The genesis of a 'Romanian Roma Issue' in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona: urban public spaces, neighbourhood conflicts and local politics

La construcción de la 'Cuestión Gitana Rumana' en el Área Metropolitana de Barcelona: espacios públicos urbanos, conflictos vecinales y política local

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Abstract. This paper intends to present a general overview of the situation of the Romanian Roma Population in Barcelona Metropolitan Area and briefly describe and analyse the ways in which their presence is being managed. Methodology used range from media analysis to ethnographic fieldwork. First, I will offer some references as well as a general background of the presence and migratory process of the Romanian Roma population in Spain and Barcelona. Next, I will focus on the local construction of the 'Roma Issue', briefly using three different and interrelated examples: public space regulation and marginal economic strategies; settlement policies and the idea of nomadism-mobility; and finally political construction and culturalization of concrete neighbourhood conflicts. Finally, I intend to offer some conclusions as well as some reflections about the possible evolution of these processes both at a local and state level.

Keywords. Roma migrants; marginal jobs; public spaces; mobility.

Resumen. Este artículo tiene la intención de presentar un panorama general de la situación de la población Rrom (gitana) rumana en el Área Metropolitana de Barcelona y describir brevemente y analizar las maneras en las que su presencia está siendo gestionada. La metodología utilizada va desde el análisis mediático al trabajo de campo etnográfico. Primero, ofreceré algunas referencias y un contexto general de la presencia y el proceso migratorio de la población rrom inmigrada en España y Barcelona. A continuación, me centraré en la construcción local de la 'cuestión gitana', usando brevemente tres ejemplos diferentes e interrelacionados: regulación del espacio público y estrategias económicas marginales; políticas de asentamiento y la idea del nomadismo-movilidad; y finalmente la construcción política y culturalización de conflictos vecinales. Por último, se ofrecen algunas conclusiones y reflexiones sobre la posible evolución de dichos proceso a un nivel local y estatal.

Palabras clave. Gitanos migrantes; trabajos marginales; espacios públicos; movilidad.

Introduction and methodology

Despite being quite unknown, Romanian Roma in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (Catalonia)[1], as in the general Spanish context, have been often very visible in the media and the political agenda at a local level, while being deeply unknown at the same time. This invisibility affects, above all, the situation of a significant segment of this population (in a persistent socioeconomic exclusion), that clearly implies specific characteristics regarding housing, mobility and marginal economic strategies, among others: all of these closely related fields require an inexistent in-depth knowledge of the conditions in which the Romanian Roma population lives and some of them demand urgent and solid intervention by local authorities and other actors to improve the living conditions of this population.

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[1] Formally, the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona is conformed by 36 municipalities and approximately 3.2 million inhabitants (CAMB, 2010). However, even if research has covered other areas, in this text I refer specifically to the municipalities of Barcelona, Badalona, Santa Coloma de Gramenet and Sant Adrià de Besòs.

Nevertheless, those issues have been usually ignored or subsumed in the broader approach of social services and charity (already overwhelmed, and where often Roma population does not arrive), when not approached exclusively through coercive interventions (forced evictions, regulations penalizing marginal strategies and so on). This situation contributes to a dynamic whose only objective seems to make their settlement and presence more difficult and comes together with the constant construction, from the political and media arena, of a certain image of this population (as a problem or issue): not only an exercise of racism or stereotypation, but also the genesis of discourses that justify, support or foster particular political and management decisions about the Roma migrants.

This paper intends to present a general overview of the situation of the Roma Population in this area and briefly describe and analyse the ways in which the presence of the population (and the construction of a 'Roma Issue') is being managed and generated. In consequence, I will first offer some bibliographic references as well as a general background of the presence and migratory process of the Romanian Roma population in Spain, focusing later on this specific area. Next, I will focus on the construction of the 'Roma Issue' in Barcelona, using three different and interrelated examples: public space regulation and marginal economic strategies; settlement policies and the idea of nomadism and mobility; and the political construction and culturalization of concrete conflicts (as 'overcrowded flats/pisos patera'). The main idea behind this text is that discourses associated with this fields 'crystallize' in (and are constructed again by) legal frameworks, management models, and so on. Despite it is impossible to fully analyse all three in here, I believe they serve well to observe the progressive construction of a 'gitano rumano' issue in Barcelona as well as other aspects related with urban management. Finally, I intend to offer some conclusions as well as some reflections about the possible evolution of these processes.

Regarding methodology, this paper is based both in the conclusions of a long-term ethnographic fieldwork and a media analysis on the representations about Romanian Roma migrants in the context of the study. In both cases the information used here represents a small part of a wider research whose main topics are housing, subsistence strategies (mainly marginal economical activities) and the uses of urban public spaces and mobility (both at local and transnational levels)[2]. The fieldwork was conducted mainly with street-level participant observation and semi-structured/in-depth interviews, as well as other kinds of approach to the situation of the Romanian Roma population in Barcelona (including to some extent observation of institutional contexts and of the impact of different policies in their access to services and life conditions, just to mention some). As for the media analysis, it was conducted using three of the main newspapers in the context of study (El Periódico, El País y La Vanguardia), and based mainly in some of the categories proposed by Teun Van Dijk (2003; 2005) and Theo Van Leeuwen (1996). In any case this text does not intend to perform a systematic analysis of all the universe of news which mentions Romanian Roma

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[2] Starting in 2006, I have participated in two different researches (both of them supervised by Teresa San Román) regarding Romania Roma people in Catalonia (Spain). The first one is my own PhD in Anthropology, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Education. The second, financed by the Catalan Health Department, had to do with socioeconomic inequalities and cultural difference in health access. I have to also thank Meritxell Sàez as the other half of the team of ethnographers that worked with Romanian Roma in those projects.

and only uses some of the quotes considered relevant in relation with the topics and positions I try to briefly describe. Finally, it is important to point out that although there were other research contexts aside from Barcelona (including a short fieldwork in Romania), I have conducted research just in one territory of Spain. Therefore, even if I have some knowledge about the situation in other areas (and some of my conclusions may also be valid for them) there might be some differences between my perception and what happens in other concrete contexts of Spain.

Brief contextualization of Roma migrations in Spain and Barcelona Metropolitan Area

As I already said, the Romanian Roma population is probably one of the migrant populations that accumulate more press headlines and widespread prejudices in the Spanish context and, at the same time, one of the most unknown and invisible populations (Gamella, 2007; López, 2008). This imaginary frequently induces to the simplification of the migratory process and of the population itself, both facilitating confusion with other populations (for instance, with general Romanian population or even 'eastern population') and hiding its internal diversity. In this sense, there exists an important diversity regarding the origin countries of Roma population present in the Spanish state, although a majority comes from Romania. As in many other groups heterogeneity is a dominant characteristic: in this case it expresses, among other aspects (and independently of a certain shared identity) in their subgroup distribution: town of origin or current residence; traditions, grab and social and family organization; socioeconomic and labour situation; the use of Romany or Romanian language; religious practices; and, finally, the different biographical and migratory processes for each person and family.

Another factor that contributes to this invisibility is the little specific research that has been done in our context[3]. From this bibliography, that has a variable quality and is relatively recent (publications before 2005 practically don't exist), an important part are reports of different associations or NGOs which present relevant intervention processes and can be a source of interesting information. From among those, it is necessary to highlight the ones carried out by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) in different Spanish cities (see FSG, 2009a; 2009b and 2010), and other belonging to other entities or projects like Kale Dor Kayiko (2004), APDHA (2005), Lungo Drom (2007) or ACCEM (2007).

The other great group corresponds with the scientific works on this topic[4]. There exists a reduced number of books (Paniagua, 2007, that devotes one chapter to Romanian Roma migration in Spain) as well as master thesis, doctoral thesis and research reports, the most relevant being Koen Peeters (2005), centred in the Romanian Roma population in Barcelona and their access to education, Vincle (2006) that makes a first general approach to this

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[3] I refer in this section to publications or reports that refer to the Roma migrant population in the Spanish state (in their entirety or in some territories). Therefore, texts about the Spanish gypsy population or about other populations' migration processes (included the majority ones) have not been included, since both are much more numerous.

population in Catalonia; Miguel Pajares (2006) that devotes a chapter of their doctoral thesis on Romanian and Bulgarian migrations; Óscar Prieto (2007) that besides working with Spanish and Catalan gypsy population analyses some aspects of the Romanian Roma to reflect on identity construction and Almudena Macías (2008), focusing on the migratory processes of Romanian Roma to Spain. Stefano Piemontese (2011) has also worked with Romanian Roma migrants in Granada, mainly on the subjects of Housing, mobility and education. Finally, Teresa Sordé (2010) has recently produced a report on some of the aspects of Roma migrants in Spain. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out a reduced number of articles in specialized magazines and communications to scientific events. Among them, Joaquín López Bustamante (2005), Miguel Laparra (2005), Macias (2005; 2006), Juan Antonio Gamella (2007), Adriana María Villalón (2008) and Ana Contreras *et al.* (2010) can be highlighted.

In general, it is assumed in the previous bibliography that there were some 'turning points' regarding Romanian Roma migration to Spain, that to some extent are coincidental with the mobility of the Romanian majority population. In a first period that goes approximately up to 1994, the Roma that arrive to the Spanish state do so looking for an acknowledgement as political refugees and constituting a pattern of dispersed families more than of concentration in certain areas. Macías (2006, p. 4) points out that their presence began in 1993, like the data of asylum demand reflect. The asylum applications were very important until the year 1997, and don't begin to diminish until 1998.

In a second period, starting in 1998, there is a clear increase of the presence, probably attracted also by a growing irregular market and certain possibilities of regularization compared to other European countries (Peeters 2005, p. 29),. Another basic change is that first collective settlements, mainly in big cities, start to appear, such as the one in Fuencarral (Madrid) in 1995, which was dismantled in 1999[5]. This period, until 2002, also reflects the increase of the negative imaginary on the media, as well as a much more intense response from the administrations to this 'new shanty town problem'. The evictions and expulsions of Romanian Roma population were quite usual and particularly intense after the new Immigration Law (2001). Nevertheless, the presence continued increasing and spreading to different cities. For instance, most of the researches (Peeters, 2005; Pajares, 2006; Vincle, 2006), point to this period as the moment in which the first families arrived in Barcelona and began to become visible in its public space. This is coherent with our fieldwork, although there were some previous arrivals (1998-1999), mostly coming from Madrid.

January of 2002 implies a new change in the entrance requirements for the Romanian citizens in Spain, which also affects the Roma settlement processes. As consequence of the negotiations for the UE expansion, the visa to travel to any country of Schengen space from Romania was suppressed under certain conditions (Peeters 2005, p. 30), with two main

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[4] Inside this category it would be necessary to mention some of our own works: López (2008), Sàez (2009), López and Sàez (2009; 2011) and Sàez and López (2011).

[5] Pajares (2006, p. 243), Vincle (2006, p. 41) and Gamella (2007) mention a population in this camp of between 400 and 550 people. After the eviction, ACCEM and the Red Cross started an intervention creating some camps. Some of the population I met during the fieldwork in Catalonia had previously been in these camps.

consequences: a greater flexibility in Romanian population's entrance in Spain and the possibility for the persons under irregular situations to return to Romania and enter again legally. In any case the number of Romanian Roma population increased quite significantly in most of the Spanish main cities[6].

The access of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU (2007) represented a new turning point: as citizens of the European Union, the circulation and presence in Spain turned legal in all cases, and implied the regularization of a large number of Romanian citizens[7]. As for the increment of Romanian Roma population, it was not as spectacular as the media pointed out, neither in total number nor in proportion. In fact, this new context produced new patterns of return, temporary or definitive, to Romania or towards other countries (for example, UK), as we observed during the fieldwork in Barcelona in the first months of 2007. It is also indispensable to mention that this biggest flexibility was related with residence, but not to the free circulation of Romanian workers: there was a period of moratorium for this right, established in December of 2006, which lasted for 2 years (up to January 1st of 2009). This implied a complex situation, in which a job permission was still necessary (for being an employee, but not for self-employment) while residence was perfectly legal[8]. Even if the population still kept suffering its effects, the extinction of this moratorium supposed an important change in the Roma population legal status in Spain, equalled in terms of labour rights (at least formally) to any other UE population. Unfortunately, this situation has now reverted to its 2007-2009 status, as the Spanish Government recently reinstituted the moratorium[9]. In any case, there are other issues, like the economic crisis (both in Romania and in Spain) that were and still are playing a role in the Romanian Roma migration, basically increasing or maintaining the 'push factors' related with the precariousness in life conditions in Romania, but also still making difficult to work in integrated jobs in Spain[10]. Finally, considering the political actions in other UE countries in the recent years (Italy starting in 2007, and France in 2011) is also important, because it theoretically should have increased a lot the presence of Romanian Roma people in Spain. The fact is that, until now, and at least for the direct data from fieldwork and other indirect data, it has not. That does not mean that there are not some individuals, groups or families that have moved to Spain for that reason, but at least in our research context it has not been massive or clearly visible.

In this respect, it is necessary to stress the fact that there are no current reliable data about the total Romanian Roma population in Spain. First, it is important to point out that ethnicity is not a variable in Spanish official censuses, and therefore some data (for instance the number of Romanian citizens registered in a certain territory) do not allow estimations to be made. Moreover, those sources are usually quite useless for some populations, as they do not give a real account of people not registered or detected by local authorities, with a higher

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[6] For instance, Vigo and Bilbao in 2002 and, starting in 2003, different cities of Andalucía (Vincle, 2006). Also Valencia, Madrid, Barcelona, Castellón, Granada and other cities in 2004 (Gamella 2007).

[7] The 211.325 legal residents at December 2006 became 603.889 in one year, which is a 185.76% increment (Secretaría de Inmigración, 2006; 2007), caused mostly by statistical visibilization of those in an irregular situation.

[8] For details about the Moratorium see the Instructions DGI/SGRJ/08/2006 from MTAS (Spanish Government).

[9] That decision was taken in July 2011 (Orden PRE/2072/2011) and was later approved by the European Commission (COMMISSION DECISION of 11 August 2011). Justified by the situation of Spain regarding GDP and Unemployment, was originally set until 2014 (although the EC finally reduced its duration until the end of 2012).

mobility or a more precarious settlement. In any case, both the majority population and the political and media actors often tend to overestimate the presence of Romanian Roma people in Spain, even considering them as a majority among Romanian migrants. This is clearly a mistake: most estimations[11] point out that the proportion has consistently been somewhere between 5 and 10 % of the Romanian citizens present in Spain (a proportion closer to their estimated number in Romania)[12], which would currently represent figures between 40.000 and 80.000 people. Although these data cannot be considered as reliable, they provide a picture of the overall situation and are quite coherent with the situation in Barcelona Metropolitan Area, where the estimations have ranged (depending on the moment) from 1.100 to 2.000 people (Peeters, 2005; Pajares, 2006; Vincle, 2006). To summarize, and even if those figures have probably been and still are higher (considering also that some of the Romanian Roma are quite invisible and follow patterns closer to the general Romanian population) they surely do not exceed few thousands in Barcelona.

On the other hand, Romanian Roma population in this context is mainly composed by complete family units or couples with their children staying in Romania, and is not usually a migration of isolated families or people, but communitarian and quite linked with its kinship organization (like Matras 2000, p. 36-7, in Sobotka 2003, p. 92, mentions for other groups). This doesn't mean that different –more individual– processes take place, as it indeed happens; but this communitarian character is expressed with clarity in the internal relationships of the group in destination and in a clear distribution of settlement concerning origin towns: in this regard, although others exist, there are two main origins in Barcelona – Țăndărei (and other villages from the region of Ialomița) and Murgeni (and other villages of the region of Vaslui), in the South and Northeast part of the country–[13], that concentrate mainly in Badalona and Santa Coloma municipalities. The proportions of these two groups have varied through time, being Țăndărei the group with longer and most numerous presence (decreasing in the last 4 years) while Murgeni has probably become currently the main group. On the other hand, the more common identification among the Romanian Roma population in Barcelona is that of khanglări or pieptănari[14] (comb makers), shared by both communities. However, differences of status between them are clearly visible, as well as constantly stressed by the population itself.

The construction process of the 'Roma Issue' in Barcelona: three examples

Romanian Roma in Barcelona are undoubtedly linked to a series of imaginaries, stereotypes and attributions, mixing both the ones still present for Spanish Roma population and others, developed in more recent times ('migrant', 'eastern', 'Romanian', and so on).

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[10] As I will point out later, the impact of the economic crisis in marginal activities is somehow different and diverse, and is probably not having such a clear impact in presence of Roma migrants in Spain.

[11] See, for instance, Vincle (2006), and López (2008), for more detailed estimations. As I will point out later, these figures also play a role in the political discourses about Roma settlements.

[12] See Barany (2002), for a comparative estimation between different east and central European countries.

[13] Data of the census of July of 2002 (Centrul de Resurse pentru Diversitate Etnoculturală) estimate the proportion of Roma in those villages, respectively, in 12% (1.731 persons) and 13% (1.043 persons). This percentage is probably superior, considering our own ethnographic experience in origin towns and the bias in the statistical data. Nevertheless, I find it unlikely to arrive to the 50% estimated by Pajares (2006, p. 239) for the first case.

As I have already said, the main idea behind this text is, on the one hand, that those discourses strongly relate (and interrelate) different fields, just as the attitudes of –and the interactions with– the general population (and other minorities), the local politic agenda and the political parties, the mass media and other actors, such as NGOs or neighbourhood associations (opposing those imaginaries or not) to mention the most relevant ones. On the other, they 'crystallize' in (and are constructed again by) attitudes, measures, legal frameworks, management models, budgets, programs, and so on. Said in other words, not only the discourses contribute to the construction of certain ways of approaching the 'Roma Issue', but also these approaches themselves serve, once designed and applied, as a strong framework in which discourses develop.

Despite not being fully developed here, the three examples below intend to clearly show this interrelation, showing ways in which some imaginaries / ideologies / stereotypes, relate, construct and get reconstructed by policies, politic discourses and legal frameworks, though doing it in different aspects. However, some precisions have to be made: evidently, there are other possible fields in which the same elements can be analysed, just as the child protection system, the health access or the depiction of some illegal activities. All of them have been equally present during fieldwork, but in this text I privileged the ones more present in the local context and with a clearer interrelation.

On the other hand, I am mostly using ethnographic data and other sources of information regarding some mass media and political parties, but not always offering the full picture by including also other relevant actors such as Roma organizations, NGOs and neighbourhood associations. Besides the limitations of space in this text, the main reason behind that decision is that their role in the construction of imaginaries about Roma migrants is, in my opinion, less visible and articulated[15], when compared with other European contexts (such as France): for instance, there are not currently any organizations created or used by the Roma migrants themselves in Barcelona, and some of the Spanish Roma movements have not always had a clear discourse about this population and about the processes I depict below.

Public space regulation and marginal economic strategies

Marginal activities[16] are one of the most visible labels linked with Romanian Roma in Barcelona. However, it is necessary to mention that there are segments of population which have strategies closer to the majority of the rest of Romanian population. I found some –few– Roma that worked in integrated jobs with different grades of regularization, in industry, warehouses, cleaning, construction and agriculture, just to mention the most important ones. And there exists some proportion of illegal activities as well, although I cannot develop this

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[14] According to Peeters (2005, p. 14) there has also been a limited presence of ursàri and kalderàri.

[15] Maybe with the exception of some NGOs, clearly present in the territory but still with a smaller impact in public opinion and policies than would be desired.

[16] I follow here San Román (2002, p. 437) who classifies economic activities in function of the worker's regularization and the positive or negative regularization of the activity itself. This implies four categories: integrated

subject here. In spite of it, it is true that an important part of them are marginal occupations, ranging from street sale (lighters, handkerchiefs, 'La Farola'[17], etc.) and begging (in an active or passive and more or less hidden way) to the cleaning of car's windshields at intersections and scrap collection. The former were mostly used by the Țăndărei group, while the vast majority of the Murgeni population works in scrap collection, quite usually under precarious conditions (without vehicle, with improvised carts and walking big distances on foot). This implies much smaller incomes, sometimes in the limit of subsistence[18].

In general, marginal economic activities are diverse and combined. As Liegeois says (2007, p. 81-82), if something characterizes the economic strategies of the Roma it is their versatility: they strongly depend on the place and moment in which they are applied or combined, in a two sense influence that conforms their lifestyle and mobility and vice versa. In this respect, as San Román (1997, p. 130-131) points out, they are "patterns with which it is necessary to work and economic central strategies" that have to be understood more as appropriate and adapted solutions for the economic and cultural survival next to the majority than as options for a concrete and long term economic activity.

In any case, some of these activities increased with the previous irregular situation and the previously mentioned moratorium (2007-2009) influenced in a decisive way in the use of submerged and marginal occupations. Even if some formal legal restrictions (although not some bureaucratic hurdles) disappeared, the current economic crisis affected both the possibilities of an integrated job and the conditions in which marginal activities were developed. For example, scrap collection has been, in most cases, used as a full-time activity. However, I observed a change in that dynamic for some family groups: on the one hand, the number of non-migrants and migrants from other origins that have been forced to adopt marginal strategies (as scrap collection) has increased, as a result of the loss of their work in different economic sectors. On the other, the price of scrap metals decreased in some moments in a very significant way, even reaching values 50% lower than in previous periods (although this is not a constant). This has pushed some Roma families to increase the number of working hours or to change the schedule/space (for example, beginning at an earlier hour or covering wider areas of the urban space), but also to combine it with other marginal activities (as begging) in the moments in which the incomes from scrap collection are not enough.

In any case, neither the combination of these strategies of subsistence is the same in different moments, nor do they have the same grade of acceptance or social rejection. The marginal activities outlined above take place, mainly, in the centre of the city and therefore, as Barcelona has been relying strongly in tourism and other related economic areas, there are strong discourses against these uses. The examples are diverse, and some refer

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work (worker and activity regularized), submerged work (activity regularized but not the worker) marginal or excluded work (worker and activity not regularized) and illegal work (forbidden activity).

[17] "La Farola" selling has probably been one of the activities most associated to the imaginary about "Romanian gypsies" in Spain. Usually defined as "social press", began its activity in France in 1993 and arrived in Spain in 1994-1995. It was first welcomed and even praised, although later a lot of criticism was made to its management.

specifically to pick pocketing, usually lumping it together with marginal strategies and generalizing for the whole migrant Roma population:

> [They are] clans that serve of and hide behind minors –harming not only citizens and merchants, but also the touristic image of the Catalan capital city. (La Vanguardia, 28 of March 2006)

> [After the police raids] the presence of these precocious petty thieves in the city has plummeted [and] some victims, especially tourists, can breathe a sigh of relief. (El Periódico, 27 of March 2006)

> Because they are organized in mafias (…) and very often the children are booked and trafficked (…) Because mainly they are drugged to guarantee their immobility. ¿Are not you surprised to always see them so still? (…) Because the majority of those children end up having severe brain injuries and all kinds of malformations. (Rahola, Pilar. 8 of September 2002; quoted in Pajares, 2006, p. 241)

As I already mentioned, the above discourses have clearly penetrated the imaginaries of the majority population regarding Roma migrants, but it is also likely that they influenced the policies and management processes at a municipal level: in January 2006 a legal framework, the *Civic Ordinance of Barcelona* (2006) was approved –other municipalities followed later–, including some articles regarding marginal economic strategies in public spaces. As we can read in its preface:

> This law intends to preserve (…) the right of citizens to walk the city of Barcelona without being bothered or disturbed in their will. (…) It tends to protect people that are in Barcelona from (…) insistent, organized, intrusive or aggressive, direct or indirect begging.

The main content (and the associated fines) affecting the marginal economic strategies Romanian Roma currently use was related with 'coactive begging' (120€), 'windshield cleaning' (between 750 and 1500€) and begging 'directly or indirectly with minors or people with disabilities' (between 1500 and 3000€). It has to be mentioned that these fines are not always applied or can be replaced by 'insertion itineraries' (in fact most of the practices categorised in those cases are still usual in the public spaces), but their mere presence serve to control and give ground for their prosecution. On the other hand, I would say there has been some kind of adaptive processes by the population itself regarding –not only but also– the grade of acceptance or social rejection of these same practices: for instance, the sellers of 'La Farola' (a majority of which were women) generally sold at the same time other objects (lighters, handkerchiefs, etc.) and also beg. Quite usually, they just carried with them only a few newspapers and even only one (maybe out-dated) and laminated. Not only was more profitable (because they had to pay those newspapers in advance) but also a strategy for getting some acknowledgment through a somehow recognized activity while doing other (more discredited) marginal activities[19].

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[18] During fieldwork I observed that it was, for the most precarious segments, between 10 and 15 daily Euros (in 2008), depending on the quantity of collected material.

[19] The same happens, for example, with the "signature collection" by Roma persons, which feign some sort of disability and use a signature sheet that heads with the sentence "Certificate of the Regional Association for the disabled, deaf-mute and poor children. We want to build a national and international center". In this case begging seems to be "hidden" behind a "more legitimate" activity, resembling other NGOs that look for members or contributions in the public spaces of the city.

In any case, it is not so easy to exactly define the scope that previous discourses had in this institutional approach, despite the connection between them seems quite clear: revisiting the implications of a certain definition of public urban spaces (and concretely the ones in the centre of the city, strongly related with tourism), there is a multiple construction of some marginal workers as 'offenders'. Evidently, I do not understand the impact on tourism as the main or single factor here, but still I propose it has a key role as part of more general economic and urban management processes that categorises activities and populations. For instance, scrap collecting (clearly another marginal strategy) has not the same social consideration or has been regulated by the civic ordinance despite it is also developed in public spaces. On the other hand, other groups performing marginal activities (such as Senegalese street sellers) do not share the same negative imaginaries in media or the majority population (even if their activities are also penalized). I would say this has to do, among other factors, with the more direct and visible character of the activities with a more negative depiction that somehow show a not desired reality by forcing interaction, while scrap collecting and some kind of street selling are considered more 'neutral' or even positive (in the latter case) in the eyes of 'the man in the street'; but also with the economic position of the activity itself: as I will try to point out in the discussion, there is also a strong connection with the real or perceived profitability of these marginal workers and jobs. Scrap collection, for instance, implies a larger structure of businesses that are actually generating economic activity and profit from a marginal activity, while begging or wind-shield cleaning, to pose just two examples, do not.

Settlement policies and the imaginaries about nomadism and mobility

As I already said, Romanian Roma in Barcelona are not newcomers and have been in the same area (with more or less stability) for some years. However, a high percentage (40-50%, which is significantly higher than other migrant populations) has not been registered legally at a local level (padrón) for several years[20].

The *padrón* or *empadronamiento* can be defined as a tool of administrative management for local councils, which also represents both recognition of citizenship in this municipality and a prerequisite for accessing some basic services and fundamental rights (health, education, political participation, etc.)[21]. Moreover, as stated by the legal framework (Law 7/1985, Law 4/2000 and Resolution 1997), it is compulsory for any person living in Spanish territory and town councils shall register in the *padrón* all the foreigners that normally reside in the municipality. This is particularly important, because the latter regulation also specifies that substandard housing (slums, huts, etc.), and even public spaces, should appear as valid addresses in the *padrón*, designating Social services (or other instances) as the actors to identify and certify these concrete addresses.

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[20] The situation I am describing in this subsection corresponds to 2007-2008 and before: in some aspects, both registration and housing situation has significantly changed (not always improved) in the last three years.
[21] Or previously represented recognition of these basic rights: In the current wave of budget and service cutting, some of them, such as health access, are being questioned.

Therefore, we can find two different situations regarding *empadronamiento:* those living in houses/flats or those who live in substandard housing. In the first case, the main requisite for registering is a valid rental agreement, although some local councils have established a limited number of applications per address. In contrast with other contexts, this is the most usual situation among Romanian Roma in Barcelona (around 90% of them live in flats). This proportion is linked with different economic and demographic factors of those neighbourhoods, the previous processes of settlement an eviction, and others, such as the situation of the real-estate market in Spain and the possibility of some migrant populations (such as Pakistani) to access mortgages with the purpose to hire[22]. This created a 'segmented market' (Martínez-Veiga, 1999) strongly related with the lack of options in general housing market and the small amount of public/social housing available. The main consequence of this dynamic was, quite usually, the lack of a valid rental agreement, as well as higher prices, that combined with the low incomes of the Roma population and other factors[23] produced a significant presence of overcrowded flats[24]. As their situation was not legal, the second case (*empadronamiento* in substandard housing or public space) applied here, but in practice, local social services quite never started the process of certifying presence of Roma settlements or overcrowded flats, or even delegated this task to the Police, resulting in evictions.

We observed during fieldwork concrete examples of mobility and instability between different areas of the MAB. Some of the most extreme ones were related with the Murgeni population. For example, summarizing the trajectory of a family during six months we observed 12 displacements and successive settlements that took place between five different municipalities. Of the 8 different places in which they settled down (for some days or during months), two were overcrowded flats and the rest were improvised camps or abandoned buildings. On the other hand, 10 out of 12 displacements were caused by police evictions (with little or any intervention of social services, previously or in that moment) and in most cases leaded to a new settlement in other of the neighbouring municipalities.

The previous one was an extreme case, but it is also coherent with the great mobility that exists among the population in a more precarious situation that usually lives in flats, although in these cases the reasons are not generally police evictions but the lack of economic resources and of an accessible and stable housing. What is important to highlight is that the absence of *empadronamiento*, combined with police pressure and effective lack of intervention by social services, also contributes to a more unstable settlement and to the increase of this type of forced urban mobility. In other words, as local administrations are able (and should) register these people in the census once detected in their territory, the *empadronamiento* process –that implies a formal recognition of the presence and should

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[22] Not to mention the fact that there are not many non-built-up spaces in Barcelona Metropolitan Area where bigger size slums can exist.

[23] Such as the sublet (sometimes even exploitation) processes that exist in the Roma population itself, in which persons with an overall better economic situation can access some flats and hire them (while sharing the space or not) to other families.

guarantee an easier settlement and access to some basic rights and services–, is being used in practice as a settlement control strategy[25]. Moreover, it prevents the population from reaching a better overall situation that may help to fulfil the 'legal requisites' (i.e. valid rent agreement) for registering, creating a circular dynamic. Both in the cases in which presence is not recognized due to the limitations and in those in which the settlement takes place in the public space, the concrete practice is usually not to make an effort for the rooting and the improvement of the life standards, but for not recognizing this population's presence. In other words, we could say that some of the municipalities somehow consider the Roma population as people 'not supposed to be in their territory', and they don't have objection if an eviction just produces a displacement to a neighbouring municipality, as long as the 'problem' disappears.
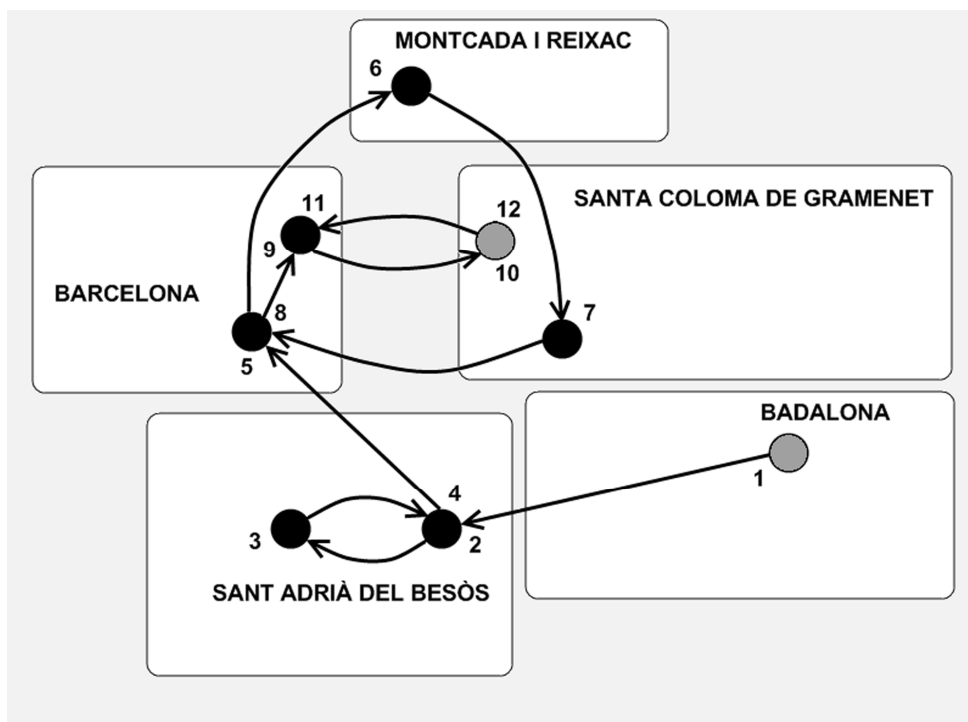

Figure 1. Settlement places and evictions of a Roma family from September 2007 to March 2008[26]. Source: Author

Revisiting the 'Roma Issue' construction subject, and the way discourses and imaginaries are connected with management and politic decisions, this unstable settlement and the lack of *empadronamiento* sometimes serve as a way to justify the lack of integration policies. For instance, as Pajares (2006, p. 259) notes:

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[24] We use here the same parameters as the Decree 259/2003 from the Catalan Government: less than 8.8 m^2 per person as a limit for habitability and 5.5 m^2 for considering it as overcrowding. Interviews showed that 36% were in the latter category, in coherence with the rest of the fieldwork.

[25] In some cases it made also the empadronamiento (a free procedure) something that is sold and bought in the black market (150-300€).

[26] Lighter spots represent flats and darker spots shacks. Numbers represent the ordin in which places were used.

> There are not specific interventions by Badalona local council. They said the main reason is that they do not want to spend founds in a population that "may disappear from the neighbourhood today or tomorrow".

It is important to mention that, as it happens in other contexts, nomadism of migrant Roma population is a widespread discourse in Spain, among general population and politicians. In this regard, I also found examples of these ideological devices from social or health services, which represent a culturalization process of situations strongly related with structural socioeconomic factors. Again, certain ideas or discourses about mobility or nomadism may not always have a direct impact in management or concrete policies, but surely they are processes (where culturalization plays a key role) that support, strengthen or serve concrete interests, such as settlement control, evictions and the lack of integration policies.

Political construction of neighbourhood conflicts around overcrowded flats and civility

The above mentioned examples have been an essential part of the 'Roma Issue' for the last four years, usually combined with another dimension related with political parties and their construction of the 'Roma Issue'. In this regard, I will focus in this third example in the way the PP –*Partido Popular*– (main right-wing political party of Spain) has been approaching the subject of Roma migration in those municipalities in the last years[27]. To summarize, in February, 2007, there were some demonstrations in 'La Salut' neighbourhood against 'overcrowded flats', demanding expulsion of Romanian Roma, because of their 'antisocial' and 'criminal' behaviour:

> The neighbours complain about noises at night, increasing dirt in common spaces and more thefts. (El Periodico, 7 of February 2007)

> Other neighbour from the block explained that the urine smell in the stair is impossible to stand and all the neighbours refuse to clean it (...) They also bring scrap to home and make noise. The building is full of cockroaches since they came. (El Periódico, 10 of February 2007)

In May 2007, three months after those demonstrations (that PP supported), this political party edited one video, named '*7 minutos*'[28], published on-line and by the delivering of 30.000 DVDs among the neighbours. It speaks, among other things, about "the lack of security, linked to illegal migration; the increasing phenomena of the *pisos patera*[29], that harm the welfare of neighbours and the disconnection of the major of the city with their real problems" (El País, 8 of May 2007). This was clearly connected to the image of a political party close to the neighbours (an ideal 'we') and both against the 'others' (not considered neighbours) and the ones responsible for the situation (the party in power in the different municipalities, whose weakening was one of the main objectives as municipal elections were close).

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[27] Clearly there are other political parties worth analyzing, not only in the local but also in the regional (CiU, ERC, ICV) or Spanish context. The main reason, besides space, to just use Partido Popular is that it has been the actor that has more clearly raised the "Roma issue" to public opinion in this context.

[28] "7 minutes". See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JkG3zWCDuko

Events occurred in 2010 (April and September) represented one step beyond in this process. If in the previous case the conflict was in some way 'previous' and the PP took advantage of it (even if some neighbourhood associations can be actually related with concrete political positions), this time the situation was somehow inverse: despite the problem with overcrowded flats (that really exists to some extent) and the unrest related with it being quite constant in the three years between those two moments, there were no explicit conflicts going on in the neighbourhoods at that moment. However, in April 2010, the PP issued a pamphlet (El País and Radio Televisión Española, 26 of April 2010) with the title "Is your neighbourhood safe?" and distributed it in the street. It contained a statement from the local candidate, saying he was just two councillors away from wining local elections, and assuring that as a major, "we will be able to walk in the streets without being stalked or mugged" as well as "whoever lives in Badalona will have to adapt to our customs". In the other side some photos of Romanian Roma, demonstrations, accumulated rubbish and so on, were followed by the words "insecurity", "delinquency", "filth" and "incivism", ending with "more security" and the PP acronym. This generated a polemic at a state level, and the regional and national PP had to tone down the words of the local representatives (for instance, because one of the pictures showing the slogan "we do not want Romanians"), but still not disavowing them. Later on, in September 2010, the PP local and regional representatives visited the neighbourhoods with an UMP Euro-parliamentarian, previously notifying it to the mass media. In their own words:

> Maria Thérèse Sánchez-Schmid went for a walk this morning in the neighbourhoods (…) to satisfy her curiosity about if Romanian Roma cause in Catalonia the same problems her party denounces in France (...) And the situation is comparable. They are the same problems of coexistence and security. (El País, 20 of September 2010)

> Here we do not have Roma camps like in France, here the situation is even worse (…) They are spread in several neighbourhoods of the city, making life impossible to neighbours and moreover, if we complain, they attack and accuse us of being racists. (El País, 20 of September 2010)

The above examples represent, again, situations in which local politics clearly contribute to the construction of a 'Roma Issue', this time with an explicit objective. Voting results cannot be exclusively attributed to those conflicts (there are many other economic and political factors to consider), but their construction process and the precise moments where some of the discourses were raised seem to support the hypothesis of a 'result-oriented' discursive strategy. Actually, the PP clearly improved its position in Badalona in the two electoral processes carried out just some months after the two episodes I have previously described, in May 2007 –municipal– and November 2010 –regional–, from 17% to 22% of votes (5 to 7 representatives) and from 10% to 12% (14 to 18 representatives), respectively. And in the last municipal elections (May 2011), the PP grew from 22% to 33% of votes (7 to 11 representatives), accessing the local government. On the other hand, this new political context has already had some management and legal effects regarding Roma migrants,

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[29] *Pisos patera* is the name usually given to overcrowded flats. It refers to the small boats (*pateras*) used by migrants to cross Gibraltar strait or reach the Canary Islands, alluding to the high amount of persons concentrating in the really small space available in the boat.

some of them more visible than others[30], which confirm that the previous discourses were not only an electoral strategy, but also the expression of a certain approach to public space management, diversity policies and the migrant Roma presence itself. As the analysis of these concrete policies is not the main goal of this paper I am not going to dig deeper into them, but they had to be mentioned as part –and consequence– of a process related with the construction of a 'Roma Issue'. Therefore, as I will try to point out in the conclusions, I believe that establishing comparison with the evolution of policies in other European countries is a new aspect that is worth stressing.

Discussion and conclusions

As I already pointed out, the main idea behind this text is that not only the discourses contribute to the construction of certain ways of approaching the 'Roma Issue', but also that these approaches themselves serve, once designed and applied, as a strong framework in which discourses develop. I believe the three examples I just presented show this interrelation to some extent: the negative stereotypes regarding marginal economic activities and the way they relate with the civic ordinance and other ways of regulation of public spaces; the idea of 'nomadism' and how it supports certain policies that difficult settlement; or the use of stereotypes and negative imaginaries to construct a politically profitable conflict.

Beyond this approach, together with the negative image of Roma migrants, there are also discourses and practices that segment the urban space in a complex periphery-centre relationship, between the 'good looking neighbourhoods', parts of the city where the Roma are not supposed to be; and the neighbourhoods where they actually live. Using words of Cottino (2005, p. 121) it is a "politic of disappearances", the representation of an ideal image of the city and public spaces, based in a fictitious presentation of them as non-conflictive spaces of consensus (Delgado, 2005), where deviation is not allowed. In this regard, for example, marginal activities more invisible and not directly connected to certain central public spaces, can be more likely to be 'put up with', and therefore contribute in a less prominent way to the construction of negative imaginaries about the 'Roma Issue'; negative imaginaries that are usually constructed through the categorisation (Aramburu, 2005) and the creation of a certain image of the 'other' as an offender.

Moreover, the three examples above are also strongly influenced by the idea that there has been a clear evolution in the way this issue is constructed: from a local and urban 'social exclusion' or 'civility' level, to a political local, national (or even European) level. Evidently, the first one is still active (and also strongly politic), but the latter sometimes represents also an emergent process supported by the success of local constructions. To pose one example, statements as the one below where not so present in the events of 2007:

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[30] For instance, the installation of signs translated to Romanian under traffic cameras to insinuate that they are also used to perform surveillance over public space to prevent "incivic" activities, or banning the use of fountains and banks in some public squares frequently used by Roma migrants.

> The president of the catalán PP has considered the visit as "timely and necessary". She asked for a greater control of frontiers and blamed the president of Spain for the conflict with Romanian roma in the third city of Catalonia: "situations as the one Badalona is living are caused by the wrong policies of Zapatero". (El Periódico, 17 of September 2010)

On the contrary, the 'pull' or 'magnet' effect line of argument, for not taking the same (considered) 'hard line' measures on Roma migration used in other European countries was extremely used in 2010 statements to mass media. I would say this makes even more clear that local contexts matter, encouraging the need for social sciences to stress in comparison of the actual practices and discourses. That does not mean that specificities of different Roma populations are not equally important, but that they get subsumed into a wider process of categorisation. In fact, the previous examples show that, even if some mechanisms (such as census) do not explicitly refer to them, there is enough ground for the implementation of ethnically constructed policies. It is here where culturalization and stereotypation play a key role, explaining and approaching complex socioeconomic factors and processes from a narrow cultural perspective; individualizing and making intentional concrete behaviour patterns It is evident that when saying that a high number of people live in overcrowded flat or an 'illegal' camp for a cultural reason, the economic conditions that do not allow another kind of settlement are being ignored. This is far from being new, but as Stolcke (1995) and Taguieff (1987) show, it closely relates culturalization of social problems, homogenization and 'we'/'them' opposition, as well as denial of classic racism (based in race, skin colour, blood or even genetics). Said plainly, configuring characteristics that don't have a social origin and therefore cannot be modified, when it is just the opposite. As for stereotypation, it is being activated both in 'traditional' stereotypes (just as Spanish Roma as unfairly recipients of social housing) and in recent ones: this is clearly shown when discourses about Roma migrants argue about 'illegal migration', when in fact they are speaking about EU citizens.

The general approach by the authorities in Spain may not be so far from other western European countries, even if it is also necessary to distinguish between the diverse national and local responses and policies. However, I would say there are two main differences, one regarding the general perspective or discourse about Romanian Roma people and the other about the way policies are implemented. Both have to do, among other factors, with the political sign of the government: even if their policies in practice are not that far, the discourse about immigration of a Social-democratic party (PSOE) is different from the one of a more right-winged one (like PP, currently in power after winning the last general elections) in terms of integration, interculturality, diversity, and so on. This has to do with the general discourse about migrants, but also with the policy framework addressed to Spanish Roma, that has had certain weight in the political agenda (not enough, if we consider that their integration and effective access to basic rights is also far from being accomplished). On the other hand, neither this government nor the previous had still clearly depicted Romanian Roma as a 'national problem', as other European governments have done in the last few years. However, it is possible that, in the near future that situation changes: in fact, there are some precedents for it in the process I just mentioned in the previous section, in which the

PP has clearly used local conflicts, making later a bigger discursive leap to state and European contexts.

Unfortunately, that makes part of an increasing trend in some Spanish municipalities that have been using regulations or practices designed *ad hoc*, reacting to concrete conflicts, stereotypes and/or created social alarms. A trend that has also, as a common characteristic, the process from a 'social exclusion issue' to an ethnically constructed 'Roma Issue' that plays a role in the political arena and in the competition between political parties. These dynamics are, therefore, strongly related to local political agendas, management and founding aspects (maybe even more visible in the last years, due to the crisis situation), and the way politicians try to deal with them showing a specific image to the general population and the mass-media: political parties are well aware of the negative image of Romanian Roma people, and therefore they either 'fear' reactions to concrete interventions by the general population or they take profit of this negative image. For instance, just to pose two examples from fieldwork: naming a resource for Roma children as summer school was not possible in summer 2008 because the local council had previously cut the budget for summer schools destined for general population. Also, and to show again how figures play an important role, some months after the conflict in February 2007 the municipal authorities flaunted about the 'effectiveness' of local police in making pressure for Roma families in overcrowded flats to leave, resulting in a concrete number of persons left[31]. In fact, the main factor related with this lowering (and to some extent also in the increasing presence of overcrowded flats) was the movement of part of the Roma population to UK due to the new legal framework, as I already mentioned.

Therefore, we can consider that some of the actual approaches of local or state Spanish authorities are just other (probably less visible) ways of 'dealing' with migrant Roma, maybe still less aggressive compared to other countries, but equally ineffective in terms of real scope. Usually based in something as simple as getting rid of the problems or ignore them, obviating that it is necessary to take determined steps for integration and basic rights, at European, national or local level. Obviously, a lot of criticism can be made to the measures taken both in Italy and France, but the same can be assumed for the non-systematic way in which Spanish authorities have faced the situation: for instance, it is important to point out that there have been also evictions of Roma settlements in Spain, and even 'concealed' expulsions to Romania (by paying the travel to an individual or family in a situation of serious exclusion), even if they have not been so systematic and have not raised so much attention in international or national media. The whole is even more worrying if we consider that the 'Spanish model' has sometimes been described in the last months as some kind of 'good practice' regarding Roma population. Evidently, there exist some action frameworks at national, regional or local level, sometimes related with intervention with the Roma population in general (focused in Spanish Roma). On the other hand, there are also some programs, generally based in NGOs, which are the main part of the specific actions made around Romanian Roma people. Finally, it is necessary to mention that social services and

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[31] It is worth mentioning that the resulting number was actually quite close to reality, but it was preceded by a previous estimate significantly higher, as its objective was to show how many people they managed "to get rid of".

other instances have in some places developed specific programs regarding Romanian Roma people. However, in most cases, Romanian Roma are supposed to be approached just by the already overcrowded 'standard' social or charity services, which has been proved as clearly insufficient. To summarize, although both the high vulnerability and the intervention difficulties are evident, the approaches to the Roma migrant population have not always been the most appropriate, not focused on the appropriate subjects or from the necessary knowledge of some basic aspects of their specific situation and characteristics.

This entire situation has not usually offered in practice nearly any chance for improvement of migrant Roma life conditions; and it is important to understand that many of the problems that affect this population and the situation in the neighbourhoods are only the 'tip of the iceberg': the harsher expression of the situation of structural inequality, that in the case of the Romanian Roma population is expressed with bigger intensity and virulence. In other words, and although there are multitude of specificities that is necessary to keep in mind, it is necessary to locate the analysis and the intervention in these situations in a wider context, in which a significant part of the Romanian Roma population is occupying the margins of a system that is not itself neither equal nor egalitarian. This is strongly linked with the insufficient welfare state due to political-historical reasons (Navarro, 2002), and the unequal distribution of resources between urban areas (Requena, 2003), and has clearly affected the discourse about Roma in Spain (both as minority and as part of migrant populations) in terms of 'resource competition' with Spanish neighbours and other groups, being quite often one of the basic subjects addressed in the local arena to justify rejection of their presence. In this regard, discourses that support marginalization clearly show both how the game of 'useful' and 'unuseful' migration is being played to justify rejection of Roma migrants and, at the same time, how real are the practices that prevent Roma to be socioeconomically integrated because they are not really needed (San Román, 1986, p. 187): despite there can be some processes of integration in the lower layers of society when the overall economic situation is better, when this one worsens marginalized populations are always the first to be excluded again, as well as constituting the perfect scapegoat to blame. Accompanied by political discourses, economic crisis and high unemployment rates, legal framework and other factors, the genesis of a 'Roma Issue' at a local level represents a general worsening of the reactions and prejudices against migrant Roma in Spain. Moreover, it strongly contributes to the creation of a breeding ground for conflicts in concrete neighbourhoods, as well as to the concealment of the significant deficits of our welfare state.

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