BEYOND PREJUDICE: THE RHETORIC OF EXTREME DIFFERENCE AND MORAL EXCLUSION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The end of communism in Central and Eastern Europe has brought a rise of racially and ethnically based discrimination, marginalization and exclusion of the Romanies. Romania, the country with the largest Roma population in Eastern Europe, has not constituted an exception from this pattern. Romanies deserve special mention as they have been the most affected by the widespreading Eastern European anti-Gypsy sentiment and violence (see ERRC, 1996, 2001).

The increasing political power of the Romanian right-wing nationalist parties and their representatives (Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Gheorghe Funar), but also the reproduction of a common sense ideology of difference coming from across the social and political spectrum, has led to the enactment of an extreme nationalist and moral exclusion discourse in relation to the two main minority groups: the Hungarians and Romanies.

Drawing on a critical discursive analytic approach, this paper examines a rhetoric of extreme difference using talk about Romanies as an empirical case. This paper will illustrate and discuss some of the extreme discursive, rhetorical and interpretative resources used to talk about and legitimate the blaming of Romanies and on the other hand, it will document the constructive ideological processes used to position the Romanies as beyond the moral order, as both outsiders in society and space (Creswell, 1996, Sibley, 1992, 1995). Let me note that I don't necessarily start from the assumption that participants' talk about the Romanies is intrinsically extreme. *Extremity* (as *moderation* or *ambivalence* for that matter) is something that has to be judged in the interplay of discourses and judged not as something inherent to discourse, but as the *effect* of using specific discursive and rhetorical devices in order to achieve specific purposes, such as assigning blame and morally excluding the Romanies.

A preliminary quantitative analysis has identified three main ideological (subject) positions in relation to the avowed support for the fairness of the policies of the representatives of the Romanian right-wing, Corneliu Vadim Tudor and Gheorghe Funar. Three categories were identified: those speakers supporting, those ambivalent and those opposing Tudor and Funar. I will start treating these categories as discrete categories, but, for the purposes of this paper, my main interest is to look at the detailed, dynamic and flexible use by participants in each the supporting and opposing Tudor and Funar category of cultural and interpretative resources available in the Romanian society in order to argue about controversial issues related to the Romany ethnic minority. The main contention is that one will find a very similar rhetoric of extreme difference and expression of moral exclusion discourse (Opotow, 1990) across the two positions[1].

This paper documents the construction of extreme prejudice and moral exclusion with a concern for locatedness and the construction of otherness (Augoustinos & Walker, 1998). It is argued that an ideology of 'exclusion' (and bigotry) implies a notion of place, which is the yardstick against which ideological and exclusionary discourse is put together and prejudice enacted. Concerns with being *in/out of place* shape the ideological contours of a moral exclusion discourse and underpin a specific stereotypical descriptions of Romanies which places them beyond the moral order.

The place of Romanies in (the Romanian) society pretty much depends on the symbolic place they are assigned when people describe them. The focus of this paper will be "on the ways that particular ways of speaking might depersonalize the *other*" (Billig, 2002: 184, see also Bar-Tal, 1989, 1990) through an examination of a rhetoric of extreme difference in interview-talk (Tileagă, 2005*a*, 2006).

2. MATERIALS AND ANALYTIC APPROACH

The extracts presented here are taken from a corpus of thirty-eight recorded semi-structured discussion/interviews with middle-class Romanian professionals, both male and female, selected to cover a variety of social backgrounds in the region of Transylvania (north-western part of Romania). This is part of a wider project aiming at comparing and contrasting the way Romanians talk about the Hungarians with the way they talk about the Romanies. The interviews discussed generally *controversial* issues regarding prejudice and prejudice related issues in Romanian society. The extracts were transcribed using a lite version of the well-known set of conventions that

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[1] Opotow (1990: 1) argues that "moral exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are perceived *as outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply*".

have been developed by Gail Jefferson for conversation analysis (see Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998).

This empirical case looks at the views of participants in each the supporting and opposing Tudor and Funar category on various issues regarding the Romanies (explicit). It is not the extremity *per se* of participants' views that made me choose these particular extracts (it should be noted that they talk in a different way about the Hungarians, see Tileagă, 2005*b* for details), but because of the ways they accounted for the positioning of Romanies beyond the moral order as common-sense without requiring elaborate justification.

The critical discursive analytic approach (cf. Wetherell, 1998) in this paper has a dual focus. First, it focuses on the identification of the action-orientated nature of justifying claims together with a detailed look at the accountable conversational practices that warrant, sustain a specific denigratory version whose effect is to pin blame on the Romanies. Second, it takes the form of an ideological analysis focusing on the ideological patterns of sense-making and their specific ideological functions such as rationalizing, legitimating or naturalizing social relations and the blaming of Romanies. Here I follow the concern of Critical Discourse Analysis which sees discourse as a form of *social practice*. As Fairclough & Wodak (1997: 258) point out, "discourse is socially *constitutive* as well as socially shaped: it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people". As the present analysis will try to show, discursive practices may have major ideological effects, that is, helping produce and reproduce the status quo, naturalize and legitimise the blaming of Romanies. The analysis rests overwhelmingly on the assumption that ideologies are above all discursive, instantiated in discursive actions (Billig, 1991). As Michael Billig (2002: 184) has recently suggested, "the categories of ideology, together with the shared stereotyping and commonplace social explanations, are framed in language".

3. ANALYSIS

I will now turn to show some of the ways in which extreme prejudiced discourse is put together and Romanies are constructed beyond *difference*. In documenting the extreme rhetorical and interpretative resources used to talk about and legitimate the blaming of Romanies and the constructive ideological processes used to position the Romanies as beyond the moral order, I will give first examples from the supporting Tudor and Funar category.

Consider extract 1, from a speaker (Sandra, a fifty-one year old speech therapist) who has expressed support for the fairness of Tudor and Funar's policies. The excerpt starts with Sandra displaying reasonableness by offering a story of helping Romanies which on one hand emphasises her willingness to help *them* and on the other hand, their reluctance (or one should say, refusal) to accept this kind of help.

Extract 1

		[…]
411	Sandra	Le-am dus un sac cu haine (.) frumoase (.) erau
412		zdrenţăroşi (.) (da) le-am dat haine frumoase, le-am
413		dus o plasă cu mâncare, că mâncau din gunoaie (.)
414		ca a doua zi, hainele frumoase pe care eu le-am dat
415		să se îmbrace, să se schimbe (.) daca am stat lângă ei s-au schimbat, dacă nu (.) le-au
416		aruncat la container
417		(.) Păi, nici eu nu mai ştiu (.) De ce se comportă
418		aşa? (.) înseamnă că *le place* să trăiască în murdărie (mm) în murdărie, prin (.) furt (.)
419		Şi să-i ajute cineva (.)
420	Chris	De unde credeţi că vine (.) treaba asta?
421	Sandra	Eu cred că este ceva (.) care vine din (.) din (.)
422		ancestral (.) nu ştiu, din (.) din originea lor (.)
423	Chris	Din natura lor?
424	Sandra	Din natura lor (.) au (.) au ceva (.) nu
425		le place (.) de aia zici ca ţiganii îs 'koszos' (.)
		[…]

		[…]
411	Sandra	I have brought them a sack of nice (.) clothes (.) they were
412		walking in rags (.) (right) I have given them nice clothes, I have brought them a bag of
413		food, cos' they were eating from the garbage (.) just to see the next say (.) the nice clothes
414		that I've given to them to wear, to get changed (.) if I stayed with them they've changed
415		clothes (.) if not (.) they've thrown them into the garbage container (.) well, I don't really
416		know (.) why do they behave like this? It means that *they like* living in dirt (mm) in
417		dirt, through (.) theft (.) and someone to help them (.)
418	Chris	Where from do you think that this (.) originates?
419	Sandra	I think that it is something (.) which comes from (.) from (.) the ancestral (.) I don't know

420		(.) from (.) from their origin (.)
421	Chris	From their nature?
422	Sandra	From their nature (.) there is (.) there is something (.) they don't like (.) that's why it is
423		said that the gypsies are 'koszos'
		[…]

Sandra's story (lines 411-416) about helping does not have a straightforward conclusion, but finishes with Sandra's puzzlement on the issue. "Well, I don't really know (.)" which is followed, after a small pause, by a question "why do they behave like this?" (lines 417-418). Sandra herself volunteers to offer an explanation of their behaviour without the intervention of the interviewer: "It means that *they like* living in dirt (mm) in dirt, through (.) theft (.) and someone to help them" (lines 418-419). What this question does is to objectify, to make factual the subsequent explanation, presenting it as independent of her motives or desires, as a neutral and objective comment. Like in her previous account, Sandra explains the behaviour of Romanies using a rather extreme description "they like living in dirt" which is followed by another reference to Romanies as living through theft. Her account closes on a tone of implicit indignation, which takes its force from the implicit *expectancy* of Romanies of being helped.

The reference to "living in dirt" is an explicit sign of a moral discourse that implicitly draws attention to a transgression of a moral boundary. There is no need for explaining what this moral boundary is and what are the implications of transgressing it, but alluding to implicit moral values attached to it is enough. The ascription of an inner personal disposition linked with the idea of "living in dirt" essentializes this attributed stereotypical trait and makes is part of the Romany way of being. An implicit moral boundary is drawn between *us* and *them*. The significance of drawing moral boundaries is related to the positioning of Romanies beyond reasonable bounds, beyond civilized and *clean* moral order.

In line 420 the interviewer seems to be asking for a clarification: "From their nature?" and proposes a different label to summarise what Sandra has just said. This new formulation is immediately taken up by Sandra who continues from where the interviewer has left: "From their nature (.) there is (.) there is something (.) they don't like (.) that's why it is said that the gypsies are *koszos*" (lines 421-422). The word that Sandra uses to describe the gypsies is not a Romanian word, but a Hungarian word. It is a rather general practice in Transylvania to use sometimes Hungarian words to convey some meanings that a seemingly equivalent Romanian word does not convey. The same happens here where Sandra uses the more extreme term

koszos to express and ascribe a moral quality of the Romanies instead of the milder Romanian equivalent *murdar* literally translatable into *dirty*.

Note the shift from talking about "living in dirt" to the more extreme way of ascribing an essential moral quality to the Romanies through the use of *koszos*. What cannot (or shouldn't be) stated in Romanian is stated in Hungarian. There is a shift and upgrade from an inner personal disposition linked with a way of life ("living in dirt") to a more extreme ascription of an intrinsic moral quality of Romanies. The implication of this upgrading is that dirt, filth is not only something that Romanies like living in, it is something that is essentially part of their being, it is *what they are*. The upgrade in itself does not account for the extremity of these comments, but what accounts for it is rather the implicit symbolic assumptions behind a term such as dirt or filth. As Kristeva (1982: 69) has argued, "filth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a boundary and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin".

This is a fierce example of delegitimization and dehumanization as Romanies are portrayed as abject, as horrible by the standards of *civilized* society (note also the presentation of this as knowledge-in-common, as something of a common-place). This way of depicting the Romanies reinforces a view of Romanies as residual, as something that needs *cleaning*. Pollution is to be seen as a type of danger. As Douglas (1966, see also Sibley, 1992) suggests, dirt is matter "out of place". Romanies are thus "matter out of place", beyond the boundaries of the acceptable.

One could argue that the delegitimizing and dehumanizing premises for an 'eliminationist' conclusion are in place. Eliminationist concerns are something that cannot be aired directly, but are nevertheless implicitly contained in the premises. Following Billig (1999), one could argue that a process of social repression of immorality that is always present on the edge of over-imposing morality, is at stake here. There is an ideological struggle and moral tension between the requirements of a rational discourse of cultural differences and an irrational eliminationist discourse, which ultimately places Romanies beyond moral order and excludes them from *civilized* society. At the same time, this ideological tension also points to whatever is socially forbidden and must not be uttered, but instead needs to be repressed.

The analysis continues with a series of examples from the opposing Tudor and Funar category. As the analysis of such extracts will show, even for the participants in the opposing Tudor and Funar category the answer to the previously raised concern seems to be clear: *they* [Romanies] are not like *us* [Romanians] and *they* don't belong with *us*. As emphasised in the short introduction to this paper, the place of Romanies in (Romanian) society

depends on the symbolic place they are assigned when participants describe them. As the next extract will try to show, concerns with being in/out of place constitute an important ideological concern in casting the Romanies beyond the moral order. Thus, one ought to consider the stereotypical ideological representations of the Romanies within a broader concern for the locatedness of this *Othering* process.

The symbolic place that it is assigned to the Romanies, the symbolic physical and moral boundaries which is said and shown that they transgress has important implications for constructing an extreme discourse of difference that places the Romanies beyond the moral order. The 'banal' language evocative of fear, disgust, withdrawal from contact engenders an immutable ideological representation of Romanies with extreme political and social consequences.

It is Alina's views, a thirty-five year old accountant, on the issue of integration of Romanies that are going to constitute the focus of the remainder of this paper.

Extract 2

		[…]
413	Alina	Nu-i văd pe țigani integrându-se între noi, nu le
414		place stilul civilizat (.) de altfel, nu vor să meargă la
415		şcoală, nu vor să evolueze deloc (.) Nu pot să am o
416		părere despre ei (.) ha ha (.) decât proastă
417	Chris	A cui credeți că este vina?
418	Alina	A lor, în primul rând, pentru că nu cred (.) efectiv, au
419		fost duşi cu forţa la şcoală (.) au fost (.) li s-a cerut să se integreze şi nu pot (.) Există în
420		capătul Oradiei, în nu ştiu ce cartier, bloc construit expres pentru ei şi (.) şi l-au
421		mâncat din temelii precum şobolanii (.) nu?
422		[…]

		[…]
413	Alina	I don't see the gypsies integrating themselves among us, they don't like the civilized style (.)
414		by the way, they don't want to go to school, they don't want at all to progress (.) I
415		cannot have an opinion about them (.) ha ha (.) but a bad one (.)
416	Chris	Whose blame it is, do you think?
417	Alina	Theirs, first of all, because I don't think (.) effectively, they were dragged to school (.)
418		they've been (.) they've been asked to integrate and they cannot (.) There is at the end of

419	Oradea, I don't know where, a block especially built for them and (.) they have eaten it
420	from the ground like rats (.) isn't that so?
421	[…]

Alina starts by admitting that she does not see "the gypsies integrating themselves among us" (line 413) and what follows are justifications to support this idea: "they don't like the civilized style", "they don't want to go to school", "they don't want at all to progress" (lines 413-415). This is a very similar way of accounting with the previously documented essentialist disposition-talk discourse of *nature*.

The essence of these ideological stereotypical descriptions is made relevant several lines later. The story that Alina offers in lines 420-422 brings this issue to the forefront: "There is at the end of Oradea, I don't know where, a block especially built for them and (.) they have eaten it from the ground like rats (.) isn't that so?". This is not to be seen as a simple story of transgression , but its implications stretch beyond *rational* thought, into the realm of the irrational, the repressed, the unsaid. Note the reference to *rats* which dehumanizes Romanies and places them into the natural, presents them as vermin. This representation of people, human beings as animals, as particular species which are associated with residues or the borders of human existence achieves a relegation of Romanies to the status of the abject and denies their human qualities. Through this specific representation, one can see that Romanies are again being associated with dirt and the register of impurity and cleanliness is brought to the front. Rats are filthy animals which need to be eliminated for cleanliness and purity. As dirt has to be removed from our houses, likewise, people categorized as dirt are to be removed from *civilized* society. This extreme description has clear eliminationist connotations. As rats are carriers of terrible diseases, in the same ways Romanies are carriers of an ultimate threat which must be eliminated. This is taken further by Alina when talking on the same subject several lines later.

Extract 3

		[…]
428	Alina	Ce poate să facă societatea cu ei? (.) să le facă o baie comunală, ți-o distruge (.) le face
429		un bloc (.) îl distruge (.)
430		nu , nu se poate cu ei, e ceva de (.) de (.)
431		pleava (.) pleava societății, cum să zic (mm)
		[…]

428	Alina	What can society do for them? (.) To make them a communal bath,
429		they destroy it (.) it builds them a block (.) it is destroyed (.) No, you cannot take it with
430		them, it is something like (.) like (.) the scum (.) the scum of society, how should I put it
431		(mm)

The opening rhetorical questions set the Romany *problem* as an issue without a solution. It is implied that there is nothing that the (our) society can do for them: "To make them a communal bath, they destroy it (.) it builds them a block (.) it is destroyed (.)". Being cast as the *problem* that calls for a solution, the Romanies are not regarded anymore as moral subjects. In lines 430-431, Alina is in a search of a formulation that could capture the previous (and the general feeling about Romanies), formulations which eventually comes in line 431: "the scum of society".

It is not presented as a peremptory description, but it is *intended* to capture the essence of what Romanies *are*. Like in her previous intervention, one can see how the use of a metaphor of residue stands as a metaphor for residual people. To categorize them as residual, as abject *par excellence* is again to ignore their visible human qualities and to allude to a conclusion with eliminationist connotations. All the premises are there, are explicit, but not the conclusion. The conclusion is something that cannot be directly stated. Whilst the consequences of Romany behaviour and way of being are (made) problematic, the consequences of this problematic eliminationist categorization are not.

One could argue, that in such circumstances of delegitimizing and dehumanizing talk, immoral and social forbidden desires lurk under the surface of this ideology of 'moral exclusion'. The immoral, eliminationist conclusion is implicitly contained in the premises. Going on the steps of Freud, Billig (1997: 148) cogently argues that "immorality always lurks on the edge of overdemanding morality". What is not said, what is absent from the interaction cannot be nevertheless absent from the analysis. The repression of immorality, what is not said (but could easily have been) becomes of central importance.

4. CONCLUSION

As I hope to have shown, the same processes of excluding Romanies from *civilized* society grounded on an extreme discourse of difference with eliminationist connotations was identified not only in the case of the participants supporting right-wing politics and its representatives (Vadim

Tudor and Gheorghe Funar), but also in the accounts of those opposing Tudor and Funar. In examining extreme prejudiced discourse against Romanies, this paper has provided a critical investigation of social psychological categories such as depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanisation which are reconceptualized in discursive terms in an attempt to understand the situated dynamics of bigotry and some of the ways in which particular ways of talking dehumanize the *other* (Billig, 2002).

Across the two ideological subject positions, an extreme discourse of difference, a discourse of delegitimization and dehumanization is used to portray the Romanies as matter *out of place*, as *polluting* our moral and physical space, as an ultimate 'threat' for which a solution is called for. This extreme discourse on the Romanies is the outcome of an ideological double bind. On one hand, discourses with eliminationist connotations are, in most cases, the outcome of ideological descriptions of Romanies. On the other hand, these very ideological descriptions are based and constructed on eliminationist assumptions, which open the way for the social repression (Billig, 1999) of socially forbidden thoughts.

Social repression becomes relevant if one is re-placing issues such as racism and bigotry, social exclusion and politics of identity from within the psychological build-up of the individual, into the dilemmatic and unfinished business of social life, within the workings of *discourse* with exclusionary and eliminationist ideological and political effects. Social repression has not to be seen as an overarching universal process, but as a *localized* process. I am not just referring here to a specific geographical and ideological location (Eastern European post-communist Romania), but to the idea that this process of social repression is enacted in relation to a specific *category of people*, that *we* (not necessarily Romanians), the settled, the civilized etc. categorize as being matter *out the place*, as abject, as deplorable, try to place beyond the bounds of reasonable behaviour and way of being in the world. Social repression (not necessarily as an automatic process) comes into place when *solutions* to this *problem* are implicitly felt to fall outside the bounds of democratic and moral procedure.

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