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# Ethnopolitical uses of Gypsy Evangelism. An Approach to local contexts in a transnational perspective.

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## Résumé

The idea of an ethnically homogeneous and compact gypsy people has been widely debated by social scientists, in spite of the arguments given by linguistic and folk studies in the nineteenth century, in order to demonstrate the common origin of all the gypsies around the world. Social scientists have their doubts about this essential unity because too much evidence has been built up against the idea. The evidence is related to the divergent historic processes, ways of life, cosmovisions and the different ways of interacting within the dominant society which are characteristic of most gypsies in different parts of the world. It has to be added that the different gypsy groups don't always see themselves as belonging to the same moral and social community, and in addition to this, that gypsies don't usually claim a common history, a shared political project or their own land, unlike the Jews, the archetypical diasporic population, as Gay y Blasco proposes. However, the ethnographic research that explores the limits of this political and structural fragmentation of the different gypsy communities (in the context of the emergence of a political activism capable of creating an imagined community), shows how this diasporic history is in increasing confrontation with the rapid expansion of global evangelical Pentecostalism on the one hand, and with the growth of the Rom international political activism on the other.

These two movements have had different degrees of success and are dependent on very different imaginaries: fundamentalist christianism of North American origin, on the one hand, and Rom Identity politics on the other. However, both of them support the unity of an international pan-gypsy community, the fight against social discrimination and against ubiquitous anti-gypsy racism. The emergence of the Romani transnational movement ("Romani movement") and its political incursions in the international arena today present several, serious dilemmas regarding integration and self-determination. The Roma activists support the view that, despite being the largest European minority, the Gypsies are not represented adequately in the domestic political contexts of the countries they are living in. Because of marginalization and exclusion, Roma activists aim to protect Gypsies worldwide against discrimination and persecution by ensuring the exercise of their human rights. But the Romani multiterritorial and multicultural condition all over the world is representing an important challenge to the activists in their attempts and possibilities of shaping a transnational Romani community. The role played by the religious dimension is in this context could be decisive in the next decades: I think that currently it is easier to think of the possibility of certain unification through religion, the brotherhood and its authority structures, coordinated by the Evangelical Romani movement from Western Europe and its rapid expansion through Romani networks in many different territorial ways, depending always on the local

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contexts.

In this text I'm going to deal in some way with both movements: taking the case of the Gypsy Pentecostal movement in Spain, I will briefly explore its main current characteristics, the limits of its recent transformation into ethnopolitical and religious activism and its relationship with the International Roma Political Movement. This process has evolved over the last decade and depends on factors such as the efficient transmission through the gypsy relative networks and respect for the traditional structure of authority, but dependent on public policies as well. I will focus, therefore, on politics, ethnopolitics, the uses of "culture" and the intersection of all of these with regard to recent gypsy evangelism. In addition, I'll try to do all this from a relational point of view: we will avoid talking about ethnicity, race or religion as if they had an essential and reified quality because that, many times, supports the interests of the religious but, mainly, the interests of the political and ethnic elites themselves, to convince the people about the immutability and ahistoric character of their mission. Due to this, the situation frequently ends up provoking an undesirable convergence between the enemies of the religious and ethnic minorities and some of the spokespersons of these minorities (frequently the social analysts themselves, and always the mass media), all of them determined to present them as if they were just reified systems. In these pages I will focus on the most recent expression of gypsy confessional ethnopolitics in Spain: The Cultural Christian Associations Federation in Andalusia (referred to henceforth as FACCA), that was founded in 2001 by some Andalusian leaders of the Philadelphia Church, the Church created by the converted gypsy that came from France in the 1950's. In Spain there are currently 1300 churches belonging to the Philadelphia Church and more than 6500 priests. Approximately 20% of the Spanish Gypsy population is today evangelical. At present the FACCA is made up of 170 churches or evangelical cults that, in the last decade, have founded parallel associations that have been legally registered. But this is quickly changing.

**Mots-Clés:** Gypsies, Ethnopolitics