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# Tell Me That I Am Not a *Ciganin*, Damn Your Mother! The Social and Political Consequences of Enregisterment in Bulgaria

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## ABSTRACT

In Bulgaria, the Rom/Ciganin persona is defined by non-Ciganin Bulgarians as a set of reiterated features, displayed as fixed and supposedly identifiable by all. This persona is enregistered through various semiotic processes, television being one of the most important ones. *Rom/Ciganin* is the name that links together a set of indexical stereotypes (naturalized as essences) and purports to denote a particular referent, a community, an ethnicity, and the individuals who, by being so labeled, are said to belong to it. Through the study of a racist act of aggression filmed in Bulgaria, I hypothesize that the hatred of Cigani passes discursively through a typification constantly reelaborated by a process of enregisterment. The making of peoples, groups, and communities is not new, but it becomes problematic when researchers, and the institution in general, relay the idea of fixed ethnic categories without problematizing them. They thus legitimize the Roma (or Cigani, Gypsies, etc.) category, and indeed the Rom *persona*, through the (re)production of a set of political discourses based on ethnicity and discrimination. This legitimizes a category that allows the marginalization and exclusion of individuals and families in the name of their supposed membership.

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The very notion of savagery is increasingly redundant on empirical grounds, irrespective of the Savage-object. Lingering conditions of modernity make the notion a hard one to evoke in imagination, now that hordes of Savages have joined the slums of the Third World or touched the shores of the North Atlantic. We are far from the days when five Eskimos caused an uproar in London. The primitive has become terrorist, refugee, freedom fighter, opium or coca grower, or parasite. He can even play anthropologist, at times. Televised documentaries show his “real” conditions of existence; underground newspapers expose his dreams of modernity. Thanks to modernity and modernization, the savage has changed, the West has changed, and the West knows that both have changed empirically.

—(Trouillot 2003, 24)

**A**fter having followed (and sometimes participated in) the antiracist activities carried out by the European Union for several decades, most researchers concerned about the permanence of practices of exclusion, ostracism, marginalization of, and racism against so-called Roma/Gypsies/Tziganes/*Cigani* (and so on)<sup>1</sup> in Europe have admitted in recent years that these policies have been in vain.<sup>2</sup>

Many political scientists and anthropologists indicate that the millions invested (e.g., during the George Soros Rom decade) have changed little or nothing for the families they work with, that the Roma are still the most marginalized people in Europe, that acts of racism have not stopped (indeed, on the contrary, they have increased), and that their political participation remains very low (Stewart 2012).

1. As this article questions the “Roma/Gypsies/Tziganes/*Cigani* (and so on)” categorization, I will only be using these labels in relation to the process of typification I focus on. There is a clear difference between these labels and the diversity of people and families I have lived with in Bulgaria or met elsewhere that might be labeled by them. In Bulgaria, there is the masculine singular *Ciganin* (Циганин), the plural *Cigani* (Цигани), and the feminine singular *Ciganka* (Циганка; note that the pronunciation of the transliterated letter C is the same as the affricate *ts* in English). As the label *Gypsy* (or its equivalents, such as *Tsigane* in French, *Gitano* in Spanish, etc.) is not used in the cases I examine, I prefer to use the local Bulgarian word *Ciganin* and its variants. Since the 1970s, the homogenization of the Roma/Gypsies/Tziganes/*Cigani* (and so on) categories in Europe has been promoted by some Rom activists who decided to impose the ethnonym *Roma* (Canut 2011; Canut et al. 2016). Such activists consider this term less discriminating and more politically correct, even though many Rom-identified individuals refuse it, arguing that it will not change anything for them. I return to this point below.

2. McGarry (2014, 762), e.g., writes: “After years of policies, laws, activism, advocacy, the establishment of representative organisations, training, funding and capacity-building projects, there is a general consensus that the situation of Roma has not improved. The notable gap between Roma and non-Roma in terms of wealth, education, employment and life expectancy remains. Due to the inferior position Roma occupy and enduring negative representations that reinforce their marginality, it is hardly surprising that policies aimed at inclusion have not met with success.”

The challenge of such a failure for the new generation of researchers in the West as well as in the East<sup>3</sup> resides in the apprehension of the causes of exclusion at the heart of the “ethnicity-based governmentality” of families under the label *Roma* (van Baar 2011, 208). By breaking from an essentialist vision that homogenizes a supposed “Roma community” (McGarry 2014, 771), these researchers lash out against a culturalist and politically incoherent approach that, while based on the reversal of stigma, in fact maintains, in subtext, the spread of stigma.

While the aim of interculturalism in political action was to counter “misconceptions” about the so-called Roma,<sup>4</sup> in practice the neoliberal logic and specifically the European biopolitics of interculturalism have only reinforced the age-old marginalization of Roma (van Baar 2015, 2017).<sup>5</sup> And even though some families have “integrated,” the Gypsy Other (Woodcock 2007) has remained an object of hate for the growing number of (ultra)nationalist movements in Europe. The question is above all political, and European institutions are, according to these authors, largely responsible: “current European governmentalities towards the Roma tend to contribute to their marginalization and the displacement of their voices” (van Baar 2011, 210). Can what Slavoj Žižek (2010) has named a “reasonable anti-Gypsyism” be countered within Europe? One answer that has been offered is to draw from the counterpowers offered by the Rom activists themselves.<sup>6</sup> But is it up to the victims of racism to fight racism?

While the critiques offered by recent research and the renewal of studies concerning racism against people considered to be Roma is salutary, I believe it remains insufficient and poses a major epistemological problem, namely, the fact

3. See, among others, McGarry (2014); Van Baar (2008, 2011, 2015); Fox and Vermeersch (2010); Olivera (2014, 2015); Cheshmedzhieva (2009); Woodcock (2007); Vincze (2014); Resnick (2009); Surdu (2016); Yildiz and Genova (2017); and Picker (2017).

4. This perspective is still at work today in many Rom-defense NGOs and associations. See the presentation speech of the association “La voix des Roms” [the voice of Roma] by its president, accessed February 27, 2018, <https://alencredemaplume.com/2018/02/23/lassociation-la-voix-des-rroms-presentee-par-son-president-william-bila/>.

5. As van Baar (2017, 220) writes: “Europe biopolitically rely not only on an ambiguous construction of European citizenship along the binary lines of EU/non-EU membership, or on correlated differentiations of non-EU nationals, but also on “intra-EU” differentiations.” He explains “how a de-nationalization of the concepts and methods of migration and border studies—beyond methodological nationalism and Eurocentrism—sheds light on the under-researched impact of the EU’s external border regime on minoritized EU citizens.” By the notion of “evictability” he discusses “the case study of Europe’s Romani minority to show how contemporary forms of securitization further divide Europe bio-politically along intra-European lines” (van Baar 2017, 212).

6. “Yet, making these Romani voices heard and their struggles visible in the current debates are the first steps necessary to challenge the multiple forms of exclusion with which substantial parts of Europe’s Romani minorities are currently confronted” (van Baar 2011, 210).

that the Rom category is itself used unproblematically by researchers. Even if it has been legitimized by a small self-labeled “Rom” elite in order to counter the negative indexicalities of the “Roma/Gypsies/Tziganes/Cigani (and so on)” label, what is problematic is that the only solution offered to the problem is the constitution of an ethnic group (whatever its name). As Alaina Lemon asserts, “Rather than deconstructing essentialist categories, Romani intellectuals and activists have worked with them” (2000, 97).

In Bulgaria, the Ciganin persona<sup>7</sup> is defined by non-Cigani Bulgarians as a set of reiterated features, displayed as fixed (naturalized) and supposedly identifiable by all. These include the indexical values of poverty, illiteracy (or unculturedness), insubordination, theft, cheating, lying, laziness, savagery, deviance, and uncontrolled reproduction, and, more recently, those of terrorism (Canut et al. 2016; Canut 2018). The category of Rom/Ciganin is a persona that is enregistered through various semiotic processes, television being one of the most important ones. It is the name that links together a set of indexical stereotypes (naturalized as essences) and purports to denote a particular referent: a community, an ethnicity, and the individuals who, by being so labeled, are said to belong to it. How is this category enregistered and racialized? Does it echo the Western discursive formation of Otherness that Trouillot (2003) termed the “savage slot”?

In this essay, I first show that the construction of values attributed to social *types* can only be observed within sociosemiotic interactions. I do so by attending to the metapragmatic dimensions of such interactions, that is, to the ways in which reflexivity is a determining element of the apprehension of signs. As such, the notion of *stereotype*, as it is generally apprehended by researchers—namely, as a closed object denoting a rigid repertoire of expressions (“the language of war”; see Cheshmedzhieva [2009]), “representations,” or “images” (see Sigona [2005]; Stewart [2012]; McGarry [2014]; Vitale [2018], among others)—will not be very useful here. Rather, I suggest that such a conception erases the historically complex racialization of the Rom/Ciganin type in the West, precisely because it is part of that very process of racialization.

The indexical values attributed to the Rom/Ciganin types result from a reflexive process of the typification of voices (Agha 2005, 44) and their enregisterment (Silverstein 1996; Agha 1999), a process that enacts a set of competing ideologies (Lemon 2000, 2002a). Such a process is constantly reiterated in social

7. If the introduction in the 1960s of a new name, “Rom,” modified the social type in question, it did not modify the process of construction of this “type,” as we will see.

interactions. These values are dynamic and do not exist outside of their semiotic performance. During this process, the “assignment of stereotypic indexical values to performable signs” (Agha 2007, 81) can lead to the constitution of an often multimodal semiotic register (visual, proxemic, language-based, etc.). The latter, however, cannot be considered as a closed and rigid set but as a continually (re)constructed phenomenon, as implied by the framework of dialogism (Bakhtin [1929] 1970; Volosinov [1929] 2011) that informs my analysis.

Second, this approach, as applied to a concrete situation of arrangement of the Ciganin type in Bulgaria (which I introduce through the discussion of a parody television show below), will lead me to question the recurrent opposition between negative appreciation (racism) and positive appreciation (anti-racism) both as a structure of analysis and as conflict resolution. The typification of the Ciganin—also called Rom in media space—and its constitution as persona is, on the contrary, part of complex processes of inverted typification, that of the “non-Ciganin Bulgarian,” which makes it necessary to pay attention to the positionalities of speaking subjects (or what Goffman [1981] described as “footing”) when they utter anti-Ciganin discourses. A focus on this process brings me, third, to the discursive analysis of the “them”/“us” opposition in such discourses, whose reiteration in insults allows for the perception of a porosity of borders much more than an effective differentiation (van de Port 1999; Lemon 2000).

Through the study of a racist aggression filmed in Bulgaria, I hypothesize that the hatred of Cigani (or what the non-Cigani perceive as Cigani) passes discursively through a typification (the Ciganin persona) constantly re-elaborated by a process of enregisterment.<sup>8</sup> Yet far from being affirmed once and for all, the ideological opposition between “us” and “them” seems unstable, questionable, and at times vacillating in the real social practices that I discuss, as if the typification could fail at any time. The permanent discursive re-elaboration of this opposition accounts, paradoxically, for a recurrent anxiety and fantasy for a large part of non-Ciganin Bulgarians: that of an inextricable resemblance and commonality, that of a blurring of the difference and implied underlying identity.

If discourses display (at the level of the denotational text) an externality, a strangeness of the Ciganin Other considered as totally different from oneself, a

8. This hypothesis is the result of more than ten years of work in Bulgaria in a “Gypsy ghetto” (*ciganskata geto*). This research consists of an ethnography of social and semiotic practices in the “ghetto,” as well as an analysis of the production of political, media, and digital discourses about what is described externally as a “community” (*obshtnostta*), namely, the “Roma/Cigani.”

metapragmatic analysis (at the level of the interactional text, Silverstein 1993) shows that, on the contrary, the Ciganin is a figure of familiarity, as a refracted image of the self, a kind of internal element whose expulsion would irreparably lead to the death of oneself.

In conclusion, this process will allow us to understand that hate speech persists because of the political, media, and academic adoption of the ethnicizing Roma/Cigani categories, categories that consolidate the foundation that enables the reification of a racist register. Like other racist registers, it is part of a wider historical construction of the “savage slot” enacted by the West, one that has taken many forms (Trouillot 2003, 24).

The political consequences of taking this approach are decisive: rather than differentiating the so-called Roma (who are asked either to integrate<sup>9</sup> as they have been for centuries, or to become anti-racist activists, in the name of ethnic homogenization, an ad hoc construction of “gypsiness”<sup>10</sup>), the imperative would be to highlight the sociodiscursive positions of the dominant non-Roma (the “listening subject”; see Inoue 2003, 158; Rosa 2019, 5), since the question can only come back to them as they, ultimately, construct the categories in question. For nationalists in Bulgaria, the hatred of Cigani seems to be the price to pay to save the nation and assert themselves in national space. While they express their suffering to be the poorest country in Europe—for example, because of a strong corruption of their rulers—at one and the same time they complain about the protection granted to minorities like Roma by the European Union. And although few Roma have been economically successful, more important is that the situation of non-Rom Bulgarians is deteriorating more and more. From these nationalists’ point of view, the fight against Human Rights imposed by the institutions of Western Europe simply favors a people (i.e., the Roma/Cigani) who

9. “Instead of incessantly deploring the “lack of integration” of Roma and Gypsies, we should perhaps try to understand better the ways in which these social groups have been well and truly an integral part of European societies for centuries, for better and for worse. From this perspective, the rhetoric of “inclusion,” referring to an ideal society that does not exist outside the upper-middle classes, is probably not conducive to a better understanding of the dynamics of exclusion and integration at work today. Before trying to “empower people,” it may be useful to understand how people are already empowered, locally and concretely. This means accepting the fact that this empirical and effective power and the strategies employed do not always coincide with our own way of experiencing the world. This new starting point is not necessarily an obstacle to the relationship but, perhaps, part of its very possibility” (Olivera 2015, 149).

10. “Now that ‘the Gypsy’ is openly spoken of in the public space, now that individual Roma are labeled ‘Gypsy’ by their non-Roma neighbours, now that there are ‘Roma’ organisations and institutions there are signs that a new sense of ‘shared Gypsiness’ may emerge. This study raises the question therefore of whether the potential now exists for creating a civil rights type defensive movement among the Roma. If Roma do move from being weak political actors, it would be an ironic product of the social processes that have also produced such rabid hostility and aggression as has rarely been seen in these countries for many decades” (Stewart 2012, xxx).

are “thugs.” As such, the antiracist fight against Human Rights that would uplift the Roma is linked to a sense of injustice, contempt, and imposed humiliation by the ultraliberal rules of Western *demokratsia* (democracy).

### The Making of Roma/Cigani: A Dynamics of Enregisterment

Most of the international studies of representations, discourses, or even attitudes of non-Roma/Cigani toward the construction of the Rom/Ciganin persona are still based on an approach that assumes a pre-existing Rom/Ciganin identity (e.g., Marinov 2016; Vitale 2018) and are based on a purely denotational conception of language (Silverstein 1993; Silverstein and Urban 1996). Understood outside the social and political conditions of their production and their interpretation, such discourses can then be assimilated to immutable categories (from which one does not hesitate to produce statistics), the negative stereotypes about which are then combatted so that the supposed Rom community can recover from their marginalization by others. What this approach fails to perceive lies in the typifications on which the analyses of these researchers paradoxically rest: who is this “Rom” that remains the object of so many researchers?<sup>11</sup>

While he or she is blasted as a Gypsy Other (Woodcock 2007), he or she remains a persona, an object built in research and the business of a growing identity industry. What can be done, then, from the position of the concerned individuals who declare that “the Rom/Ciganin” does not exist any more than the Rom/Ciganin community, or the Roma as a homogeneous whole (Canut 2011; Olivera 2014)? To consider men and women, multiple and varied families, under the banner of a homogeneous whole—which is furthermore ethnicized (Marushiakova and Popov 2011)—to which a large part refuses to adhere, and endowing it with positive qualities does not change anything in the ongoing process of differentiation, stigmatization, and racism.

In this way, it is important to understand how the Rom type is day after day (re)constructed in and by discourses, arranged<sup>12</sup> in semiotic regimes, by sound and image in particular. To do this, it is necessary to approach, within semiotic

11. Consider, e.g., the following passage from Olivera: “Therefore it is necessary to assume that the fight against stereotypes requires above all a fundamental reconsideration of the categorization process that nourishes stereotypes. That is to say, it entails an understanding regarding what purpose it serves—which has definitely nothing to do with any “Roma identity”” (Olivera 2015, 3).

12. Rather than talking about “mise-en-scène” or staging that refers to the modality of performance, here I prefer to use the concept of (musical) arrangement to account for the implementation and acting out of enregisterment. The concept of arrangement differs slightly from that of assemblage (“agencement” Deleuze and Guattari) in that it supposes that semiotic productions are always situated and linked to subjective and sociopolitical positionings.



regimes (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 97), the productions as multiple assemblages (*agencements*)—machinic assemblages and collective assemblages of enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 140)—which supposes analyzing the social and political conditions of their production, while inscribing them in the historical thickness that encapsulates them. Why are racist remarks aimed at differentiation ceaselessly reiterated—through what Deleuze and Guattari call “territorializations/deterritorializations,” or what are defined as entextualizations in the field of linguistic anthropology (Bauman and Briggs 1990)—in multiple interactional situations? Why do anti-Roma/Cigani need to reaffirm the differentiation between “them” and “us,” to verify it, to reelaborate it, to reinforce it? In political and media discourses in Bulgaria (Canut et al. 2016; Kratunkova 2018), the typification continues to be put into action by multiple assemblages: where does this need to hammer home the difference and to incriminate the Roma/Cigani with multiple deviations come from?

Enregisterment (Agha 1999, 2004) is a key concept for understanding not only the registering of ways of speaking but also the constitution of various features aimed at the categorization of people at the discursive and interlocutive level (Gal 2016, 2018). This process leads to what Agha defines as registers of discourse,<sup>13</sup> temporary forms and always ephemeral sedimentation of indexical values attributed to signs. Enregisterment as a process of arrangement of signs—into sets of sounds, gestures, images, and speeches—allows us to account for the dynamic construction of a persona, a construction that is then necessary for all kinds of social oppositions to other semiotic registers. Constituted through power relations (which Deleuze and Guattari [1980, 96] situate in the *mot d'ordre* ‘order-word’), these registers come to be shared across some social domain, thereby giving rise to forms of differentiation, hierarchization, essentialization, discrimination, and so on, allowing in turn for the affirmation of self-positioning in the social and political space.

Rather than conceiving of the category as a definitive and stable state of affairs, the concept of enregisterment requires us to focus on the material elaboration of interpretations within each material semiotic event in order to consider the category as a permanent reconstruction, insofar as it indexes new pragmatic values in each event of use. This analytical procedure, which leads

13. Agha writes: “A register of discourse is a reflexive model of discourse behavior. The model is performable through utterances in the sense that producing a criterial utterance indexes a stereotypic image of social personhood or interpersonal relationship. The model is formulated by semiotic practices that differentiate a register’s forms from the rest of the language, evaluate these repertoires as having specific pragmatic values and make these forms and values known to a population of users through processes of communicative transmission” (Agha 2007, 80–81).

the researcher to identify processes of indexicality, entextualization/contextualization, rhematization, and so on (Silverstein 1993; Irvine and Gal 2000; Gal 2016; Nakassis 2016) within semiosis also makes it possible to render the phenomenon of sedimentation of features, which generally refers to what Peirce addresses through the notion of “habit” (Olivier 2013). But how can a cluster of indexical values be more or less sedimented during a given period within a given group, legitimized to qualify another group, if not through power relations (Agha 2007, 146)?

Moreover, these indexicalities are far from being identifiable with a delimited field, since the boundaries of the register are necessarily vague and porous (Agha 2007, 168). There is a kind of status quo in a set of features and values, useful in particular for their essentialization (Agha 2007, 74). The values that are part of this diverse, heterogeneous set are far from all being summoned in a similar and systematic manner in the various semiotic situations observed, varying from place to place, moment to moment, and person to person. The interdiscursivity that characterizes these arrangements supposes, moreover, during the reactualization of the utterances, a ceaseless process of entextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990) that leads to their variation. These statements, deterritorialized and reterritorialized in other sign regimes, are resignified within a new context, indeed (re)constructing that context itself (Silverstein and Urban 1996).

In Bulgaria as elsewhere, television is a very effective way for the racially dominant classes to promote the Rom/Ciganin in a particular way: it is a question of reiterating the forms of the Rom/Ciganin and, second, of verifying (through “abduction”; Canut 2018) that his or her defining features correspond to a reality, that the Rom/Ciganin is indeed embodied by men and women, here and now.

### **The Mediatized Embodiment of the Rom Persona**

I have studied, through several broadcasts on Bulgarian television, how the enregisterment of the category of the Ciganin or Rom was based on this or that trait of the Ciganin or Rom persona (Canut et al. 2016). Having deepened the analysis of a television document (about the neighborhood in which I work; see Canut 2018) proceeding from the arrangement of a particular indexical value (crime) attributed to the Cigani, here I mainly consider a program claiming to be humorous,<sup>14</sup> *Gospodari na efira* (Господари на еФира ‘The lords of the air’), produced on a private channel (NovaTV) that is well known by and popular

14. <http://gospodari.com/ромска-нова-година-video34609.html>

among the Bulgarian public. If politicians are the favorite targets of Gero and Rumba, the two comedians who host the show, the “Roma brothers,” as they ironically call them here, are very often the object of their sarcasm. The excerpt below corresponds to the beginning of the program devoted to the “Rom New Year,” which is celebrated on January 13. The organization of the show consists in taking excerpts from other TV channels (mainly TV7, in this case), piecing them together in a specific way, commenting on them through the hosts’ voice-overs, foregrounding certain aspects through subtitles, and, above all, directing interpretations by triggering recorded laughter:

Speaker	Transcription/Translation	Image
1. Host 1, Rumba (voice-over)	chestita nova godina (.) bratya romi <b>happy new year (.) dear roma brothers</b>	Succession of fast images of Rom Bulgarians with background of music and sound effects [selected images of the following sequences]. Close up on a cake with inscription “Bango Vasil.”
2. Host 2, Gero (voice-over)	aé chestito (.) gledame dobro utro Bulgaria (0.2) na tv sedem <b>okay well (.) we’re watching Good Morning Bulgaria (0.2) on TV seven</b>	Excerpts of TV7 channel: Men toast in a room.
3. Journalist	chestita nova godina (.) kako se kazva ili po-tochno ot nashiya sabesednik shte razberem kak e na romski (.) chestit bango vasil (0.2) rusko gueorgiev (.) prepodavatel po balgarski ezik <b>happy new year (.) as we say and we are going to try to understand more precisely how it is said in romani (.) happy bango vassil (0.2) rusko gueorgiev (.) teacher of Bulgarian language</b>	Wide Shot: a TV news set on the left (indicating “Studio TV7”, a journalist in duplex in a school with a microphone in hand. On a banner at the bottom of the screen: TV7 with the name of the reporter (Martin Gueorguiev). Banner under the two images: « good morning Bulgaria » (+ news rolling), name of the show. Close up on the journalist holding the microphone then turns to the right, as we discover another man. The reporter’s name appears on a banner (Martin Gueorguiev).
4. Host (voice-over)	interesna kombinatsiya (.) rom prepodavatel po balgarski (0.2) a imeto mu (.) rusko (0.4) no neka chuem posle <b>interesting combination (.) a rom who teaches Bulgarian (0.2) with a russian (.) name (0.4) ((recorded laughter)) but listen to what’s next</b>	Repetition in slow motion of the previous images: the later seconds of the preceding shot without sound but with the voice-over of the animator and recorded laughter.

Speaker	Transcription/Translation	Image
5. Journalist	zdraveite <b>hello</b>	
6. Rusk	dobre vecher <b>good evening</b>	The journalist faces the man being interviewed in front of a classroom (the interview happens in the corridor of the school)
7. Journalist	kak e na romski (.) chestita nova godina <b>How do you say happy new year in romani.(.)</b>	
8. Rusk	<i>bahtalo tumarge (.) bahtalo tumar nevo bresh romane</i> <b>happy new year to you (.) happy new year to you roma</b>	The title which appears under the images says: « The will to leave the ghetto » ( <i>volyata da izlezesh ot getoto</i> ) Recorded laughter is triggered.
9. Host 1 (Rumba)	gero (.)mnogo dalag pozdrav <b>gero (.) it's a very long greeting</b>	Repetition in slow motion (two times) of the last seconds of the previous shot, without sound.
10. Host 2 (Gero)	taka e roumba (.) bratyata romi sa temperamentni (0.2) i osven pusuvnite i pozdravite sa im dalgi <b>eh yes it's very long roumba (.) roma brothers have a fiery temperament (0.2) both their swearings and greetings are long</b>	Recorded laughter is triggered.
11. Rusk	bahtalo tumarge (.) bahtalo tumar nevo bresh romane <b>happy new year (.) happy new year to you roma</b>	Repetition (twice) of the last seconds of the previous shot, without sound.
12. Host 2 (Gero)	chuhme originalniya romski pozdrav (0.2) da vidim kak chestitiha v zdravey balgaria <b>we heard the original greeting in romani (0.2) let's now see how they wish a happy new year in hello bulgaria let's now see how they wish a happy new year in Hello Bulgaria ((TV show))</b>	Outdoor shots with roma children. Other program in the snow: three children facing the camera (wide shot). Banner under the shot: Nova TV « zdravey balgaria » (« Hello Bulgaria »). Then a panoramic shot on the right side (empty space with snow). A sign appears: « Chestita nova godin » [Happy new year].
13. Host 2 + 2 (Rumba + Gero)	CHESTIT NOVA GODIN ((recorded laughter))(0.4) napisano na balgarski ama zvuchashto po (.) tipichno romski <b>HAPPY NEW YEAR ((recorded laughter)) written in Bulgarian but with a typical Rom sonority</b>	The sign is framed in red and grows larger: « Chestita nova godin » [Happy new year]. Recorded laughter is triggered.

In this excerpt, we can identify a set of tokens that contribute to enregistering certain indexical relations that are aimed at reaffirming the Ciganin/Rom persona,<sup>15</sup> especially with regards to their illiterate, uneducated, and vulgar nature. The frame of the interaction is the entanglement of three layers referring to three semiotic spaces that are intertwined, producing a triple intertextualization: (1) the raw material composed of a speech event, involving a teacher (Rusko) who is at his workplace (school) and who translates into Romani, at the request of a Bulgarian journalist, the greeting of a Rom Happy New Year; (2) the televised staging by Channel TV7 from which this first filmed document comes: the interview of the professor on the television newscast by a journalist who smiles at the incongruity of the situation; (3) the comic staging of the two hosts (Goro and Rumba) of the show *Gospodari na Efira* on NovaTV, who manipulate these images (through associations, exhibitions, slow motion, repetition, sound effects, recorded laughter, among other textual operations<sup>16</sup>) and comment on them, helped by a recorded laugh track that garnishes the whole.

As in many other news reports on Bulgarian television, the words of the individuals that are supposed to represent the Rom persona are never proposed in their entirety and in their continuity. Here, they are cut off from the outset, deterritorialized then reterritorialized (or entextualized), and then commented on (voicing). The outset is thus extracted from its initial context to be embodied in two other visual and discursive devices, first that of the television journal, then that of the parodic broadcast. In fact, the voice of “Rusko,” the only voice visibly embodied on screen and in an interaction with a journalist, is put at a distance and covered by the recorded voices of the two hosts, neither of whose bodies or faces are visible. Their comments are in a low voice, dialoguing in a complicit manner, subsuming other layers in a dominant and parodic way: their voices, linked to unmarked positions, come from nowhere. This device carries the voice and the words of Rusko at the center of the examination, a judgment made from above according to an omniscient point of view that makes him an object at the heart of a performance, an object that the spectator is asked to judge and mock, with the help of the hosts. Through this change in footing (Goffman 1981), the metapragmatics of the interaction appear, and the viewers can thus experience the difference between themselves and the Rom.

15. The *Ciganin* label is not used on TV, due to the requirement of the politically correct label. This is why I use the label *Rom* in this section.

16. It is impossible to translate the written error between the two genders into English: the normatively feminine word for “year” in Bulgarian is written as a masculine (*godin*), even though the adjectives for “happy” and “new” feature a feminine ending (*chestita nova*).

This objectivation reinforces the typification of the parodic object: the repetition and deformation of this sequence (e.g., in its use of slow motion, its reiteration of images, etc.) deconstruct the initial interaction to turn it into a caricature. What was only the simple and serious interview of a Bulgarian professor speaking Romanès instead moves into a parodic objectification of the Rom characterized by particular (racist) indexical values, which the viewers can then verify as seemingly “true.” The recorded laughter that indexes the “parody” genre leads the viewer to co-construct the meanings oriented by the montage, these interpretations being decisive for the typification and the exhibition of Rusko, who then takes on the features of the Rom persona here referring to all the “Roma brothers.” If this persona is totally embodied by the audiovisual text (i.e., what we hear and see as part of the profilmic space of the television show), the audience linked to the non-Rom voice is totally disembodied, in that it follows the nonsituated (acousmatic) voices and the meanings borne by commentators, who absolutely withdraw from the scene itself. As such, the public of the television program is constructed to be non-Rom: the show is exclusively based on a non-Rom “listening subject” (Inoue 2003, 158), differentiating the non-Roma from the Roma even as it solidifies their relation. The former voice seemingly comes from nowhere and occupies the unmarked position of the universal (Trouillot 2003).

The succession of these audiovisual tropes—which can be seen as “tropes of mediatic ghettoization”<sup>17</sup>—erase the primary indexical values of the initial interview and construct, and, through rhematization (Gal 2018), new indexicalities are produced that participate in the process of reifying the Rom persona. Such tropes thus contribute to the development of a multimodal semiotic register (multichannel text) associating both the visual (images), editing (embedding of several speech events), metrical, poetic structures (laughter, jerky rhythm, repetition, slow motion, etc.), and discursive reflexivity (voice-over). All of these indexicalities, operating at several levels (or text-level indexicalities), become congruent by converging on the single object they (re)construct: the Rom persona.

### **Voicing the Rom Persona**

The meanings proposed by the voice-over of the hosts appear first of all in the form of humorous but always reflexive translations aimed at making the Roma

17. I thank Michael Silverstein for this relevant idea.

“readable.” These evaluative statements are embodied in a dialogical form (between the two hosts) reconstituted a posteriori and aimed at making their prepared and recorded discourse seem spontaneous. The statements produced by Rusko are systematically repeated and summarized (“a Rom who teaches Bulgarian,” line 4) and then judged by means of appreciative formulas (“it is very long,” line 9; “both their swearings and greetings are long,” line 10) and attributive ones (“with a typical Rom sonority,” line 13), which are systematically constructed on negative assumptions about their referents.

At the heart of these indexicalities, several specificities are put forward to typify the voice (Agha 2005, 45) of the “Romani brother,” an expression to which I will return. Their customs (“the Bango Vassil,” choice of the subject of the show), their ways of being (the “fiery temperament,” line 10), their physical characteristics (reference to the hair of the Roma, which does not correspond to the stabilized metapragmatic value of the name *Rusko* ‘Russian’ and ‘blond’, line 3), their Bulgarian language (“typical Rom sonority,” line 13), their Romani language (with swear words as long as their greetings)—these are some of the examples chosen here, among others highlighted throughout the show (see Canut et al. 2016), of how a particular figure of the Roma is constructed by this text. Their association through rhematization progressively (re)builds the set of “order-words” and social or racial range slogans of the anti-Rom semiotic regime. As Alaina Lemon observes in a very relevant essay concerning Roma in Russia (2002, 47), these discourses focus specifically on the metapragmatics of linguistic function (e.g., by ignoring the Romanès linguistic code) and thereby reinforce a “particular hierarchal mapping of the metapragmatics of code over those of function” (2002, 47) in which the real linguistic code corresponds to Bulgarian.

A Rom way of speaking—assimilated to their intellectual and linguistic deficit (cf. Rosa 2019, 6), a recurrent indexical value in such discourses—is the favorite object of such media taunts. While initially the implication is merely suggested, later in the text it is declared through a series of truth assertions. In line 3, for example, the statement “a Rom who teaches Bulgarian (0.2) whose first name is (.) Rusko (0.4)” is a summary of the journalist’s words, if we stick to the denotational text. These words are immediately placed in enunciative distance, even before their production by the humorous tone and the hosts’ evaluation of it as an “interesting combination (.)” Reinforced by the recorded laugh track, this thematization presupposes an incompatibility between being Rom and teaching Bulgarian:<sup>18</sup> even if he is a professor, first and foremost he

18. Concerning “Rusko,” the play on words resides in teaching Bulgarian and the “Russian” connotation.

is Rom. Without being explicit, the taken-for-granted assumption shared between speakers and receivers of these utterances lies in the *unspoken* constituted into common value through this collective laughter: “a Rom cannot teach Bulgarian (well).” Much more than the implicit, what appears here is a non-predicable or “constitutive silence” as described by Orlandi (1996, 59). The relationship between being a Rom and having an intellectual profession, especially when it concerns the Bulgarian language, is always placed under a regime of suspicion. This relation refers to those “folk models of indexical value”<sup>19</sup> (Agha 2005, 46) that deny Rom intellect through the regular erasure of those of them who are educated. The link between this questioning and the assertion by the same speakers in line 10, concerning the “typical Rom sonority” in (written) Bulgarian—which, as will become obvious later in the show, boils down to barbarisms and grammatical differences—reinforces, through interlocutive dialogism, these indexical values, which Rosa has labeled “raciolinguistic enregisterment” (2019, 7). These allusions to statements uttered previously (the already mentioned) and elsewhere (especially in the political arena and in the media), like so many tokens aimed at legitimizing the Rom type, only work for the non-Rom viewer because they are reterritorialized or retextualized here and now within a particular semiotic event.

### The Embarrassing “Rom Brother”

The dialogical resumption of the expression “Rom brother” (line 1) is a key element in the complex process of distancing the so-called Roma. This common turn of phrase refers to a very important term of solidarity in Romanès,<sup>20</sup> *phral* ‘brother’, which is not limited to brothers or family cousins but rather which indicates primary positive inclination toward another. Regularly mocked by non-Roma, this address is then taken up by them to mimic the Roma by reversing the supposed solidarity against them. By the very fact of its utterance by a non-Rom, this expression immediately typifies the Rom by text-metrical contrasts (e.g., in intonation, prosody, looks, mimicry). The irony here is the contrast between the supposedly benevolent sense of “brother,” which once addressed to the Roma by the non-Roma takes, on the contrary, a negative

19. “The data of socially recurrent typifications amount to an order of metapragmatic stereotypes—folk models of indexical value—associated with a repertoire of forms” (Agha 2005, 46).

20. In order to simplify, we will use the term *Romanès* here to qualify these linguistic practices, but they are more specifically called “to make word in a Romanès way” (Canut 2006; Canut et al. 2018).



indexical value, suggesting, “You can call us brothers, but we will never be your brothers.” The antiphrastic function associated with the dialogical value of this statement refers to what Brès defines as the dialogism of irony (2010, 696). This interactional trope, which has almost become the icon of the Rom type, is shaped by its social domain: “In such cases we have a social regularity of typification—a system of metapragmatic stereotypes—whereby a given form, or repertoire of forms, is regularly treated as indexical of a social type by a given social domain of persons” (Agha 2005, 45).

This reiteration touches on the heart of the question of racism in Bulgaria (Nacu 2006; Ditchev 2011), which paradoxically exposes itself in the guise of xenophobia, where Roma (though of Bulgarian nationality) are excluded from the Bulgarian nation (see the second example below).<sup>21</sup> The impossibility of being “brothers,” clarified by the resumption of a stereotypical discursive marker, subsumes multiple private and public speech acts aimed at refusing the presence of different families identified as Roma or wishing them to disappear (Canut et al. 2016). Thus, the ironic resumption of the formulation “Roma brothers,” sedimented through iconicity in discourses (as well as *ciganka rabota* ‘Gypsy work’ or *ciganiya* ‘brothel’; Canut et al. 2016) illustrates the complexity of typification processes leading to the creation of registers constituted as a Rom (or Bulgarian) “model of language use.” But this model always implies positionalities (or footings, in Goffman’s sense; see Agha 2005, 46).

Indeed, since “registers always exist in contrast” (Gal 2018, 9) this one supposes the mirroring elaboration of antagonistic personae, in particular that of the Bulgarian persona. Necessarily composed of all the positive traits denied to the Rom person, the non-Rom Bulgarian must be, by implication (though certainly not by fact), cultivated, clean, fair, honest, hardworking, morally irreproachable, and so on. Unfortunately, these indexical values are far from unanimous, as Bulgarian politicians are simultaneously described as corrupt and thieves by almost the entire population, the nation is perceived as weak (under the weight of the European Union), young Bulgarians are deserting school, unemployment is increasing, poverty is becoming overwhelming, and so on. The Bulgarian type is far from the positive ideal opposed so far to the Rom type. Indeed, *as* opposites they are also twins. The anxiety belied by the enregisterment

21. A link could be made here with Hill’s “covert racist discourse” (Hill 1999, 683) relying on especially visual indirect indexicalities (Ochs 1990), as opposed to “vulgar racist discourse.” Similarly, Lemon argues for an approach to race as a “discursive practice” (2002b). Such an approach shows how this category can be subjugated to many other categories as nationality, ethnicity, local hierarchies, and so on.

of a Rom/Bulgarian persona, thus, is that we, Bulgarians may fall as low as the Rom (Nacu 2006), that we will come to know this shameful and stigmatized poverty (if it hasn't already befallen us).<sup>22</sup> The porosity between the registers thus has consequences on the very form of the construction and the reiteration of the process of typification and indexical effectiveness. Indeed, it demands the reiteration and entrenchment of this very process of enregisterment. One efficient way, in other words, to fasten the opposition is through the political institutionalization of registers,<sup>23</sup> in order to stabilize them through standardization using, among other things, private media (Canut et al. 2016). The utterances produced, as so many "order-words" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 96) effectively lead to double binds, favoring the rise of ultranationalism. They consolidate infrastructural racism (Jetchev and Canut 2019), promoting direct actions of explicit racism, as in the case that we now turn to.

### **The *Ciganin* Inside, or the Impossible Murder of a Speaking Alter Ego**

The semiotic event presented above is not without impact on the making of the audience, in that it re-creates the Rom and non-Rom personae in presence and attempts to strengthen the differentiation between non-Roma and Roma. Hate speech that circulates on walls (Canut 2006) and on social networks, and that forms the basis of political discourse (Canut et al. 2016), offers other examples, even more degrading, of typification. Beyond the functioning of the process of typification, however, I now turn to its effects on social praxis through analysis of a rather unprecedented—yet from the perspective of this essay, predictable—incident that took place in 2016. A resident of the Pazardzhik region filmed himself in the process of beating up a young man whom he calls *Ciganin*, on the sole pretext that the latter claimed to be his equal. In one empty street of the small village of Ovtchepoltsi, during the day, Angel Kaleev, 24, filmed Mitko Yonkov, a 17-year-old boy from the *Ciganin* neighborhood:<sup>24</sup>

22. "The majority see their poverty as an anomaly, an inadequacy in status, and seeks to avoid identification with those whose poverty is taken for granted, those for whom it is 'natural' so to speak" (Nacu 2006, 178).

23. "Institutional processes of various kinds frequently seek to stabilize features of registers—their repertoires, indexical stereotypes, social domain of users—by codifying their normative values or restricting access to them; yet registers frequently change in their defining features through communicative activities that mediate their social existenc" (Agha 2007, 47).

24. See <https://youtu.be/8hwqKHEgWx4>, accessed October 23, 2016. In this transcription, beside the breaks (.), I indicate rising intonation with //, and :: indicates vowel lengthening.

1. Angel kade kaza che shte hodish// be  
**where are you saying you're going// huh**
2. Mitko u doma  
**Home**
3. Angel kade kaza che// (.) kakvo shte pravish u vas//  
**Where you say that// (.) what are you going to do at home//**
4. Mitko ami(.) shte si pochina  
**Well(.) I'm going to rest**
5. Angel shte si pochinesh// (.) kvo kazaa che az s teb sam raven (.) taka li// (0.1)  
**you're going to rest// (.) what did you say// that I am your equal (.) that's it//(0.1)**
6. Mitko tuk na zapis li shte vzesesh// (0.1)  
**you are recording aren't you// (0.1)**
7. Angel az s teb sam raven (.)taka li^//  
**me and you are equal (.) that's it//**
8. Mitko ako ti mene ne iscash da me biesh:: tova oznachava che sme ravni  
**if you don't want to hit me that means that we are equal**
9. Angel ami (.) az ako resha da te nabia//  
**but (.)if I decide to hit you//**
10. Mitko ami:: ((Angel hits Mitko several times))  
**but:: ((Angel hits Mitko several times))**
11. Angel kvo pravim (.) be// (.) kvo pravim (.) be// (.) kvo pravim (.)be// (.) kvo pravim (.) be// (.) mirno ot tuka (.) mirno (.) lyagay dolu (.) lyagay dolu ti kazah (.) be (.) Lyagay dolu (.) dolu (.) putka maina takava (.) lyagay dolu (.) lyagay dolu (.) be::: ((Angel forces Mitko to lie down on the ground))  
kvo kaza che az s teb sam raven (.) taka li//  
**what do I do (.) huh// (.) what do I do (.) huh// (.) what do I do (.) huh// (.) what do I do (.) huh// (.) nicely here (.) nicely (.) lie on the ground (.) lie on the ground I tell you (.) huh (.) lie on the ground (.) on the ground (.) damn your mother (.) lie on the ground (.) lie on the ground huh ((Angel forces Mitko to lie down on the ground)) what did you say that I am your equal (.) that's it//**
12. Mitko izvinyavay (.) bate  
**excuse me (.) big Brother**
13. Angel kakvo kaza che az s teb sam raven (.) taka li// az tsiganin li sam (.) be//  
**what did you say that I am your equal (.) that's it // I am a Ciganin myself (.)huh//**
14. Mitko ne si ((Angel kicks Mitko in the face))  
**you are not ((Angel kicks Mitko in the face))**
15. Angel az tsiganin li sam (.) be//  
**I am a Ciganin myself (.) huh//**
16. Mitko ne si (.) bate ((Angel kicks Mitko in the face))  
**you are not (.) big Brother ((Angel kicks Mitko in the face))**
17. Angel az tsiganin li sam be//  
**I am a Ciganin myself huh**
18. Mitko ne si ((Angel kicks Mitko's body))  
**you are not ((Angel kicks Mitko's body))**
19. Angel az tsiganin li sam (.) be (.) putka maina//  
**I am a Ciganin myself (.)huh (.) damn your mother //**
20. Mitko ou ou ou::  
**aouch aouch aouch::**

21. Angel putka maina(.)stavay gore (.) stavay gore (.) ti kazah (.) be (.) STAVAY GORE STAVAY GORE (.) kvo da te pravya sega// az s teb raven li sam (.) be//  
**fuck your mother (.) get up (.) get up (.) I tell you huh (.) GET UP GET UP (.) what am I doing to you now // I am your equal myself (.)huh//**
22. Mitko ne si:  
**you are not ::**
23. Angel kvo kaza predi malko ti// che nie sme ravni// ako nie sme ravni (.) ako ne iskam (.) da te bia (.) ami (.) ako recha da te utrepya (.) kvo shte te pravya (.) be// kvo shte te pravya (.) be// kvo kaza// lyagay dolu (.) lyagay dolu vednaga (.) lyagay dolu (.) lyagay dolu (.) be (.)((he screams))lyagay dolu (.) PUTKA MAINA ((Angel kicks Mitko))az s teb shte sam raven (.) taka li (.) be// taka li (.) be (.) tsiganin//  
**what did you say just now // that we are equal// if we are equal (.) if I don't want (.) to hit you (.) but (.) if I decide to kill you (.) what can I do with you (.) huh// what can I do with you (.) huh// what do you say // lie on the ground (.) lie on the ground (.) right now (.) lie on the ground (.) lie on the ground (.) huh (.)((he screams)) lie on the ground (.) DAMN YOUR MOTHER (.)((Angel kicks Mitko's body))I am your equal myself (.) that's it (.) huh// that's it (.) huh// Ciganin /**
24. Mitko molya te (.) BATE (.) MOLYA TE  
**please (.) big Brother (.) PLEASE**
25. Angel stani (.) STANI VEDNAGA (.) STAVAY (.) STAVAY VEDNAGA (.) BE(.) ((Mitko gets up)) az tsiganin li sam (.) be//  
**get up (.) GET UP RIGHT NOW (.) GET UP (.) GET UP RIGHT NOW (.) HUH (.) ((Mitko gets up)) I am a Ciganin (.) huh//**
26. Mitko ne sam kazal che si tsiganin  
**I didn't say that you are a Ciganin**
27. Angel az tsiganin li sam (.) be//  
**I am a Ciganin (.) huh//**
28. Mitko ne si  
**you are not**
29. Angel ne sam li tsiganin// iscash li da ta nabia (.) a//  
**I'm not a Ciganin (.) you want me to hit you (.) a //**
30. Mitko needy  
**no**
31. Angel hen//  
**what//**
32. Mitko needy  
**no**
33. Angel kakvo ne//  
**what no//**
34. Mitko nishto takova ne sem kazal (.) ne si tsiganin  
**I didn't say anything like it (.) you are not a Ciganin**
35. Angel a taka (.) drugiya pat pak kaji (.) che sme ravni (.) putka maina takava  
**Ah there you go (.) next time you just have to say (.) that we are equal again(.) damn your mother**

A first analysis of this interaction (Canut et al. 2018) might focus on the issue of verbal and physical violence between two young Bulgarians, considered as non-Ciganin and Ciganin. The visual framing of the event is here reduced to a single low-angle shot by a phone, at the initiative of the attacker. The physical and verbal interaction is initiated, from start to finish, by Angel, while Mitko was about to leave at the beginning of this sequence.

Angel's aggressive speech is built on the questioning of a single utterance by Mitko before the scene is filmed, an utterance that the abuser reiterates in the form of a past-tense question ("what did you say//, that I am your equal (.) that's it//"-5-11-13). The object of the conflict, it would seem, is to lead to the negation of Mitko's precipitating utterance by Mitko himself. Mitko is obliged, in the end, to repeat this negation under physical constraint: "you are not" (16-18-22-28), "I didn't say that you are a Ciganin" (26), "I didn't say anything like it (.) you are not a *Ciganin*" (34). This interaction is based on a seeming misunderstanding between two indexical values attributed to the expression *sme ravni* 'we are equal': while the human equality between the two individuals refers in Mitko's previous statement to a peaceful intention, as he explains it a posteriori ("if you don't want to hit me:: that means that we are equal::"), for the abuser it is about an ontological definition of self ("what did you say, that I am your equal (.) that's it // I am a *Ciganin* myself (.) that's it //" -13).

Faced with this competition of meanings initiated by Angel, the young Mitko, initially threatened, tries to explain by denotatively glossing the indexical value of his words ("that means that"-8). Only after having been hit and lying on the ground is he forced to refute the second indexical value imposed by the aggressor, which is to say, the interactional text at issue for Angel. In passing from one indexical value to the other, two universes of meaning are telescoped, referring to two regimes of signs: the equality of rights between human beings, in one case, and the (in)equality of identity (or ethnic/racial) definition, in the other.

The process of rebuttal of this constitutive equality between the two individuals passes not only by its questioning (through interlocutive dialogism) and by insults but also by a discursive injunction forcing the assaulted young man to formulate this inequality of nature, accompanied, in sound and in images, by physical subjection. Physical violence itself constitutes a pragmatic value: beyond the supposed mistake about the meaning given to the term *equal*, blows condition what is or is not possible to say, they condition the order of discourse. This order, however, maintains just these words that only death could abolish: "If I decide to kill you (.) What can I do with you?" (23).

This injunction becomes performative by anticipation and is valid for any future relationship, as Angel announces at the last occurrence, through the threat. This is why the role of the video broadcast on Facebook takes its meaning in this modality of anticipation: in addition to showing (through the image) the domination of the non-Cigani over the Cigani, the attacker addresses himself to his “fellow” to make the utterance of this inequality heard *ad vitam eternam*, engraved and repeatable, by the very one to whom he prescribes it. Not only does Angel demand Mitko’s recognition of their hierarchical difference, but in posting the video he solicits the recognition of this very act of recognition. This performance of domination thus presupposes, and thereby entails, the definitive inscription of the domination of non-Cigani Bulgarians over the Cigani.

This first analysis, however, does not account for a paradoxical dimension in Angel’s words, and more specifically the contradictory injunction that characterizes his desire not to be identified as Ciganin by a Ciganin whom he addresses nonetheless. Indeed, this altercation differs somewhat from the classic racist insults that can be read every day on social networks where extermination and death are envisaged as a “solution” for Roma (Canut et al. 2016; Kratkunkova 2018). The difference lies in the sudden proximity of bodies and voices, in their uncomfortable intimacy. On the one hand, Angel asks Mitko to tell him that they are not equal—that they are different—while at the same time they position themselves in the purest human equality in interaction, speaking and moving.<sup>25</sup> Angel recognizes Mitko as a subject only to insist on the latter’s subjugation as something less-than, for indeed, Angel’s own subjectivity is itself revealed as dependent on this doubled gesture of recognition and domination.

Angel seems to ask Mitko two contradictory things: he seems to be saying at the same time, “you’re like me, a person,” since he orders him to understand him and to memorize his words, while asking him to affirm that he is not like him, that he can not understand him since he is an inferior being. This is tantamount to asking Mitko to tell him that what he understands, the reality of the man who

25. This “passion of inequality,” a central theme in the work of Jacques Rancière, begins with the finding of equality between all speaking beings to produce and prove the inequality of intelligences: “Inequality is the consequence of nothing, it is a primitive passion; or, more exactly, it has no other cause than equality. The unequal passion is the vertigo of equality, laziness before the infinite task it demands, the fear of what a reasonable being owes to himself. It is easier to compare oneself, to establish social exchange as the bartering of glory and contempt, where each receives a superiority in return for the inferiority which he confesses. Thus, the equality of reasonable beings wavers in social inequality. . . . The love of domination forces men to protect one another in an order of convention that can not be reasonable, because it is only the fact of the unreason of each, of this submission to the law of others that inevitably entails the desire to be superior to it” (1987, 134–35, my translation).

speaks to him and the violent man, he can not understand. This double bind provokes disarray in Mitko, who ends up apologizing while using a term of kin relationality: “big brother.” If for Mitko this expression is the result of the perpetuation of a link of nature between them—which would therefore disqualify violence—it will not simply index for Angel a mark of proximity and familiarity between the two men. Instead of appearing as nonproblematic or as an acknowledgment of this continuity, it sticks to Angel, the racist aggressor, as a sign, and becomes the announcement of just this immutable link that disgusts him.

It is just at the moment, then, when the relationship is made that the relationship must be suppressed, since making it last would signify its relevance and would thus give reason and recognition to the victim. To kill the “Ciganin Other,” here and now, without delay, appears to the aggressor as the only solution to put an end to a double-bind situation. It is the only way to get out of the dead-end where one is ridiculed for ultimately holding their dominance only from a power relationship that their absurd logic derides. And yet this is impossible. This possibility, mentioned by Angel only in the form of a question, will remain as such, because the stakes of this event paradoxically reside in speech. In fact, at the same time, while he wants to silence him, to objectify him, he makes him a man of dialogue by forcing him to speak. At all levels, Angel’s injunctions are therefore contradictory and bear absurdity. What he asks of Mitko is impossible, *aporia*, a rhetorical stalemate, comparable to what Deleuze said about an utterance as incoherent as “Long live death!” in which he saw, more than the rallying cry, the most chilling expression of fascist thought.<sup>26</sup>

This interaction illustrates perfectly the incommensurable gap between typification (the Ciganin type) and the actual experience of bodies and words, that is, human beings in their prolonged existence. This gap forms the tipping point of all kinds of racism: while reality inevitably shows the type as flawed, since everyone is each other’s neighbor and Bulgarian from the beginning, the only thing left for the racists is to believe in a fabricated myth of essential difference. We thus understand why the most excluding Bulgarians hide on social networks to insult Cigani and never engage in communication with the individuals they identify with the Ciganin type. Nevertheless, the so-called Roma families that they inevitably cross paths with (and sometimes without recognizing them as “Roma”), those families with whom their parents and grandparents shared

26. “Once again, a fascist is recognized by the cry: Long live death! Any person who says Long live death! is a fascist” (lecture in Vincennes on the May 27, 1980, retrieved on February 27, 2018).

workdays, holiday camps, military service, and so on, do not seem to correspond in vivo to the type they promote.<sup>27</sup> But they do have the “proximity of the Neighbor” mentioned by Slavoj Žižek (2010).

In this context, we can better understand why it is appropriate for (ultra)nationalists to permanently redeploy and brand the type they have made: because the Cigani are too close, because they are so exactly like us that they are ultimately *in us* and, what is more, a part of *ourselves*.<sup>28</sup> The metaphors of disease (cancer, viruses, gangrene, parasites) or of intrusion (rape, invasion), which constitute a very large part of the devaluation of Cigani on social networks (Canut and al. 2016), confirm this interpretation. The Ciganin type for ultranationalists is clearly a disease, but this disease is by definition within oneself and, therefore, as fatal as it may be, homogeneous to oneself.

These intimate attachments respond, on another scale, to the anxiety of social declassification assimilated to *Ciganiya* (ciganization; Nacu 2006; also see Lemon 2000 on the *tsiganshchina*), while Western European discourses about human rights spread with Bulgaria’s entry into the European Union. On one hand, a need to accentuate differences for fear of becoming Rom emerges, and, on the other, new laws from the West impose equality between individuals. Beyond poverty, this blurring affects all indexical values: to be or become poor is to be or become as lazy, deceptive, lying, thievish, criminal as a Ciganin. And it is because the non-Rom Bulgarians have incorporated the ideological discourse accusing Europe of the disintegration of their nation and often consider themselves treated or humiliated by others (Western Europe in particular) that all these fluctuating features constantly haunt the nationalists.

Mocked beings are never presented as quite ab-normal. Nor are they ultimately ever described as foreign beings, aliens, outsiders, totally other. On the contrary, in all TV shows, and even more so in the aggression described above, the proximity of the Ciganin-assigned human being is such, insofar as it causes Angel’s panic, that it leads to confusion, even to madness. Therefore, everything must be done to keep it at bay (through incorporation mechanisms in particular). Because it is indeed the fear of looking like a Ciganin, of becoming, or simply of being a Ciganin that seems to animate racism, much more than the fear of Ciganin strangeness. In the large racist mechanisms described, for example, by

27. Accordingly, it is rather interesting to note that this proximity with the Roma is claimed directly at an academic Bulgarian level (in order to criticize Western researchers who supposedly misunderstand that the Roma are never considered as foreigners by Eastern researchers): “(. . .) they were, are and will remain “our own,” and they cannot be perceived as strange and exotic community” (Mariushakova et Popov 2011, 60).

28. About the blurring of the border between “them” and “us,” see Lemon (2000) and Van de Port (1998).



Tevenian (2017), this specific case results from the incapacity of thinking both difference and equality.

If the Bulgarian (ultra)nationalists do not collectively advance from word to deed, even if they never cease to consider the extermination of the Cigani, it is because to kill a Ciganin would, in a certain way, entail killing one's mirrored self and thus enter a cycle of destruction without hope for a way out—a cycle of self-destruction or annihilation. Hatred of the Ciganin type comes just as much from a hatred of Self-as-Other as from the pure exteriority that a Ciganin being would represent: the Ciganin as he is presented in himself thus makes his own typification complicated, especially when Ciganin type traits can be assigned to all Bulgarians and even, finally, to the Bulgarian type. To nationalists, the nation's salvage is at stake here too: large critiques from Western Union against the East and specifically against high corruption and criminality in Bulgaria, associated to the demographic increase of Rom citizens, lead to the porosity of the boundaries between the two racial/ethnic types. This does not shelter families grouped under the ethnonym *Cigani* from the worst kinds of discrimination and violence (Kratunkova 2018) but makes it clear to their detractors that the price to pay for Ciganin disappearance, whatever they claim, is as high as that of their own conservation, and that only insanity awaits the purifiers.

### **Conclusion: Political and Epistemological Issues**

The metasemiotic approach proposed here considers semiosis as a social praxis (Volosinov [1929] 2010), which makes the production of meanings and interpretations an emergent process in interaction, through metapragmatic indexicalities (Silverstein 2003). It makes it possible to break with the essentialist notion of stereotypes, images, or fixed representations, which constitute the basis of exclusion and, second, with the idea that these “stereotypes” can be accentuated by the fact of a socioeconomic gap between two categories that are historically constructed (Lemon 2000), Cigani and non-Cigani.

One must then return to the history of these relationships. The process of typification of Gypsies has existed for centuries (Barany 2002; Crowe 2007) with a wide range of local variations in history (Asséo 1994, 2012) and tragic concrete effects in the name of homogenization (such as slavery in Romania or the Samudaripen, Roma genocide under Nazism). Political institutions, in Bulgaria and elsewhere, have oscillated from time to time, the places, the events, between hatred and fascination, between denial and indifference. Ciganin criminality was already mentioned by the Bulgarian communist regime (Canut 2018) and is part of a wide and long interdiscursivity.

The question is therefore precisely that of the enactment here and now of racist discourse and acts and of their proliferation in the sociopolitical space (as at other moments in history, but organized according to other semiotic regimes). This question makes it necessary to focus attention on the subjective positionalities of those who arrange and organize indexicalities: what do individuals (politicians, journalists, etc.) do when producing such discourses? Susan Gal (2018, 7) makes it clear in regards to the enregisterment of *cigánybűnözés* ‘gypsy-crime’ in Hungary: “I ask not (only) how registers are made, but what is made with registers. How do the social effects of this semiotic process derive from the various ways in which arenas of action are socially organized as separate, thereby constructing or reconstructing social organizations through interdiscursivity ” (4–5).

The making of peoples, groups, communities (Gal 2018, 6) is not new but is a problem when researchers, and the institution in general, relay the idea without problematizing them.<sup>29</sup> To legitimize the Roma (or Cigani, Gypsy, and so on) category, and indeed the Rom persona, is to legitimize in a certain way a set of political discourses based on ethnicity and discrimination. It legitimizes a category that allows the marginalization and exclusion of individuals and families in the name of their supposed membership.<sup>30</sup>

The conclusion of our journey inside the essentialist semiotic productions in Bulgaria reveals that even if the ethnic-racial stratification need to be constantly reconstructed in each interaction by the process of dialogism playing with many different tokens, racism can’t be treated with changing labels. The Rom type is not different from the Ciganin type or from the “Gypsy Other”: they are all interchangeable. Whatever the labels are, the sedimentation of this mega-register has hardened so much that the name of the type doesn’t matter: it occupies tirelessly the “savage slot.” Relexicalization will never change anything if the structure of the enregisterment that it names is not altered. Consequently, the academics critical of such racism need to change their focus: the problem is not the quality of stereotype in itself (negative or positive), and even less the problem of “Roma” who should defend themselves against racism; the question is really

29. “For the police, Gypsies are the usual suspects for criminal behavior, whereas for policy research, they are the subjects of policy measures for social integration. While the police acts toward Gypsies with the repressive force of the state, policy research appeals for Roma integration through the benevolent action of the same state” (Surdu 2016, 67).

30. This is true even if they do not claim it or more, if they refuse it, like a section of Bulgarians who declare themselves Turks but who researchers prefer to bring back to the earlier, supposedly “truer” category of *Horhane Roma* (Muslim Roma). Ethnic passion or obsession as a mode of categorization and control of populations reduced to their putative “origin” leads to a sclerotic approach erasing all indexical and historical processes.

us, non-Roma and researchers, who are “listening subjects,” who are playing with political and ethno-racial categories as one would with fire. As Trouillot suggests, it seems urgent to “show that the Other, here and elsewhere, is indeed a product—symbolic and material—of the same process that created the West” (2003, 28). Historizing the difference, does not mean erasing it, however, but multiplying it: “What remains is to foreground the “specificity of otherness” in order to show there exists “a residual of historical experience that always escapes universalisms exactly because history always involves irreducible objects” (Beckett 2013, 180). Further, it is urgent to account for otherness in its local, contextual heterogeneity according to “an ethical and political stance on the question of what it means to be human” (180).

People labeled Roma—whether they call themselves Rom/Gypsy/Tzigane/Ciganin and so on or none of the above (Stefanova Nikolova 2011)—have been European for centuries and claim at the same time that they are Bulgarian, Romanian, French, Spanish, and so on.<sup>31</sup> Very rarely do they wish to get involved politically against racism in the name of one identification, and when they do they often give up this type of commitment rather quickly. They are fully aware of what is at stake.<sup>32</sup> History has taught them that claiming any “Gypsiness” implies exposing to misunderstanding, reappropriation, and disasters far worse.

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31. It is, e.g., the case of many people with whom I live in *Nadezhda* (Sliven, Bulgaria). See Lemon (2000) on the long deconstruction of this ideological homogenization in Russia.

32. “Perhaps it is primarily related to the fact they do not see the advantage of mobilizing under this label (which is historically built for discrimination), and because they have other resources to ensure their local legitimacy and their individual and family autonomy” (Olivera 2015, 149).

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