

Re-ACT

Remember and ACT!

Factsheet on antigypsyist and antisemitic conspiracy theories

Common narratives, rhetoric, and manifestations of antisemitic and antigypsyist hate speech

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About the project

Analysis of hate data collected by members of the International Network Against Cyber Hate, INACH, in Europe has shown that there are strong and documented links between current online hate phenomena and hate-slurs, prejudices and practices that have been propagated in the Third Reich.

To transform these worrisome findings into effective warnings, especially since remembrance and knowledge on the Holocaust and its horrors are fading, the project Remember and ACT! (Re-ACT) is putting a special focus on researching how “old” concepts of antisemitism and antigypsyism are being re-enacted by concerted hate campaigns and where they originated from. Starting from there, Re-ACT will develop, collect, and provide educational materials and tools for the prevention of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and other forms of intolerance.

These self-generated sets of information plus a curated collection of high-quality educational materials will build the foundation for the establishment of an online prevention-hub at INACH.

About this factsheet

In the framework of the Re-ACT! project and the establishment of an educational online-prevention-hub at INACH, the purpose of this factsheet is to present, to explain and to raise awareness on antisemitic and antigypsyist conspiracy theories, their common narratives, their rhetoric, their terrible impact, and tools for debunking them. The antisemitic and antigypsyist narratives, conspiracy theories and their manifestations are presented for educational purposes only. The focus of this report is to encourage civil society to fight online hate speech by providing them relevant debunking material.

Conspiracy theories are always following the same mechanism using key-elements: the existence of a secret plot, the action of a group of conspirators, some supposed evidence that seems to support the theory. Another essential element is the scapegoating process of a particular group of people, which triggers the divide of the world in two distinguished groups: the perpetrators and the victims. In the era of social networks, there is a bloom of antisemitic and antigypsyist conspiracy theories, which echo with “traditional” hateful myths. Many traditional stereotypes have been remodelled for a modern-day audience using the same rhetoric and images.

Antisemitism can be defined, according to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition, *“as a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and / or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities”*¹.

Antigypsyism can be defined, according to the reference paper ‘A working definition of antigypsyism’, *“as a specific racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatized as “gypsies” in the public imagination. Antigypsyism is often used in a narrow sense to indicate anti-Roma attitudes or the expression of negative stereotypes in the public sphere or hate speech [...]. Antigypsyism is not only about what is being said, but also about what is being done and what is not being done”*².

¹ International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Working definition of antisemitism: <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism> (last accessed 19/04/2021)

² Antigypsyism.eu, A reference paper on antigypsyism. A working definition of antigypsyism. Building an alliance against antigypsyism: https://www.antigypsyism.eu/?page_id=17 (last accessed 19/04/2021)

Roma and Jewish people: traditional scapegoats from Middle Ages to nowadays

Roma and Jewish people “demonized” by the Christianity

“Traditional” common antisemitic and antigypsyist narratives are based on accusing both communities of associations with the devil. Both Jews and Roma people were perceived as enemies of Christianity. Jews were usually depicted as demons or named “children of Satan”. They were portrayed with horns and tails-characteristics. This demonisation and allusion to the Devil set the groundwork for other theories. The accusation that Jews caused the death of Jesus, has been used to justify and to incite violence against them. As with the Jews, the Roma were commonly demonized due to their supposed “different” appearance, traditions, and language. Whilst Jews were commonly perceived as “the deicides”, the Roma people were connected to the myth of the “Gypsy blacksmith”. According to this myth, the “Gypsy blacksmith” was the only person willing to forge the nails used to crucify Christ. There is a variant of the legend saying that the descendants of the “Gypsy blacksmith” were condemned to wander the earth and never settle. As a parallel to this myth, the myth of the “Wandering Jew” states that a Jew refused to give some water to Jesus when he was on the way to the place where he had to be crucified. Therefore, this Jew was condemned to eternal and restless wandering.

Jewish and Roma people presented as a “threat” against children

For centuries, Jews were compared to parasites or vermin using sorcery. They were accused during pandemics of being plague-bearers by using well-poisoning. Most common hateful narratives alleged that they were perpetrators of child-murders. Indeed, the most popular narrative was the accusation of “blood libel” by the Jewish people. The “blood libel” was the presumed sacrifice of Christian children at Passover to obtain blood for religious rituals in matzos, the traditional unleavened bread. This myth continues to be disseminated for example in the new anti-Zionist/antisemitic trend where Israeli people are presented as vampires eating Palestinian children and stealing their organs. Regarding the Roma people, a similar narrative was also still very popular nowadays. The Roma people were

accused of child abductions and perceived as child kidnappers. This ancestral rumour has circulated for centuries. In the 15th century, the German Reichstag accused the country's Gypsies not just of child-kidnapping but same as for Jews, of sorcery, espionage, and spreading the plague. The centuries-old anti-Roma myth of "gypsies who steal children" is still used for spreading racist rumours about organ-trafficking or sex-trafficking involving "dark forces".

Jewish and Roma people: from the horrors of the Holocaust and Porajmos to their denial

The Nazi's horrible perception of the Jewish and Roma community

Roma and Jewish people were both the victims of the perverted ideology of the superiority of one race over others and of the hateful mechanism of dehumanization. This destructive ideology led to the Holocaust of the Jewish people - the "Catastrophe" in Hebrew - and the Porajmos of the Roma people - the "Devouring" in Romani. Both communities have been portrayed as racially inferior and have for this reason been persecuted and murdered. According to Nazi racial laws, they were considered as "biologically tainted", being part of the "low races". They were perceived as an "anti-social element". There was a link between both, the so-called "Jewish Question" and the "Gypsy Question". Both communities were exterminated because of the Nazi vision of radical "ethnic cleansing" or 'purification', implemented by a programmed genocide. In Nazi ideology, if Roma people were associated to "criminality" genetically transmitted because of mixed races, Jews were blamed for being responsible of the decline of Germany because of their "influence", their domination, and their connection to communism. For Roma people, the horror did not finish with the end of the war in 1945. In the countries of the socialist bloc, there was a mass effort for the forced and violent so-called "assimilation" of Roma.

Denial and distortion of genocides

Soon after the Holocaust, and the Porajmos, Nazi theories continue to be spread by the apology of these crimes against humanity; or by denying these crimes; or by promoting a new genocide. Regarding the denial of Holocaust, one of the main conspiracy narratives is the promotion of the concept of "HoloHoax", which claims

that the Holocaust did not happen. The idea behind this is, that the Holocaust was created for making money and presenting the Jewish people as the "eternal victims". In the revisionist theory of the so called "Holocaust Industry", the genocide is allegedly being used for imposing financial reparations from the Germans as well as for justifying the establishment of Israel. For Roma people, the Porajmos had been neglected, and to this day far too many European citizens remain ignorant of this Nazi horror. The Porajmos is sometimes described as the "forgotten" genocide, in which perhaps as much as half of the European Roma population was murdered. The fact that the Roma still demand a recognition of their genocide underlines the ignorance and the blindness of European society. Another element of this genocide is, as for the Holocaust, its apology, which is considered a "right" in some European countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

Roma and Jewish people: opposite racist perceptions regarding their "role" and "position" in societies but same violent and excluding consequences

The basis of the antisemitic conspiracy theories

Main antisemitic conspiracy theories are stating that Jews are trying to control the world thanks to "their lobbies which pull strings of the world". One of the most devastating conspiracy theories can be found in the well-known fake publication 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion': the 19-century presumed report claimed to prove that there was a secret pact of Jewish leaders to rule the world. Its lies about Jews continue to share online bolstering many antisemitic conspiracy theories. Jews are accused to be "everywhere" and, as consequence, to be the perpetrators behind world conspiracies drawing out the antisemitic stereotype of influential Jews "manipulating" politicians. Corresponding to this stereotype is the right-wing conspiracy theory of the "New World Order" (NOW) as part of this rhetoric. The NOW theory explains that "a tyrannical, socialist one-world conspiracy has already taken over most of the planet and schemes to eliminate the last bastion of freedom with the help of collaborators within the government". The final goal would be ensuring an authoritarian regime by implementing repressive measures.

The basis of the antigypsyist conspiracy theories

Main antigypsyist stereotypes depict Roma people as thieves, profiteers, and beggars. It states that they get preferential treatments by the authorities and that they are abusing the social system and benefits. The Roma people are perceived as profiteers who only came into the respective country to exploit the social aid system. Their supposed deviant "non-territorial" characteristic involves that they have no roots of their own – and even less European roots. The most popular antigypsyist narratives describe their "anti-systemic behaviour" because of their supposed nomadism. Even as most of the Roma people lead a sedentary life, people still allege that they prefer to live in temporary encampments due to their 'nomadic' lifestyle. Another narrative is based on presumed high birth rates "due to higher social benefits and allowances and their inability to socially adapt". These concepts make a strong echo to those used in Nazi propaganda materials. The Roma people are perceived as "non-integrable" because of "their own behaviour" and "their belonging to the second-class", or downright as "inferior citizens". They are considered as "inadaptable" to society. They are often compared to "lazy parasites that suck out a decent majority". All this conspiracy theory of the "Gipsy" profiteers leads to welfare chauvinism and to demands for their "symbolic" exclusion from social aid systems as well as from the societies. The Roma people are finally perceived as a "threat to order and a burden on society".

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