



# 'It's the best place for them': normalising Roma segregation in Madrid

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## **'It's the best school for them:'**

### **normalising Roma segregation in Madrid**

We got word that we had to take our children out of their school so that other children could go there. We said that all the children should study together because the school had space enough for all. But we were ignorant. We didn't realize that the Education Department and the other parents would never even imagine putting all the children together in the same school. Because they fear that their children will get stained by the attitude of ours.

Gitana mother, 2010.

Half-way through September 2008 the national media reported a heated dispute taking place in Villaverde Alto, one of the most deprived districts of Madrid. The regional government had dictated a swap that would involve moving two whole schools—students, teachers, even school names—to each other's premises, located just a few blocks apart. The 240 Gitano (Spanish Roma) and immigrant children of San Roque School would exchange their building with the 480 children of Cristóbal Colón School, most of whom were Payos<sup>1</sup> (non-Roma Spaniards). Over two decades school places in the area had increasingly been allocated along ethnic lines so that, whilst the much larger San Roque was now half-empty, Cristóbal Colón had become overcrowded and dilapidated. To the officials who devised it, the swap seemed an obvious, inexpensive solution. But the Gitano parents rebelled, asking that the over-quota children from Cristóbal Colón be transferred to join the students of San Roque. When government representatives and Payo parents refused to mix the two student bodies, a stalemate was reached. With the school year about to start, the country debated the rights and wrongs of the exchange and whether or not the separation of Gitanos from Payos in school constituted a form of racism and discrimination.

The educational segregation of Roma children is in fact widespread in Spain, and throughout Europe, across highly diverse social, political and legal contexts. Well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most European Roma children are educated in Roma-only schools in ghettoised residential areas, in Roma-only classrooms within mixed schools, or in special education schools aimed at intellectually disabled children, which together function 'as a de facto substandard parallel system of education for Roma' (UNICEF 2011:19). Even where no deliberate segregation policies are in place, diverse forms of white flight are often endorsed by local authorities (Messing 2012:140). Despite a multitude of initiatives taken at local, national and European level, segregation, like the enduring marginalisation of Roma more broadly, seems a problem without solution (Farkas 2014:5).

Here I contribute to the debate about the persistence of Roma exclusion and marginality in contemporary Europe by analysing the Villaverde conflict in detail, aiming to uncover the concrete processes through which educational segregation comes to be represented, by state actors and large sections of the dominant population, as inevitable, necessary, and advantageous for Roma. I argue for a contextual approach that looks to the historical background as well as the ethnographic foreground: combining perspectives reveals how current discourses and practices regarding the necessity of school segregation in Madrid build on other, long-term practices of Gitano control—in particular, on housing policies designed to isolate Gitanos within the city and on associated initiatives of forceful re-education. As Teasley has argued for Europe more broadly, in Madrid too 'the degree of educational equality the Roma experience vis-à-vis majority populations is seriously hindered by multiple forms of containment operating both inside and outside of educational systems' (2013: 29). This embeddedness of educational segregation in broader forms of coercive supervision of Gitanos inserts it deeply into the physical and social landscape of the city, making it appear commonsensical and

unavoidable—and hence, I argue, extremely difficult to challenge and dismantle. Looking beyond Roma to the anthropological understanding of inequality more broadly, my analysis helps elucidate how core institutions of welfare provision in democratic contexts—the school, social work assistance, social housing—become ‘touchstones of endemic marginalisation’ (Simmons et al. 2011).

The control of Gitano children and adults through isolation in contemporary Spain parallels the eugenic supervision of problem populations in other developed contexts in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, where the capacity for self-governance is treated as an index of ‘fitness for citizenship’ (Horton and Baker 2012: 784), and where it is assessed and disciplined through the management of physical and social hygiene, education, and parenting (Ong 1996, Phelan 2001). So whereas Stewart (2012) has rightly identified a recent hardening of attitudes towards Roma in Europe and has linked it to the recent rise of populism, I argue that, in Spain, a diachronic perspective reveals a growing convergence of eugenic and paternalistic discourse similar to that identified by Horton and Baker (2012) for migrants in the United States, where representatives of the welfare state determine the extent to which problem groups deserve inclusion in the body politic. However, in Madrid—as with the Milanese Roma discussed by Picker (2012)—this convergence has taken a distinct form that borrows from pan-European institutional discourses on the management of ‘internal outsiders’ (Triandafyllidou 2001), and that revolves around the trope of integration, *integración* (cf. Martínez Guillem 2011, Veermersch 2012).

As I show below, since the consolidation of democracy in the early 1980s, the isolation of Gitano families in purpose-built ghettos in Madrid and of Gitano children in segregated schools has been couched in the language of liberalism, inclusion and positive discrimination. Described by politicians, planners and officials as a tool to achieve their eventual integration into Payo society, the forceful relegation of Gitanos to clearly delimited ‘penalised spaces’ (Wacquant 1997: 343) has gone hand in hand

with intensive social work monitoring and compulsory adult re-education. Thus not only do coercive measures 'exist side by side with neoliberal strategies to install self-discipline' (Horton and Barker 2009: 788), but the very means through which compliant self-regulation has been encouraged in Gitanos are themselves punitive. These concrete 'mechanisms of triage,' of 'ethnoracial closure and control' (Wacquant 1997: 344), underline at once the Gitanos' innate incapacity to behave according to the rules of urban coexistence, and the benevolence of the democratic state in attempting their redemption. In the process the failure of segregation to achieve any kind of positive transformation, and the visibility of ghettos and ghettoised schools in the urban landscape as ethnic spaces of poverty and increasing decay, confirm in the popular imagination the permanent status of all Gitanos as threatening non-citizens. The paradox of 'inclusive exclusion' described for the Roma of Milan by Picker (2012) works similarly in Madrid to reify and indeed augment the abject alterity of Gitanos.

At the core of processes of residential and school segregation of Gitanos in Spain are deep preoccupations with contagion, the 'stain' of which a Gitana mother speaks in the opening quotation above. Throughout the Villaverde dispute, the proclaimed unruliness and anomie of Gitano children and their parents was said to endanger the self-improvement projects of working-class children and their community. Whilst successful citizenship is increasingly defined in Western democracies in terms of 'self-reliant struggle' (Ong 1996: 739), 'the failure of one person to act as a citizen makes the citizenship of others more precarious' (Phelan 2001: 17). In Villaverde, living near Gitanos, and having their children educated together, evidenced for working-class Payos their subordination at the hands of the middle-classes, embodying the uncertainty of their own belonging. And, as elsewhere in Europe (Messing 2012), in Madrid too state representatives sanctioned these fears of contagion as legitimate bases for Gitano exclusion. As often when it comes to Roma, the idea that the 'rights and membership of the minority should be

endorsed even when it makes the majority uncomfortable' (Phelan 2001: 20) was absent from everyday relations, policy making, and the application of legislation.

So below I trace the chain of events around the conflict in Villaverde, revealing the 'constant play of designations' and their effects—the 'naming, categorizing, describing, depicting, and narrating' (Carrithers et al. 2011: 661) Gitanos as a presence within the city—and analysing both the statements and actions of individuals, and official labelling and nomenclature. Since segregation and its meaning was and remains contested in the south of Madrid, I pay attention to the realm of coercive biopower, but also to the contrasting understandings and choices of particular social agents involved in decision-making and knowledge-production regarding Gitano housing and education. To illuminate the interface between 'discursive constructions of minorities and discriminatory policy making' and implementation (Martínez Guillem 2011: 25), I elucidate the roles of town planners, officials, local residents, and NGO workers in crafting knowledge about the proper place of Gitanos in the urban landscape and Spanish society at large. I look for 'the official gaze' as it tries to render 'threatening bodies and people legible' (Aretxaga 2004: 404) but pay attention also to the attempts that individuals make to find a place for themselves and their own in the city. Producing a detailed ethnographic account of the conflict in its context, my aim is to reconstruct the layering of complementary actions and discourses of exclusion, across diverse contexts and media, that lead to the sedimentation of Roma abjection and non-belonging.

As happens often when individuals and interest groups confront the state and its representatives, in Villaverde too many of the communications between the parties involved in the dispute took place in writing—in the form of letters, complaints, official statements, internal memos and reports, court rulings, and press releases. I therefore examine these textual materials ethnographically, as cultural products deeply revealing and constitutive of broader world-views, and I frame them by

reference to repeated periods of extended participant observation in Villaverde between 1992 and 2009. My strategy follows a well-established anthropological tradition that uses texts as avenues into contested understandings about personhood, belonging and citizenship in Western contexts (e.g. Yngvesson and Coutin 2006, Greenhouse 2011). I begin by tracing the evolving role of housing and educational policies in normalising the isolation of Gitano adults and children in Madrid, and go on in the second half of the paper to produce a detailed analysis of the conflict itself and what it might reveal about the production of Roma marginality more broadly.

### **Housing segregation, social work, and Gitano surveillance**

The only way to integrate them is to keep them apart. Then with a bit of luck we can get some to learn how to live in flats, how to pay their rents, and take their kids to school and all that. *Then* they can live in regular flats like everybody else. It's a never ending struggle.

Social worker, 1993.

In Madrid, the segregation of Gitano children in schools has been normalised through broader, long-term mechanisms of Gitano isolation and surveillance which, as I show in this section, have played a key role in defining Gitanos as an object group, to be controlled and kept apart. Social housing and social work intervention have been particularly significant in this regard, and were consolidated in the early 1980s, shortly after the end of Francoism, alongside programmes of urban regeneration aimed at the Payo working classes. With the advent of democracy a massive urban transformation initiative was put in place in Madrid: 150,000 slum-dwellers were resettled and almost 40,000 new council flats built across the working-class periphery. Payo neighbourhood associations, increasingly powerful with the end of the dictatorship, negotiated with local officials which families would be resettled and

where (Castro, Molina and Bada 1996). As a result of these negotiations, the Payos who lived in the Villaverde slum were moved to flats but most of their Gitano neighbours were left behind: although almost a third of the people in urgent need of rehousing in the area were Gitano, they made up less than a tenth of those relocated (GCRPMM 1986: 70-77). The pattern was exaggerated in Madrid as a whole so that the slums that remained dotted across the capital became Gitano-only spaces. During the 1980s, with living standards gradually improving throughout the city, slums, deep poverty and marginality became tied in the popular imagination with Gitanos.

As the decade progressed, policies of ethnic segregation became went on to become more explicit and determined, and their eugenic dimensions more elaborate and far reaching. In 1986 the regional government and the mayor's office set up a Consortium for the Resettlement of Marginal Population to do away with the Gitano-only slums that had emerged as a result of the recent relocations, carrying out a complete census of the Gitanos left behind—approximately 15,000 people—but also determining their perceived suitability to live amongst Payos. When I first arrived in Villaverde to do fieldwork in 1992, Gitano informants described the detailed assessment carried out by social workers—'They wanted to know everything!—whilst the latter shared with me Consortium paperwork indicating that they indeed scrutinised each family in need of rehousing, determining their 'level of cultural development,' mental health status, and their habits and practices to do with such things as employment, schooling, and physical hygiene. After the census, the policy was, some Gitanos would join their departed Payo neighbours in blocks of flats, but those who were classified by social workers as least able to live among and as Payos were to be moved to new purpose-built, Gitano-only, isolated estates—the so-called Special Typology Neighbourhoods. Confinement to these ghettos was conceived by the Madrid authorities as a tool to facilitate the surveillance of Gitanos, the implementation of targeted social work and

re-education programmes, and their removal from working-class Payo areas where, as Consortium workers recorded, their presence was becoming increasingly unwelcome.

Nine Special Typology Neighbourhoods were built during the 1980s in Madrid to house but also separate, contain and re-educate Gitanos as part of the so-called Resettlement and Holistic Social Work Programme—an initiative that aimed to deploy housing and social work as joint instruments of social transformation. When they were ready to be integrated into Payo society, the official line went, some Gitano families might be offered standard council flats. Others were to remain indefinitely in their Neighbourhoods, which were said to fit perfectly their economic needs and cultural idiosyncrasies. These ghettos—some consisting merely of metal prefabs, others of cheap terraced houses—were placed far from the nearest inhabited areas, in derelict vacant lots difficult to reach on foot, and with no infrastructure, public transport or facilities, but all included a social work centre. ‘Isolate to integrate,’ as a social worker explained to me in Villaverde in 1992, was a clearly formulated policy: the physically isolated and ethnically homogeneous Neighbourhoods were paradoxically also officially denoted Housing for Social Integration. Justified in the name of paternalistic benevolence, the Neighbourhoods were in fact punitive and penalised spaces that signalled and reproduced the child-like but also abject status of Gitanos as wards of the state and their incomplete citizenship—*homines educandi*, ‘a collective human subject to be educated, improved, and enculturated’ (Trubeta 2013: 16), and kept apart.

In Villaverde, two years after the census, 62 of the 223 Gitano families left behind at the time of the original Payo resettlements were moved to council flats among Payos. Once there, policy stated, their ongoing ‘adaptability to the regular urban environment’ and hence their right to stay would be monitored by social workers. 81 Gitano families were dispersed to metal prefabs in isolated Special Typology Neighbourhoods across Madrid. The remaining 80 families, 400 people, were moved to

permanent accommodation in Plata y Castañar, the one Neighbourhood built in Villaverde, 2 km away from the nearest inhabited areas. Separated from the rest of the district by a huge stretch of empty barrenness, it consisted of three streets of cheaply built terraced houses, and there was also a social work centre where re-education classes took place, and a nursery school.

Wherever they were resettled, the Gitanos of Villaverde were monitored closely by social workers who, from 1990, were also instructed to use a newly devised instrument, the Madrid Income for Integration. Presented on official documentation as a ‘mechanism of economic redistribution,’ the Income worked also as yet another instrument of coercive invigilation. During the 1990s I often accompanied Gitano families from Plata y Castañar to the local social work centre to sign their individualised Integration Contracts, agreeing to fulfil a series of requirements in exchange for a much needed monthly payment—sending the children to school regularly, paying the bills, or enrolling in a detox programme for example. As an adult education teacher explained to me at the time, since compliance with the contract had to be regularly evaluated—through home visits and assessments—for the money to be paid, the Income was a tool that helped monitor Gitanos and ‘how well they are progressing in their path towards integration.’ I also often sat alongside Gitanos through lessons on numeracy and literacy, but also on subjects like family hygiene and reproductive health. Official policies and social work practice aimed to achieve the access of Gitanos to health services and their facilitate their entry into the formal labour market but also to ‘control population growth’ and ‘modify their behavioural habits’ (Lago Avila 2012: 4, 5). Crucially, nowhere in Madrid had Payos been subjected to the same regime of eugenic assessment and invigilation when slums were dismantled.

## Anti-Gitano protests and the fear of contagion

The Payo population of Villaverde has been punished by administrative decisions to rehouse Gitanos here.

Housing association representative, 2005.

Stating as they did that Gitanos could not and should not live amongst the majority population, the policies of ethnic segregation that I have outlined were essential in helping reify them as a separate, threatening group in the popular imagination. Throughout the 2000s, this depiction was magnified and strengthened through tensions between Villaverde residents and state representatives—and in particular through grass-root initiatives where local Payos expressed their dissatisfaction with class inequalities that, they argued, limited their rightful access to resources within the city. This layering of discourses across policy and public debate revolved around and consolidated the fears of Gitano contagion that would be so central to the framing of the school conflict in 2008, and that are still central to relations between Gitanos and Payos in the southern periphery of the city.

During the 1990s, Plata y Castañar, Villaverde's Special Typology Neighbourhood, became increasingly overcrowded and dilapidated. Its infrastructure deteriorated rapidly as its population grew with nowhere to go, and its purpose disappeared as funding for the Resettlement and Holistic Social Work Programme dried out. By the early 2000s, fifteen years after its construction, nobody in Villaverde referred to Plata y Castañar as Housing for Social Integration: on the contrary, the government-built Special Typology Homes were now described in official documentation, but also in news items and very active internet forums, as *infraviviendas*, infra-homes, houses unsuitable for human habitation, the role of the state in their creation apparently forgotten. The ghetto was regularly described, in the media and official documents, as a magnet that drew drug-dealers, addicts, and

other criminals to the district, a war zone, a frontier where savagery and civilisation clashed: as a major national newspaper put it in a phrase that encapsulated multiple racist tropes and that became much repeated, this was ‘Comanche territory’ (ABC 2013).

When the Mayor’s office finally announced the demolition of the ghetto in 2005, vocal protestors demanded that Gitanos who lived there not be resettled in Villaverde, where many had been born and where their parents and grandparents had lived, sometimes since the 1950s. As a campaigner graphically wrote in a popular forum,

The shit is going to splatter the whole of Villaverde, without exception. The ‘neighbours’ of Plata y Castañar, those who apply themselves to burning, setting fire to, charring, stealing and pillaging cars, as well as those who apply themselves to drug-trafficking and all kinds of illegal rackets, all those are staying in Villaverde ... Villaverde is a powder keg, and the authorities have lighted the fuse. Those who, irresponsibly, have started this appalling political manoeuvre will be responsible for the ordeal awaiting the neighbours of the whole of Villaverde (<http://www.plataycastañar.net>. Consulted 7/7/2006. Original quotation marks).

Arguing against the resettlement of Gitano families from the ghetto in Villaverde, an alliance of eight neighbourhood associations collected 10,000 signatures in the summer of 2005 demanding that they be sent elsewhere—preferably in districts with smaller or no Gitano populations in the affluent west and north of the city. As the text of the petition explained, whenever Special Typology Neighbourhoods and shanties throughout Madrid were demolished, their Gitano inhabitants were relocated ‘to the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and districts of the capital, Villaverde amongst them.’ Protestors argued that the resulting ‘saturation’ limited the socioeconomic development’ of the ‘receiving areas,’ thwarting the attempts at betterment of working-class Payos through the indifference

of those in charge. The contagious permanence of disorderly Gitanos and criminalised Gitano areas within the shared space of the district undermined in the eyes of many the precarious entitlement to 'good citizenship' (Porter 2005: 297) of the Payos who surrounded them.

### **Positive discrimination and school segregation**

In this school we have their cubs.

Teacher, 2005.

By the mid-2000s, when the protests over Gitano resettlements took place, housing was not the only concern of the local officials or protestors in Villaverde. Education too was a pressing issue, and in particular the allocation of limited resources to Payo and Gitano children who, by then, had been attending two different but neighbouring schools for almost two decades. As with housing segregation, the separation of children along ethnic lines in the south of Madrid had been kick-started in the early 1980s with the advent of democracy and the consolidation of the paternalistic welfare state. In Villaverde educational and residential segregation drew upon and developed the same set of understandings of Gitanos and their place within Spanish society, were orchestrated through the same institutions, and were put in place by the same state representatives—social workers and teachers employed by the Consortium for the Resettlement of Marginal Population. At the core of these processes was the concept of 'compensatory education,' *educación compensatoria*, which, in 1983—just as Payos were resettled and Gitanos left behind in the slum—had been enshrined in national legislation to facilitate the access to education of children from a variety of disadvantaged backgrounds. In Villaverde, however, compensatory education became a disciplining tool and an instrument of containment. Drawing on North-Euro-

American notions of benevolent positive discrimination enmeshed with the trope of integration of which I have already talked, it was locally deployed at once to raise the levels of school attendance of Gitano children and to isolate them.

In the 1970s and early 80s the two primary schools involved in the conflict, Cristóbal Colón and San Roque, were mixed, although the attendance of Gitano children was more sporadic than that of Payos. From 1983, however, the new legislation meant that increasing the numbers of Gitano children in full-time schooling became a pressing concern for educational authorities throughout Spain (Vieira Ferreira 1999: 240). The head teacher of San Roque was charged with implementing the new legislation and adapting the school to suit the perceived needs of the Gitanos of Villaverde: the school abandoned the national curriculum and started implementing its own separate compensatory programme. As elsewhere in the city, social workers from the Consortium, already scrutinizing the behaviour of Gitano families as part of the rehousing programmes that I have discussed, were charged with enrolling all the Gitano children of Villaverde in school and tracking their attendance: they were to do so using incentives like the Madrid Income for Integration mentioned above. They, rather than parents, became the main points of contact with schools and, in conjunction with the education board, decided which school each child was to go to. This was the Holistic Social Work Programme, in which the surveillance of Gitano adults was facilitated by the educational monitoring of Gitano children.

In the years that followed, Gitano children were progressively concentrated in San Roque. This worried deeply some of the teachers and social workers employed in Plata y Castañar in the mid-1990s, who disliked the fact that the school was becoming, as one put it to me at the time, 'a dump for Gitanos' and who recorded on internal documentation the wish of Gitano families that their children be enrolled elsewhere, 'so that they learn to live with everybody.' Whilst these requests were disregarded by the local board in charge of school places, overall enrolments in San

Roque were reduced and Payo families increasingly were allocated or directly applied for places at Cristóbal Colón or another neighbouring school. White flight and state-orchestrated segregation went hand in hand. And then in the early 2000s, San Roque, already delimited as an irregular, ethnically-saturated space, was chosen by the local authorities as the school where to manage another problem/outsider population—those children of immigrants who were deemed to be in need of ‘specific need of learning support.’

During the 2000s, as public opinion in Villaverde was mobilised against the resettlement of Gitanos from Plata y Castañar in the district, San Roque was seen locally, in the words of two of the teachers who worked there, as a ‘difficult school,’ one in which there were ‘many obstacles to developing a good teaching practice’ (Del Olmo Jimeno and Rodríguez Arroyo 2007: 13). Its ‘key feature,’ the teachers explained at a pedagogy conference in Madrid, was ‘the high percentage of students of Gitano ethnicity’ (ibid.). This was not merely a factual but a moral assessment: as Gitanos, the children did not have ‘routines, habits, appropriate and rich oral language;’ their communication ‘lacked abstract concepts;’ they ‘distrusted other social groups;’ and they were uninterested in ‘subjects outside their reality and their culture’ (ibid.: 14). Echoing representations of Gitanos as threatening, anomic and even animal-like that circulated in the district and the press, del Olmo Jimeno and Rodríguez Arroyo argued that the student body was so problematic that teachers left regularly, and there was little continuity so that learning was made even more difficult (ibid.). Said to lack the very capacity for self-discipline that is so important to understandings of nonwhite citizenship in Western democracies (Ong 1996: 739), Gitano children were often portrayed as ineducable.

By 2008, when the conflict over the swap took place, it was clear that the concentration of Gitanos in the school had devalued it: whereas 92 local families had applied for a place in Cristóbal Colón that academic year, only two requested places in San Roque. Although all other state schools in the area were at the very least full,

and although politicians bemoaned their inability to allocate to children a place in the school of their choice, no plans were made to diversify the San Roque teaching provision to include the national curriculum, to bring to San Roque Payo children in need of additional support, nor to disperse the children of San Roque to mixed schools and provide additional support for them there. In Villaverde, as it seems to happen often when it comes to Roma education, segregation had acquired an area of inevitability, making white flight appear necessary and commonsensical and rendering the possibility of mixed education almost unimaginable.

### **The conflict: debating entitlement and belonging**

There is no doubt that the building is the best in the area, and they've enjoyed it for thirty years. The swap is a milestone for the neighbourhood, no more and no less than the recovery of a public space for the whole neighbourhood. Whereas for them it's just a move of 300 metres.

Payo father, 2008.

They've told us to ask for anything, that they'll give us millions to fix the other building. Anything at all except putting all the children together! They say it can't be done because ours have a lower level, and they don't learn the same as the others. How can that be? How can the children all go to state schools, but be taught different things?

Gitano father, 2008.

On Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2008, four days before the start of the Easter Holidays, the head teachers of San Roque and Cristóbal Colón schools received letters from the regional Madrid government, announcing the swap of their premises. Officials stated that the aim was to address 'the need to adjust the offer of school places to demand.'

the swap would enable local authorities to allocate to families a space in the school they wanted. And indeed the rationale appeared simple: the two schools were within striking distance of each other so that their catchment areas overlapped; Cristóbal Colón was ‘oversubscribed;’ the much larger building of San Roque was ‘underused.’ As the Payo parent states in the quotation just above, the swap would return a much needed piece of real estate to the local community, which did not necessarily include the Gitanos of Villaverde—‘the whole neighbourhood’ as opposed to ‘them.’ Whereas the parents of Cristóbal Colón voted to support the exchange, those of San Roque quickly moved to reject it, objecting to the transfer of their children to a building that was smaller and in considerably poorer state of repair, ‘so that others can have our nice big school.’ In the months that followed, whilst the Gitano parents became militant in their resistance—publicising the conflict, enlisting the help of civil rights NGOs, and mounting a legal challenge—immigrant parents chose to remain in the side lines.<sup>2</sup> As a result, in exchanges between the parties involved as much as in the national media, the Gitano identity of the children of San Roque took centre stage. The debate and its outcome came to encapsulate core—albeit contradictory—understandings about the place of Gitanos in Madrid, about their nature as humans and as citizens, and about their relationship to other groups in Spanish society at large. Of particular relevance were notions of integration, responsibility and discipline, and the role they played in constituting the distinctiveness of Gitanos as a separate group with an ambiguous relationship to the rest of society.

At the core of the dispute was the contested meaning of educational segregation which, as I have explained, had already been in place in Villaverde for two decades. For the Gitano parents, segregation was evidence of on-going racism, and the conflict ‘the long-awaited’ opportunity to redress the situation: ‘This is our chance,’ a Gitana mother told me, ‘we can do something about it now.’ The parents

wrote to the Education Department: 'To become integrated we need to relate to others, not be isolated. Let the doors of the school be open, but don't throw our children out.' They proposed that, to address the overcrowding at Cristóbal Colón, the two schools be merged or that the over-quota students be transferred to join the children of San Roque.

The authorities—politicians and senior civil servants—and the Cristóbal Colón parents association, however, rejected any merger. Significantly, they did so by explicit appeal of the notions of integration and positive discrimination, by now embedded in educational practice and discourse in Villaverde for two decades. A merger was impossible, they said, because the children of San Roque benefitted from 'special attention:' activities at San Roque were 'more personalised and individualised,' the staff/student ratio was smaller, and some of the teachers were experts in compensatory education. All these additional advantages would necessarily be lost under a merger, they reiterated at meetings and in writing, and therefore the children of San Roque would suffer if mixed with those from Cristóbal Colón. As in housing policies, here too segregation from Payos was phrased in terms of the benefits for Gitanos: both state representatives and Payo parents emphasised the Gitanos' disproportionate share of limited welfare resources, and their own willingness to accept this unequal distribution.

Most importantly, as the local government stressed in the official dictate ordering the swap, segregation was necessary because support for students with special needs should be delivered 'in the most appropriate place' according not just to their to 'personal' but their 'social characteristics' (BOCM 17/06/2008). This statement is particularly revealing: made in passing on a little-read piece of bureaucratic writing, it embodies the processes through which monolithic identities are produced by the machinery of the state. The Cristóbal Colón parents association and the Education Department, and other entities like the regional arbitrator the Defender of the Child, also argued repeatedly that segregation was needed because

of the 'singularities' and 'peculiarities' of the children of San Roque. Crucially, these singularities were not a result of each child's individual trajectory, but rather a shared, ethnically defined, condition: the collective character of the children—the typology of the student population—was consistently emphasised in meetings, press releases, letters, and responses to enquiries and to complaints.

As an ethnically defined group with 'distinct social characteristics,' the Gitano children of San Roque, and by extension their parents, were described by state representatives primarily through their perceived lack of engagement with schooling, and repeated use was made of the notion of 'school absenteeism.' Officials and the Cristóbal Colón parents association argued that in San Roque there was an 'extremely numerous amount of students of Gitano ethnicity affected by absenteeism,' and that Gitanos as a group were an 'absenteeist population,' a 'collective traditionally affected by absenteeism.' In response, Gitano NGO representatives accused the authorities of depicting Gitanos as 'absenteeist by nature.' In the debate about ethnic segregation absenteeism—the reluctance to submit to disciplinary practices of citizen-making—became symbolically loaded as the key marker of Gitanos' incapacity for self-governance, and hence of their lack of entitlement to a place within Cristóbal Colón and within the social body this school came to stand for.

Hand in hand with the stress on the inability of Gitanos to behave as demanded by the rules of urban coexistence went the notion of Payo parental choice. Politicians and officials stated that the swap was necessary, and a merger impossible, because of 'the need to adjust the offer of school places to demand.' In reality, however, this meant increasing the number of spaces in Cristóbal Colón for Payos and some children of immigrants, since the same statements depicted San Roque as the most appropriate school for Gitano and immigrant children needing additional support. Here the proclaimed right to exercise consumer choice, essential to the

exercise of citizenship in capitalist democracies (Jubas 2007, Baudrillard 1998[1970]) was deployed by the authorities to reassure working-class Payos of their place within the Spanish society: in their protests over the overcrowding at their school, the Parents Association at Cristóbal Colón had emphasised the disregard of the regional government for their plight, asking ‘Don’t the children of the south of Madrid have the same needs as others?’ (El Pais 04/06/2008). As has been documented for Roma elsewhere in Europe (Messing 2012), white flight and policy implementation went hand in hand.

Whilst politicians emphasised the advantages that a compensatory education delivered through ethnic segregation brought the children of San Roque, Gitano parents and supporting organisations portrayed it as discrimination. At the start of the dispute Gitano parents had been distraught to find out that the school did not follow the standard national curriculum: on written statements and media appearances, and also to me in interviews, they explained that they never become aware of this fact. Representatives of Gitano NGOs equated the San Roque’s ‘special educational project’ to the absence of an adequate teaching and learning program. As an NGO worker explained, ‘Children don’t receive an education, they are piled up, they are entertained.’ The lower educational level of the children of San Roque—emphasised by officials and Cristóbal Colón parents’ association as a neutral, non race-based reason why the merger was impracticable—was, in the eyes of Gitano parents and NGO representatives, the result of the negligence of the educational authorities who did not consider Gitano children worth educating. On their submission to the Public Prosecutor’s Office accusing the Madrid Government of discrimination the Gitano parents made a graphic link between the lack of an adequate curriculum, the practice of ethnic segregation, and the invigilation and control of Gitano children:

No curriculum is developed, and there are no study plans to be put in place during the so-called ‘school’ hours. Being in school between 9am and 2pm is

a complete waste of time and of resources: one hour of 'break,' another for lunch, and the rest to store, entertain, control, and oversee these children, who are strange, different, ignorant and incapable of learning, to whom there is no point in teaching anything.

Self-governance—its presence and its absence—thus became central to the way the various groups argued their positions and claimed entitlement to inclusion in the social body and the in the disciplining institutions of the state.

### **The denouement: interpreting Gitano disobedience**

We ALL have the RIGHT to protest and to be listened to, particularly when we disagree with something, but we also have the DUTY to submit to the established laws, which are compulsory for all, whether we agree with them or not.

Cristóbal Colón Parents Association, 2008 (original capitals).

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2008, the day schools reopened throughout Madrid, the Gitano parents of San Roque took their children to their old school building. There, they found the Cristóbal Colón parents and children, the press, and armed police. Heated verbal confrontations between parents from both schools took place. The San Roque children were allowed in, but kept in a room separated from those of Cristóbal Colón. A Gitana mother explained: 'The head teacher told me that our children were not going to go out to the patio for their break, nor spend any time at all with the other children. The police were there with the children, with guns and all.' Unhappy that the children would be isolated within the school, the parents took them home. When they returned the next day, they were not allowed into the building and further confrontations took place.

Whilst the Gitano parents of San Roque saw their attempt at entering the school as an assertion of their children's rights and of their own democratic entitlement to protest, the Cristóbal Colón parents' association depicted it as refusal to adapt to the norms of civil society. It was the lack of obedience to the 'published Order of exchange' of the parents of San Roque, their refusal to 'comply with the dictated norm' by 'occupying a public building without authorisation' that had made the police presence necessary 'so that classes could be imparted with normality and without incidents.' Echoing the same stereotypes of Gitanos as disobedient and uncivilised whose pervasiveness and effects I have traced, the Cristóbal Colón parents association stressed their resistance to obey an official mandate 'that applies to us all.' The Gitanos' protest at the segregation of their children thus became the very grounds on which this segregation was made necessary. The same lack of acquiescence to governmental dictates—the Gitanos' unruly behaviour—was finally deployed against the protesters by the authorities. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, with Gitano parents still refusing to take the children to the new San Roque building, the Education Department issued a press release threatening to sue them for their 'refusal to comply with their obligation to school their children.' Defeated, and frightened that social workers would become involved and that their children might be taken away from them, the Gitano parents of San Roque finally gave in.

Over the next two years, three official bodies, the regional arbitrator the Defender of the Child, the national arbitrator the Defender of the People, and the High Court of the Comunidad de Madrid, ruled that no discrimination had taken place, and that the Education Department had acted within its rights ordering and implementing the swap. Only the Defender of the People commented negatively on the failure by the Department to accompany the swap by a redistribution of the children needing additional support across the two schools. Six years after the swap, San Roque school, now in the premises that used to belong to Cristóbal Colón,

figured prominently in overview of segregation in Spain: it was only attended by Gitanos and by immigrants (Santiago and Maya 2012).

### **Concluding remarks**

The thing is that when Gitano children are born, say my three grandchildren, we already know that most of them will end up in a separate school.

Gitano grandmother, 2016.

Analysing the encounter between recently arrived Eastern Europeans and locals in inner-city Glasgow, Grill (2012: 51) has described how, over a short period of two years, the former's 'ethnic and cultural distinctiveness was not only 'discovered' by state institutions and NGOs but made a central project for the state.' From 'undefined strangers,' Grill explains, 'certain Slovaks became fixed as Gypsies' in popular and state representations (ibid.: 43). Picker too, talking about migrants in Milan, has emphasised the role of city authorities in creating a status of fear and segregation of Roma' through the deployment 'overlapping discourses of social integration and deviance' (2012: 83). Similar dynamics of forceful categorisation have taken place in Madrid over the last three decades, and above I have provided a detailed account of some of the key processes through which knowledge of Gitanos has been produced since the end of the Francoist dictatorship. Looking to the ways this knowledge emerges out of and creates concrete actions and effects, my aim has been to tease out the 'confluence of violence and paternalism, of force and intimacy' that Aretxaga (2003: 406) tells us is so central to the way the state functions in contemporary Western contexts. Yet the state is not the only agent in the creation of Roma marginalisation: the conflict in Villaverde reveals the need to pay attention to the intertwining of the world-views, actions and positions of a variety of actors, and their roles in creating multiple levels of exclusion. I have wanted to convey this layered

proliferation, taking an ethnographic lens both to the past and the present, 'linking and crosschecking' one with the other as Marushiakova and Popov (2015: 20) argue for the study of Roma and policy in Europe more broadly. Seen in this light, the difficulties faced by governmental and non-governmental organisations attempting to dismantle the educational segregation of Roma children in Europe to which I referred at the start of this article (UNICEF 2011) appear indeed predictable: how indeed to cut the head of the hydra?

Responses to the Villaverde dispute, and to the segregation of Gitano adults and children in Villaverde, were far from monolithic—swathes of popular opinion supported the Gitano parents, and above I have described the discomfort of some of the teachers and social workers charged with implementing exclusionary policies. Nonetheless, the story of San Roque School makes clear the resolve with which Gitanos are kept 'in the most appropriate place' in contemporary Spain, across a wide variety of structural arenas. Not just the success of the regional government in implementing the swap, but the repeated endorsement of segregation by courts and arbitrators, and the continued existence of a ghetto school in Villaverde, all evidence this determination. Beliefs about Gitano deviance may be rephrased through idioms of integration, multiculturalism, and positive discrimination—as they are throughout contemporary Europe (Veermersch 2012, Stewart 2012, Picker 2012)—and they may be strongly contested. However, these beliefs remain essential to how working- and middle-class Payos struggle for their own place within a contested urban landscape and a fragmented body politic, and indeed to their relation to one another and to the state. Deeply entrenched notions of Gitano unruliness, anomie and contagion thus overlap with practices of control and 'inclusive exclusion' (Aretxaga 2004: 407), taking place decade after decade, making the isolation of Gitano children appear commonsensical and necessary. Punitive institutions of declared assimilation, like the compensatory school and the Special Typology Neighbourhood, together

produce and evidence non-belonging, with disciplinary practices claiming to install citizenship and civilisation leading to creation of permanent non-citizens. In this process, Gitano adults and children alike are suspended out of time, in an on-going state of therapeutic marginalisation and enforced improvement.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> 'Payo' is the term used both by Gitanos and non-Gitanos to refer to the later.

<sup>2</sup> Exploring why immigrant parents chose not to become involved in the conflict is beyond the remit of this paper.

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