of an individualist ethos, they have been very effective in empowering marginalised gitano families and in re-vitalising community life in highly conflictive circumstances.

- Finally, during the nineties many of the local as well as national leaders have been “emancipating” from their former associations’, NGOs’ or parties’ tutelage and have created independent organisational structures. This gitano movement constitutes a completely new “ethnic intelligentsija”. As such, it maintains close relations to the regional or municipal governments and/or to their former payo-dominated associations, but it insists on the cultural and ethnic specificities of being a gitano in contemporary Spain. While they often compete on the local level with pre-established NGOs, church or governmental institutions, they have been pioneering and very successful in participating internationally in the European pan-Roma movement, focusing currently on language revitalization projects and on the legal recognition of the gitanos-Roma as a non-territorial national minority in each of the European nation-states.

Challenges and recommendations

Several challenges have been identified in the course of this research, which will finally summed up in a set of recommendations regarding the future of political integration and participation of gitanos in Spain:

- 1) The governmental actors which are officially committed to gitano integration and promotion policies will fail if they (a) do not consistently include mechanism of gitano participation in the whole cycle of project elaboration, implementation and evaluation and if they (b) do not abandon old customs and practices of political clientelism, patronage and monopolization of certain organisations in detriment of others.

- 2) The integrated and multisectoral nature of the current national and regional gitano promotion programmes has to be preserved and further developed; in practice, these programmes still function in sectorally isolated ways. This task will only be achieved if a new generation of gitano and payo professionals is trained in interdisciplinary and intercultural project implementation.

- 3) Governmental agencies should sharply distinguish between programmes to prevent social exclusion of the poorest sectors of society, on the one hand, and ethnic recognition and empowerment measures, on the other hand. The first kind of projects must combine generalist anti-poverty measure with particularistic gitano integration activities; these sets of measures, however, should not be mixed up with the multiculturalist promotion of gitano culture and ethnicity, which should not be limited to marginalized segments of the gitano community. If the current blurring of both kinds of projects persists, the payo majority society's simplistic equation of gitano-criminals-poor people is indirectly acknowledged.

- 4) The growing internal diversity of the Spanish gitano community in terms of social class, region, gender and religion must be recognized by all actors. The frequent criticism directed against the pan-Roma movement as a mere “elite phenomenon” of the new ethnic intelligentsija over-simplifies the political and cultural potential of contemporary Roma ethnogenesis. Only in the last months, several bottom-up organisations and coalitions have been created to channel an articulate the interests of the young and highly educated gitanos. Innovative Initiatives such as the Asociación de Mujeres Universitarias Romís Andaluzas (Amuradi) and the Asociación de Universitarios Gitanos Españoles (AUGE) are not reducible to merely “ethnicized” expressions of “hidden class interests”, but symbolize the “coming out” of a new generation of gitanos, who combine an ethnic consciousness vis-à-vis the payo world with peer-group interests with regard to the elderly gitanos.

5) The rising protagonism of the gitanas, the Roma women, both inside the educational and social welfare programmes and inside the gitano/Roma movement has to be acknowledged by specific measures of empowerment, training and professional development. In the current scenario of rapidly changing gender and age status roles inside the gitano communities, educationally successful, politically active and ethnically committed gitanas will open new spheres of social integration for their fellow gitanas still suffering situations of gender-based exclusion and/or ethnic discrimination.

6) The basic objective of preventing gitano exclusion and discrimination while at the same time promoting gitano culture and ethnicity is a common task, which cannot be accomplished by a single actor or movement. After phases of tutelage by payo institutions and organizations and phases of segregated empowerment, the future of the internally diverse gitano movement depends on its ability to establish and maintain both inter-cultural and intra-cultural dialogues on different levels: (a) between gitano and payo social actors, (b) between the payo institutions and the gitano leadership, (c) between male and female activists and constituencies of the gitano movement, (d) between the leaders and representatives of the pan-Roma intelligentsija and the grassroots initiatives from below, and (e) between the new generation of gitanos supposedly apayaos (educated young gitanos sometimes criticised by their own communities for having adopted payo cultural characteristics) and the older customary gitano authorities.

7) In the near future, the different governmental and non-governmental, gitano and payo policy actors will need to define a balance between their underlying, often different, but complementary approaches of empowerment - focused on the minority as such - versus anti-discrimination - related to the majority society. Apart from the above discussed constitutional articles, there is neither a particular officialised definition of discrimination and anti-discrimination currently existing in Spain, nor are there distinctive agencies or institutions dedicated to the implementation of anti-discrimination measures. The debate on the necessity of introducing clearly defined anti-discrimination issues in Spanish legislation itself, as has already been accomplished in other EU member states, is only just beginning. The approval of a directive issued by the Commission of the European Union - the Directive 2000/43/EC - and aimed at harmonizing the very heterogeneous national legislations of the member states on equal treatment on the basis of race and ethnic origin will force Spanish legislation to develop its own legal framework on racism, xenophobia, and ethnic, racial and religiously motivated discrimination, in whose elaboration the gitano and pro-gitano movements will need to have a strong say.

8) Accordingly, the strategy of gitano empowerment is a priority, but it should not be defined restrictively in ethnicised terms. The question is not just to empower the gitanos as such, a highly heterogeneous collectivity, but to empower those gitanos who are persistently excluded and discriminated against in terms of their ethnicity, their culture, their religion, their gender and their social class. Thus empowerment must be dealt with in an inclusive way.

Endnotes:

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² For details, see http://www.emz-berlin.de/projekte_e/pj18_1E.htm.

³ The empirical collection of historical as well as ethnographic data has been realized by a team of three researchers: Maripaz Peña, pedagogue and anthropologist from Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz), Tania García, pedagogue and anthropologist from Barcelona, and Gunther Dietz, anthropologist based in Granada and acting as research supervisor.

⁴ Cf. Dietz, Gunther (2003) The State and the Gypsies in Spain. Granada: Laboratorio de Estudios Interculturales; see also http://www.emz-berlin.de/projekte_e/pj18_1E.htm.

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