



INEQUALITY, PRIVATION, SOCIAL VULNERABILITY: HATE SPEECH TOWARD BULGARIAN ROMA IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The object of research of this study is hate discourse within the context of the analytic interpretative network of inequality – privation – social vulnerability. Hate discourse is problematized sociologically through ethnomethodology as an unconventional approach in the study of social interactions. The research focus is on utterances marked by hate speech against Bulgarian Roma in the situation of COVID-19. The perspective this approach provides as to tracing the micro-techniques of organizing utterances gives us the possibility – now in the context of a sociology interested in the everyday ways of generating social inequality – to state the thesis that the pandemic ‘awakens’ repressed affectations related to socially inherited stereotypes and prejudices. In everyday relations, there is not only the invasion of the fear of the ethnically other, of her ‘unhygienic’ body that breaks the regulations, a body that the ‘healthy’ and ‘uncontaminated’ body passes by, but the object itself of fear is over-determined: it acts by constructing the other as a danger menacing life itself. Hence, the important questions: 1) how hate speech, having ‘contaminated’ everyday and institutional discourses, entails social actions of exclusion and stigmatization; 2) how a practical logic founded on conceiving the Roma solely through the prism of their privation of what is naturally proper to ‘us’ stands in the basis of their unequal treatment, putting them into a permanent situation of social vulnerability; most generally: how hate discourse ‘does things with words’.

Key words: Roma, hate discourse, inequality, social vulnerability, privation, ethnomethodology, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

This study sets itself the task to analyse the way in which the ‘invisible’ racism toward the otherness and difference (mostly of the Roma) in Bulgaria affects and ‘infects’ interhuman relations during the COVID-19 pandemic. In using discursive segments published in different popular media (TV news, newspapers, journals, social media) and in the official discourse (statements by state officials, institutional positions, legal provisions), the study problematizes the way in which this invisible racism¹, repressed and seemingly ‘forgotten’, in the psychoanalytic sense, in everyday relationships in the conditions of a

‘normal’ living-together, returns in the pandemic everyday life. It symptomatically unfolds in the logic of *‘I am not a racist but I hate all Gypsies because A, B, C’* (they are *‘unhygienic’*, *‘uneducated’*, *‘infection carriers’*, *‘dirty’*, *‘walking around in crowds’*, etc.), and this logic formats, limits and imbues with an extreme form of hate speech the relation to otherness and difference. Thus, the representatives of the Roma ethnos are recognized ‘in one glance’ through the category of ‘enemies-potential infection carriers’ and, as such, as essentially negatively opposed to the bearers of the essentially affirmative identity of ‘saviour heroes’ – doctors, checkpoint policemen, volunteers, and people doing charity in Roma neighbourhoods (often being themselves representatives of this same ethnos). The study will try to interpret the ‘return’ of this invisible racism in an open and

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explicit form in the conditions of a pandemic, hence - to problematize the ways in which the ideologically charged discursive segments block the symbolic efficiency of official discourse (1) and the interhuman relations themselves in the situation of global imprevisibility and total social vulnerability that generates new forms of inequality and social suffering.

Such a linking of the problem of attitude to the ethnically other with the effects of the global pandemic is not arbitrary, it draws its justification from a few starting premises.

The starting point is understanding that the pandemic is a litmus that uncovers in all their acuity those prepredicative evidences of the ethnically different others that are normally repressed/passed over in silence. In the conditions of an escalating fear of what seems an increasingly more imminent meeting with 'the invisible enemy', these prepredicative evidences disrupt the seemingly calm surface of the ethnic togetherness of the Bulgarian social reality. The complex crisisification of 'life-as-usual' literally blows up the certainty of experiencing the world, turning it into a 'different' world that is 'not ours', completely different, therefore, unpredictable. As such, it is increasingly less easy to perceive as a common 'world-for-all'. The imperative of 'Social distancing!' disrupts the ontological fabric of social history that is incorporated in things and places and individual history incorporated in bodies, disturbing the fragile balance of the 'living together'. This leads to a sharp increase in hateful and discriminatory discourses (2-4).

Hence, the next premiss – the extra-ordinary 'state of emergency'³ that was introduced on 12th March 2020 in Bulgaria has infected the everyday attitude toward the ethnically different Others, loading it with fear, hence - with hatred (5), constructing social oppositions and structuring positions of social exclusion, stigmatization and marginalization (6, 7) – most generally speaking, generating relations of inequality in and through discourse.

This is the context of meaning of the main thesis of this study: the COVID-19 pandemic in Bulgaria 'awakens' frozen and repressed affectations connected to culturally and socially inherited stereotypes and prejudice of ethnically different otherness, leading to the

strengthening of the fear of and the hatred for them. Hence, making explicit the discursive forms of 'negation as privation'¹ in which Bulgarian Roma are conceived ('undisciplined', 'un-safe', 'not washing their hands', 'not observing hygienic norms', 'not like us') open a chasm of negativity and reveal the cracks (breaks, disruptions) in the symbolic efficiency of the official and everyday discourses through which the living-together is 'normalized'. In this study, the way to problematizing them passes through the unfolding of a specific analytic of hating which thematizes it as a social and categorial phenomenon.

Preliminarily, it can be said that hate speech pours into the media, floods social networks, seeps into political discourses, and is a symptom of social intolerance and/or discrimination. The virus – that invisible, other, foreign agent coming from outside, unknown and still-not-understood – 'becomes alive' (not only in a bodily manner, contaminating the bodies), but by its articulation to the figures in which the ethnically others are perceived as well. Constituting them as a 'common threat', it works toward constructing an imagined subject that gives himself the group charisma of the privileged 'us-ideal' (the majority, those still in good health), constructing and constituting itself as a real victim of those who threaten their life with their very presence (and their contaminated body). Moreover, being a part of the privileged majority, this subject charges the ethnically others with the group stigma of an essentially negative 'them-image', hence - grants themselves the 'right' to hate them, habitualizing (9) both their social privilege and their social exclusion and segregation. The practical logic of such an encounter of an individual and collective bodies and discourses can be described in this way: 'together we hate, and hatred is what binds us together'.

Such a displacement usually connects fear to hatred – an important point on which the study is going to dwell a few times. It is important to note here that the autonomization of fear is an important indicator of identity. The idea that 'I am under threat' (it is not by chances that the phrases 'invisible threat', 'invisible enemy' are stably present in the COVID-19 related official and everyday discourses) – and a threat that has

¹ Heidegger's conception of negation as not a mere denial or exclusion, but as a retaining of what is missing

(8), is an important methodological instrument in this study which will receive special attention.

its own independent existence, being wholly unpredictable, unthinkable and unexplainable – is a condition of possibility of the emergence of the generalized idea of ‘being at risk’. One talks of risk groups, risky behaviours, risky policies, risky intentions, etc. – and once cannot miss talking of a ‘risky other’. Thus, in everyday human relations, there is not just the invasion of the fear of the ethnically different others, of their ‘unhygienic’ body that breaks the regulations, a body that the ‘healthy’ and ‘uncontaminated’ body meets in the shop and passes by in the street, but also the object itself of fear comes out to be over-determined: fear acts by constructing the Roma as a danger menacing not just the single individual but life itself.

This preliminary context of meaning brings us to the important questions to which the study will try to find answers, namely:

1) **how does one ‘do’ hate?** How do socially shared stereotypes and prejudice, imposed as a negative distinction onto the ethnically different others, precondition ‘our’ talk about ‘them’? How does hate speech, penetrating into everyday and institutional discourses, entails social actions of exclusion and stigmatization of certain social groups and communities? In other words, how does hate discourse ‘do things with words’²;

2) **what are the conditions for the possibility of ‘doing’ hate?** How does a practical logic grounded on the restricting perception of the different Other solely through the prism of his privation of what is by nature proper to ‘us’ stand in the basis of their unequal treatment which, on its part, puts them into a permanent position of social vulnerability? Can one talk of circular amplification, or mutual conditioning, between privation, inequality and vulnerability in the attitude toward the Roma in the first half of 2020 in Bulgaria?

For the purpose, the study will first dwell on the basic postulates of an author-developed non-classical perspective on inequality, a perspective in which inequality is viewed as a social and categorical phenomenon (11-13) and is put into the context of privation and social vulnerability (14). Then, it will show how hate discourses are a mechanism of (re)production of unequally distributed relations of power and domination with regard to the Bulgarian Roma, disproportionately increasing their social

vulnerability, marginalization and stigmatization in the conditions of COVID-19. Finally, by bringing up specific data from the discursive segments collected in the course of research, it will trace the way in which the Bulgarian Roma are presented in the situation of a global pandemic. These main problem points will guide the more general research intention to interpret the specific ontological ambivalence of the life situation of the Bulgarian Roma – both risky and vulnerable, as well as to demonstrate the heuristic value of the research approaches applied to its problematization.

METHODS

• A different research perspective: inequality as a social and categorical (member) phenomenon

Conventional sociology views inequality mostly in an objectivist perspective, being interested in (un)equally distributed resources, goods, access to social orders and hierarchies, ranks of social positions and differentiations.

In this study, the research optics is reversed. The goal is for inequality to be seen from another perspective, namely as a *member achievement that ‘happens’ in everyday interactions*. Such an understanding draws its grounds from the ethnomethodological perspective (15), that substitutes the term of ‘members’ for all known sociological conceptual interpretations of socialized individuals as ‘persons’, ‘roles’, ‘agents’, ‘actors’, and uses the designation of ‘member methods’ when asking itself ‘how social order is possible’: ‘[we] do not use the term [‘member’] to refer to a person. It refers instead to mastery of natural language’ (16).

This methodological move is in the basis of what has been proposed as *discursive sociology of inequality* (17) which allows a microscopic analysis of the experience of the social vulnerability, inequality and privation of the stigmatised and marginalised ethnically different persons in the context of ‘how they are’: 1) situated, constructed, constituted, involved into discourse; 2) ‘oriented towards’ and being ‘a part of’ everyday practical actions and/or ideological discursive practices related to them. Discursive sociology of inequality also studies the ‘doing of difference’ (18) in-the-course-of-interaction. Analyses show that the

² This is an explicit reference to John Austin’s title *How To Do Things With Words* (10)

seen but unnoticed ethno-methods used by the members produce the effect of inequality in its quality of, as Garfinkel (19) would say, ‘incessant practical achievement’ in the local situations of discursive interaction in which it becomes an ‘observable-and-reportable’ discursive event. Moreover, the analysis of situated behaviour produces the best exposition of ‘how these “objective” properties of social life achieve their ongoing status as such and, hence, how the most fundamental divisions of our society are legitimated and maintained’ (20).

Thus, not only the way is problematized in which individual ‘description’ of inequality are constructed but also the way how the *practices of inequality* become a *discursive ‘theme’* in the course of everyday interactions. It can be expected that bringing in such a micro-perspective toward inequality will add a missing element into the traditional research approaches to it. The *discursive sociology of inequality* studies it as the everyday work of agents and as methods that are established in the work of its production and maintaining.

In the first place it means that situations of inequality are studied as ‘*living local practices*’. As far as they are subject to their own reflexivity and rationality, they are unfolded as an event in discourse and discursive practices. In other words, inequality is not pre-given, once and forever established and passively recognized by the members, it is constructed and constituted in the way they talk, describe, negotiate, legitimate or deny by the natural language the ethnic others, the virus, the common threat, the urgency of necessary measures of protection and counteraction, etc. Thus, the situations of inequality are always locally organized situations of ‘this-here-now’ but thought of as not a regularity but as an ‘each time concrete facticity’ (21).

Therefore, this perspective views inequality, social vulnerability and privation as *active performative social phenomena that ‘do things’*. Along with that, however, it takes into account that the social interactions that can be ‘seen’ as ‘members’ of the category of ‘doing inequality’ are not only local but also historical: the domination, the symbolic violence of which these social interactions are imbued, are interiorized under the form of habitualized possibilities of (un)equal treatment (22) and as such, act as a practical sense of inequality, directing ‘our’ primary attunement toward

‘them’. But they are also **ideologically charged**, being produced by a practical relation of *belief*: the undisputed, pre-reflexive, naïve and inborn consent with the fundamental prescriptions of social reality, i.e. the doxa as a ‘*primordial faith*’ that is not a conscious state of the mind but a state of the body (23). It is rooted in the immediate complicity between incorporated structures turned partial schemes of recognition and acknowledgment of existing relations of (social) inequality and objective structures of (un)equal social divisions. It is this doxic relation to the structures of inequality, which is pre-reflexive, is the real ‘mystery’ of symbolic power of which Bourdieu speaks (24). Practical belief consists of quasi-bodily dispositions, classification schemes which, functioning in a practical state, are incorporated and therefore implicit. Their meaning and essence are long forgotten, and are not sought for, since they are generally shared beliefs of ‘things in the world such-as-they-are’ which are always mediated *by* and shaped *into* certain discourses and discursive practices.

This outline – necessarily laconic – of the basic tenets of the so-called discursive sociology of inequality aims not so much at describing in detail its theoretical premises but, rather, to emphasize the main points from which further analysis must start in order to fully interpret ‘hating’ as a social and analytic problem. In the next section, the research focus will fall on the phenomena of privation and social vulnerability of Bulgarian Roma and on their manifestation in and through specific discursive practices.

- **Hate discourse in the context of the triple relation of *inequality* – *privation* – *social vulnerability***

The above sketched unconventional conception of inequality is especially applicable to the study of hate discourse and the strategies by which essentially negative categorizations of Roma otherness are realized. ‘*Mangals*’ (a slur), ‘*dirty Gypsies*’, ‘*thieves*’, ‘*criminals*’, are among the most frequent ‘names’ that hate speech uses to refer to the Roma in the Bulgarian public space. These slurs are essential rather than factual identifications, and in a certain way they ‘do things’ in social reality – they socially exclude, marginalize, repress, insult, curse. Moreover, by them ‘we’ (the non-Roma, the majority) provide ourselves with a group charisma that gives us the right to ‘hate’ ‘them’ (the Roma, the minority) who we have in turn loaded with the heavy and unbearable stigma of social exclusion, marginalization and

repression; it is through the ideological polarization of 'us'- 'them' that the social conflict becomes publicly overstated and hate speech is getting 'hotter'. This essential polarization is discursively maintained and reproduced by discrimination, humiliation, demonising and subsequent social exclusion of the essentially negatively identified 'otherness' by the legitimate and normatively privileged community of 'us' – the 'normal' and 'civilized' ones. This is not to mean that this polarization happens by necessity but only that if and when it happens, it happens in this way.

Hence, the question that will guide us: in which way do hate discourses (institutional, political, scientific, everyday, etc.) generate relations of inequality and are a mechanism of (re)production of unequally distributed relations of power and domination with regard to the Bulgarian Roma, strengthening disproportionately in the conditions of COVID-19 their social vulnerability, marginalization and stigmatization?

The answer to this question passes through the attempt to think hate discourses as active performative social phenomena that 'happen' anew for 'each next first time', according to the famous formulation of Garfinkel. Being such, their forms – as was already said – are not established once and forever, able to be described according to formally measurable criteria (ranks, scales, statuses). They are, rather, phenomena that, as Austin (25) would say, 'do things'. They bring about social actions as far as they are constructed on the basis of socially shared prejudices and stereotypes.

A few discursive segments can be quoted in order to demonstrate how such talk constructs social differences and sets limits that are difficult to overcome. Excerpts 1 and 2 were taken from official statements of institutional persons while 3 and 4 are discursive segments representing the viewpoint of everyday people:

1) *'Gypsies rebel today because they don't have the habit of observing the laws. They rebel because they have the habit of using the state as a milking cow for poverty aid and child*

³ A statement in the Facebook profile of Aleksander Sidi, an MP of the party VMRO that was a part of the ruling coalition in Bulgaria in 2017-2020: <https://dariknews.bg/novini/bylgariia/sidi-romite-se-buntuvat-zashtoto-ne-sa-sviknali-da-spazvat-zakonite-2222308>

⁴ A statement of the Mayor of Nova Zagora before a journalist of BTV, one of the leading Bulgarian televisions, in a show of 17.03.2020 on the installation of

*allowances but not as a high authority that would expect any kind of response action from them*³;

2) *'Maybe a large part of those of our compatriots who live in the Sixth neighbourhood are like... less educated people, and they don't watch Bulgarian national televisions, don't read newspapers, and are not up to date with the serious consequences of spreading the coronavirus.'*⁴;

3) *'It is worrying, but they are such a kind of population who won't hear a word of whatever you have to tell them, and they... don't observe any... how to say it... they neither move around with masks, nor observe any hygiene, I suppose [stressing this word], and hardly will, even if imposed a quarantine or any other restrictions... [shaking head negatively]. They are so densely populated that...'*⁵;

4) *'If they don't restrict them, it will be even worse... In the past that you young people don't remember, there [in the ghetto] used to be a disinfection machine for lice. It was installed there and they would all get disinfected. Hygiene – this is all of it. Nostradamus once found a cure for the plague in deciding that people should wash their hands and from time to time their bodies' (cf. ibid).*

These remarks demonstrate that the manner in which the Roma are socially represented in official discourses (examples 1 and 2) inevitably influences the way in which their otherness and difference is represented at the everyday level (examples 3 and 4). Such practical descriptions do not make directly explicit the underlying meaning but, rather, 'talk' of them as of member intentions (26), moods (but also attunements), emotions, perspectives on the event of inequality, that are deployed in hate discourse under the form of **positive reference to 'oneself' and a negative reference to 'otherness'**.

Thus, the everyday modes in which the vulnerability of the ethnically others appears in discourse and creates effects of unequal and marginalized attitude are conventionally reflected in specific institutional and everyday categories – such as 'uneducated', 'illiterate',

a checkpoint in the Sixth neighbourhood of the town: <https://gospodari.com/в-нова-загора-въвеждат-вечерен-час-и-кп/>

⁵ An excerpt from a report entitled 'Do We Observe the Measures in Yambol? Citizens say discipline is a personal choice', shown on the Diana Cable TV in Yambol on 08.05.2020, <http://yambolnews.net/obshtina-yambol/item/37749-tv-novini>

‘unsocialised’, ‘undisciplined’, ‘unhygienic’, ‘uninformed’, ‘not speaking (Bulgarian)’, ‘not reading (our newspapers)’, ‘not watching (Bulgarian TV)’, ‘not observing (regulations and laws)’, ‘ungrateful’, ‘uncultured’, ‘uneducated’, ‘uncivilised’, but also ‘homeless’, ‘jobless’, ‘irresponsible’ etc. What’s in common to all examples is that they retain a **human essence that is missing here and now**, i.e. a privation of certain characteristics that ‘we’ ascribe to ourselves and of which – according to us – ‘they’ are deprived. Let’s see what the theoretical dimensions of this missing essence are.

Privation and possession as states of essence are thematised as early as in Aristotle⁶. From this perspective, privation – ‘not-p’ (‘un-educated’, ‘un-informed’, ‘un-hygienic’, ‘un-civilised’, etc.) is for him an ontological problem, retaining both 1) the necessary and proper by essence, and 2) its concrete absence here and now. Heidegger comments on this problem in the context of Dasein’s self-understanding, noting: ‘[i]f we negate something in the sense that we do not simply deny it, but rather affirm it in the sense that something is lacking, such negation is called a *privation*. [...] Each privation implies the essential belonging to something that is lacking something, which is in need something’ (28).

In reference to ‘discovering-the-other’ in the sense of privation, Heidegger’s interpretation reveals the practical logical mechanism of its identifying through the above-stated categories. They are neither affirmative nor properly negative. Like Freud’s *Verneinung*, they carry a certain real, even a certain truth about the real’ and constitute ‘a singular object’, ‘a paradoxical entity of “with-without”⁷, i.e. a third essence, that of privation: ‘existence as such is marked by a fundamental lack (or privation): If something exists (in objective

reality) it cannot live up to its notion.’ (29). ‘At the moment it is spoken there remains a trace of that which is not’ (ibid). This trace, opening the chasm of negativity, disrupts the intersubjective fabric of interaction, being ‘materialised’ in a stigma – due to that, categories are hurting and privatising the individuals to whom they refer. In cases when the perception of Roma otherness takes place through negation as privation, this leads to its being recognised, identified, grasped in a single glance, but a glance retaining privation alone – ‘less educated people’ who ‘don’t watch Bulgarian national televisions’, ‘are not up to date with the serious consequences of spreading the coronavirus’.

The everyday ideological aura of the doxic perception of the Other through their privation of what is proper to ‘us’ traces everyday life by defining and ranking the values, orienting perspectives and direct perceptions, fixing our own and the others’ identities, setting the ‘correct’ ways of acting – and not only for ‘us’ but also in relation to ‘them’.

The overall effect is the emergence of different modes of socially generated vulnerability and suffering, as far as the unequal treatment of differences and otherness stands on the relations of ‘us’-‘them’ / ‘me’-‘him’ / ‘the ours’ – ‘the other’s’⁸. Here, as a priority, the first parts of the pairs are loaded with positive and the second ones - with negative connotations. Thus, the different is conceived not merely as other – conceiving is a matter of value – it connects the relata by comparison and divides them by evaluation. The different appears as so foreign that is represented and ‘naturally’ perceived simultaneously as ‘foreign’, ‘unnatural’, ‘incorrect’, ‘immoral’, ‘bad’, ‘ugly’, ‘disgusting’, even ‘dangerous’, as it lacks what is for us ‘familiar’, ‘ours’, ‘natural’, ‘good’, ‘beautiful’. In this way, relations become opposition pairs and difference turns

⁶ In *Categories*, Aristotle says: „Privation and possession are spoken of in connexion with the same thing, for example sight and blindness in connexion with the eye. To generalize, each of them is spoken of in connexion with whatever the possession naturally occurs in. We say that anything capable of receiving a possession is deprived of it when it is entirely absent from that which naturally has it, at the time when it is natural for it to have it. [...]“ (27)

⁷ ‘A negation of something that is neither pure absence nor pure nothing nor simply the complementary of what it negates.’ (29).

⁸ Many places in this study use such oppositions, making a difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This analysis largely draws on what Sacks calls membership categorization devices (MCD) describing the ways in

which everyday language is organized of the agents of practice. Most of the impressive work of MCD is related to the description of membership categories that are relatively stable (e.g. mother/child, young/old, doctor/patient) and have a wide application in practice. In the tradition of MCD, it will be said that the two categories are ‘standardized couples of relata’ – using the one in the interaction invokes the other and ‘constitutes a place for a series of rights and obligations’ (30). Therefore ‘we’ and ‘they’, ‘us’ and ‘them’ are always a local effect of polarization that is realized in-the-course-of-interaction but, since it happens indexically, it is identified as an abstract configuration taking the form of deindexicalizing group relations and namings of the kind of ‘majority’, ‘minority’, ‘Roma’, ‘Bulgarians’, ‘refugees’ etc.

into a symbolically charged dissimilarity systematically blocking the intersubjective fabric of interaction, provoking negation, distancing, isolation, unequal treatment, and in many cases intolerant, even discriminatory, behaviour and hate discourses. When the everyday ideologies of ‘our’ group make me think of the Roma as unobservant of laws, regulations and elementary hygiene, then, implicitly reproducing this ideology, here and now I will identify them precisely as the ones.

Conceiving the Roma through **their privation of what is proper to ‘us’** stands in the basis of the legitimization of institutional action against ‘them’ – enclosing Roma neighbourhoods, setting up checkpoints, increasing police presence, all-over disinfection of streets in ghettos, spraying a Roma neighbourhood with disinfectants by using an agricultural aeroplane, monitoring the dwellers’ body temperature by drones, an informational crash campaign on COVID-19 prevention and protection carried out in ‘their mother’s tongue’ by mediators belonging to the same ethnoses, etc., all aiming at protecting the majority that has been already perceived as the victim of ‘their’ irresponsible attitude⁹. To the journalist’s question concerning the possible dissatisfaction of the dwellers of the Roma neighbourhoods about setting up checkpoints at its entrances, the mayor of a big Bulgarian town answered: *‘Naturally some of our fellow citizens will be dissatisfied, but since this is an emergency situation and everything is connected to the life and health of people, that should be the greatest priority. To me, moods don’t matter at all’*¹⁰. This stance is clearly demonstrated also by an MP who is even more radical: *‘I fully approve of the police actions and I don’t accept any talk of human rights and tolerance just for one single ethnoses’*¹¹.

The conviction that ‘they’ are not and will never become like ‘us’, or rather our implicit fixation on their inability-to-become-like-us that stems from their essence, in fact empirically reproduces the impossibility,

mentioned also by Aristotle, of the transition from privation to possession¹². And this is so because essence is perceived as pre-given. Thus, the identities ascribed in these categories are not negative but must be thought of as essentially negative. Thus, they put those to whom they are ascribed into a permanent situation of vulnerability. The essential identification through negation as privation is reflected in spoken words and performed actions, in demonstrated preferences, in evaluative references by agents. These are the practical acts of ‘doing’ inequality, because the ethnically others are perceived through categories. This is precisely how glances turn into actions, as one could see in Sacks (32). In this sense, looking through categories is not merely a looking but a seeing of the Other.

This ‘seeing’ of otherness and difference is simultaneously ‘ordinary’, i.e. usual, and ideologically mediated, i.e. evaluative. It is a ‘formal structure’ being reproduced ‘each next time like the first time’ when meeting the Other. It can be stated that the ‘how’ of looking at the Other stands in the basis of ‘doing’ inequality by glances, words and actions as an ‘observable’, i.e. ‘visible and communicable’, social phenomenon (33). The evaluative and restricting conceiving of the different Other solely through the prism of privation of what is by nature proper to ‘us’ stands in the basis of the unequal attitude to them, putting them into a permanent situation of social vulnerability.

The following sections will analyse how the COVID-19 global pandemic enhances and multiplies the effects of the network of *privation-inequality-vulnerability* through the symptomatic of hate speech on the Bulgarian Roma.

RESULTS

• The symptomatic of hate speech against the Bulgarian Roma in the situation of COVID-19

In this section, the hard conditions will be briefly described into which Bulgarian Roma

⁹ All described actions are a part of the practices of the official authorities, established by the introduction of the so-called extraordinary state on March 13, 2020, and maintained by the installation of police checkpoints in the Roma neighbourhoods

¹⁰ An excerpt from a statement of the Mayor of Nova Zagora before a journalist of BTV, one of the leading Bulgarian televisions, in a show of 17.03.2020 on the installation of a checkpoint in the Sixth neighbourhood of the town: <https://gospodari.com/в-нова-загора-въввжлат-вечерен-час-и-кп/>

¹¹ An excerpt from a statement in the Facebook profile of Aleksander Sidi, an MP of the party VMRO that was a part of the ruling coalition in Bulgaria in 2017-2020: <https://dariknews.bg/novini/bylgariia/sidi-romite-se-buntuvat-zashoto-ne-sa-svknali-da-spazvat-zakonite-2222308>

¹² Aristotle says: ‘With privation and possession, on the other hand, it is impossible for change into one another to occur. For change occurs from possession to privation but from privation to possession it is impossible’ (31).

were put at the outset of the pandemic. This is hardly to say anything new, such descriptions of the human situation of diverse marginalized and strongly stigmatized groups can be found abundantly (34-38). But to reach a maximal understanding of the ways in which the Covid-19 global pandemic enhances and multiplies the effects of the network of *privation-inequality-vulnerability* through the symptomatic of hate speech against Bulgarian Roma, it is necessary to introduce the social, economic and political context of this difficult period.

On 13th March 2020, a state of emergency was announced in Bulgaria with the aim of limiting the spread of Covid-19. The life in the closed space of the home for a long period of time, and the regular attack of the media informing of pandemic levels provoked anxiety and panic leading to the gradual increase of tension in actions and speech provoked by hatred. It was directed to the Roma as 'risky Others' since it was tacitly assumed that the first cases of infected people are Roma, that the first cases of disease-related deaths are Roma, that the areas with a predominant Roma population are the main spreader of Covid-19. Despite the absence of information or specific data on the spread of infection, an entry and exit control was established in many Roma neighbourhoods. The measures directed at the coercive restriction of movements in the places with a predominant Roma population were not grounded on any profound preliminary evaluation or justification. Their efficiency was not discussed and there was no preliminary information whatever of the ethnically different communities who had to suffer the effects of such grave restrictive measures (39). Thus in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Roma community came out again as the most vulnerable one. A researcher cannot fail of speaking of the ethnicisation of restrictive measures and of the utter stigmatisation of Roma, in direct contradiction with the principles of official discourses that proclaim solidarity and unity of the nation. Privation from all resources marginalises sustainably many Roma families, putting them on the edge of physical survival.

Here, instead of a detailed and pedantic discourse analysis of the media publications that have been studied, there will rather be attempts to trace trends and outline problem fields, starting from the preliminary assumption that permanent crises and the serially produced insecurity of 'life-as-usual' produce fear that molds out into explicit hate discursive practices and social actions directed against the Roma as essentially different (in the above described sense) others.

In many discursive segments, a clear answer can be found as to how, under the conditions of Covid-19, such discourses enhance the social vulnerability, marginalization, and stigmatisation of the ethnically different Roma. In them, hatred not merely articulates the separate figures ('*Uncle Mangal*', '*risky population*', '*a dead weight on the economy, society, and the state*', '*live on aid and only whine*', '*commit 92 % of all crime*'), but also wakes up old associations ('*incubator and carrier of infection*', '*Orcs*'¹³, '*filthy mob*', '*riffraff*'). It thus becomes possible for some bodies and discourses, by their presence, to generate mistrust and be 'seen' as a reason for 'our' hatred for 'them'. It is in this way that the (principally non-existing) link is created between the loss of control, filth and contamination, which works in the direction of mobilising fear and the increasing anxiety that one can-be-befouled, and most generally contaminated, by their actual or potential physical, spatial, bodily proximity.

It is in this way that hate discourse generate effects: they create im-press-ions of 'them' as those who inhabit 'our' space but who threaten its existence by their very presence ('*There will be a boom of contamination within a couple of weeks as from now*', '*neighbourhoods will burn with infection and the disease will flood us*', '*if this illiterate crowd becomes infected and scatters around, spreading the virus all over Bulgaria, we're done for*'¹⁴).

Empirical data also show in what way an imagined 'us' which must be protected from the infection constructs a categorial difference within 'them'. Covid-19 has put mayors into a paradoxical situation, as far as the need for protect public health has bestowed on them two

¹³ The name 'Orcs' is an unofficial slang used sometimes by the police who usually perform actions in places with a predominant Roma population. The idea of ugly, dirty, sticky, deformed bodies with which we connect this word hardly needs more comments.

¹⁴ A comment to the article 'Bulgarians and Roma – we can all become ill, or why mediators don't wait for the state, published on 19th March 2020 in the *Dnevnik* newspaper: https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2020/03/19/4043303_bulgari_i_romi_-_vsichki_moje_da_se_razboleem_ili/

seemingly coherent requirements: on the one hand, the imposed need for closing the Roma neighbourhoods as a preventive measure against the spread of the disease, and on the other hand, the obligation to guarantee the performance of communal activities in towns and small localities. The seeming coherence of these two requirements has exploded because of the fact that it was the Roma, who are predominantly engaged in communal activities, were supposed to stay in their closed neighbourhoods – *‘I will give you just a small example of the communal activities done by people who live in there: landscaping, cemeteries, street cleaning. We are speaking of hundreds of people whose absence from work will create problems to the town as a whole’*¹⁵. In this situation, it is practically impossible to perform a ‘correct’ action, since the two equally legitimate requirements delegitimise one another, and the contradiction comes up as a ‘paralysing paradox’ (40). The practical solution of the paradox is not the lift of the prohibition but the transformation of the *prohibition* into a *permission* to pass. This is how a categorial difference within ‘them’ is constituted, as far as the differentiation is constructed of ‘Roma-who-shouldn’t-pass’ / ‘Roma-who-can-pass’ through the checkpoints of the closes Roma neighbourhoods.

The internal fragmentation of ‘them’ is institutionally legitimated, being justified solely by the sanitary, hygienic, cleaning jobs of some of ‘them’ in relation to *public* health. Thus a part of ‘them’ are ‘human’ to ‘us’ (*‘communal activities done by people [author’s emphasis] who live in there: landscaping, cemeteries, street cleaning. We are speaking of hundreds of people whose absence from work will create problems to the town as a whole’*¹⁶) and, as such, are welcome¹⁷. But the remaining part of them (*‘incubator and carrier of infection’, ‘Orcs’, ‘a dead weight on the economy, society, and the state’, ‘live on aid and only whine’, ‘commit 92 % of all crime’, ‘illiterate crowd’*) are not.

By the discursive move described above, a collective ‘us’ imagines not only ‘itself’ but also its restricting and enclosing practices as non-discriminatory – it permits ‘humans’ to pass the barriers and come out of the neighbourhood, in keeping in all the rest¹⁸. It is another question whether this is indeed an absence of discrimination or whether it affirms the social isolation, marginalisation and stigmatisation of the Roma – it must be stressed that working Roma occupy the lowest and most marginal social positions which presumably are extremely unprivileged and undesired by the representatives of the majority. Moreover, they deal entirely and solely with human waste – as sanitary workers in hospitals, street cleaners, waste collectors, grave diggers (evidently in a situation of global pandemic the risk of infection in their case is much higher than in other professions); most often they themselves are reduced to not being anything more than a ‘human waste’. The pandemic, however, showed that ‘we’ humans need ‘people like them’ – such as they are perceived institutionally, publicly, every day – humans but ‘second rank’ ones, ‘not really human’. For they are conceived of – as was already shown – solely through their privation of what is a given for ‘us’ as human beings – hygiene, information, education, discipline etc., features that turn individuals into ‘real’ humans. Not possessing these qualities, conceived as properly ‘human’, opens the deep chasm that splits from within the category of ‘humans’, bringing the Roma under the generalising and marginalising notion of **‘actually, not humans’** (*‘illiterate crowd’, ‘that kind of population’, ‘riffraff’, etc.*). It is this ‘humans’, **cleft from within**, is the prepredicative evidence through which we think both ‘us’ and ‘them’. It functions as a figure of hatred that involves again the discourse of insecurity and crisis and, by that itself, reinforces the symbolic efficiency of such an ideological construction.

How does one make the difference between ‘humans’ and ‘not humans’?

¹⁵ From the statement of the Mayor of the Sliven Municipality at a session of the Municipal Council, Protocol № 7 of Session №7 of the Municipal Council, Sliven, held on 23rd April 2020, p. 63 (as quoted in Grekova et al, 2020: 36).

¹⁶ From the statement of the Mayor of the Sliven Municipality at a session of the Municipal Council, Protocol № 7 of Session №7 of the Municipal Council, Sliven, held on 23rd April 2020, p. 63 (as quoted in Grekova et al, 2020: 36).

¹⁷ As far as they are like ‘us’, they are working, but in ‘our’ neighbourhoods, parks, cemeteries, therefore working for ‘us’.

¹⁸ The analogy seems very interesting between this specific regime of passing and another regime in which the body *with* and the body *without* the virus is treated – **how to let pass the living body without letting along with it the virus that must be stopped, is indeed a genuinely ontological problem.**

By the logic of hate discourse, it is possible that 'we' may not always be able to express explicitly the difference between 'us' and 'them', and hence the real danger exists of 'them' to enter in 'us' without obstacle. In the specific cases of checkpoints, the way into 'our' space and the fear of possible contamination (literally and metaphorically, of course) functions as a technology that conjoins laterally **movement in space** with **ascribing identities**. Thinking those ethnically other ('*incubator and carrier of infection*', '*Orcs*', '*a dead weight on the economy, society, and the state*') as un-human (always and everywhere), after the apperception of those ('*hundreds of people who, if they are absent from work, we will have a problem as a whole, for which we have no plan B*') here-and-how as **analogous** to 'them', also sets the condition of 'hating' them. The modifier 'not human' in the case functions prepredicatively and can only be 'shown' under the form of a series of practical inferences – hating them is one of these inferences.

In this way the possibility for us not to be able to make and express the difference fast enough, finding out that only '*some*' of the Roma are 'not human' who must be isolated, enclosed, forcefully quarantined, is converted into the **defensive practical logical** move for '*all*' of them to be 'seen' and 'heard' in this way. As was established, this transference is done by way of practical induction (41) by which the category of 'inhuman' is enlarged by an (in)definite quantity of quanta ('*incubator and carrier of infection*', '*Orcs*', '*dead weight*', '*illiterate crowd*' etc.). When every Rom is thought as threatening the 'ours' (our space, life, safety, family etc.), inevitable a figure of hate speech appears, shaped into the discourse and essentially negatively representing the ethnically different Other. Hate discourse makes it so that always, at any time and everywhere, 'we' begin to deal with essential identities in our interactions with 'them'; i.e. 'we' every day quantify into a negative modality, producing ideological effects of accusation, denouncing, outrage, castigation, warning, prohibition etc. with regard to 'them'. But the opposite is also possible – when the category of 'Roma' is not split into two separate categories along the line of 'those-who-must-not-pass' / 'those-who-can-pass' but is merged

with another category. There is the example of a short article published on 11th July 2020 on the website of the *Konkurent* newspaper under the title 'A 47 years old wedding merrymaker died of corona virus after two weeks of pain'¹⁹. Here is the full text of the article:

A 47 years old man with corona virus died in the hospital of Blagoevgrad where he was moved from the Puls private hospital about two weeks ago. Despite the intense treatment, because of other present illnesses, the man couldn't overcome the virus and died today, writes Struma.com.

The patient of the Puls hospital was tested for Covid-19, and, giving a positive result, he was quickly moved to the infections department of the Blagoevgrad hospital. He said that he had been to a wedding in a famous local restaurant. This story immediately shot out the regional health inspectorate and the police to the Roma neighbourhood of the town but there were no positive tests for Covid-19.

The Gypsy neighbourhood of Blagoevgrad became dark with policemen because of the corona virus infected wedding merrymaker. The number of people infected in Blagoevgrad and the region is growing, Today, 19 newly infected were recorded. The infection department of the hospital is full above capacity.

It becomes clear from this discursive segment that the deceased victim of the corona virus has turned guilty as far as he-can-have-infected many other people. By that, the tragicity itself of his death is denied. There is no tragedy because the deceased Rom, being a virus carrier, is already conceived as someone who has committed an even greater crime: his death itself is a (negligible) result of the real threat he carries against 'our' lives, security, safety. Note the intensity of the narrative: '*shot out the regional health inspectorate and the police*', '*became dark with policemen*'. Such a reversivity of the relation between victim and guilt / crime becomes an implicit defence of the 'racialisation of guilt'²⁰ of which ethnically different otherness is charged everywhere. This is how the double figure appears of the **victim/guilty-criminal**, as far as the figure of the Rom is posited parallel to that of a breaker of the orders of the Bulgarian Government and the National Operative Headquarters. Hence

¹⁹ See <https://www.konkurent.bg/news/15944815194523/47-godishen-svatbar-umrya-ot-koronavirus-sled-2-sedmichni-maki>

²⁰ In this connection, see the article 'The virus and the hunger': <https://www.goethe.de/ins/bg/bg/m/kul/mag/21898936.html>

the implicit ‘therefore’ makes it possible for the ‘**Rom-victim**’ to be thought as the ‘**Rom-guilty/criminal**’ and the inference follows that in fact ‘**the victim is guilty / a criminal**’, and, at that, guilty of an absent crime (*‘there were no positive tests for Covid-19’*).

This figure lives ‘its own life’, containing a seemingly affective quality: the **victim** becomes a quarantine breaker (*‘he had been at a wedding in a famous local restaurant’*) and the Rom who lost his life becomes a **criminal**. Coupling the two categories works as a discourse of safety: the ‘sacred ours’, its body and its subject must be protected against the hidden threat carried by some people’s bodies. It is obvious that this discourse is not formulated explicitly, it rather works through the ‘movement’ between bodies, discourses, and figures of hatred that it generates. The circulation of images, of unconscious, imagined and imaginable, produces the essential polarisation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – ‘they’ are those who are constituted as the cause and reason to legitimate ‘our’ feeling of hatred for ‘them’. This is how the problem returns back of inequality and social vulnerability stemming from the essentially negative categorisations of Otherness.

CONCLUSION

This study has raised the problem of social vulnerability in the context of an ‘unconventional’ perspective to inequality, reformulating it in an ethnomethodological key. Interpreting as member activities organized and performed in discourse and discursive practices makes explicit the way in which one ‘does’ hate speaking through them in the situation of ‘extra-ordinary state’ caused by the Covid-19 global pandemic. The use of ideologically loaded member categories canalizes the hate speech, deploys a specific relational affectivity, increases social distances and enhances the tension between ‘Roma’ and ‘non-Roma’. This inevitably leads to a blockage of the ‘essential reflexivity’ of interhuman relations themselves in the situation of global imprevisibility and total social vulnerability. It can be summarised that the conventional use of such – marked by privation – categories as ‘member method’ generates a multitude of effects of the ‘splitting’ of the experience of ‘living together, bringing up singular forms of ‘being hurt’, shaping the outlines not only of the social but also of the bodily space, corporealising social vulnerability, distorting and deforming the

sense of ‘oneself’ and generating forms of social suffering.

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