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WE ABOUT THE ROMA

Discriminatory Discourse in the Media in Slovenia

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Gypsies on the road again (Slovenske novice, 16.11.1997), The Roma avails gather crops (Slovenski list, 2.10.1997), One has to be a Rom in order to get help? (Dnevnik, 16.10.1997), They do not want their plots of land built up because of the Roma (Delo, 16.10.1997), Nobody likes the Roma (Delo, 17.9.1997), The migration of the Roma

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SUMMARY

Today the mass media are the key compilers of the agenda setting the importance of topics that are publicly discussed, that is to say, the topics that people consider or talk about. Through the choice of topics, sources, genre, language and style, the media daily construct the image of “us” as the representatives of a majority population, and of “them” as the representatives of a minority. They impart only specific cultural patterns, add new meanings to them and, finally, make them common-sensical, universal and exclusively correct.

This study analyzes the Slovenian media writing about the Roma in autumn 1997 when the villagers of Maline set up a village watch to prevent the settlement of a Romani family who bought a house in their village. The prevalent mood of the coverage could be summed up with a single word - “PROBLEMS”. Moreover, when writing about the Roma, the media invariably use the expressions “Romani issues” or “Romani problems”. The media are not interested in their difficulties unless they turn into a conflict that also threatens to affect the majority population. Out of 131 accounts in newspapers, on television and radio, only one falls short of our hypothesis that the media write about ethnic minorities only when they are involved in some conflict.

Journalistic writing about the Roma rests on the assumption that the Roma are ‘different from us’. Their differentness is so ultimate and self-evident that it does not need any further explanation either. Using special techniques, like stereotypes and generalization, the media concentrate on particular “negative traits” of the Roma, for example cultural differences, deviation and the apparent threat they pose to the majority population. Thematically they could be divided into the following categories:

1. The Roma are the protagonists of negatively evaluated acts (crime) which represent a threat to the social order. In line with this, the Roma are represented as aggressive and dangerous. The prevalent assertion in the media coverage is that the Roma are (by nature) thieves.
2. The Roma threaten our social and economic interests, thus representing a threat to economic order. They are idle and lazy, they live on social assistance (which, in the opinion of the majority population, is higher than their wages would be if they worked).

3. The Roma have a different culture, mentality and behavior which are not in accordance with the norms of the majority population, hence this poses a threat to our cultural order. The Roma differ from the majority population by their looks (skin color), they have a different culture, values and habits, they are unadaptable and their natality is too high.

This concocted media image of the Roma is so powerful that in the coverage analyzed here, the Roma only rarely appear as concrete individuals. Instead, the media assessment of their deeds rests on the characteristics that are generally attributed to the Roma by the majority. In this way the media prevent their audiences from identifying with a Romani protagonist or harboring doubt about a clear-cut division between good Slovenians and bad Roma.

With specific regard to the coverage of ethnic issues the power of the media is even greater, since there is a shortage of alternative sources of information. The media coverage of minorities, as a special example of underprivileged communication opportunities, exclusively relies on the sources of the majority population, as is shown in this study. Therefore special media exclusion and isolation couples the spatial, economic, cultural and social ghettoization of a minority.

INTRODUCTION - THE HATE SPEECH

The beginning of April 1941. A bus advances through a bleak, autumn landscape somewhere in Serbia. The passengers are a failed popular singer (s), a newly wed couple, an older man (m) on his way to visit his son who has just been conscripted, a hunter, a priest, a patient with tuberculosis, a state official (o) who jots down folk wisdom into his small, black notebook, and two Roma. At a certain moment the old man realizes that he misses his purse. In the last scene of the film *Ko to tamo peva* (Who sings out there) by renowned Serbian director Slobodan Šijan, passengers are establishing who is guilty, who “among us” is a thief.

s: Stop the bus and search us.

m: Don't let anybody out before I get my money back.

o: Why stop and search honest people, when it is well known who in here is a thief?

The camera then moves to two sleeping, unsuspecting (and innocent) Roma. In a moment the small “bus community” turns into an aggressive mob governed by prejudices and hatred. The two Roma are brutally beaten even though one of them is “only a child”. If anything unacceptable happens and there are Roma among us - their guilt is indisputable. No matter what actually happened, no matter who is actually guilty, the only important thing is that we *all* know who steals, that we *all* know who by nature is prone to crime - the Roma.

This study analyzes the Slovenian media writing about the Roma in autumn 1997¹, when the villagers of Maline set up a village watch to prevent the settlement of a Romani family who bought a house in their village. The purchase of the house and the intended move of the Romani family

¹ The analyzed journalistic coverage and readers' letters appeared in the Slovenian media in the period between the beginning of September and the end of November 1997. *Delo* had the most extensive coverage: 18 news items and accounts, four commentaries, one field-account and five readers' letters; the next most extensive coverage is found in the local weekly *Dolenjski list* with 22 news items and accounts, two commentaries, two readers' letters and a telephone survey. *Dnevnik* published 18 stories: 14 news items and accounts, one commentary, one interview, one reader's letter and one survey. *Večer* had 11 stories, that is 7 news items and accounts, two commentaries, one reader's letter and an excerpt from the commentary published by the *Mladina* weekly. Our analysis included also other printed media: *Nedelo* (2 stories), *Nedeljski dnevnik* (2), *Slovenske novice* (7), *Gorenjski glas* (3), *Kmečki glas* (3), *Mladina* (8), *Mag* (3), *7D* (1) and *Svobodna misel* (1). SLO1 tv channel broadcast five journalistic accounts (3 news items and two interviews), POP TV had four (three news items and accounts and one interview in the studio). *Radio Slovenija 1* broadcast 7 news items and accounts, RGL radio station had two talks in the studio. The total number of all analyzed stories is 131.

provoked mass protests and gatherings that turned into a political problem which was publicly discussed by parties' representatives and presidential candidates during the pre-election campaign. This event, which was an obvious example of the moral panic propped up by the media coverage of the so-called "Romani problem", gave rise to hatred, intolerance and contempt directed towards the specific minority group.

The hate speech, which for years had been surreptitiously aimed at other minority groups, most conspicuously showed its chauvinist face in this instance of writing about the Roma. The Roma are not simply different from "us", they are altogether different. So different in fact that the majority population would most like to "have a complete record of them", gather them all in one place and move them to a special settlement built up especially for them "somewhere in Kočevski Rog".

The crucial questions raised by our study are:

- *How does the media coverage, by making use of various linguistic and rhetorical tools, construct and make legitimate ethnic inequality?* Previous studies of the media coverage of minorities (Van Dijk, 1991; Stocker, 1993; Matouschek in Wodak, 1995; 'Hate Speech' in the Balkans, 1998) point out that the media have a crucial role in establishing and giving legitimacy to ethnic inequality. Through the choice of topics, sources, genre, language and style, the media daily construct the image of "us" as the representatives of a majority population, and of "them" as the representatives of the minority. Especially effective are the so-called concealed techniques of favoring a particular side, such as a more detailed and a 'more sympathetic' representation of a specific viewpoint, the concealment of information (especially when covering Romani issues where there is a shortage of alternative sources of information), the emphasizing of favored information, the neglect of the representatives of a minority who lacks institutionalized support etc.
- *What argumentation strategies and techniques do the media employ to mediate implicit prejudices on the one hand and to justify ethnic differentiation on the other?* In covering Romani issues, the Slovenian media used numerous techniques and strategies ranging from the denial of intolerance, mitigation, justification, generalization, and the accusation of the victim, to transposition of guilt to others. Here attention should be drawn especially to the techniques that were used to shed positive light on the majority population and

present them as neutral agents in an extremely conflicting situation or even as victims who need a special protection. *How come that such an outright hateful, racist and chauvinist treatment of the Roma (was) is possible?* In its most explicit form the hate speech denies the existence of the other. In our example it has become clear that society lowered its 'threshold of tolerance' to a dangerously low level of hate speech. In the words of Romani specialist Dr. Vanek Šiftar, "*the resolution of the Romani issues in Europe coincides with the process of separating out racists*" (*Nedeljski dnevnik*, 26.10.1997). The authors of the comparative study *Hate Speech in the Balkans* (1998:92) likewise conclude that the Roma are the object of continual hate speech in all countries of the Eastern and Central Europe. "*Human rights are continually discussed, but Gypsy rights are regarded more or less as if they were the rights of trees: they are entitled to grow, but it is their business how they manage to do so.*"

The analysis includes the study of the so-called differentiation discourse (Matouschek and Wodak, 1995), whose function is, in the first place, to portray oneself positively and the others negatively. Or to put it differently, to shape such social, economic and political practices that would exclude specific groups from accessing material and symbolic resources. The writings and the discourse on minorities, immigrants and refugees have wider social, political and cultural functions as they signify one's belonging to a dominant group as well as the internal interaction of this group on the one hand, and the exclusion of the minorities and all those different on the other (Van Dijk, 1992:88). Linguistic discrimination, however, is not only evident in attributing obvious prejudices, but it becomes manifest on the explicit level too.

Today the mass media are the key compilers of the agenda setting the importance of topics that people consider or talk about. When it comes to minorities, the media agenda (the index of importance) is based on the assumption that the media standpoint is "common sense" and a generally valid one, that it is the standpoint of the majority (i.e. the surrogate for the majority opinion supplied by the media), that is to say, it is the only way to see (and explain) ourselves and others. Using this approach, the media offer their audiences only selected cultural patterns, they shape and add new meanings to them and, finally, make them universal and exclusively correct. The media influence does not end with the choice of events or

favoring of particular explanations, but extends even further, to what is omitted from the media coverage. As American researchers Lazarsfeld and Merton established in their more-than-half-a-century-old study *Mass information, popular taste and organized social functioning*, the influence of media on their audiences “is not manifest only through what they say, but, more importantly, through what they don’t say” (Lazarsfeld, Merton, 1999:28). Therefore, when analyzing the media coverage of the Romani issues we should also analyze that which has not been articulated *i.e.* that which has been intentionally left out from the media focus.

WE (THE SLOVENIANS) - THEY (THE ROMA)

Through our analysis of the sources of information we wanted to find out what sources journalists relied on and what patterns of quotation they used. In short, we were looking for the answers to the questions: who talks, how often and what about?

The readers of quality media expect journalists, especially those reporting some conflict, to supply an account of things which corresponds to the real situation, and to represent all involved parties. The media coverage of the Roma does not meet this hypothesis though. In 131 analyzed pieces (news items, accounts, field-reports, interviews), the Roma were the source of information in 32 instances, compared to 226 instances in which informants were the representatives of the majority population. The journalists referred to Romani sources eight times less often than to the sources of the majority population.

TABLE 1: THE SOURCES IN THE JOURNALISTIC COVERAGE OF
THE ROMA (THE TOTAL NUMBER OF REFERENCES IN ALL AR-
TICLES)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION	FREQUENCY	
	NO.	%
Villagers, local people	59	22.9
Municipality mayors	38	14.7
Incidental listeners, onlookers or other respondents	19	7.4
Municipal and local officials	17	6.6
Presidential candidates	14	5.4
The rep. of a community or parents' associations	12	4.7
Roma experts, ethnologists	10	3.9
Police	9	3.5
Teachers, school headmasters	7	2.7
The representatives of the Office for Nationalities	7	2.7
The representatives of ministries, inspectors	7	2.7
The representatives of political parties in their comm.	7	2.7
Municipal experts, social services	6	2.3
Other experts	5	1.9
Judges	3	1.2
The representatives of the church	3	1.2
Various (company manager, security guard)	2	0.8
A champion of human rights	1	0.4
TOTAL (the majority population)	226	87.6

The Roma, directly affected by those events	16	6.2
Other Roma	9	3.5
The president of the Association of Roma Societies	6	2.3
A counselor to the Roma	1	0.4
TOTAL (Roma)	32	12.4
 TOTAL	 258	 100

Lesser representation of the Roma in the journalistic coverage may be attributed in part to the obstacles of an organizational nature: while social institutions have orderly relations and long established methods of communication with media houses, as well as effective public relations departments which shape public announcements, the Roma are much less organized, and consequently, their voice has more difficulty reaching journalists. But this illuminates only one aspect of the disproportion, that is to say, it explains the higher share of institutional sources. On the other hand, the same argument cannot be used to explain rare references to Romani witnesses in general, even less to explain the neglect of those potential Romani sources who were directly involved in an event.

We could say that the Roma are clearly underprivileged in terms of communication and excluded from the shaping of media agenda. Even when events directly relate to the Roma, the media treat them as being 'under age in terms of communication', or to put it differently, as informants that are not able to put forth their own views, therefore needing some kind of intermediaries.

To illustrate the journalists' selection of informants, we have chosen the coverage of the events in Maline village, where villagers prevented the settlement of a Romani family from Grosuplje. Even though the events involved a concrete Romani family, they were given the opportunity to make their standpoints known in only two accounts (*Mag*, 24.9.1997, *Delo*, Saturday Supplement, 25.10.1997). On the contrary, the other side expressed their standpoints very often - both those directly involved in the conflict (the villagers of Maline and surrounding places, the mayors of the municipalities, municipal officials) and those who were not directly affected by the event (presidential candidates, representatives of the church, of political parties etc.).

In the accounts that we have analyzed, journalists only

exceptionally related their own observations, but instead they relied rather on the statements and opinions of their sources of information. Therefore, in addition to analyzing the frequency of the appearance of particular sources, we also analyzed the method of introducing informants. The table below confirms once again that the major part of the coverage was based on information that was obtained from the representatives of the majority population. On the other hand, the fact that the mere presence of sources representing all parties involved in the conflict does not by itself ensure the coherence of the reporting or the real account of events has been confirmed through the coverage on *POP TV* and in *Slovenske novice*. Both media included the Roma in their coverage, yet their representation was discriminatory. As a matter of fact, the media often observe the norm of balanced reporting mostly in order to evade their own responsibility.

Another indicator of the extremely deficient citing of Romani sources is the distribution of the information sources across the coverage. Even when journalists chose to quote Romani sources, their standpoints were not given independently but were invariably presented together with those of the majority population. Most frequently, a Romani source was opposed by a majority population source. The only two exceptions were the interview with the President of the Association of Roma Societies published in *Mag*, and a short notice in *Dolenjski list*.

TABLE 2: THE PROPORTION OF JOURNALISTIC ACCOUNTS WITH REGARD TO THE PRESENCE OF PARTICULAR SOURCES OF INFORMATION

SOURCES	ROMA ONLY	SLOVENIANS ONLY	ROMA AND SLOVENIANS	TOTAL	NO STATEMENTS
<i>Delo</i>	0	16	2	18	1
<i>Dnevnik</i>	0	15	6	21	2
<i>Dolenjski list</i>	1	16	1	18	5
<i>Sl. Novice</i>	0	1	4	5	0
<i>Mladina</i>	0	2	1	5	0
<i>Mag</i>	1	1	1	3	0
<i>TVSlo</i>	0	4	1	5	0
<i>POP TV</i>	0	0	4	4	0
<i>other</i>	0	19	1	20	0
TOTAL	2	74	21	99	8

ABOUT THE ROMA AS THE PROBLEM

The analyses of the newspaper coverage in Great Britain and The Netherlands has shown that among the writing concerning ethnic communities accounts of crime, cultural differences, excesses and problematic migrations prevail (Van Dijk, 1991). The dominant image of minorities and emigrants produced by the media could be summed up with a single word - "PROBLEMS". Since minorities are not commercially attractive, the media do not pay attention to their difficulties unless they turn into a conflict that threatens also to affect a majority population.

The analysis of the Slovenian media coverage concerning a concrete ethnic minority - the Roma, confirms this hypothesis: the Slovenian media mostly write about the Roma in terms of problems which upset Slovenians: immigration, accommodation issues, social problems (high social assistance, violence, crime), cultural differences, difficulties with integration etc. Moreover, in their writing about the Roma, the media invariably refer to "Romani issues" or "Romani problems".

Other terms reflecting the dominant thematic emphasis are 'differences', 'deviation' and 'threat' as is evident from the very titles of articles. A title in fact summarizes the content of the article or draws attention to a dimension that is regarded as the most important by either the journalist or the specific medium. Let us list some examples: *Gypsies on the road again* (*Slovenske novice*, 10.11.1997), *The Roma avidly gather crops* (*Dolenjski list*, 2.10.1997), *One has to be a Rom in order to get help?* (*Dnevnik*, 16.10.1997), *They do not want their plots of land built up because of the Roma* (*Delo*, 16.10.1997), *Nobody likes the Roma* (*Delo*, 17.9.1997), *The migration of the Roma raises the temperature* (*Delo*, 15.9.1997), *'Gypsy' keys do not open doors in Maline* (*Dnevnik*, 29.9.1997).

Much more rare are the writings that deal with 'problems' caused to the Roma by the majority population. This theme mostly appears in commentaries: *The lynching atmosphere* (*Mladina*, 14.10.1997), *A modern ghetto for the Roma* (*Mladina*, 28.10.1997), *Ethnic engineering in the Dolenjska style* (*Delo*, Sobotna priloga, 26.9. 1997), *Our problems should not be solved through hatred towards the different* (*Gorenjski glas*, 17.10.1997).

Out of 131 accounts in newspapers, on television and radio, only one falls short of our hypothesis that media

write about ethnic minorities only when they are involved in some conflict - only the news item in *Večer* (28.10.1997) dealt with the activities of a newly established Romani association in Velenje.

THE ROMA AS A COLLECTIVE PROTAGONIST

The most characteristic feature of the coverage of the Roma is that the Roma only rarely appear as individuals, but rather as members of the ethnic group. By denying individual images to the Roma, they are also denied the opportunity to escape the habitual portrayal of the ethnic group resting on prejudices and stereotypes. Even when a Rom appears as an individual protagonist, the journalist's appraisal of his doings relies on characteristics generally attributed to the Roma by the majority.

Let us explain this through a concrete example of a typical shift from an individual to a collective body. The journalist refuses the statement of a Rom that his family is unproblematic. His argumentation is based on a 'generally known' opinion about Romani character and habits rather than on facts. Moreover, the journalist does not utilize the opinion of inhabitants or of the president of local community, who are obviously not inclined towards the Romani family, but relies on a general, unverified opinion: "Although S. (the Romani family) say that **they do not cause trouble to other people**, the members of Zagradec local community, in the region of Grintavec, Dečja vas and elsewhere, think differently. In the words of the leader of Zagradec local community Marija Zaletelj, they often turn to the local community's council. **Today most of the Roma have cars most of which are not registered**, the Romani drivers behave as if they were the only drivers on the road and most of them do not have a driving license. In addition, they often carry arms..." (*Dolenjski list*, 23.10.1997)²

By referring to a collective protagonist, the media also prevent the audience from identifying with the Roma or from questioning a clear distinction between good Slovenians and bad Roma. As the above example indicates, the Slovenian media coverage of the Roma lacks precise data about protagonists, places, time etc. The journalists reported the assumed doings of the Roma on the basis of rumors, even when the statements were quite problematic, like for example the threat about shooting. "As a

² The parts printed in bold face throughout this paper were emphasized by the authors of the study

matter of fact, the Roma from Grosuplje **publicly threaten** the villagers of Maline that they will burn the village, shoot the villagers, forcibly move in and organize the Roma (who are more numerous than the villagers of Maline), if they refuse to accept among them their cousins. The threats triggered a self-defense mechanism." (*Delo*, 26.9.1997)³. Ten days earlier the same newspaper published the following "information": "people are so enraged that they talk about setting mines and burning houses" (*Delo*, 15.9.1997). In none of those cases had journalists made an effort to obtain opinion or a statement from the police station in a real situation.

HOW DO "WE" SEE THE ROMA?

Before we embark onto a more detailed analysis of the media coverage of the Roma in Slovenia, it should be mentioned that the differentiation discourse is especially typical of the popular media in which the complexity of the world is reduced through stereotypes, personalization and simplification.

The key principle of presenting protagonists in the popular media rests on the so-called We discourse, which divides population into "us" and "them". It exaggeratedly attributes positive characteristics to "us", and proportionally negative ones to 'them'.

Rather than relating information to their readership, the popular media furnish stories. The most frequently reiterated formula of telling a story relies on a positive or negative deviation from the normality. In this case the normality represents some kind of a context needed to understand the story: it is something we all agree about even though in reality such a common sense consensus does not exist. In short, the more the content deviates from the normality, the more it corresponds to the ideal type of a message as understood by the popular media.

A typical story in the popular media follows Link's formula (1986) in the way that it connects selected 'facts' with positively and negatively evaluated social symbols. The stories structured according to this formula are continually present in the media with the purpose of maintaining an unchanging pattern of a content designed to calm down the public.

In order to achieve a perpetual alternation of the pub-

³ In all of the 18 stories dealing with these topics, *Delo* quoted only two statements of the Roma from Prekmurje, but not any statement of the Roma directly involved.

lic from agitation to calming down and vice versa, the popular media resort to emotions. In his analysis of the popular German newspaper *Bild* and Austrian *Neue Kronen Zeitung*, Stocker found that through emotional reporting the readership of the popular media acquire an emotional attitude towards the world which they perceive as spectacular and melodramatic day by day (Stocker, 1993). We can conclude that in our case quality media as well have adopted this melodramatic pattern. The dramatization is most evident in the use of a number of non-neutral words to describe the situation: local people **sharply oppose this** [...], the **untenable** manner of arranging things [...], conditions are becoming **very strained** [...], **heated** circumstances, **tense** circumstances [...], **extraordinary** circumstances, **serious** situation [...] (*Delo*, 16.9.1997), the Romani migration **raises the temperature**, people are so **enraged** that they talk about blasting and burning houses (*Delo*, 15.9.1997). Nobody has right to hand over Maline to the Gypsies, **say furious villagers at the barricades pointing accusing fingers**.

Through its demand for cultural hegemony, the mentioned We discourse includes selected individuals from various social groups into the privileged category (We group) and excludes others. This fictitious We group is exploited to achieve a positive identification by journalists and, likewise, the readership. In addition, the fundamental function of the We discourse is to lend legitimacy to prejudices, or in other words, to justify them using generalization.

Before the announced protest of the inhabitants of Mlačevo, a regular radio broadcast called "*The Morning Might Be Like This*" dedicated its time to "Romani issues" (RGL, 15. 10. 1997). The anchor woman (A) tried to stop the eruption of hate speech by appealing to personal experiences of the callers (c) ("*Have you ever lived near some Romani village?*") or, to put it differently, she tried to relativize their statements and present them as prejudices that were not based on personal experience. The result of this naïve attempt was the following conversation:

- c: No, I will put it like this. I was very much against everybody who said that it was hard to live with Yugoslav brothers. I said: "So what, what about it?" Now I have them around me. It's a horror. They even don't know how to use the toilet. Mind you, he comes from another environment which should be on a higher level, no. You cannot do that. It doesn't work. The culture is different.
- A: Well, what then, what can be done? I could agree with you that it is difficult, but what can be done?

- c: Look, it's like this, experience shows that these people are not in ghettos all around the world for no reason. I will say honestly. In a surrounding in which he and I have to be in the same room, if I may say so, or in the same apartment, in the same house, we both come off badly in some way. Why? I cannot listen to my music, he cannot listen to his. He cannot express that brouhaha of his, I don't know, because he is used to it, because he takes heed of me, and in the same way I cannot live fully. None of us has a home.
- A: o.k. Andrej, no offense for what I am going to say, but of course, you would not confine yourself to a ghetto, as you would the other person?
- c: But I am in a ghetto. I am in a ghetto called Slovenia.
- A: Is it a ghetto?
- c: Everything is a ghetto. Every country, take a closer look, no need to go micro, look at these state boundaries, what do they mean? Down there is Burundi, Uganda, and there is America. These are in fact ghettos in which a specific race.. do those people live under the same, relatively same conditions?
- A: o.k. The world limits us, doesn't it, let's put it like that Andrej.
- c: It does, everybody, for a long time now, because through this you find the environment that suits your stage, the one that you have reached in your development.

As the authors of the study *Hate Speech in the Balkans* (1998) established, the image of the Roma is almost identical in all eastern and central European countries. What are the Roma supposed to look like? The first picture: they are dark-skinned and dark-haired. They are criminals, thieves and swindlers. They wear tattoos, kitsch golden jewelry, they have rotten teeth, they are chain smokers and alcoholics. Women are beautiful. They look old very soon. The second picture: the Roma are passionate musicians. They are exotic, wild, incomprehensibly beautiful in their infinite strangeness. Plus a Slovenian 'peculiarity' (found in 10 various contributions). "People are desperate because of their driving. Although most Roma do not work, they are well equipped with cars, which are mostly unregistered and in doubtful technical condition, while the drivers have no licenses. Their driving habits match this state of things." (*Delo*, 17.9.1997). On the other hand, there are good and bad Roma, those with culture and those without it (*i.e.* with their 'special' culture). The representative of Mlačevo villagers explained this difference to the president of the Association of Roma Societies in Slovenia.

"You ('good' Roma) have culture, and you preserve things in their elementary state. With our Roma, culture consists in night

shooting, driving, speeding across farmland and so on. That is their paramount culture. In our regions the Roma do not have culture, in the sense that they play instruments, dance, entertain themselves, sing their songs, there is nothing like that in our parts and we do not know anything like that." (*POP TV*, 19.10.1997).

Jeno Zsigo, the president of the Romani parliament in Hungary says: "*the only image of us they* (i.e. the majority society) *tolerate is that of a dancing good-for-nothing*" (cit. v Kerenyi, 1999: 147).

SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION - "THE ROMA STEAL, THEY ARE IDLE AND PROPAGATE QUICKLY"

The basic purpose of social categorization is to construct the image of a majority as a homogeneous ethnic group on the one side, and of a minority on the other. To categorize and stereotype groups, the media resort to naming and labeling them, and to citing implicit and explicit prejudices. As to prejudices, they consist of long established and generalized evaluations and statements about persons, groups, objects and the like, that are based on negative viewpoints and minimal information (Wodak and Matauschek, 1993:142). They help construct a positive social identity of one's own group and a negative identity of a minority.

The analysis of the coverage of the Roma shows that Slovenian journalists have often exploited prejudice. Rarer was the categorization by naming or labeling, since such a style of public communication is very conspicuous and hence can be more easily pinpointed as biased or discriminatory. Journalists thus consistently referred to the minority as the Roma, since this term is supposed to be neutral in comparison with Gypsies (Cigani in Slovenian). The exclusion of stylistically or meaningfully laden terms is supposed to ensure neutrality in relating information. Slovenian journalists have in practice satisfied this demand by using the term Gypsies only when quoting informants, or they separated it from the rest of the text by putting it in inverted commas, as in "the denouement of the 'Gypsy' affair" (*Dnevnik*, 29.9.1997).

The assumption behind every social categorization in journalistic mediation of information is the differentiation between a majority population, who is represented by the majority media, and an ethnic group. Journalistic writing about the Roma rests on an assumption that the Roma are

‘different from us’. Their differentness is so ultimate and self-evident that it needs no further explanation. The differentness is not value-neutral either, but ‘not normal’ - it is negatively evaluated with the aim of preserving the distinction between the majority population and the Roma. As an example let us quote the following news item in *Dnevnik*: “The villagers say that they will not give in and will not allow the construction of the Romani settlement as long as the Roma do not begin to behave ‘normally’.” (*Dnevnik*, 14.10.1997).

Which stereotypes about the Roma prevail among the majority population, and what is the role of the media in the production and reproduction of the former? Taking themes as the starting point, they could be divided as follows:

1. The Roma are often the protagonists of negatively evaluated acts (crime) - they are a threat to the social order. The most widely spread stereotype is a belief that all Roma steal, that is, they are naturally prone to crime.
 - “Do you think that you, the Roma, are naturally prone to it, that you are prone to, I don’t know, idleness, or maybe a higher degree of aggressiveness” (*POP TV*, 19.10.1997), was the question of a journalist at the round table about the events in Grosuplje addressed to the president of the Association of Roma Societies. We do not know what kind of answer he expected, but he justified his question by falling back on apparently prevalent opinion. And what opinion is that?
 - “...Everybody, everywhere have many difficulties with Romani neighbors. As a matter of fact, the Roma ruin farmland, meadows, and forests, they beg, rummage through trash cans, threaten...” (*Delo*, 17.9.1997)
 - “The Roma steal our crops, cut trees in our forests, pollute the environment by burning plastic off copper cables... in the night one can hear them shooting guns and sub-machine guns, as if there were a war.” (*Dolenjski list*, 6.11.1997)
 - “The number of Roma increases and they are ever more violent.” (*Večer*, 16.10.1997)
 - “Villagers demand that the Interior Ministry should “regularly inspect Romani neighborhoods, since they often shelter dangerous criminals, prison runaways, refugees, illegal immigrants, arms and stolen goods dealers, and besides, it is also the place where various crimes are planned...” (*Delo*, 17.9.1997)

The same article cites the following statements:

- the statement by the officials from the Grosuplje police station that “with D.H.’s family (the family that bought the

house) there were never any troubles, but nevertheless nobody in the neighborhood likes them”:

- the statement of the officials from the Trebnje police station that “a decrease of criminal offences in the municipality has been observed. In the first nine months of 1997, 14 criminal offences out of 152 altogether were committed by the Roma.”

A similar contrast between the public opinion and actual state of things has been observed in Hungary. According to the national opinion poll in Hungary in 1995, as many as 67% of the Hungarians think that the Roma are prone to crime by nature (Kereny, 1999: 41). Due to increasing intolerance, in 1997 Hungary instituted legal protection of personal data and minorities, which prohibits mentioning of the nationality of a presumed criminal offender (Kereny, 1999:144–145).

2 The Roma threaten our social and economic interests - they are a threat to the economic order

Another area of generalization and adaptation of the media perspective to the common sense conviction is the assertion (conclusion) that the Roma are (by nature) idle and lazy. Moreover, the Roma are believed to live a comfortable life on high social assistance, which is generously provided by the state and taken from “the pockets of all tax payers”.

- “The villagers can remember that the first inhabitants of Štiri roke neighborhood were hardworking, in contrast to those living there now. They were spoiled by the state which gives them social assistance...” (*Dolenjski list*, 16.10.1997).

- In the opinion of villagers from Cerovec “Roma receive high social assistance, but nobody supervises how this money is spent” (*Dolenjski list*, 16.10.1997).

- In contrast to the devoted, diligent and industrious people (the majority population), the Roma are not capable of making use of options offered by society.

“We farmers toil on hillsides where our tractors tip over, while he will build a house in flatland, on a nice plot.”

“I have my plot of land there but I was not allowed to build a house there, on my own land, and now the Gypsies can build houses there, while I had to buy a plot in Grosuplje” (*POP TV*, 24 UR, 15.10.1997).

“Here we are used to hard work all day long, we are poor but firm and honest, nobody ever gave us anything for free. And now we are to end up with the Gypsies in our village, they are not going to do anything at all, except cause trouble.” (*Dnevnik*, 29.9.1997)

And what are the ‘actual’ living conditions of the Roma

in Slovenia? If we take the municipality of Semič as an example, we find that all Roma living there are illiterate and have never been employed, according to a social worker there. "They live in wooden huts and in tents, except for three families who live in houses, without water or electricity, they have many school-aged children among whom there is a high incidence of chronic diseases etc." (*Dolenjski list*, 16.10.1997).

If these facts are coupled with 'traditional' parables about the Roma's inability to adapt to urban life - for example, take the stories about Roma who burn wooden floors in new apartments, rear pigs in bath tubs etc. - then, in harmony with the justification strategy, the responsibility to provide for the Roma a living place where they can live alone, in their 'own way', lies with society.

- 3 The Roma have a different culture, mentality and behavior which are not in accordance with the norms of the majority population - they are a threat to our cultural order
- The Roma differ from the majority population by their appearance: "The dark-skinned inhabitants of the shanties suddenly turned out more numerous than the villagers of Gazice and they were becoming ever more daring." (*Večer*, 16.10.1997).
- The Roma have a different culture, values and habits: "The municipality of Ribnica was also warned that, should they decide to build a Romani settlement in their vicinity, they should be consulted about that, since **those are people who have different values and a different behavioral pattern** which is not in harmony with ours (*Delo*, 17.9.1997), the Roma, who have **peculiar habits and culture...**" (*Delo*, 15.10.1997).
- The Roma are unable to adapt: "The education of children and their inclusion into schools - in this respect Novo mesto schools have done the most, since there several Roma 'grind' along with their peers - should represent an important turn in their lives. **Or perhaps not, since it is well-known that the Roma have difficulty adapting to urban surroundings.** (*Večer*, 21.10.1997). For the time being it is encouraging that in most municipalities in the Dolenjska region **some Roma have settled down to hard work, yet unfortunately they cannot get rid of their habits.**" (*Večer*, 21.10.1997).
- The Roma have high natality: "While Račje selo village is dying out, **the Roma rapidly multiply and move in from everywhere.**" (*Dolenjski list*, 6.11.1997).
- The media often mock the Roma's demands that they should not be called Gypsies (Cigani in Slovenian). "The Roma are Gypsies and Gypsies stay Gypsies." (a survey con-

ducted on the streets of Ljubljana, *POP TV*, 19.10.1997)

"I consistently use the term Gypsy (Cigan) as has been the practice (...) in Slovenia from time immemorial. I will use the new-age term Roma (Rom means man in Romany) when referring to those who I think have deserved it through their behavior. In fact we must be aware that there are great differences among that population and that treating them all as being equal would be highly unjust." (Readers' letters, *Dolenjski list*, 30.10.1997).

3A A special group of stereotypes refers to hygienic and dietary habits of the Roma.

- "They are known as great lovers of pork and hedgehog meat. In the past they used to collect dead pigs, which were considered especially tasty if the pigs were buried in the earth for several days. Some of them continue with this practice, but they no longer look for them under the earth but in front of pig farms." (*Dnevnik*, 22.10.1997).
- Because of their hygienic and dietary habits, the Roma are supposed to be the carriers of various infectious diseases. This creates the threatening image of a foreigner who not only gnaws at our country, our tradition and national institutions, but our body too. The Roma are like a disease, and a catastrophe for the environment in which they live. And, when it comes to infectious diseases, society has at its disposal special measures: isolation (enforced, if necessary) and a separate life in a special place. Therefore, the inhabitants of the neighborhoods with Romani population have required a special compensation from the state (*Dnevnik*, 5.10.1997), which is usually given to threatened areas, or areas that are willing to take toxic waste (as the author of the commentary in *7D* on 5.11.1997 sadly concludes "they do not yet know what to do with the Roma, the same as nobody ever solved, not even in the most comprehensive poll, what to do with the waste", i.e. the area that was affected by some natural catastrophe).

3B The Roma are believed to 'cheat' also when it comes to spiritual matters i.e. their religious beliefs.

In the article entitled "At baptism they promise anything, but..." (*Dnevnik*, 23.10.1997) a priest answers the journalist's question (statement), "Is not the job of a priest, who works in an area inhabited by the Roma, similar to the work of a missionary?" His answer: "Otherwise there is no spirituality among them. I only know that they are terribly afraid of cemeteries at night. They are ready to promise anything at the funeral or baptism."

A POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE - GOOD SLOVENIANS

The media image of a majority group is diametrically opposite to that of a minority. If the Roma are represented as bad, the protagonists belonging to the majority are attributed positive traits.

- The villagers are simple and honest and journalists show interest in their problems: "They come out of their houses and tell with distress how their struggle for survival on these steep slopes and modest land has been crude since long ago, how their elders had to go to Germany and America searching for bread, how the people drained out of the village after the war because there was no waterworks or asphalt, how they contributed much to society but got little in return." (*Dnevnik*, 29.9.1997).
- They are kind and hospitable: "... quickly learns what upset Bela krajina people, who are widely known as kind and hospitable people."
- The villagers stand in sharp contrast to the lazy Roma, they are unanimous: "Bela krajina people all as one against the planned migration (*Delo*, 16.9.1997), The villagers keep an alert watch on everybody who enters Maline, self-defense is excellent and decisive." (*Dnevnik*, 29.9.1997)
- The journalists explicitly sympathize with the villagers: "Some hearts in Črnomelj are breaking." (*Slovenske novice*, 6.11.1997)

The journalists had decided that the Roma were a collective culprit, whereby the strengthening of a positive self-image of the majority population served to reinforce the picture of good Slovenians and bad Roma simplified to the extreme. This strategy of homogenization of both groups makes positive identification of the majority population easier and provides grounds for the discriminatory discourse.

THE STRATEGIES OF ARGUMENTATION

The basic characteristic of the hate speech today is exactly the denial of intolerance. In Slovenia, like in most other modern countries, social norms as well as laws forbid public display of prejudices or discrimination. Subjects of public statements are aware of these social constraints, therefore when speaking negatively about the minorities they try to protect themselves using various strategies which are usually manifest in statements like "I do not have anything against the Roma, but...".

Due to the social unacceptability of intolerant discourse, the media often employ denial or mitigation (the understatement of harmfulness/the overstatement of non-harmfulness, rationalization of evidently intolerant attitudes, the transfer of guilt, the interchanging of the victim and the protagonist). These strategies and argumentation techniques are used to justify the discriminatory discourse and, at the same time, to calm down the public, saying something to the effect of "everything is normal - we are not responsible for this". Through them, journalists represent the majority population as being neutral and innocent protagonists or even victims, thus attributing responsibility to others.

One could say that the more powerful the social norms that oppose discrimination and racism, the more often people resort to denials and mitigation. Another strategy used is justification, employed when public speakers want to justify negative acts or a hate speech through legitimate defense tactics or by demonstrating the guilt of another. In doing this they do not deny the act itself, but the negative nature of the act instead. A similar strategy may be used by the media in situations when part of the "guilt" for the event is attributed to special circumstances or to others.

A reader from the village of Maline, to where the Romani family was supposed to move, wrote in his letter: "I am exasperated because we, the villagers of Maline, who set up a watch and do not let in the Roma, are presented in the media as not knowing legal norms, as having no feelings and as lacking tolerance towards the different. They even blame us for being racists, inhuman in short. This certainly is not true. We are open-hearted people ready to help anybody. Everyone with good intentions is welcome in our village as our guest. Three families of Uskoks with their culture and religion had lived in our village for decades. In search for a better life they moved to Ljubljana and Zagreb. Today a family from Bosnia-

Herzegovina lives in our village and we all help them, because they are hardworking, they take care and are honest. With the Roma, for whom there is no place in Grosuplje we couldn't get along well or live in harmony. Everybody who knows their ways recognizes this." (*Delo*, 11.10.1997).

Van Dijk furthermore points out the strategies of justification whereby the members of a majority population justify their acts by claiming provocations *i.e.* by accusing the victim. The most powerful form of discriminatory writing is a reversal though, where the members of a minority are usually represented as the ones who cause difficulties. In such cases the majority population is presented as a victim (even as a victim of too democratic a state), who has a right to "take into their own hands" the protection of their interests ("the Roma simply make a fool of the state, while the villagers say that they will have to take the law into their own hands" (*Večer*, 16.10.1997)).

In analyzing the coverage of the Roma we have concluded that the majority population, in most cases, did not employ at all the strategy of denial. The hate speech was entirely open. Let's take a look at a morning radio broadcast dedicated to "open" discussion about "Romani issues". A lady who called in first established that the protection of the Roma in Slovenia is unparalleled elsewhere in the world. After that she contributed her proposal for the solution of "the Romani problem":

"For the Roma I would do this: I would give them clothes, provided by Red Cross, I would dress them, but food they should obtain themselves. Nobody says .. they could eat only plants. Let them work for their own food. They do not have to eat meat. Let them be vegetarians." (*RQL*, 15.10.1997)

THE DENIAL OF INTOLERANCE

A typical strategy of positive self-representation is the denial of tolerance. Both the journalists and the informants were aware that their negative opinion about the Roma could be understood as racism or intolerance, so when giving negative statements about the Roma they exploited various forms of the denial of intolerance.

The media coverage often included demands that the Roma should be separated from the majority population. These demands were stressed by journalists as well as politicians and those directly involved in the events. Let us have a look at the statements of the independent presi-

dential candidate commenting on current events in Grosuplje. To the journalist's question "As the president of the state, let's suppose with significant authority in your example, would you stand up for, say, fundamental human and citizen rights of the Roma from Grosuplje...", the presidential candidate answered: "First of all I would have to protect Slovenians against crimes if committed by the Roma. It is known that they steal, that they have social problems, that they are *corpus alienum*, they are the foreign body in our national organism. On the other hand I am, of course, also their president, so I would have to approach the issue with much delicacy and seriousness. If there is no other solution, I saw this in America, there are some modern ghettos for those Roma. They must not present a social problem, they must not present a health problem, and things could be resolved then." (*TV SLO1, Studio City*, 21. 10. 1997). After the turbulent public response, the same candidate repeated in the *Mladina* weekly his explanation of the "technical problem", as he put it, that Slovenian society has with the Roma. "I said *corpus alienum*, which is a medical term that I should explain... The Roma are the people who do not want to adapt. I said that the Roma were *corpus alienum* but not in the sense that they should be extracted. For heaven's sake, I judge man by his soul, by his civilization. I used another term that raised a storm - ghetto. It became a stigmatized word only after the Holocaust. Besides, the Americans freely talk about ghettos. When I stayed near Detroit my hostess talked about ghettos: this is the ghetto of surgeons, that is the ghetto of professors... You ask me what to do with the Roma? We will simply give them a living if they do not want to integrate. They do not like Slovenian society, they are not Catholics, I respect them, they came from Asia and Punjab, they have their own culture. God bless their culture, the more minorities, the more marginal people and the differently thinking, the more complete is a nation. That contributes to multi-culturalism, to the struggle against boredom, to the diversity of life. If we managed to survive living with so many Yugoslavs, we will also manage several thousands of the Roma" (*Mladina*, 11.11.1997).

By using the strategy of mitigation and justification, the speaker attempted to rationalize his discriminatory and racist statements. The ghetto intended for the Roma has by no means the same characteristics as the "ghetto of professors" or the "ghetto of surgeons" in American (= democratic) society. Since in the opinion of the majority population the Roma become used to urban life only with difficulty, they should be moved to a location where they could live "in their own way". In other words, the Roma have rights to have their own living place, yet only if that place

is distant enough. As the villagers of Cerovec said at the round table about “Romani issues” (with no participation by the Roma), a neighborhood for the Roma should be built somewhere in Kočevski Rog. For the solution of this problem the state should provide “some variant of Slovenian UNPROFOR” (*Dnevnik*, 14.10.1997). Before the final choice of the location, the state “should immediately make an accurate record of the inhabitants” (*i.e.* the Roma) (*Dnevnik*, 17.11.1997).

Along the same lines the municipal council, for example, concluded that “the Interior Ministry should immediately take a census of all Roma and their permanent residences” (*Delo*, 17.9.1997). The same thesis was taken up by a journalist on public TV who reported the mentioned events: “Our coverage of these events might again be understood as the media fomenting some anti-Roma war. And I certainly run a risk when I dare repeat a recent proposal from Bela krajina, where we find a remarkably similar example, that the Romani population should be moved to deserted villages in Kočevski Rog.” (*TV SLO*, 14.10. 1997).

Although the journalist did not directly advocate the proposal of the villagers about a separate Romani settlement (in a deserted village where nobody else wants to live, but it is good enough for the Roma), she did not oppose it either. Her ostensible ‘risk’, however, would have been more genuine had she put forth the fact that the Roma who were supposed to be moved there, were Slovenian citizens who had the constitutional right to choose their own place of residence independently. Therefore, her “objective” coverage of the events is much like the statement of the leader of a local community to where the Roma should have moved: “We consented to the fact that the Roma also have to live somewhere and have to have their own home” (*Dolenjski list*, 6.11.1997). As we will show later, the above example also reveals a special strategy of mitigation and justification used by journalists to justify negative and unacceptable ideas and acts thus reducing their own responsibility for the situation as well as that of the “silent majority”. In this way the completely unacceptable actions of majority society have become justified and understandable.

Let us now describe another example of the proposal for the spatial solution of Romani issues. In this case we have a complete demarcation line between the majority and the minority group. In the interview entitled “Maline materialized 300 years ago”, the mayor of Maline proposed that “it

would be best if the Romani settlement included a social institution, a police station and a medical service. Some kind of a state within the state..." (*Dnevnik*, 23.10.1997).

Where is the demarcation line between taking a record of the people, relocating people and their involuntary confinement to a specific region? What kind of a ghetto would be 'acceptable' for the Roma? Where is the demarcation line between the articulated and the act? And, how has this boundary been trespassed by the media?

MITIGATION

Whenever journalists could not avoid negative denomination of the doings or events whose protagonists were the majority population, they resorted to mitigation or diminishing of the significance. A speaker or a writer thus admits negative acts, if only partly, while at the same time avoiding to determine who is responsible for the situation.

Various forms of mitigation are especially frequent methods of denominating events. The major part of journalistic accounts analyzed here covered intolerance, discrimination, ghettoization, racism, disrespect of constitutional rights, restriction of movement, relocation, and exclusion of a specific ethnic group. Nevertheless, journalists rarely denominated them as such, and rather used softer, neutral expressions which apparently evade evaluation. We say apparently because by reducing discrimination to 'a complication', the journalist does not remain neutral, but implicitly suggests his/her viewpoint. Since the denominations given below appeared more than once and in various accounts, we will leave out the references to the sources: circumstances, tense circumstances, a complication that acquired unimaginable proportions, an interesting story, a case which tremendously enraged the Slovenian public, the Maline affair, increasing tension ...

In all of the above examples the protagonist of the conflict was not clearly specified, therefore, since there are no protagonists, there is no a transgressor either. This dispersion of guiltiness might be explicit as well. Even though the conflict was not provoked by the Roma but by the villagers, the responsibility lies with both parties involved: "The conflicts and intolerance **between** the Roma and the majority population are growing. (*Večer*, 23.10.1997). [...] yet the solution of the difficulties that oppress the relations **between** the Roma and other inhabitants is still a long way from here." (*Večer*, 16.10. 1997)

Also the following denominations are supposed to be seemingly neutral evaluation, even though they point to the fact that concrete problems were not isolated examples, but were a part of the complex problem that the Roma cause to “us” through their way of living: a Romani problem (also referred to as notorious, burning, heated, unsolvable issues), Romani issues, the Romani affair, events that were provoked by the announced moving in of the Roma, the migration of the Roma raises the temperature, complications surrounding the planned migration of the Roma.

GENERALIZATION

Another justification strategy used by the Slovenian media was generalization. Generalization disperses responsibility: if others (i.e. everybody) have difficulties with the Roma, then something is wrong with the Roma, not with us. “People **everywhere** have difficulties with Romani neighbors (*Delo*, 17.9.1997); Nobody wants Roma as their neighbors (*Dnevnik*, 15.10.1997); Some kind of front lines separating the Roma are found in other municipalities as well, since people cannot live normally in their vicinity.” (*Večer*, 21.10.1997).

JUSTIFICATION

Similar to mitigation, this strategy too enables journalists and their sources to denominate clearly negative acts of the majority population and to justify them in the same breath. This reduces the guilt of the majority population in the situation. When reporting conflicts, the journalists attributed at least one part of the guilt to extraordinary circumstances, they explained the background and gave the reasons why some act was justified and understandable. Characteristically, the speakers and the writers both used the strategy of justification only in relation to the negative acts of the majority population, but not for the acts of the Roma. On the contrary, while mitigating the acts of the majority population, they stressed the acts of the Roma using negative exaggeration.

The acceptability of good Roma

In their effort to justify circumstances, Slovenian journalists resorted to the comparisons not only of “us” and “them”, but of good and bad Roma as well. The differences

that resulted from these comparisons dealt with the characteristics of the Roma from Prekmurje and those from Dolenjska, with the former playing the role of adapted, that is to say, “good Roma” and the latter that of “unadapted” Roma, who are therefore justifiably the victims of prejudices and discrimination. This distinction between good and bad Roma occurred only when journalists and other speakers wanted to justify their viewpoints to the effect “We are not against good Roma...” <caption> Mayors and government about the Roma from Dolenjska <title> They should take Prekmurje as a model. (*Dnevnik*, 11.9.1997).

Journalists very rarely gave the reasons for the differences in the degree of socialization and integration among the Roma. The example below portrays the Roma as being responsible for these differences, although the rest of the text suggests that the differences in the social status of the Roma could be attributed to the attitude of the majority population towards them among other things: <subtitle> [the Roma] from Prekmurje are very different from those from Bela krajina or Dolenjska - They have their representatives in local bodies, they have their own newspaper and radio broadcasts - The situation is much worse in other parts of Slovenia. (*Delo*, 17.9.1997).

Threats

A typical example of justification were the writings dealing with threats that accompanied the events in the village of Maline, when the villagers “set up a village watch” to prevent the settlement of a Romani family who bought a house there. From the very beginning the newspapers reported the threats by the villagers who asserted that they were ready to fight for the “purity” of their village: “The villagers **say** that they would **fight** for their land by setting even **road blocks** if necessary” (*POP TV*, 30.9.1997, 19:30, 24 hours); “If the Roma come to Maline, there will be **war**” **says Bukovec** (*Mag*, 24.9.1997); “They **say** that they are ready to **resist** such measures even using force” (*Mag*, 24.9.1997); “The villagers **answered** that their response to such intervention will be **self-defense** - even using force, and that **the whole region will resist**” (*Delo*, 16.9.1997); “They will enter our village **only over our dead bodies**” (*Mag*, 24.9.1997).

This coincided with the publishing of the threat by a Rom who intended to move to Maline. Talking about their life in the unwelcoming environment, they said: “The house is ours, we had to sell four horses to buy it. If anything happens to Darko, **they will be sorry. We'll shoot all of them, we'll soak houses**

with gas and burn them. If anybody survives, we'll set an ambush when he goes to work in the morning. Yet as long as they treat us well, we are going to be peaceful." (*Mag*, 24.9.1997).

Journalists dealt with these threats in various ways. Despite the fact that the villagers guarded the house with weapons and laid mines around it, their actions were diminished and described as innocent: "The villagers keep an alert watch on everybody coming to Maline, self-protection is excellent and decisive" (*Dnevnik*, 29.9.1997); [...] "they still persistently keep vigil to prevent the Roma from Grosuplje from moving in" [...] (*Delo*, 15.10.1997); "They peacefully guarded the road that leads to the village" (*Dolenjski list*, 18.9.1997).

The threats of the villagers were justified something to this effect: since they feel threatened and are afraid, they have the right to protect themselves: "The Roma simply make a fool of the state, while the villagers say that they will have to take the law into their own hands. So, what will the state do then?" (*Večer*, 16.10.1997); "The disturbance here is such that I am afraid of the outcome, as people are so enraged that they speak about setting off mines and burning houses [...], said the mayor of Semič." (*Delo*, 15.9.1997).

In contrast to this, the threats that came from the Roma were reported with bias. A single occurrence of such a threat was reported by *Mag*, but other newspapers took up this statement without reservations. Even though the Rom who uttered this threat twice stressed that they would respond with force only if challenged, the journalists did not try to justify his threat as they did in the case of the majority population. On the contrary, they stressed and exposed it. The unfolding of events was even reversed in the account cited below: since the Roma threaten the villagers, they have right to defend themselves. <title> "Vigil" instead of the village watch in Maline <subtitle> The villagers do not trust agreements - the Roma menace that they will attack villagers of Maline and burn the village <introduction> As a matter of fact, the Roma from Grosuplje publicly threaten the villagers of Maline that they will burn the village, shoot the villagers, forcibly move in and organize the Roma (who are more numerous than the villagers of Maline), if they refuse to accept among them their cousins. The threats triggered a self-defense mechanism. (*Delo*, 26.9.1997).

REVERSAL: THE ACCUSATION OF THE VICTIM

The next step in the strategy of positive self-representation and negative representation of others is the accusa-

tion of the victim. This strategy is more powerful than mitigation and justification, since it transfers the responsibility for the situation or events to the victim.

The first maneuver in the reversal strategy is to present a “real victim” - it is “we” who are threatened, not the Roma: <title> One must be a Rom in order to get help? (*Dnevnik*, 16.10.1997); <a reader’s letter> “We, ordinary citizens, have eyes and ears too, and we see things around us, **how injustice is done to the Slovenians in the first place [...]**; **“It’s not surprising that racism and nationalism have emerged** (to be quite frank, the Slovenians are seriously in need of the latter), since in Europe there are people on the streets **who feel threatened among other things because of infinite solidarity towards others.** (*Dnevnik*, 18.10.1997).

The last example already indicates the denial of one’s own intolerance along with the accusation of the victim. This was partly evident from the differences in covering the threats of the Roma and those of the Maline villagers, but it also came through in other accounts: “It can be heard among people that they would not oppose the building of the neighborhood if the Roma would become industrious and would accept the habits of their surroundings. In this way they would become unproblematic, so **the reason for the opposition would be eliminated**” explained Janko Bukovec. (*Nedelo*, 12.10.1997), “They agree that the Roma have to live somewhere and in principle they **are not set against them**, only if they had no difficulties with them and if they were the same as them. Yet now the situation is such that **the minority intimidates and terrorizes the majority.**” (*Dolenjski list*, 16.10.1997).

The villagers have to put up with unadapted Roma day by day, they are victims, some deceptively attempt to entrap them in a Romani ghetto. Since they are threatened they are justifiably afraid. The state does not side with them, so they rely on their own resources and sympathetic neighbors: “We do not intend to become the **national reservation for the Roma**” (*Delo*, 12.9.1997); [...] “in short those who daily come into undesired contact with the Roma” (*Nedelo*, 12.10.1997); “The villagers of Maline in the municipality of Semič still keep vigil because they are **afraid** of the Roma from Grosuplje (*Delo*, 15.10.1997); “Our people are worried because they feel **threatened**” (*Delo*, 17.9.1997); [...] “they wait upon the outcome **uncertain and angry, in fear and rage**” (*Dnevnik*, 29.9.1997); “since **the state is powerless**, the locals consider the introduction of armed village guards” (*Večer*, 16.10.1997), “Among people from Semič, who are **disturbed and sympathize with** the villagers from Maline, whom somebody attempted to **deceive** and bought, in the middle of their village, an

old house for the **unadapted** Roma, circulates the following anecdote [...]" (*Dolenjski list*, 18.9.1997).

Their anger and potential negative actions are therefore understandable. They are angry, enraged and excited [...] people are so **enraged** that they talk about setting off mines and burning houses (*Delo*, 15.9.1997) [...] **the infuriated villagers point accusing fingers** at the barricades (*Dnevnik*, 29.9.1997) [...] the **upset** villagers of Mlačevo, **exasperated** protesters (*Delo*, 16.10.1997).

Their decisive resistance against the Roma occasionally turns into real heroism; <subtitle> Now the whole of Slovenia knows about Maline - the village that does not give in to deception - The locals closed the road as they do not want undesirable inhabitants, that is, the Romani families from Grosuplje (*Dolenjski list*, 18.9.1997).

The following extract is an extreme example of the reversal strategy: "The board is of the opinion that should the construction plan be adopted only the Roma could build houses in this area, so **the locals would be in an unequal position, which is against the constitution.**" (*Delo*, 15.10.1997).

THE STRATEGY OF COUNTER-ATTACK:

"WE ARE NOT INTOLERANT, OTHERS ARE".

A special form that combines the strategy of reversal and the denial of intolerance, is the counter-attack strategy. It is exploited above all when a speaker or a writer denies the accusation of intolerance. The final result of this strategy is: "It is not we who are intolerant, but those, who accuse us of intolerance." In addition to the protagonists who are directly involved in the events, journalists also resort to this strategy: "**But there is Vlado Miheljak who set upon the protesters.** In his column he describes the people of Dolenjska as the growers of 'cviček', potato, Christian democrats, Janez Janša and similar peppers, and **proclaims them racists.** Had we not known Miheljak, we could even believe him. **But as a matter of fact he is known for his intolerant assaults,** from which he cannot refrain even during his lectures at the Faculty of Social Sciences." (*Mag*, 22.10.1997).

If the opposite side cannot be accused of intolerance, then it is ridiculed or its doings are attributed less noble objectives: <a reader's letter> [...] **The preachers of equality and freedom in the bygone style, who offer lollipops to the Roma, do not do this on their own account** (*Delo*, 26.9.1997), <a reader's letter> Amnesty International and other organizations, in order to justify their own existence, fabricate various offences, or blow up

things, which, of course, does not have anything to do with the reality. (*Dnevnik*, 18.10.1997).

THE STRATEGY OF THE SCAPEGOAT

In this case the guilt or the responsibility for the conflict is transferred to a third party. In the coverage analyzed here, most frequently this scapegoat was the state and its institution: The list of reproaches to the state, **which permits the Roma do many things for which other citizens face serious persecutions**, was long (*Nedelo*, 12.10.1997). The villagers can remember that the first inhabitants of Štiri roke neighborhood were hardworking, **in contrast to those living there now**. They were spoiled by the state which gives them social assistance. (*Dolenjski list*, 16.10.1997). The assertion **of the representative of Ministry of Work, Family and Social Issues**, that the law about social assistance treats everybody equally, was assessed as **untrue**, because in their opinion the Roma receive high social assistance, while nobody supervises how this money is spent (*Dolenjski list*, 16.10.1997). The villagers of Cerovec and many other surrounding neighborhoods with Romani inhabitants are convinced that in solving the Romani issues the **state** became so **ineffective** to the extent that it appears as if **acting like that on purpose** (*Dnevnik*, 14.10.1997).

THE CONCLUSION - WHY ARE WE ALLOWED TO WRITE BADLY ABOUT THE ROMA

Why are we allowed to write badly about the Roma? In Slovenia, like in most other modern countries, social norms as well as laws forbid public (open) display of prejudices or discrimination. Journalists and subjects of statements in journalistic articles are aware of these social constraints, therefore when producing a negative coverage of some minority they try to protect themselves using various strategies. Their purpose is to picture the majority population as neutral and innocent protagonists, even victims, thus redirecting attention away from openly hostile attitude. By using the differentiation discourse and its justification, the media thus created the community of the Slovenians from which the Roma are excluded - without a possibility that their voice may reach the other side.

The Roma are continuously the subject of racist speech and writings. We talk about the Roma only as members of a specific group and not as individuals. They do not speak, they are spoken about. Even when they speak, their talk must be 'translated' into the language that is understood by the majority.

That is how we see Roma. But we do not know how they see us. The Roma have no economic, political or communication powers. Their appearance in the media is usually extremely simplified and revolves around a simplified set of topics - difficulties and conflicts. In the eyes of the Slovenian media, the Roma are a problem, so in journalistic parlance they talk about 'Romani question' and 'Romani problems'. However, the continual production and reproduction of the above-mentioned images has wide consequences. The Roma have become inferior citizens, that is to say, the citizens towards whom verbal (and physical) violence is almost justified.

According to the 1995 public opinion poll in Slovenia, almost half of the respondents would not like to have Roma as their neighbors. In contrast to, for example, Muslims, immigrants and foreign workers, which are the groups where social distance decreases (with immigrants and foreign workers it reduced by nearly half between 1992 and 1995), in the case of the Roma the social distance increases. The most unwanted social groups in Slovenian society (data

from 1998) are: drug addicts (79.5% of respondents would not like to be their neighbors), alcoholics (78%), political extremists (68.5%), homosexuals (60.3%) and the Roma (53.5%) (Toš, 1999: 856).

In a documentary entitled *Almost Serbs* from 1998, by Lazar Sojanović, a Romani musician from Serbia tells how he decided, due to permanent molestation by the police, to change his Muslim name into a Serbian one. The greatest wish of this veteran from the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, who lost his hand fighting for the Serbs, is to become “We”, to belong to the majority, that is “almost Serb”. It is a touching story about a Rom who believes that his Muslim name was the main reason for his exclusion from the majority group. But he stoically concludes that he is not happy with the new name, because it is not his own.

Stojanović’s story ends with the footage of the killing of an eleven-year old Rom in the middle of Belgrade. A boy with a Serbian name and surname was brutally killed only because he was a Rom. During the demonstration that followed his funeral, the Roma burned yellow strips calling out “Never again”.

This tells us that in societies in which the different and the differentness is marginalized, ghettoized and criminalized, the majority cannot be safe “ever again”. Anybody can be excluded, as the reasons can be so easily justified, with the assistance of the media among other things.

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