



Guidelines

for the texts of the app “KonterBUNT” on group-focused enmity

➤ Antigypsyism

IMPRESSUM

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Amtsgericht Stendal: VR 3874
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The project is funded by:



Gefördert im Rahmen des Landesprogramms





Antigypsyism

What is antigypsyism?

For many centuries, Sinti and Roma [1] have been stigmatized, devalued and persecuted with the name 'gypsy'. This term is therefore inextricably linked to racist attributions that over the centuries have become an enclosed image of the enemy. We now refer to this specific form of group-focused enmity as antigypsyism.

The term "antigypsyism" and alternative terms

The earliest use of this term known to us today comes from post-revolutionary Russia in the 1920s. [2] In Germany, by contrast, the term 'antigypsyism' only appeared in the context of the civil rights movement of the Sinti and Roma in the 1980s and has been reinforced in science since the late 1990s. In the meantime, it is also being used more and more frequently in public usage. Nonetheless, 'antigypsyism' remains a controversial term. [3]

The main weakness is that the term 'antigypsyism', too, reproduces the racist external attribution "gypsy" – and that injuries and trauma could be kept alive in this way. Therefore, other but less frequently used alternative terms are in circulation, e.g. 'anti-Romanyism' or 'gadjé racism'. Both alternative terms aim at preventing the linguistic reproduction of the stigma "gypsy". While the term 'anti-Romanyism' focuses on those affected, the term 'gadjé racism' contains the word "gadjé" from the Romani language (the

language of the Sinti and Roma) that is used to denote a non-Roma. In this way it should be linguistically indicated that the exclusion of Sinti and Roma comes from people and institutions of the majority society. [4] The term 'antigypsyism' is also based on this basic assumption, by means of which it should be made clear that racism against Sinti and Roma is based on the external and enemy image "gypsy".

Regardless of which term we use or prefer, the following applies: antigypsyism or, for example, gadjé racism is a power relation that to this day prevents both Sinti and Roma from exercising their indivisible fundamental and human rights [5].

Definition

A frequently used working definition of the ² term 'antigypsyism' was developed by the Alliance Against Antigypsyism, a coalition of many European organizations. According to it, antigypsyism has established itself over several centuries and denotes "the racism towards social groups that are stigmatized as 'gypsies'". Consequently, antigypsyism refers to hostile attitudes towards people based on their real or perceived belonging to the group of Sinti and Roma (also pejoratively "gypsies" in everyday parlance), which can be distinguished from the majority as a unitary (i.e. homogeneous) group. Certain characteristics (or better say prejudices) are attributed to all members of this externally defined group. In addition, for those affected, this assertion of "differentness" also results in



disadvantages in daily life and sometimes even physical and pogrom-like violence [6].

Impact and consequences

A large number of studies have shown that Sinti and Roma are among the most unpopular population groups in Europe. In Germany too, the rejection of Sinti and Roma remains relatively stable at an alarmingly high level [7]. Today's widespread antigypsyism is not only expressed in individual prejudices and attitudes, but also manifests itself in massive structural discrimination [8]. Sinti and Roma are disproportionately affected by disadvantage in many areas of everyday life due to antiziganist attributions such as crime, incapacity for integration or abuse of the welfare state. In education and health system as well as in the labor market, it is very clear that antigypsyism has a direct negative impact on the life of many Sinti and Roma.

It is important to emphasize that antigypsyism is the main obstacle to the equal participation of Sinti and Roma in social life. However, it is often said at regulars' tables and in media discourse that "the" culture of the Sinti or Roma is responsible for the fact that they

cannot integrate at all and are therefore ultimately to blame for the exclusion. Where a conflict arises, it is crucial that social problems are not ethnicized or culturalized, since people's social action can only be understood in the context of a specific situation. Of course, this also applies to Sinti and Roma.

Another consequence of antiziganist discrimination is that Sinti and Roma often make themselves unseen. For example, many Yugoslavia-born Roma have arrived in Germany as migrant workers since the 1970s and been hiding their affiliation to the Roma community for fear of renewed stigmatization in Germany [9]. The invisibility is a widespread strategy to avoid possible unequal treatment. This in turn creates a further problem: successful biographies of Sinti and Roma are often not perceived and "overlooked". It is therefore important to counter the negative clichés about Sinti and Roma with more realistic and positive images. After all, Sinti and Roma are just as individual and different as all other people.

Tobias Neuburger

Antigypsyist Slogans

"Sinti and Roma are poor and only come to us to get social benefits."

Of course, not all Sinti or Roma are poor. If there are more poor Sinti or Roma compared to the average of the population, then this indicates their discrimination in society. They have it harder e.g. to get good school qualifications, training or jobs.



Sinti don't even have to "come to us", because they have been living here for 600 years and are German citizens with the same rights as any other German – including social benefits.

There are also German citizens among the Roma, whose ancestors immigrated as early as the 19th century. Other Roma came to Germany later: as 'guest workers' in the 1960s, as refugees from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s or as immigrants from various EU countries in the 2000s.

Many of them no longer saw any prospect due to massive discrimination in their home country. In Germany, they do not "sneak up" on social benefits, but instead exercise rights that they are entitled to under certain conditions by the Basic Law, the European Convention on Human Rights or the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

"Sinti and Roma should all be deported!"

German Sinti and Roma are a recognized national minority in Germany. As German citizens, they cannot be deported. In addition, the state is obliged by the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities to particularly protect this group.

Furthermore, Roma live with us as 'guest workers' who helped to build the economy in Germany. They too are an integral part of Germany, feel at home here and cannot be deported.

Other Roma have fled the successor states of Yugoslavia since the 1990s. There they were and are faced with racial discrimination. For many of them, living in dignity is not possible in their home countries – which is why they sought protection and asylum in Germany as well as other countries.

In the recent past Roma have immigrated to Germany from various south-east European countries. Here, too, you have to take a closer look. Roma, like other people from Romania and Bulgaria, exercise their rights as EU citizens: they have a right to work and live in Germany.

The above examples alone show that blanket demands for deportation are negligent simplifications.

"Decent people go to work, but the Roma beg in our cities!"

This slogan discriminates because it assumes that all Roma do not want to work and would beg. Of course that is not the case. What applies to the majority of the general public also applies to Roma: work is an important part of their lives, and many of them find it degrading to be unemployed.

And when people beg, it is not a voluntary decision. In the case of the Roma, it is repeatedly, though wrongly, claimed that begging is an integral part of their culture.

Unemployment or poverty is not a cultural characteristic of an entire minority. If Roma are more affected by unemployment than other people, then the social causes should be examined. For centuries, Roma and Sinti have been marginalized, discriminated and even persecuted. This exclusion is not the least cause of disadvantage in the education system and consequently poverty and fewer opportunities in the labor market.



"They steal, cheat and rob ... Gypsies are just criminals to me!"

This slogan is discriminatory at least due to the term 'gypsy' that is rejected by most Sinti or Roma as an offensive swear word. This abusive term was and is still used to denigrate members of these minorities as particularly sneaky criminals – a prejudice with a long history.

The National Socialists used this stereotype in order to persecute and murder hundreds of thousands of the Sinti and Roma as "criminal gypsies". Because they were wrongly accused of being inherently criminal, the Sinti and Roma fell victim to gradual and scheduled genocide.

After 1945 this prejudice was used in German post-war society to play down the crimes committed. For example, in a 1956 ruling, the Federal Court of Justice claimed that Sinti and Roma had a "propensity for crime, especially theft and fraud". In 2016 it apologized for this scandal judgment, i.e. only sixty years later.

"Sinti and Roma live for the moment – carefree and without worries ..."

The fact that Sinti and Roma would live without a thought for tomorrow is a common cliché across Europe. It comes from the romantic art of the 19th century. But even today this cliché is still a popular motif in pop culture.

For example, in her song "Gypsy", released in 2010, the singer Shakira picks up romantic stereotypes about Roma and Sinti: they are free people who do not keep agreements, do not feel committed to anyone and enjoy life to the fullest – that is the message of the successful singer.

However, such apparently positive attributions are only unproblematic at first glance. In fact, these statements also follow the pattern that all Sinti and Roma are different from "us". The only difference to overtly hostile prejudices is that the counterpart is not immediately devalued. Ultimately, this 'gypsy romanticism' is based on envy – after all, everyone would like to live a life without worries. In the chorus of her song, Shakira therefore hums several times "I'm a Gypsy".

The evil of such insinuations is that in reality Sinti and Roma lead anything but a carefree life, because until today they are often met with rejection or even open hostility and violence.



Sources and links to further information

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