**Envy, corruption and ‘hard racism’: Studying antigypsyism as an ideological fantasy**

**Introduction**

This paper aims to contribute to a debate on the conceptualization of antigypsyism in the study of Roma marginalization, segregation, and persecution (Agarin 2014; Cortés Goméz and End 2019; Kyuchukov 2012; McGarry 2017; Selling et al. 2015). In this context, antigypsyism is often seen as a racist ideology that legitimizes discriminatory and violent practices towards the people(s) stigmatized as ‘Gypsies.’ But whereas there is a number of studies concentrating on racism, almost no attention has been paid to the specification of what is meant by ‘ideology’, and how such a clarification could enhance the understanding of antigypsyism both as a concept and an empirical phenomenon.

Ideology is, of course, far from being a simple concept. In fact, over time the notion has received manifold and even contradictory meanings (Eagleton 1991). If ‘there are almost as many theories of ideology as there are theorists of it’ (Eagleton 1994: 14), this paper refers to the Lacanian theory of ideology as exemplified by Slavoj Žižek. This approach is part of the critical tradition that considers ideology as a matter of dominance. Starting with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, authors pertaining to the tradition conceptualize ideology as a ‘meaning in the service of power’ (Thompson 1990: 7), as a mechanism that obfuscates the real condition of human existence and social relations. What Žižek adds to the Marxian tradition is a resolute rejection of the tendency to approach ideology as a problem of ‘false consciousness’ that can be overcome by ‘true’ knowledge. Instead, Žižek asserts that ideology has more to do with how we make sense of the world, how our sense of ‘reality’ is constituted in the first place, drawing on the psychoanalytical apparatus of Jacques Lacan (cf. Ali and Whitham 2018).

The article attempts to redress the lack of engaging with the ‘ideology’ component in the definition of antigypyism by bringing Žižek’s conception of ideology into the debate. The conception is first examined *in abstracto* and then illustrated on the data acquired via research among the non-Roma inhabitants of a declining neighborhood with the significant presence of Roma people. All of this is guided by the question ‘What insights into the operation of antigypsyism can we get if it is understood as an ideological fantasy?’

As for the structure, the paper begins with a reflection on the thesis that antigypsyism is a racist ideology. Then, the Lacanian theory of ideology is explicated using texts by both Žižek and some of his interpreters. Žižek’s writings on ideology are so complex and nuanced that it is impossible to discuss all facets here. What is presented below is thus only a brief account of Žižek’s conception, based on Lacan’s theory of subjectivity and categories such as fantasy, desire or enjoyment, which together create a conceptual framework that is applicable in empirical analysis. The analysis is structured along three vignettes where each illustrates a certain aspect of antigypsyist phenomenon: envy, political corruption and ‘hard racism’. In closing, main findings are summarized and future research directions are outlined.

**Ideology in antigypsyism**

Recently, there has been a progress in conceptualizing antigypsyism, albeit the notion remains controversial. For some, ‘antigypsyism’ is a pertinent term because the phenomenon it reflects is different from other forms of racism and is not necessarily connected with Roma and their lived realities (Alliance against Antigypsyism 2016; Selling 2015; Nicolae 2007).