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Ideologies of moral exclusion: A critical discursive reframing of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization

Abstract

This paper focuses on some of the issues that arise when one treats notions such as depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization as social practices. It emphasizes the importance of: (a) understanding depersonalizing, delegitimizing and dehumanizing constructions as embedded in descriptions of located spatial activities and moral standings in the world and (b) invoking and building a socio-moral order linked to notions of lesser humanity or non-humanity, (spatial) transgression and abjection. These concerns are illustrated by taking talk on Romanies as a case in point taken from interviews with Romanian middle-class professionals. It is argued that a focus on description rather than explanation might be more effective in understanding the dynamics of ideologies of moral exclusion.

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The repeated ethno-nationalistic tensions in Eastern Europe together with the ethnic conflicts in the Middle East and recent (and not so recent) controversies concerning race, racism, multiculturalism and issues related to immigration in Western Europe and elsewhere have captured the imagination of social scientists. Since their inception, the social sciences (and social psychology in particular) have felt that they have something very important to say about dealing with racism, discrimination, social inequality, intergroup conflict, bias, oppression and moral exclusion as important ‘social issues’, ‘social problems’.

The most relevant theoretical and research developments on such ‘social issues’ have been mainly directed to the relatively mild forms of intergroup bias (Hewstone et al., 2002) and have not dealt substantively with the issue of extreme manifestations of prejudice. The context provided for understanding intergroup discrimination and related notions has been based mainly on the assumption of positive in-group love rather than negative, extreme out-group hostility (Brewer, 1999, 2001).

There have been nevertheless several warnings (but few attempts) at going beyond this framework of intergroup bias (e.g., Hewstone & Cairns, 2001; Hewstone et al., 2002; Reynolds & Turner, 2001; Turner & Reynolds, 2001). For example, one of the ways to go beyond a traditional intergroup bias framework has been to argue for an integration of the main intergroup approaches and competitive tests between theories of social psychological motivations (cf. Hewstone et al., 2002; see also Brewer & Gaertner, 2001). Another way of going beyond this traditional framework of intergroup bias has been grounded in the belief that “understanding ‘prejudice’ requires recognition that it is a group process that originates in the psychology of the group, intergroup relations, and the reality of human social conflict” (Reynolds &

Turner, 2001, p.178). For Reynolds and Turner (2001), social antagonism, as a psychologically rational and valid product of the way members of certain groups perceive the social structure of intergroup relations, '*arises from and reflects their subjectively-apprehended understanding of the relationships between groups in society*' (p. 160, emphasis in original; see also Turner and Reynolds, 2001; Turner, 1999a, b).

None of these attempts have been able to offer a fully satisfactory account of the link 'between intergroup bias and more corrosive forms of social hostility' (Hewstone et al., 2002, p. 575). There are several reasons for this. On one hand, one has still to deal with theories that posit the inevitability of unequal social relations (such as social dominance theory, system justification theory) (Reicher, 2004). On the other hand, one has to deal with theories that define ideological orientation in terms of psychological processes rather than content (Durrheim, 1997).

Another very important element is the problems socio-cognitive approaches face in distinguishing between prejudice and extreme prejudice, to account for 'the continuum between prejudice and bigotry or between depersonalization and dehumanization' (cf. Billig, 2002, p. 183). Starting with Tajfel's use of the notion of 'depersonalization' (see Billig, 2002 for an extensive account), one can chart the inability of social-cognitive approaches to deal with extreme prejudice. Tajfel believed that 'depersonalization' was similar to categorization in being a common aspect of intergroup phenomena (Billig, 2002). He thought of depersonalization as a 'common denominator' (Tajfel, 1981, p. 241) in the minimal group context and actual warfare. He used the term 'depersonalization' to refer to a 'milder' form of dehumanization of outgroups (Tajfel, 1981) without elaborating on the possible continuum between depersonalization and dehumanization. Later work on social

identity has instituted a crucial change in the use of the term ‘depersonalization’. For example, within self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987; Turner, 1999a), there is a move away from Tajfel’s notion of depersonalization of out-group members toward linking depersonalization to the self and the in-group (cf. Billig, 2002). There is also a move from the negative (social problem) to positive (a gain in identity). ‘Depersonalization’ is no longer invariably assumed to be a social problem. It is stripped off of its negative connotations and its implications for ‘dehumanization’ are obscured (see Hogg, 1996, for an example).

The main argument of this paper is that one needs a re-contextualization of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization as social practices within a critical framework that goes beyond psychological dynamics within unequal power relations and demarcates ‘the “ordinary” from the “abnormal”, or the mild from the strong’ (Billig, 2002, p. 181). It does so by acknowledging that ‘depersonalization should not be restricted to the depersonalization of the self, nor should it be seen as a cognitive process that somehow lies behind language’ (Billig, 2002, p. 184) and that dehumanization constitutes an extreme form of depersonalization. It also takes into account the existence of different types of prejudice and the idea that not all prejudices (and for that matter, all target groups) are the same (Billig, 2002; Tileagă, 2005a, b). As such, it is necessary to avoid reductionist theories that seek to explain social and ideological processes by reference to psychological processes, without examining their contextual specificity and their relations to differentiated targets of prejudice.

Ontologization and infra-humanization

There have been nevertheless attempts to acknowledge that not all prejudices and not all target groups are the same. For example, within social representations theory, the concept of ‘ontologization’ has been proposed and used to account for a process of ethnic group classification, which, in a way, was deviating from the general pattern of latent and blatant prejudice and discrimination (Chulvi & Perez, 2003; Moscovici & Perez, 1997, 2005; Perez et al., 2001, 2002). In a nutshell, this concept points to the idea that some minorities are more discriminated against than others. In particular, ‘ontologization’ refers to the representation of certain minorities outside the social realm, outside the realm of ‘humanity’ (the case of the Romanies/Gypsies is taken as a case in point).

The concept of ‘ontologization’ put forward by social representations theorists relies on a nature/culture dimension and a distinction between ‘ontologization’ and ‘discrimination’ (Moscovici & Perez, 2005), which is used as a basis for social classification. According to the logic of ‘ontologization’, prejudice against out-groups is not only evaluative (the realm of ‘discrimination’), but also semantic-anthropological (the realm of ‘ontologization’) (Marcu & Chryssochoou, 2005).

In this case, one is dealing with a form of discrimination that differs from traditional psychological notions of prejudice, one within which ‘others’ are judged in terms of animal (natural), but not human (cultural) characteristics¹.

One can note that this kind of theorizing of dehumanization is couched in terms of a majority/minority dichotomy, social influence, social cognition and representational processes. It does not include a moral dimension, but ‘ontologization’ is simply viewed as a psychological mechanism to achieve social exclusion. For

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¹ Paradoxically, it is also implied that it is the refusal of ethnic minorities to integrate in society that leads to their ‘ontologization’ and to a failure of the majority to convert a minority (Perez et al., 2001).

example, it has been experimentally demonstrated that ‘ontologization’ may imply a social exclusion without, nevertheless, falling into negative discrimination (Perez et al, 2002). Once the distinction between ‘discrimination’ and ‘ontologization’ is operated, the two realms are kept apart, and ‘ontologization’ is said to be functioning independently of negative evaluative judgements. This can be seen as a similar move to that of social identity theorists, who, abstracting ‘depersonalization’ of any negative connotation and moving the attention from the out-group to the in-group, are not linking it any more with ‘dehumanization’.

Infra-humanization theory is another relatively recent attempt by social psychologists to offer some more empirical evidence of dehumanization processes (Leyens et al., 2000, 2001, 2003; Paladino et al., 2002). Infra-humanization theory starts from an universal notion of ‘being human’ and possessing human attributes (characteristics) linked to a theory of primary and secondary emotions. As opposed to ‘ontologization’ theory, it does not start from the assumption that some groups are more discriminated than others, but it does share the interest in the anthropological view of human nature and human ‘essence’. Located within a strong in-group/out-group context and positing the primacy of the in-group (Leyens et al., 2003) it claims that ‘restricting the full human nature to ingroups leads to “infrahumanize” outgroups’ (Paladino et al., 2002, p. 115).

Infra-humanization theory owes most of its analytic and empirical scaffolding to social identity theory, self-categorization theory and social cognition. According to new developments in social identity theory, we need privileged or significant others which form the in-group (Yzerbyt et al., 2000). ‘Infra-humanisation’ is described as being ‘a phenomenon which integrates both ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation’ (Leyens et al., 2003, p. 705) and is said to be close to the notion of moral

exclusion (Bar-tal, 1989; Opatow, 1990a) or lesser-perceived humanity (Schwarz & Struch, 1989).

Infra-humanization is not presented as being restricted to the in-group (or the dominant group(s)), but it is claimed that 'both dominant and dominated groups can infra-humanize each other' (Leyens et al., 2003, p. 706). As such, infra-humanization is a general, universal phenomenon as 'outgroup derogation is not the exclusivity of dominant groups' (Leyens et al., 2003, p. 706). Arguably, this claim regarding balance and the universality of the theory does not account for the unequal weight of derogation and differentiated targets of prejudice (as 'ontologization' theory, for example does) and the unequal relations that have caused it in the first place. It does not consider the possibility that the ideological effects of this 'reciprocal' infra-humanization might be different depending on the social and ideological context of inter-group relations. All this is cashed out in an universal process, as according to the authors, 'at some point, all groups believe that they are superior to other ones' (Leyens et al., 2003, p. 706). Leyens et al. (2000) have provided sustained evidence that there is a tendency for in-group members to attribute more prototypically 'human' emotional attributes to their fellow group members than they do to out-group members. The implication of this type of research is that, such beliefs could, in the last instance, legitimize the 'inhuman' treatment of certain out-groups.

One can note how, notwithstanding their differences, for approaches like ontologization and infra-humanization theory, dehumanization entails the removal of a group from the domain of moral acceptability (Bar-Tal, 1990; Opatow, 1990, 1995) and point to notions such as moral exclusion and the moral order. Nevertheless, both of these theories seem to 'offer the prospect of a general, and hence generalizable, theory of out-group hate' (Brown, 2002, p. 197). What seems to be more important is

the generality of the phenomenon across contexts (be it ‘infra-humanization’ or ‘ontologization’) and its ability to *explain* the social representational and identity context of social inclusion/exclusion.

In the perspective adopted here, how people are positioned and constructed is not a matter of applying universal inference-rich references to ‘valid’ stereotypes, natural/cultural characteristics, essentially human emotions or universal processes. Rather, it is a matter of a contextual and discursive application of a moral (as opposed to an intra-psychic) order. That such a moral order might be significant for social psychology is made clear by the implications brought forward by a critical discursive psychology (Billig, 2002; Wetherell, 2003) which attempts to bridge detailed interactional analyses with social, critical concerns (Tileagă, 2005a, b; 2006a, b).

Moral exclusion and delegitimization

According to Opatow, ‘moral exclusion occurs when individuals or groups are perceived as *outside the boundary in which moral values, rules and considerations of fairness apply*’ (Opatow, 1990a, p. 1, italics in original). The term ‘delegitimization’ has been introduced as a very important social psychological process that permits moral exclusion. For Bar-Tal, delegitimization constitutes the extreme case of stereotyping and prejudice (Bar-Tal, 1989). He describes delegitimization as a specific case of group categorization - *categorization of a group or groups into extremely negative social categories that are excluded from the realm of acceptable norms and/or values*’ (1990, p. 65, italics in original). Bar-Tal argues that ‘delegitimization, the exclusion of an outgroup and denial of its humanity, is a phenomenon with cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects’ (1990, p. 78)².

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² Having as background notions such as ‘moral values’, ‘moral community’, ‘justice/injustice’, ‘moral boundaries’, ‘social inclusion/exclusion’ - to name just a few - research on moral exclusion has traditionally focused on issues such as moral exclusion in individuals (Deutsch, 1990; Staub, 1990), moral exclusion in society (e.g. deWind, 1990) and ways of deterring moral exclusion (Opatow,

As Graumann suggests, ‘what the authors of moral exclusions do not explicitly state and study is the fact that it is primarily and sometimes exclusively by *moral discourse* that we separate from and exclude others’ (1998, p. 47). Although pointing to the process of moral boundary drawing, authors Bar-tal, Staub or Deutsch tend to point more to the psychological ‘distance’ between groups, the psychological mechanisms involved in this process, than to the moral ‘distance’ and the implications of the flexible use of a moral discourse. Although a moral dimension is present, there is no programmatic concern with charting the discursive accomplishment and management of moral exclusion in actual instances of occurrence.

What is needed is an attempt of re-conceptualization of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization in discursive terms, a look at how particular ways of speaking might depersonalize (and sometimes, dehumanize) the ‘other’ (cf. Billig, 2002, p. 184) and how they are actually *accomplished* in interaction and in talk about ‘others’. What is needed is an approach that cuts across the traditional individual/social dualism, as well as the traditional micro/macro and majority/minority divisions (Potter, 2003). An approach with a focus on the way moral standings in the world, the social structure of group and category relations are being ‘produced’, that is described, invoked, categorized, for action and interaction.

This paper illustrates how a critical discursive approach which attempts to bridge detailed interactional analyses with social, critical concerns can inform social psychologists’ understanding of the ways in which delegitimization and dehumanization (as an extreme form of depersonalization) are brought off in talk, how they are produced and reproduced, both as ‘social’ and as rhetorically potent

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1990b).. Interesting developments were also made by human geographers (see inter alia Sibley, 1998; Wilton, 1998) who promoted an innovative and original thinking about the role that specific spatialities play in constructing and reproducing individuals and groups as different and their consequences for social and moral exclusion.

devices for the discursive management of category memberships, extreme ‘difference’ and moral standings in the world.

In a nutshell, the attempt is to ‘respecify’ social psychological concepts such as depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization in terms of how they are managed, framed, enacted in diverse ways in talk. This involves re-working, re-framing such notions as discourse practices (Potter, 2003). Rather than conceiving, for example, concerns with delegitimization and dehumanization as reflections of what people carry inside their heads, a matter of attributing natural/cultural characteristics or primary/secondary emotions to those classed as out-groups, people are shown to flexibly work up, formulate the nature of actions, events, their and other people’s accountability through *ways of talking* that depersonalize, delegitimize and dehumanize a particular group (the Romanies) within the cultural and discursive practices of (Romanian) society.

Critical discursive psychology

The theoretical and methodological background of this paper is that of a critical discursive psychology that attempts to bridge an ethnomethodological and conversationally analytical inspired discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 2001, 2005) with critical³, social concerns within social psychology (Billig, 2002; Wetherell, 1998, 2003).

This is an extension of previous critical social psychological work (Tileagă, 2005a, b; 2006a) on the language of prejudice and extreme prejudice that rests on a view of social inequality and unequal social relations as both social and interactional

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³ Critical, in the sense that it tries to uncover the role of discursive practices in the creation and reproduction of ideological meanings that are shaping social and category relations, unequal power relations.

objects (Tileagă, 2006b). This is linked to the belief that discursive acts are constitutive of and constituted by social and political ‘realities’ and it is through language practices that relations of power, dominance and exploitation become reproduced and legitimated (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

Taking talk about Romanies as a case in point, this paper is focusing on the situational and flexible deployment of depersonalizing/delegitimizing/dehumanizing category formulations and relations, and at the same time aligning it with critical, social concerns (Wetherell, 2003). This paper also makes the case for a study of ideologies of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization with a concern for the locatedness of construction of extreme difference. As argued elsewhere (Tileaga, 2005a), ideologies of ‘moral exclusion’ imply a notion of place, which is the yardstick against which ideological and exclusionary discourse is put together and prejudice and bigotry enacted.

Both traditional social psychological approaches, such as ‘ontologization’ and ‘infra-humanization’ theory (as well as discursive approaches to the language of prejudice) have neglected the locatedness and place-boundedness of (extreme) prejudice, the political dimension of one’s representation of place (Dixon, Reicher & Foster, 1997; Dixon & Reicher, 1997)⁴.

Constructing particular ethnic groups as out-of-place, as transgressing normative place-appropriate conduct, as abject, as repulsive (or as inviting repulsion), act as symbolic resources for reproducing their delegitimization, their depersonalization (and ultimately their dehumanization). This makes relevant the idea of considering depersonalizing, delegitimizing and dehumanizing concerns as

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⁴ As some authors have noted, the relationship between space, social activity and a socio-moral order is relevant across different contexts, but seldom explicitly acknowledged within social psychological theory (Dixon, 2001; Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003)

extending beyond the boundaries of the activities involved in interview-talk (Wetherell, 1998, 2003), placing them within discursive history, the social, political and ideological context. Recasting processes such as depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization as discursively bound opens the way for the investigation of the social and political consequences of extreme discursive patterning, understanding and interpreting the dynamics of extreme prejudiced discourse.

Social and political context

The Romanian political 'transition' has been an interesting mix of democratic and liberal rhetoric (Gallagher, 1995), echoes of Ceausescu's nationalist communism and reverberations of 1930s fascist right-wing ideology (Volovici, 1991). One of the main defining elements of the Romanian political 'transition' has been represented by the political appeals and counter-appeals of Romanian and Hungarian nationalism, which have increasingly saturated Romania's political field (until 2001 at least) (Gallagher, 1998; Tismăneanu, 1998). One other very important element has been the widespread anti-Roma/Gypsy sentiment, which has had a very strong discriminatory character and has been accompanied by outbursts of extreme violence (see ERRC, 1996 and 2001).

The increasing power of the right-wing, ultra-nationalist parties in the 1990s, has encouraged a 'politics of intolerance' (Gallagher, 1995) towards ethnic minorities (mainly the Hungarian and the Romany minority) through the intermediary of a nationalistic, racist and xenophobic discourse, incitement to hatred and extreme violence. Whereas the discourse of the right-wing on the Hungarian minority has been mainly characterised by outbursts of extreme nationalism and ethnocentrism, their

discourse on the Romanies had clear fascist underpinnings (with clear eliminationist connotations).

It is worth noting that prejudiced and discriminatory discourse against the Romanies has not only come from political extremists, but also from across the whole Romanian civic and political spectrum (Hockenos, 1993). As Mungiu-Pippidi (1999) argues in her excellent study about Transylvania, the presence of the Romanies does not somehow matter for Romanians and Hungarians alike, who are often united in their resentment and contempt for them. Both Romanians and Hungarians share pretty much the same basic negative stereotypes of the Roma population: dirty, lazy, thieves (Ethnobarometer, 2000).

Analytic context

The extracts presented here are taken from a corpus of thirty-eight recorded semi-structured interviews (collected in the year 2001) with middle-class Romanian professionals, both male and female, selected to cover a variety of social backgrounds in the region of Transylvania (north-western part of Romania). None of interviewees were part of an ethnic minority group, they were all majority group members (ethnically Romanian). The research has been introduced as looking at ‘people’s views on society and its actors’. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The recruitment has been based on a ‘snowball’ sampling technique. Each individual interview lasted between one hour-one hour and a half. Interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed using a version of the well-known set of conventions that have been developed by Gail Jefferson for conversation analysis. The extracts used were translated from the original Romanian into English by the

author of this paper. The analysis has been conducted on the original, but the references in the text are made to the English version.

The interviews discussed generally ‘controversial’ issues regarding prejudice and prejudice related issues in Romanian society, the (contested) existence of prejudice and discrimination against the Hungarians, and respectively the Romanies, inter-ethnic conflict, minority rights and other general issues related to politics, prejudice and culture.

Each interview, while 'conversational' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and ‘active’ (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) in nature, has been structured around a pre-designed and piloted schedule of questions and comments, albeit often introduced in different ways and sometimes in a different order, which allowed the exploration of a relatively standard range of topics with each participant. Interview responses were not treated as simply true or false accounts of reality, but instead ‘as *displays* of perspectives and moral forms’ (Silverman, 2001, p. 112, emphasis in original). The interviewer’s and interviewee’s subjectivity has been seen as locally produced sequentially in and through talk (Rapley, 2001; Edwards, 2003).

Analysis

As the specific interest here is in depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization practices, examples were selected from the corpus which directly or indirectly invoked depersonalizing, delegitimizing and dehumanizing categorizations and moral standings in the world. The extracts presented here offer a set of instances of displays of and orientations to a social and spatial moral order, constructions of extreme difference and transgressive (human) presence whose effect is to delegitimize and dehumanize the Romanies.

The analysis starts with Sandra, a fifty-one year old speech therapist. The excerpt presented here is part of a quite long answer to an invitation to talk about the situation and behaviour of Romanians.

Extract 1

[...]
427 Sandra They have received accommodation in a block of flats (.) well, after
428 they received it (.) they had the block brand new (.) at (.) after a
429 maximum of two months, the block was looking as if it had been
430 bombed (.) without windows, without doors (mm) dirty on the stairs
431 (.) I have (.) I have no words (.) and then (.) after a while the
432 mass-media was saying that they don't have accommodation (.) okay,
433 they don't have (.) they couldn't give to all of them (.) but what
434 has been given, it hasn't been kept in good condition (.) and then,
435 it is always the Romanian who is to blame (.) not (.) him
436 (.) the gypsy? (.)

[...]
427 Sandra Au primit locuințe în bloc (.) păi, după ce
428 le-a dat (.) le-a dat blocul la cheie (.) la (.) După
429 maxim două luni, blocul arăta ca după
430 bombardament (.) fără geamuri, fără uși (mm) cu mizerie pe scări
431 (.) N-am (.) n-am ce să spun (.) și atunci (.) după câțva timp
432 mass-media a umplut-o că n-au locuințe (.) păi
433 n-au (.) n-au putut să dea la toți (.) dar și
434 ce s-a dat , nu s-a păstrat (.) Și atunci,
435 tot românul este de vină (.) nu (.) el
436 (.) țiganul? (.)

In lines 427-430 it is said that: 'they have received accommodation in a block of flats (.) well, after they received it (.) they had the block brand new (.) at (.) after a maximum of two months, the block was looking as if it had been bombed (.) without windows, without doors (mm) dirty on the stairs (.)'. The description that Sandra gives is a very interesting one and can be understood as doing 'moral work' (Drew, 1998). As discursive psychologists have shown, our descriptions are accountable phenomena through which we recognizably display an action's (im)propriety, (un)suitability or (in)appropriateness and they provide 'a basis for evaluating the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of whatever is being reported' (Drew, 1998, p. 295).

Sandra's moral evaluative position is not quite explicit: 'I have (.) I have no words (.)' (line 431). There is a sense of moral indignation in this formulation and this implicitly points to the gravity of the matter under discussion. The story, on the other hand, is an explicit formulation of transgression. Sandra tells us that 'they have received accommodation in a block of flats, that 'they had the block brand new' and that in a short amount a time, ' a maximum of two months' the block 'was looking as if it had been bombed (.) without windows, without doors (mm) dirty on the stairs (.)'. It is not said what exactly has been done in order to obtain such a result, but the description of the state of the block does not need any explanation. The 'out-of-placeness' (Dixon, Reicher & Foster, 1997; Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003) of Romanies and an ideology of acceptable/unacceptable behaviour (Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003) is being invoked to warrant the protest and indignation.

Note the formulation '*they have received* accommodation ... ' (from 'us') (line 427) and 'what has been given' (line 433-434) which implicitly points to 'our' magnanimity and good will. It is through a contrast between 'best intentions' of 'offering' Romanies a place to stay and the resulting outcome of their behaviour that the latter is portrayed as being offensive and reprehensible. As Drew (1998) suggests, 'accounts produced in the context of talk in which moral work is quite overt and explicit appear to be generally condemnatory; that is they are associated with complaints about the behaviours of others (in 'reconstructed' versions of their behaviour)' (p. 296).

There is also an implicit orientation to the issue of intentional and deliberate conduct in order to make manifest the transgression by the Romanies of normative standards of conduct and hence to warrant her final sense of moral indignation. The outcome of the behaviour of Romanies is described (the block of flats looking as 'if it

had been bombed (.) without windows, without doors (mm) dirty on the stairs (.)' in such a way that 'the fault is not to be regarded as accidental, inadvertent, or otherwise innocent' (Drew, 1998, p. 316). By describing the negative and extreme outcomes of the behaviour of Romanies, Sandra has not only exhibited their 'conduct' as being reprehensible (Drew, 1998), but also 'themselves' as being reprehensible.

There is also a sense of this being a legitimate complaint as it is implicitly considered that anyone would find the actions (and the people) described as (being) reprehensible, and as such they appear to transgress the psychological interests of the complainants (Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003).

Sandra's seemingly rhetorical question in lines 434-436: 'and then, it is always the Romanian who is to blame (.) not (.) him (.) the gypsy? (.)' does not only hint to a 'us' vs. 'them' contrast. This is the voice of the 'dispossessed' (Billig, 1978, p. 296), an anguished and rather angered voice that points to the fact that the moral order has been turned upside down and as a consequence 'we' are the ones that get the blame. The use of 'always' points to the unreasonableness of this blaming of 'us' and at the same time, in the light of the evidence that she has put forward, the reasonableness of blaming the Romanies for their own predicament.

The behaviour of Romanies is being problematized by pointing to an 'extreme' case (cf. Verkuyten, 2001) and at the same time, Romanies get 'morally constituted' (Jayyusi, 1993) as being 'out of place'. The reference to 'dirt' associated with the behaviour of Romanies enforces this idea. Drawing on Douglas's anthropology of 'symbolic pollution', Sibley (1995) claims that people that transgress moral (and spatial) boundaries are typically classified as 'matter out of place'. Examples such as this one, of behaviour (or outcomes of behaviour) that it is seen as

violating social and moral conventions, depersonalizes and delegitimizes the Romanies, placing them beyond what is acceptable.

This move of depersonalization and delegitimization is taken further in the next example. This is a fragment that comes before the previously analysed section, but even if does not follow sequentially from the previous, it is very important in its ideological significance, in as far as it constitutes an instance of a dehumanizing discourse within an ideology of moral exclusion.

Extract 2

- [...]
- 411 Sandra I have brought them a sack of nice (.) clothes (.) they were
412 walking in rags (.) (right) I have given them nice clothes, I have
413 brought them a bag of food, cos' they were eating from the garbage
414 (.) just to see the next say (.) the nice clothes that I've given to
415 them to wear, to get changed (.) if I stayed with them they've
416 changed clothes (.) if not (.) they've thrown them into the garbage
417 container (.) well, I don't really know (.) why do they behave like
418 this? It means that they like living in dirt (mm) in
419 dirt, through (.) theft (.) and someone to help them (.)
420 Chris Where from do you think that this (.) originates?
421 Sandra I think that it is something (.) which comes from (.) from (.) the
422 ancestral (.) I don't know (.) from (.) from their origin (.)
423 Chris From their nature?
424 Sandra From their nature (.) there is (.) there is something (.) they don't
425 like (.) that's why it is said that the gypsies are 'koszos'
[...]
- [...]
- 411 Sandra Le-am dus un sac cu haine (.) frumoase (.) erau
412 zdrențăroși (.) (da) le-am dat haine frumoase, le-am
413 dus o plasă cu mâncare, că mâncau din gunoaie (.)
414 ca a doua zi, hainele frumoase pe care eu le-am dat
415 să se îmbrace, să se schimbe (.) dacă am stat lângă ei s-au
416 schimbat, dacă nu (.) le-au aruncat la container
417 (.) Păi, nici eu nu mai știu (.) De ce se comportă
418 așa? (.) înseamnă că le place să trăiască în murdărie (mm) în
419 murdărie, prin (.) furt (.) Și să-i ajute cineva (.)
420 Chris De unde credeți că vine (.) treaba asta?
421 Sandra Eu cred că este ceva (.) care vine din (.) din (.)
422 ancestral (.) nu știu, din (.) din originea lor (.)
423 Chris Din natura lor?
424 Sandra Din natura lor (.) au (.) au ceva (.) nu
425 le place (.) de aia zici că ȣiganii ȣs 'koszos' (.)
[...]

The excerpt starts with Sandra offering a story of helping Romanies which on one hand emphasises her willingness to help 'them' and on the other hand, their reluctance (or one should say, refusal) to accept this kind of help.

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

The reference to 'living in dirt' is an explicit sign of a moral discourse that implicitly draws attention to a transgression of a moral boundary. The ascription of an inner personal disposition linked with the idea of 'living in dirt' essentializes this attributed stereotypical trait and makes it part of the Romany way of being. An implicit moral boundary is drawn between 'us' and 'them'. The significance of drawing moral boundaries is related to the positioning of Romanies beyond reasonable bounds, beyond a civilized and 'clean' moral order.

After the question and answer sequence in lines 420-422 which deals with an explanation of the origins of this behaviour, in line 423 the interviewer seems to be asking for a clarification: 'From their nature?' and proposes a different label to summarise what Sandra has just said. This new 'candidate' is immediately taken up by Sandra who continues from where the interviewer has left: 'From their nature (.)

there is (.) there is something (.) they don't like (.) that's why it is said that the gypsies are 'koszos' (lines 424-425). The word that Sandra uses to describe the gypsies is not a Romanian word, but a Hungarian word. It is a rather general practice in Transylvania to use sometimes Hungarian words to convey some meanings that a seemingly equivalent Romanian word does not convey. The same happens here where Sandra uses the more extreme term 'koszos' to express and ascribe a moral quality of the Romanies instead of the milder Romanian equivalent 'murdar' literally translatable into 'dirty'.

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

This is an example of dehumanization, an extreme form of depersonalization, as Romanies are portrayed as abject, as horrible by the standards of 'civilized' society (note also the presentation of this as knowledge-in-common, as something of a common-place). This way of depicting the Romanies reinforces a view of Romanies as residual, as something that needs 'cleaning'. 'Pollution' is to be seen as a type of

danger. As Mary Douglas (1966; see also Sibley, 1992) suggests, dirt is matter ‘out of place’. Romanies are thus ‘matter out of place’, beyond the boundaries of the acceptable. There is an implicit allusion to the idea that they are a ‘threat’ to order, to cleanliness. But it is not just lack of cleanliness that causes abjection, but also ‘what disturbs identity, system, order ... does not respect borders, positions, rules’ (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Thus, it defines and justifies exclusion by defining Romanies as ‘residual’, beyond what is acceptable. The implicit message is that such carriers of danger are to be cast away (and outside from) where orderly life is conducted and outside society’s bounds.

In extract 3, one can see how a question about discrimination of Romanies leads into an account of Romanies’ incongruity with a normative moral (and spatial) order.

Extract 3

[Discussing the causes of discrimination against discrimination]

- [...]
- 80 Chris What do you think the causes of such discrimination that, that you
81 talked about are? (.) I don’t know, for example, a Romany can be
82 easily refused a job (1.2)
- 83 Carla °Because to me°- (.) >what can I say< (.) >what are the causes?< (0.2)
84 right? I think that everything happens because of them (.) so because
85 even they don’t want (.) so they don’t have the desire (0.4) I don’t
86 think that they are accepting (.) so, they would like to (0.4) to (.)
87 so, >they don’t really like to work< (.) so, as far as I know,
88 >they don’t own land to cultivate, to farm< and when they were offered
89 a place to stay or something (.) I saw it on televi[sion](.)
90 Chris [uh huh
91 Carla that they’ve put their horses in (.) so (.) >even if there were flats<
92 (.) where they managed to or (0.4) So (0.4) even them, what they
93 receive, they ruin (.) so, they don’t (0.8)°they don’t respect, that’s
94 the thing° (.)
- 95 Chris Hmm
96 (1.2)
- [...]
- 80 Chris Care credeți că sunt cauzele acestei discriminări de, de care
81 aminteți ? (.) Știu eu, de exemplu unui rom i se poate
82 refuza foarte ușor un loc de muncă (1.2)
- 83 Carla °Pentru că mi°- (.) >ce să zic< (.) >care sunt cauzele?< (0.2)
84 nu?(.) eu zic că totul pornesc de la ei (.) deci pentru că
85 nici ei nu vor (.) deci nu își doresc (0.4) nu
86 cred că acceptă (.) deci ar vrea să (0.4) să (.)
87 deci, >lor nu prea le place să muncească< (.) deci din câte știu eu,
88 >n-au nici pământuri să cultive, să lucreze<, și când li s-au oferit
89 locuințe sau ceva (.) am văzut la tele[vizor] (.)
90 Chris [uh huh

91   Carla   că și-au băgat caii (.) deci (.) >chiar dacă au fost apartamente<
 92   (.) unde au reușit sau (0.4) deci (0.4) și ei ce
 93   primesc, distrug (.) deci, nu (0.8) °că nu respectă,
 94   asta e° (.)
 95   Chris   Hmm
 96   (1.2)

Through a similar apocryphal story of transgression based on an explicit reference to ‘them’ being offered a ‘place to stay or something’, Carla manages to ‘morally constitute’ (Jayyusi, 1993) Romanies, their actions and outcomes presenting ‘them’ and their actions as morally reprehensible (Stokoe, 2003; Tileagă, 2005a).

There is an explicit formulation of transgression and the character of the impropriety is quite directly formulated: ‘They’ve put their horses in (.) so (.) even if there were flats (.) where they managed to or (0.4)’. It can be seen that by attracting attention to the idea that there were flats involved, and not any kind of residence (and definitely not a place to put your horses in), a normative standard of behaviour is invoked as the basis for complaining about the behaviour of Romanies. It is again, the same ideology of acceptable/unacceptable behaviour (Drew, 1998; Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003) embedded in powerful, very graphic a complaint that is drawn upon to construct a sense of Romanies as out-of-place, positioning them beyond reasonable bounds.

Like Sandra before her, Carla can be seen as orienting to the issue of intentional and deliberate conduct in order to make manifest a transgression of an ordered space by the Romanies. Normative standards of conduct, common-sense morality of appropriateness/(in)appropriateness of conduct, warrant her final sense of moral indignation.

The idea of a particular space (flats) which is being used for other purposes than those commonsensically attached to it, not only invokes normative standards of behaviour, but carries implications for the moral profile of the kind of people that

would do such a thing. There is a sort of moral ascription, a sort of implied reference to the moral character of Romanies. The final sense of indignation (lines 92-94), the direct reference to ‘ruin’ and the lack of ‘respect’ for ‘what they receive’ (again the reference to ‘our’ good intentions) add the last touch to the moral portrait and character of the Romanies.

One does not need to assign extreme stereotypical attributes to the Romanies in order to achieve their depersonalization and delegitimization, relegation to a moral standing incompatible with a ‘civilized’, ‘ordered’ moral order. One can simply make reference to their extremely aloof behaviour, to their out-of-placeness and morally reprehensible character. This might be a safer option to avoid the potential accusations of prejudice, as these ‘stories’ are to be heard as legitimate complaints addressed to a rational ‘universal audience’ to which the idea that Romany behaviour (and character) is inappropriate and morally reprehensible is non-controversial (cf. Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003).

Following Edwards (1997, p. 98), one could argue that the kind of descriptions or narratives that both Sandra and Carla have used are “actions” precisely in that they construct one sense of events rather than another, and “provide for” upshots, conclusions’. It is not only the sense of *events* which is being constructed, but also constructing the *actors* involved as a certain *type of people*. In this case, Romanies are portrayed as *transgressive*, as not obeying to minimal rules of conduct, lacking respect for property and for spatial and moral order.

This idea has wider implications that do not necessarily relate to the particular Romanian moral order, but to a more general contemporary society moral order. A more general point is made about the Romanies, which stresses the incongruity of their moral character with the contemporary moral order (cf. Tileagă, 2005a).

As extract 4 shows, it also has implications for depersonalizing, delegitimizing, and ultimately dehumanizing Romanies, as such accounts draw upon displays of a particular socio-moral order of ‘character’, ‘being in the world’ and concerns with being in/out of place.

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

Extract 4

[...]
413 Alina I don’t see the gypsies integrating themselves among us, they don’t
414 like the civilized style (.) by the way, they don’t want to go to
415 school, they don’t want at all to progress (.) I cannot have an
416 opinion about them (.) ha ha (.) but a bad one (.)
417 Chris Whose blame is it, do you think?
418 Alina Theirs, first of all, because I don’t think (.) effectively, they
419 were dragged to school (.) they’ve been (.) they’ve been asked to
420 integrate and they cannot (.) There is at the end of Oradea, I don’t
421 know where, a block especially built for them and (.) they have
422 eaten it from the ground like rats (.) isn’t that so?
[...]
[...]
413 Alina Nu-i văd pe țigani integrându-se între noi, nu le
414 place stilul civilizat (.) de altfel, nu vor să meargă la
415 școală, nu vor să evolueze deloc (.) Nu pot să am o
416 părere despre ei (.) ha ha (.) decât proastă
417 Chris A cui credeți că este vina?
418 Alina A lor, în primul rând, pentru că nu cred (.) efectiv, au
419 fost duși cu forța la școală (.) au fost (.) li s-a cerut să se
420 integreze și nu pot (.) Există în capătul Oradiei, în nu știu ce
421 cartier, bloc construit expres pentru ei și (.) și l-au
422 mâncat din temelii precum șobolanii (.) nu?
[...]

In extract 4, Alina starts by admitting that she does not see ‘the gypsies integrating themselves among us’ (line 413) and what follows are justifications to support this idea: ‘they don’t like the civilized style’, ‘they don’t want to go to school’, ‘they don’t want at all to progress’ (lines 413-415).

The essence of these descriptions is made relevant several lines later. The story that Alina offers in lines 420-422 brings this issue to the forefront. This is not to be seen as a simple story of transgression, but its implications stretch beyond ‘rational’ thought, into the realm of the irrational, the repressed, the unsaid. Note the

reference to ‘rats’ which dehumanizes Romanies and places them into the natural, presents them as vermin and achieves a relegation of Romanies to the status of the abject and denies their ‘human’ qualities. Through this specific representation, one can see that Romanies are again being associated with ‘dirt’ and the register of impurity and cleanliness is brought to the front. Rats are filthy animals which need to be eliminated for cleanliness and purity. As dirt has to be removed from ‘our’ houses, likewise, people categorized as ‘dirt’ are to be removed from ‘civilized’ society. This extreme description has eliminationist connotations. As rats are carriers of terrible diseases, in the same ways Romanies are carriers of an ultimate threat which must be eliminated⁵.

This is taken further by Alina when talking on the same subject several lines later.

Extract 5

		[...]
428	Alina	What can society do for them? (.) To make them a communal bath,
429		they destroy it (.) it builds them a block (.) it is destroyed (.)
430		No, you cannot take it with them, it is something like (.) like (.)
431		the scum (.) the scum of society, how should I put it (mm)
		[...]
428	Alina	Ce poate să facă societatea cu ei? (.) să le facă o baie comună,
429		ți-o distruge (.) le face un bloc (.) îl distruge (.)
430		nu , nu se poate cu ei, e ceva de (.) de (.)
431		pleava (.) pleava societății, cum să zic (mm)

The opening rhetorical questions sets the Romany ‘problem’ as an issue without a ‘solution’. It is implied that there is nothing that the (our) society can do for them: ‘To make them a communal bath, they destroy it (.) it builds them a block (.) it is destroyed (.)’ (lines 428-429). Note the objectivity and factuality of her

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⁵ In their analysis of anti-semitism, Adorno et al. (1950) make reference to the power and ideological consequences of eliminationist imagery. For example, there is mention of ‘the metaphor of the rotten apple in the barrel conjures up the imagery of "evil germs" which is associated with appalling regularity with the dream of an effective germicide’ (p. 653)

descriptions. The implication is that the Romanies are *the* ‘problem’, a problem, that is, to the rest of society. One can see how thin is the line from this position to the implicit notion that this problem has to be dealt with according to its own special requirements that pertains to the problematic nature of the Romanies leading naturally to a ‘solution’ outside the bounds of democratic and moral procedure. Being cast as the ‘problem’ that calls for a solution, the Romanies are not regarded anymore as moral subjects, they are denied ‘moral command’ (Bauman, 1990) and an autonomous moral standing in the world. In lines 430-431, Alina is in a search of a formulation that could capture the previous (and the general feeling about Romanies), formulation which eventually comes in line 431: ‘the scum of society’.

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

There is a call for an implicit solution. Evidence has also been presented that rational solutions to the ‘problem’ have not worked. The implicit message is that there is no rational solution to deal with ‘them’. One could argue, that in such circumstances of depersonalizing and dehumanizing talk, immoral and social forbidden desires lurk under the surface of this ideology of ‘moral exclusion’. The immoral, eliminationist conclusion is implicitly contained in the premises. Going on

the steps of Freud, Billig cogently argues that ‘immorality always lurks on the edge of overdemanding morality’ (1997, p. 148). What is not said, what is absent from the interaction cannot be nevertheless absent from the analysis. The repression of immorality, what is not said (but could easily have been) becomes of central importance.

Discussion

In the social psychological literature, it has been often assumed that particular instances of extreme prejudice and moral exclusion are manifestations of prejudice and out-group hate or just another extension of universal socio-cognitive identity mechanisms and psychological processes. The historical and ideological particularity of discursive traditions, the locatedness and place-boundedness of these phenomena have not been studied in their own right. Notions such as depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization have been typically accounted for independently of the actual practices people are involved in. The focus has been more on their intrinsic psychological, ‘process’-type and functional aspects. As such, social psychologists’ empirical practices and results seem to derive ‘more from the nature of the analysts’ gaze than from what is gazed upon’ (Reicher, 2004, p. 924).

This paper has illustrated how a critical discursive approach which attempts to bridge detailed interactional analyses with critical concerns can inform social psychologists’ understanding of the ways in which depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization are played up in talk, how they are produced and reproduced in the discursive management of category memberships, extreme ‘difference’ and moral standings in the world. Depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization are complex discursive accomplishments dependent on a range of constructive processes.

Most social psychological theories have offered a generalized view on the targets of prejudice. There is no sense in which one group might be described more negatively (and descriptions leading to different ideological effects) than the other. The indiscriminate use of stereotypes and biased judgment apply to all target-groups, which are placed on the same footing. The issue of precisely *how* some particular groups of people become (or are made) the target of prejudice (extreme prejudice) has been under-explored.

In order to consider that, one needs to take into account the discursive basis of ideology and the importance of the social and ideological climate; how emergent constructions of depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization are embedded in descriptions of located spatial activities and moral standings in the world and the power to exclude that comes from invoking and building a socio-moral order linked to notions of sub-humanity (non-humanity), (spatial) transgression, out-placeness, abjection. As such, a focus on *description* rather than *explanation* might be more effective in understanding the dynamics of ideologies of moral exclusion.

The significance of treating notions such as depersonalization, delegitimization and dehumanization as social practices should include an awareness of a dynamic process that does not presupposes the unproblematic distinction (attribution) of natural/cultural characteristics or primary/secondary emotions, but includes elements of the social and moral order. As this paper has suggested, it includes references to transgression of physical and moral boundaries, references to normal/abnormal behaviour, extreme negative depiction, orientations to moral standings in the world. The accounts analysed in this paper are not intrinsically depersonalizing, delegitimizing or dehumanizing. For example, in some circumstances, Romanies were not directly denied humanity, but they were

nevertheless presented as the ‘wrong sort’ of human beings (Rorty, 1989) and in the ‘wrong place’. Romanies were not being portrayed as rational actors, on the same moral footing and sharing the same moral space with the majority group. Romanies are not seen as being part of the same moral ‘community’ as the other groups (Romanians, Hungarians and other ethnic minority groups), as they are cast as abject, as matter ‘out-of-place’ (see Tileaga, 2005c, on how the same participants talk in a very different way about the Hungarian minority). This kind of discourse of extreme prejudice and difference is marked by an absence: Romanies have no homeland like other nations. As such, extreme prejudice contains or implies the ‘differentiating power’ of the absence of a national space.

When one is considering delegitimization, depersonalization and dehumanization as discursive practices, one might also want to take into account that the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee might create its own unsaid matters. As Billig put it, ‘if conscious thought is shaped by rhetoric, then so might the dynamics of dialogue provide the resources for repression’ (1998, p. 206). The way is opened to a process of ‘social repression’ (Billig, 1999) in relation to a specific *category of people*, that ‘we’ (not necessarily Romanians), the settled, the civilized etc. categorize as being matter out-of-place, as abject, as horrible and deplorable, try to place beyond reasonable bounds and moral ‘being’ in the world.

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Transcription notations

(.)	Micro-pause
(2.0)	Pause length in seconds
[overlap]	Overlapping speech
°	Encloses speech that is quieter than the surrounding talk
<u>yes</u>	Underlining indicates stress or emphasis in the speech
>faster<	Encloses speeded up talk
(clears throat)	Comments from the transcriber
Ha ha	Laughter