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The Shtick of Antigypsyism in Documentary Film and the Monomyth: How a Universal Storytelling Model Got Hijacked by Racism

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Abstract This paper tackles a number of questions that surround the topic of filmic antigypsyism and, while focusing on a recent German TV reportage, *Roma – ein Volk zwischen Armut und Angeberei* (2019), it aims to give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of racism and filmic representation of Othered minorities in the documentary form. In its first part, the paper highlights the dangerous interlocking of three different developments: the light vs. darkness symbolism of ancient myths, the color-coded racist paradigm developed in the eighteenth century, and the twentieth-century media of light. The central thesis advanced by the author is that while the monomyth, as defined and described by Joseph Campbell, represents a universal storytelling pattern, it has been usurped by modern racist ideology, its energy-releasing mechanism exploited to legitimate the picture of reality radiated by racist/antigypsyist narratives. Having thus exposed the racist core of filmic antigypsyism, in its second part, the paper examines the manner in which the black-and-white dyadic world model of the monomyth is put to antigypsyist use in the documentary form.

Zusammenfassung Der Beitrag befasst sich mit Fragen des filmischen Antiziganismus. Er konzentriert sich auf eine deutsche TV-Reportage, *Roma – ein Volk zwischen Armut und Angeberei* (2019), und vermittelt gleichzeitig ein breiteres Verständnis des Phänomens Rassismus und der filmischen Darstellung von fremd-gemachten (Othered) Minderheiten. Im ersten Teil wird die gefährliche Verflechtung dreier unterschiedlicher Entwicklungen aufgezeigt: die Licht-gegen-Dunkel-Symbolik in Mythen mythologischen Erzählungen, das im 18. Jahrhundert entwickelte farbkodierte Rassenparadigma und die Medien des Lichts des 20. Jahrhunderts. Die zentrale These der Autorin ist, dass der Monomythos, wie er von Joseph Campbell beschrieben wurde, ein

universelles Erzählmuster darstellt, das von modernen rassistischen Ideologien vereinnahmt und sein Energie freisetzender Mechanismus ausgenutzt wurde, um so das von rassistischen/antiziganistischen Erzählungen vermittelte neue Weltbild zu legitimieren. Nachdem der rassistische Kern des filmischen Antiziganismus aufgedeckt wurde, wird im zweiten Teil untersucht, wie das dyadische schwarz-weiße Weltmodell des Monomythos in der dokumentarischen Form antiziganistisch eingesetzt wird.

This paper tackles a number of questions that surround the topic of filmic antigypsyism and, while paying close attention to a recent German TV reportage, *Roma – ein Volk zwischen Armut und Angeberei/Roma—A People between Poverty and Braggadocio* (2019), it aims to give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of racism and filmic representation of Othered minorities in the documentary form.¹ The first central question that we shall consider here is as follows: what is characteristic of antigypsyism, and more concretely, how does this specific form of racism directed (primarily but not exclusively) against the minoritized groups of Roma in Europe manifest itself in films? One further point of interest is the narrative commonality which myths, literary fictions, and fictional films share with the documentary form. The second central question to be dealt with, which is inseparable from the first, concerns the functions of antigypsyist images and narratives for the construction of ‘white’ social/ethnic/national identities across Europe and for negotiating ‘whiteness’ (read: civilizational, cultural, and biological superiority) in the symbolic tug of war between nations from the (North-)West and nations from the (South-)East.

1 I first presented sections of this paper at the international conference “Deconstructing Carmen. Decolonial Perspectives in the Representation of Spanish Romanies” organized by Lidia Merás and Rafael Buhigas Jiménez in May 2023 at the Autonomous University of Madrid, and then at the monthly *jour fixe* of the Society for the Research of Antigypsyism organized by Pavel Brunssen und Yvonne Robel in July 2023. I am extremely grateful to the colleagues for the opportunity and the helpful feedback.

A shorter, significantly modified version of the paper, in German, geared to highlight the parallels between antigypsyism and filmic racism towards the Sorbs is published in *Sorbische Filmlandschaften/Serbske filmowe krajiny*. Ed. Grit Lemke and Andy Räder. Berlin: Bertz und Fischer, 2024. 335–348.

Modern Racism and the Archetypal Rite of Passage: The Usurped Monomyth

To gain a better understanding of the highly complex matter of filmic antigypsyism and uncover its racist core, it is useful to outline first, in very general terms, the modern phenomenon of racism in a way that is relevant to filmmaking and representational arts. Simply put, Eurocentric racist thought reduces the global human diversity to a handful of color-coded and hierarchically ranked groups; it places its own group, labelled as 'white,' on the top, and declares it the pinnacle of the human species (cf. Dyer 70–81), while relegating all other 'non-white' groups to an inferior position. "Patterns of hierarchy engender the figure of the Other," as Bill Nichols sums it up in his insightful book *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (202). To qualify as racist, furthermore, narratives have to simultaneously essentialize, homogenize, and polarize human groups, in addition to hierarchizing them, to refer to Birgit Rommelspacher's illuminating answer to the question "what is actually racism?" (29).²

In this paper, the focus will be narrowed down to Europe as the birth place of antigypsyism, "a specific form of racism," as scholars unanimously concur, which represents a criminally underresearched segment within the broader spectrum of racism(s) (UKA 32–41). When we look at the so-called Old Continent from a supranational perspective, it is striking that, even though European nations have developed separate and distinct cultural profiles, still all national narratives share the same mythological imaginary: the 'us' group self-perceives as the superior 'white' ethnic majority in opposition to the inferior 'black' minority of internal strangers, the imagined 'gypsies' (for a critical review of European national literatures in relation to the 'gypsy' construct, see the works of Bogdal and Brittnacher). The black-and-white dichotomy is an archetypal one and can refer all at once to established metaphors for the states of conscious and unconscious life, and thus, by extension, for cherished (positive) and despised (negative) spiritual human qualities; to the presence and absence of light (the material

2 For this practical insight into Rommelspacher's definition of racism, I am thankful to Dr. Philip Müller and his presentation of the interim project results on "Impliziter und expliziter Rassismus in Nachrichtenmedien und sozialen Medien: Ausmaß und Wirkung" during the Workshop "Diskriminierung und Rassismus," which took place on March 23, 2023 at the German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM) in Mannheim.

which the photographic apparatus translates into images); and to the eighteenth-century scientific taxonomies of human groups and the worlds they inhabit by signifying 'racial' skin color (cf. Dyer 61–70).

One filmic manifestation of this pan-European pattern of thought is the Serbian fiction film with documentary elements *Gucha—Distant Trumpet* (2006, dir. Dušan Milić), a romantic comedy which tells the story of two rivalling orchestras, a Serbian one and a Serbian Roma one. The fictional storyworld in Dušan Milić's film is organized around a black-and-white dyadic world model, and the film's director provides a very straightforward rationale for this artistic decision; the quoted text here is a transcript of a filmed interview with Milić:

On the first picture, you have two completely different worlds: one is black and the other is white. For me that was the most interesting conflict. Through that conflict, I tried to raise the forbidden love story. A film is a picture. If you have two very similar faces, people can be, maybe, sometimes, you know, not so sure what they are looking at. Because of that I wanted to have the girl Juliana with green eyes or blue eyes and blond hair and the complete opposite to her: this Gypsy Roma boy who is completely black, you know. From their skins, from their completely different cultures, this music is completely different. (*Gucha* DVD)

Dušan Milić's directorial testimony brings to light several important issues: it tells us that, first, to be comprehensible, film language often resorts to the deployment of strong contrasts in addition to familiar character types, in this case 'black' and 'white' ethnotypes. The second insight is that the 'white' and 'black' figures on the big screen are not accidental but are meticulously fabricated through the combined use of lighting, setting, costumes, and casting based on skin color (on the film's color schemes, see also Mladenova, *Mask* 219–226). By splitting the fictional storyworld of *Gucha* into two domains, a 'white' and a 'black' one, Dušan Milić makes his story universally comprehensible.

Now, if we fast forward through the history of Western art, we should also take into account the fact that the white color has been traditionally used to associate human bodies with light: with the divine light as the highest spiritual attainment, with the enlightened aristocracy as the dominant position in feudal classist societies, and with the superior 'white' 'ethno-racial' identity of European nationalist

(colonialist) societies. In religious contexts, white, the color of painted light, is a sign for the sacred deity; in feudal classist contexts, white/light is the color of the ruling elite and its civilized Europeanness, whereas in secular modern contexts, white/light signifies not only enlightenment and rationality but also biological 'ethno-racial' purity (cf. Dyer 14–40; Mladenova, *Patterns* 51–88). By contrast, in European literature and arts, 'gypsy' figures are perceived and portrayed as 'non-white' or 'black' and, by means of this color coding, they are firstly de-Europeanized and secondly associated in a mirror-obverse manner with darkness and shadow, with the night, with the cyclical time of nature, with the pre-modern past, with the forest, with paganism or pseudo-Christianity, with poverty and criminality, always stylized as social and 'ethno-racial' outsiders to the modern 'white' national body. The dramatic encounter between the 'white' national hero and 'black' 'gypsies' is obsessively re-staged up until today in all European national literatures, in the fine arts, in photography and film, and in modern visual media (see also Reuter; Bell; Charnon-Deutsch; Trumpener).

In light of these findings, there is an important realization to be made, namely that the black-and-white dyadic world model is the crux where three different developments dangerously interlock: the light vs. darkness symbolism of ancient myth, the 'black' and 'white' racist paradigm developed by eighteenth-century Eurocentric scientific thought, and the media of light, that is, photography and film. I will try to elucidate this point with recourse to the short animation *What Makes a Hero?* (2012), directed by Kirill Yeretsky. Helpfully, in less than five minutes, the film provides a visual summary of the archetypal formula that underlies all human myths, the hero's journey or what Joseph Campbell has dubbed the monomyth (23; see also Lotman 160–161). Stripped to its basic elements, the monomyth follows the three phases of an initiation rite: *separation–initiation–return*. Spatially, the path of the hero has a circular shape, as visualized on **Fig. 1**. In the nuclear unit of the monomyth, the world is split into two domains: the upper world of light, which is the "ordinary world" of the hero, and the lower world of darkness, which is the "special world" of the hero's trials. The hero's journey begins and ends in the ordinary world, while the quest passes through the unfamiliar underworld—the realm of monsters, of traps, and of personal fears; the underworld marks also the time when the hero goes through crises, when he experiences his darkest hour, and even when she comes to face death. This is a universal story pattern which all human myths invariably reproduce, as Joseph Campbell evidences



Fig. 1. Screenshot from the animation film *What Makes a Hero?* (2012, Kirill Yeretsky) written by Matthew Winkler.

in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1948) by comparing fairy tales and ancient myths from all over the world.³ It is of crucial importance to stress that the monomyth is a *universal* storytelling model found in Greek Orphic, Egyptian, Finnish, Buddhist, and Japanese mythologies, to mention some of Campbell's numerous references. The hero's journey reflects the stages that the human psyche goes through in its development and growth; stages that follow the natural rhythm of wakefulness and sleep. Significantly, the monomyth accounts for the cycles of transformation that underwrite the expansion of human consciousness. As Campbell explains, the purpose of initiation rites is "to conduct people across these difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns not only of conscious but also of unconscious life" (6). It is, therefore, fallacious to claim that the story pattern of the hero's adventure is a Eurocentric narrative and must

3 Joseph Campbell's research reached a peak of popularity with the PBS documentary "Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth" (1988), one of the most popular TV series in the history of US public television, featuring six one-hour conversations with him and the journalist Bill Moyers in George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch in California. In the first episode of the series, Bill Moyers sums up Campbell's contribution in the following way: "At a time when millions of people were yearning for a way of talking about religious experience without regard to a rigid belief system, Joseph Campbell gave them the language for it. He said myths were clues to our spiritual nature. And they could guide us to a sacred place within where we might unlock the creative power of our deeper unconscious self." The series is now available on Youtube ("The Hero's Adventure").

be discarded as intrinsically ‘white’ and, thus, racist.⁴ To repeat, the monomyth as such is not racist, because it operates with the universal metaphors of light and darkness; it cannot qualify as racist, because it refers to a narrative structure that underlies all world myths, and these were created thousands of years before the eighteenth-century German scholar Johann Friedrich Blumenbach thought it apt to classify humans into color-coded groups (cf. MacCord). It is important to understand that the power of the monomyth lies in its universality, because the question of whether it is deemed universal or not bears direct relevance for the various present-day educational initiatives which center on the hero’s adventure as their main storytelling model and which aim to empower young Romani playwrights, artists, scholars, and activists by equipping them with adequate tools for self-articulation (see Dávid Szóke’s paper in the volume).

We can now expand on the realization presented at the beginning of the previous paragraph by making one further claim of great significance: the perfidiousness of racist ideology lies in the fact that it usurps the monomyth and exploits the energy-releasing dynamics of this archetypal formula by rendering it in essentialist terms; the metaphors of light and darkness visualized through white and black symbols no longer signify states of human consciousness, universal spiritual qualities, but physical attributes: skin color as the shortcut signifier of ‘race.’ Modern racist narratives have taken possession of and re-enacted the monomyth in a reified form, reducing the plastic universal metaphors of light and darkness to fixed, geographically localized ‘black’ and ‘white’ ‘ethno-racial’ identities and flattening out the potent symbol of light to an epidermal attribute, an attribute that racial ideology pivots around. These modern narratives (racist, nationalist, antigypsyist, etc.) are thus able to harness the potency of the monomyth and use the psychic energy unlocked by its universal formula to stabilize and rejuvenate the “picture of reality” they radiate (Lotman 133).⁵

4 Such views, namely that the hero’s journey should be dismissed as a racist story model, were emphatically expressed during a workshop on “Antiziganismus in Film und Medien” that I gave on April 5, 2022 at the Filmakademie Baden-Wuerttemberg (as part of the Sommersemesterauftakt Living Diversity), or during discussions with Prof. Paul Mecheril and activists after Mecheril’s lecture on “Rassismuskritik als Gesellschaftstheorie oder: Warum eine Demokratie ohne Rassismuskritik keine Demokratie ist” on February 22, 2023 at the University of Mannheim.

5 Here I refer to the Russian-Estonian semiotician Yuri Lotman, who posits that every culture organizes itself in the form of a mythic time-space, producing a stereoscopic picture of reality, one that maps out the existentially essential coordinates of human

In antigypsyist texts and films, to come to our point, the national imaginary monopolizes the monomyth by spinning the story of the 'white-skinned' hero, the embodiment of the nation,⁶ who dwells in the upper world of light (read: the 'whites'), usually associated with the modern nation state, and who goes through an initiatory rite into the underworld of darkness (read: the 'non-whites'), invariably equated with the pre-modern lifestyle of the imaginary 'black-skinned' 'gypsies.' In this ethnoracially-coded dyadic world model, importantly, time and space are also split into two stratified sub-models: on the one hand, there is the linear time of progress, which is future oriented and ascribed to the upper world of the 'whites,' and, on the other hand, there is the cyclical time of nature, which is past-oriented and ascribed to the lower world of the 'non-whites.' This stratification and hierarchization of time by means of 'white' and 'black' figures is not confined to antigypsyism only but is a defining feature of racist thought, as David Roediger points out in reference to George Rawick's book *From Sundown to Sunup*:

The racist, like the reformed sinner, creates 'a pornography of his former life [...] In order to insure that he will not slip back into the old ways or act out half-suppressed phantasies, he must see a tremendous difference between his reformed self and those whom he formerly resembled.' Blackness and whiteness were thus created together. (95)

Spacewise, 'we,' the 'white' nation, is situated in the city as the symbolic center of modernity, whereas 'black' 'gypsies' are situated on the landfill or in a ghetto in the city periphery, or directly in nature, typically in a forest, as we shall see in the film example discussed here. In literary or film narratives, the encounter between the 'white-skinned' hero and the 'gypsies' is an encounter which attests to the domination of the upper world over the lower world, rephrased as the inborn superiority of the 'white' nation to the tribal 'black' 'gypsies,' the triumph of modernity over pre-modernity.

life: the temporal axis of past, present, and future, the spatial axis of internal and external space, and the boundary in between (cf. 133).

- 6 As Marius Turda demonstrates in "Biology and Eugenics," the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a eugenic ontology of the nation: the individual body was seen as "a synecdoche for the collective national body," while nations were "portrayed as living organisms, functioning according to biological laws and embodying great genetic qualities symbolising innate racial virtues" (456).

Importantly, the condensed image from the animation *What Makes a Hero?* (Fig. 1) helps clearly demonstrate that the dyadic world model of the usurped monomyth exhibits all the four features that define racist narratives. The superimposition of ‘white’ and ‘black’ ‘ethno-racial’ identities over and above the symbolic worlds/figures of light and darkness (usually represented with recourse to the colors of white and black) involves all the four mental operations that Rommelspacher isolates as constitutive of racism: polarization, homogenization, essentialization, and hierarchization. First, the ethnically marked groups are presented as inhabiting separate, isolated, and impenetrable domains, so we can say that the usurped dyadic world model is characterized by polarization. Second and third, the members of these ethnically marked groups are color-coded as ‘white’ and as ‘black’ and thus assigned to two ‘races’ (hence we speak of ‘ethno-racial’ identities), so we can say that the usurped dyadic world model is characterized by homogenization and essentialization. And, fourth, obviously, by organizing these two color-coded domains vertically into an upper and a lower world, we can speak of hierarchization.

Further evidence of the usurped monomyth can be found in nineteenth-century children’s narratives which deploy the same black-and-white matrix by overlaying the symbolic figures of light and darkness with ‘ethno-racial’ attributes. This is particularly evident in ‘gypsy’ child-theft stories, where a fair-skinned child of noble origin is first stolen by the dark-skinned inhabitants of the underworld to be later rescued and returned to its birth family in the ordinary world (cf. Mladenova, *Patterns* 99). Working with an impressive collection of children’s books published in Holland, Germany, England, and France, the Dutch scholar Jean Kommers focuses on the child-theft motif to report in his comprehensive work *‘Gypsies’ in Nineteenth Century Children’s Books. A Comparative Study of Four National Literary Traditions* (2022) that, in these stories, “again and again certain aspects reappeared: binary oppositions like light versus dark; aboveground versus subterranean; civilized versus wild; religious versus heathen” (298). The status of the border between the upper and the lower world, its impenetrability, is an important indicator of polarization; on this point, Kommers’ findings shows that

the border between civil society and the world of the gypsies is a very special one. It is not only an ethnic border: it symbolically expresses the crystallizing between culture and barbarism. As

expressed in *Thérèse's* story: between light (religion) and darkness (heathenism); between life and death. 'Voluntarily' crossing the border almost always implies death. Not only dying in miserable circumstances, but also in indifferent conditions. (60)

The child-theft motif clearly follows the story structure of ancient rites of passage, while its primary function is the socialization and enculturation of children within the aspirational socially/ethnically 'white' society in the modern day, as Kommers' pertinent observation demonstrates: "The return to civil society is the return to a new life, sometimes indicated as a rebirth. Of course, this idea in the first place indicates regaining the Light, but it may be emphasized by changing social status, like in Terlingen's *Paula* (1926)." (62). Just as nineteenth-century children's books instruct young readers about their place in the world, so do twentieth-century fictional films, making use of the dynamic formula of the initiation rite, where the "special world" of 'gypsies' is deployed to construct, claim, and (re-)negotiate affiliation to the 'white' body of the modern nation state (on the five functions of the 'gypsy' construct, see Mladenova, *Mask* 319–356). Furthermore, the "special world" of 'gypsies' is deployable also on a supranational level for the purpose of (re-)negotiating affiliation to the West; as we know, there are heated debates among national representatives as to how to group and name the countries that make up the rest of Europe, where to draw the boundary between Central and Eastern Europe. On this point, we can turn for evidence to the German historian Frank Reuter; as he outlines in his book *Der Bann des Fremden. Die fotografische Konstruktion des 'Zigeuners,'* the German 'gypsy' discourse in the nineteenth and twentieth century relies for its empirical visual material predominantly on Eastern Europe. In a comprehensive study of the 'gypsy' as a photographic construct, Reuter advances the thesis that the photographic gaze towards 'gypsies' reflects the supercilious if not disdainful view of Germans and West Europeans towards the eastern part of the continent. The assumed primitivism of the there-living 'gypsies' serves to attest the cultural and racial backwardness of entire nations. One relatively recent example of a film which relays the thus-described antigypsyist gaze is the German production for children and juveniles *Nelly's Adventure* (2016), directed by Dominik Wessely. Wessely's fiction film revives the age-old literary motif of 'gypsy' child theft and its black-and-white dyadic world model, where the mythic underworld of 'gypsies' is rendered true and real, and thus normalized, by showing

images from a poverty-stricken Roma settlement in Romania shot in a documentary mode (see also Mladenova, *Mask* 304–308). Photography serves, in Reuter's words, as a documentary validation of one's own supremacy and hegemonic aspirations (cf. 17).

Normalizing Antigypsyism through Ethnographic Isolation

After this general introduction to the specific features of antigypsyism in film narratives, we shall pay close attention to the Spiegel-TV production *Roma – ein Volk zwischen Armut und Angeberei*, broadcast in the SAT.1 series *Akte 20.19*. This documentary reportage provoked strong criticism from various civic groups in Germany. Romani Rose, the chair of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, was among the first to respond with a scathing statement:

Eine derartige pauschale Kriminalisierung und widerwärtige Diffamierung von Minderheiten wäre bislang gegenüber anderen Minderheiten unvorstellbar – gegenüber Roma in Europa gibt es für einzelne Medien und Filmproduzenten offenkundig keine Grenzen und keine Skrupel mehr. Mit Filmen wie dieser SAT.1-Produktion wird Haßrede im Internet provoziert, derartige Filme legitimieren Haß und Gewalt gegenüber Minderheiten und das ist eine große Gefahr für unsere Demokratie und für das Zusammenleben in Deutschland. (Rose *Zentralrat*)

Such a blanket criminalization and disgusting defamation of minorities would have been unimaginable against other minorities until now – against Roma in Europe, however, certain media and film producers have obviously no limits and no scruples. With films like this SAT.1 production, hate speech is provoked on the internet; films of this kind legitimize hatred and violence against minorities, and this poses a great danger for our democracy and coexistence in Germany. [My translation here and elsewhere, R.M.]

In his introduction to the volume *Antigypsyism and Film*, Rose compares the SAT.1 production to the Nazi propaganda film *Der ewige Jude* (1940, dir. Fritz Hippler) (19). The Central Council of Jews in Germany has joined in this criticism. The political scientist and extremism expert Hajo

Funke has written an expert report on behalf of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma in which he also criticizes the broadcast in the strongest possible terms:

Der Film ist gegen eine Kultur der Achtung und Anerkennung von Minderheiten und ihren Schutz gerichtet und erfüllt alle Kriterien der Volksverhetzung, und es sollte daher geprüft werden, ob man ein Verbot der Weiterverbreitung erreichen kann. (Funke)

The film is directed against a culture that fosters respect and recognition towards minorities and ensures their protection, and because of that, it fulfils all the criteria of incitement to hatred; therefore, it should be examined whether it is possible to obtain a ban on its further distribution.

Kaspar Pflüger, the managing director of SAT.1, responded by rejecting the criticism.⁷

Wir nehmen Ihre Kritik ernst, weisen sie aber zurück. Die Sendung ist ein ausgewogener, journalistisch einwandfreier Bericht über mehrere Familien in Deutschland und Ost-Europa. Sie thematisiert gelungene Integrationsprojekte ebenso wie Armut und unzumutbare Lebensumstände. Sie zeigt, dass Roma auch heute noch diskriminiert und ausgebeutet werden. Sie berichtet über Tradition, Werte und Stolz – aber auch über kriminelle Machenschaften einzelner Großfamilien. (Rose, *Macht* 19–20; Launhardt)

We take your criticism seriously, but we reject it. The broadcast is a balanced, journalistically impeccable report about several families in Germany and Eastern Europe. It addresses successful integration projects as well as poverty and unacceptable living conditions. It shows that, to this day, Roma are still discriminated against and exploited. It reports on tradition, values, and pride – but also on the criminal machinations of individual large families.

7 According to Launhardt, the reportage is blocked for secondary use in SAT.1's archive, but the station wants to continue to make the documentary available via its media library.

The SAT.1 reportage itself, but also the fact that the sharp criticism voiced by organizations and experts has fallen on deaf ears,⁸ is a telling example of the normalization of (filmic) antigypsyism. Here, it is helpful to resort to a parallel to elucidate what is meant under normalization: a TV reportage with similar content structure about ethnic Germans, or, in fact, about any ethnic group which constitutes a national majority in Europe, would be unthinkable because the visibility of the majority and the visibility of the minority are dependent on very different regimes of seeing (cf. Kolodii 553–554). Consequently, if French TV broadcast such a reportage about Germans, in which the latter are isolated as an ethnic group and assigned to the mythical underworld of darkness, the broadcast would be deciphered as a blatant offence, possibly even as symbolic declaration of war. To substantiate my point and to unwrap the antigypsyist regime of seeing reserved for the minority, I conduct a sequence-by-sequence analysis of the SAT.1 reportage, paying special attention to the selection and foregrounding of topics, their duration in time, and the explicit or implicit logical connections created between the themes. Such an analysis allows the reader to gain an overview of the film's structure and texture of topics and its overarching narrative, and to identify—which is just as crucial—that which the film omits to show. Thus, my analysis aims to refute Kaspar Pflüger's exonerating statement on all its points. Because *Roma – ein Volk zwischen Armut und Angeberei* is a TV production which does not comply to basic ethical standards of journalism, repeatedly showing adults and minors without their or their parents' consent, it exploits the trust of the interviewees by embedding their stories in a master narrative which situates the entire minority in pre-modernity and which treats criminality as an ethnographic pattern of Roma culture. The reportage draws its evidentiary authority from the truth-claiming ethnographic structure and mechanical objectivity of the documentary form, or what the film theoretician Bill Nichols describes as “indexical representation of patterns of culture” (*Reality* 204). Racism against Roma is, by rule of thumb, couched in ethnographicity.

8 The reportage led to intense discussions among the members of the Media Regulation Team and those of the supervisory body of the Media Authority of Rhineland-Palatinate. Having analysed the film from the perspective of media law, the issue of “violation of human dignity” was raised from a media-supervisory point of view. The Media Authority turned to the nationwide Commission for Admission and Controlling (ZAK) with a proposal for a resolution. There was no majority for a complaint about the reportage, and no objection was issued. (For this information, I want to thank Hans Uwe Daumann).

Mimicking the stance of an ethnographer, and thereby laying claim to the scientific authority that goes with the mechanical objectivity of the camera lens, filmmakers are able to fabricate the stigmatizing collective portrait of the minority, conjugating the patterns of culture in the negative (that is focusing exclusively on practices that will be deciphered as antisocial, criminal, or backward) and pass for ethical journalists. Under the cloak of ethnographicity, antigypsyism is rendered socially acceptable and is thus normalized. Therefore, the critical study of (filmic) antigypsyism requires a radical revision of classical ethnography as a scientific discipline, its basic tenets and its embedded asymmetry of power, by the logic of which European ethnographers look at the world as if from a neutral, 'white' point of view, thereby generating knowledge about other, 'colorful,' groups of people. As Nichols points out in his chapter on "Pornography, Ethnography and the Discourses of Power," the ethnographic documentary produces cultural knowledge which presents itself as authoritative and obvious but which perpetuates the economy of Otherness in just the same manner as pornography does (cf. *Reality* 203). "Ethnography is a kind of legitimate pornography, a pornography of knowledge, giving us the pleasure of knowing what had seemed incomprehensible" (210). Nichols makes use of Tony Morrison's fishbowl metaphor to comment on the illusionistic effect of realism in ethnographic and pornographic films, two film forms that share a number of structural similarities with fictional and documentary films on the 'gypsy' theme:

The objects of both pornography and ethnography are constituted as if in a fishbowl; and the coherence, 'naturalness,' and the realism of this fishbowl is guaranteed through distance. The fishbowl effect allows us to experience the thrill of strangeness and the apprehension of an Other while also providing the distance from the Other that assures safety. (*Reality* 223)

Another pertinent observation here comes from the American anthropologist Alaina Lemon, who notes that scientists often fail to account for Roma through a lens of normality, even when they consciously try to detach themselves from antigypsyist fictions. Lemon's observation shows that scholars also reproduce the dyadic world model of Campbell's monomyth in the way they think, in their mental map of references:

In this representational void, many non-Romani investigators see themselves as penetrating a hidden social world, pulling back a curtain of false stereotypes to reveal the variety of the 'real Gypsies.' But these unveilings sometimes reproduce the veil, if only because the model of a curtained proscenium divides observers and actors into two realms of 'reality.' The two realms continue to be imagined as maximally different. (80)

It is beyond the scope of this paper to subject to a critical scrutiny the discourses of sobriety which have contributed to antigypsyism. Yet, before engaging with the close analysis of the TV reportage, in the next section, I want to draw attention to the ideal of mechanical objectivity and the role it has played in establishing the authority of modern science but also of the documentary film form with its pretense of slice-of-life naturalism.

The Camera and Its Scientific Halo of Objectivity

The idea(l) of mechanical objectivity, which is one type of scientific objectivity, first emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century and gained popularity in its latter half. In delineating the history of mechanical objectivity, Loraine Daston and Peter Galison refer to the French physiologist E.J. Marey. Already in 1878, Marey "dreamed of a wordless science that spoke instead in high-speed photographs and mechanically generated curves; in images that were, as he put it, in the 'language of the phenomena themselves'" (81). The French physiologist not only imagined an imaging machine that would realize the ideal of scientific endeavor but also one that would realize "a more general ideal of a universal pictorial language" (115). The development of photographic technology is closely connected to the ideal of mechanical objectivity which elevated human non-intervention to a cult. Daston and Galison call it mechanical or non-interventionist to underline the fact that it is conceptually and historically distinct from other notions of objectivity, all of which have fused their meanings in the present-day term. What sets mechanical objectivity apart is the attempt to solve the problem of nature and its representation by eliminating human agency. In order to combat "the subjectivity of scientific and aesthetic judgment, dogmatic system building, and anthropomorphism," it embraced machines and centered on scientific images, since they held out the promise of

being uncontaminated by interpretation (82). To highlight the central place which scientific images occupied in the interplay of machine and objectivity, Daston and Galison pay attention to atlases, a specialized genre used by everyone from botanists to criminologists to visually reproduce, catalogue, and standardize phenomena. These atlases established a strong association between the factual and the visual mode, which turned them into prime bearers of the new objectivity. In the late nineteenth century, atlases underwent fundamental changes, and the authors cast light on the much-debated process by which the atlases' hand-drawn images were substituted by photographs. Since mechanical objectivity valued non-intervention more than verisimilitude, the experienced atlas artist was ousted by the machine. Its patience, indefatigability, and probity beyond the limits of human senses proved all the more superior. Moreover, "the machine stood for authenticity: it was at once an observer and an artist, miraculously free from the inner temptation to theorize, anthropomorphize, beautify, or otherwise interpret nature" (120). Eventually, the photograph, being one type of mechanically produced image, gained its current halo of objectivity, turning into "the emblem of all aspects of non-interventionist objectivity," while photographic vision became "a primary metaphor for objective truth" (120).

Documentation is, Above All, Interpretation

In the context of filmmaking, the capacity of machines to replicate, with mechanical objectivity, visual and auditory phenomena that one perceives in the physical world is central to the establishment of the documentary genre. In his *Introduction to Documentary*, Nichols explains that

recording instruments (cameras and sound recorders) registers the imprint of things (sights and sounds) with great fidelity. It gives these imprints value as documents. This uncanny sense of documents, or image that bears strict correspondence to what it refers to, is called its indexical quality. (34)

However, as Nichols strongly emphasizes, documentary images are more than just evidence: they are fragments from the socio-historical world—carefully selected by the eye behind the camera, they embody a particular way of seeing and are used in documentary films to support

an argument, a perspective, an explanation, or an interpretation (cf. 35). Therefore, the next section focuses on the antigypsyist perspective in the SAT.1 production relayed through the purposeful selection of topics, places, and protagonists. Let the reader be reminded here that a similar constellation of topics, places, and protagonists can be orchestrated and their indexical quality harnessed to create a racist filmic portrait of almost any ethnic group. In its structure, the film follows the monomyth's black-and-white dyadic world model: through the selection of the documentary material, it criminalizes Roma ethnicity/culture, situating the group in the lower world of darkness. As we demonstrated, this pattern of representation involves all the four mental operations that are constitutive of racism: hierarchization, polarization, essentialization, and homogenization. The universal story structure of the monomyth and the evidentiary power of the documentary image are thus exploited to substantiate a racist view of the world.

Roma – ein Volk zwischen Armut und Angeberei: Sequence-by-Sequence Description

In this section, we shall pay close attention to the TV reportage by reading it sequence by sequence to uncover the logic of the underlying master narrative. My analytical approach rests on the hypothesis that material placed closer to the film's beginning is invested with more importance than material placed closer to its end; my other hypothesis is that topics which are elaborated in longer sequences are ranked higher in importance than topics presented in shorter sequences. For that reason, I provide a very detailed description of the introductory sequence, a less detailed description of the sequences in the first half of the film, and a summary description of the sequences in the second half of the film. Finally, I provide an overview of the film sequences by topic and duration, which allows me to present the film's contents at a glance and to elucidate the logic behind the overarching narrative that unites the sequences.

The communicative act elicited by the reportage follows the classical formula in documentary filmmaking: 'I speak to you about them.' As Nichols explains, a film narrative based on the opposition of 'I' vs. 'them' "implies separation between speaker and subject. The I who speaks is not identical with those of whom it speaks. We as audience receive a sense that the subjects in the film are placed there for our examination and edification." (*Introduction* 61).

Sequence 1 (0'00:0'57):⁹ The film opens with a high-angle shot showing a squad of heavily armed policemen storming into an apartment. We can see their black helmets and raised guns; the helmet closest to the camera bears the image of a human skull and the message "No bullshit tolerance." The voice-over informs us that this is "Arrest of a clan's chief. His Roma family is said to have looted several million euros by defrauding German pensioners."¹⁰ Cut to a man with a pixelated face while he is being handcuffed, followed by footage from a gathering where several important-looking swarthy men in suits are welcomed inside a mansion. Cut to a long shot of the mansion with the sign "Venecia Palace" on its stairs, a big jubilant family. Cut to an expensive sports car with a young couple inside, and as the voice-over adds "The money was squandered,"¹¹ we see bottles of champagne splash amid a mass of partying bodies. Cut to an elegantly dressed swarthy man with badly bleached hair who explains in broken German: "All Gypsies live well. A Gypsy is a business."¹² Cut to a garbage truck entering a landfill, which allows the voice-over to contradict the man: "Yet many of the approximately twelve million Roma in Europe live in poverty. They are trapped in a vicious circle of hopelessness and despair."¹³ Cut to a landscape of garbage in which a black pig, children, and adults move about. Some close-ups of dead rats follow and an old man, who points to the scar on his finger while holding the dead animals by their tails. The voice-over resumes the story: "In Germany, poverty refugees from Romania sometimes set off a social time bomb."¹⁴ Images of pixelated faces of youngsters who are chased from a shop. Cut to the shop owner, who takes out the weapons he claims one needs in order to survive in the neighborhood: a 9 mm pistol, a baton, a combat knife. The voice-over continues, "It is the criminal families who ruin the reputation of the Roma. They prefer to keep to

9 The film file I have worked with begins with a delay of three seconds; it also contains three advertisement breaks, so that the overall film length adds up to 48'48, whereas the original film length is 43'39. For that reason, the time information given in the brackets is not precise, but it provides correct information about the amount of film time dedicated to the various topics and sub-stories.

10 "Festnahme eines Chefclans. Seine Roma-Familie soll mehrere Millionen Euro erbeutet haben durch den Betrug an deutschen Rentnern."

11 "Das Geld wurde verprasst."

12 "Alle Zigeuner leben gut. Ein Zigeuner ist ein Geschäft."

13 "Doch viele der rund zwölf Millionen Roma in Europa leben in Armut. Sie sind an einem Teufelskreis aus Hoffnungslosigkeit und Verzweiflung gefangen."

14 "In Deutschland sorgen Armutsflüchtlinge aus Rumänien mitunter für sozialen Sprengstoff."

themselves.”¹⁵ Cut to a police raid in a big house where the camera team is not allowed to enter. “Enquiries unwanted,”¹⁶ concludes the voice-over as the camera films the shutters rolling down. An angry woman comes out of the house and makes threatening gestures with a wooden meat mallet. The camera continues filming while the woman chases the film crew away using swear words and finally throwing the mallet.

Sequence 2 (0’58:7’08): In the time span of over six minutes, the viewers are acquainted with the Goman family and their criminal activities over the past years. We first see footage from a court case in Köln; the main offender is Michael Goman, known also as Don Michael, who is accused of the so-called grandchild’s trick fraud and carpet scams. The camera shows his relatives in the court room. The women are quick to cover their faces; however, the face of a small child remains uncovered, and the camera lingers on it. Further footage shows members of the Goman family making an ostentatious display of their wealth on social media; the voice-over adds that there are charges for bandlike fraud, moneylending, and dubious real-estate transactions. Cut to the tragic story of one victim, an elderly German lady. Further inculpatory footage shows a police razzia in Goman’s home in Leverkusen in 2018; we see a repeat of the woman who is chasing the camera team with the wooden meat mallet. Cut to attempted interviews with relatives, in which the people unequivocally express anger at being filmed.

Sequence 3 (7’08:13’14; advertisement break 11’00:12’42): In the time span of over four minutes, the viewers are familiarized with the landfill in the town of Klausenburg, Romania, and its inhabitants. The voice-over comes up with information about the entire minority in the country: “For hundreds of members of the minority, the local rubbish dump is their home, their job, their whole life. As in other countries, Gypsies, as they call themselves, are despised, discriminated against and exploited. Most of the approximately two million Roma and Sinti in Romania live in abject poverty.”¹⁷ This information is illustrated with the stories of Sidor and Arada. We learn about Sidor, a grey-haired man, that he has been living for twenty-five years on the landfill, “together with

15 “Es sind die kriminellen Familien, die den Ruf der Roma ruinieren. Sie bleiben lieber unter sich.”

16 “Nachfragen unerwünscht.”

17 “Die örtliche Müllhalde ist für hunderte Mitglieder der Minderheit ihr Zuhause, ihr Job, ihr ganzes Leben. Wie in anderen Ländern werden Zigeuner, wie sie sich selbst nennen, auch hier verachtet, diskriminiert und ausgebeutet. Die meisten der rund zwei Millionen Roma und Sinti in Rumänien leben in bitterer Armut.”

children, grandchildren, pigs, and rats,”¹⁸ as the voice-over puts it. The main focus is on Sidor’s story and the problem with the rats, to which the film dedicates nearly a minute. With a plea for help, the man shows the animal traces in the makeshift house he shares with his family of seven. Then, he presents the corpses of five rats he has killed with his own hands, and the camera zooms in on his bitten finger. The story of the second protagonist, the 35-year old Arada, whom the voice-over presents as “mother of nine, grandmother of three,”¹⁹ also centers on the rats; here twenty seconds are dedicated to the topic. Arada reports that she lives with a family of eight and describes their daily life. “If we leave something edible on the table, the rats eat it. When we lie down in the evening, they swarm around here. They are like cats, en masse. [Filmmaker’s question] Don’t you have a cat? No. Besides, the rats would kill the cat. They’re huge. They are so big.”²⁰

Sequence 4 (13’15:18’24): In the span of five minutes, the viewers are instructed about the downfall of Marxloh quarter in Duisburg. The voice-over links this downfall to the arrival of Roma, also called poverty refugees from Eastern Europe: “The quarter’s final decline begins in early 2014, when the EU decides that Bulgarians and Romanians are free to choose their jobs in the EU.”²¹ The story of Emir Yücel, a local resident, provides the illustrative material. The man complains that his new neighbors throw their garbage all over the place and this attracts rats. The camera spots one animal and follows it for a while. Yücel says that he feels abandoned by the city authorities and has to resort to vigilante justice to stop the invasion of rats on his private property. Every month, he has to pay between fifty and seventy-five euro for rat poison. The film time dedicated to the topic of rats in this sequence is a minute and a half. Further footage is shown of neighbors who complain about the newcomers and the downfall of Marxloh.

Sequence 5 (18’24:20’37): In the span of two minutes, we are introduced to a big Roma gathering on the southern slope of a Carpathian mountain; one of the Roma comes from Marxloh. In a self-incriminating

18 “zusammen mit Kindern, Enkeln, Schweinen und Ratten.”

19 “neunfacher Mutter, dreifacher Großmutter.”

20 “Wenn wir etwas Essbares auf dem Tisch lassen, fressen es die Ratten. Wenn wir uns abends hinlegen, dann wimmeln sie hier um. Sie sind wie Katzen, massenhaft. [Frage des Filmemachers] Haben sie dann keine Katze? Nein. Außerdem würden die Ratten die Katze töten. Die sind riesig. Sie sind so groß.”

21 “Der endgültige Sinkflug des Viertels beginnt Anfang 2014 als die EU entscheidet, dass Bulgaren und Rumänen ihre Arbeitsplätze in der EU frei wählen dürfen.”

way, pointing to the gold chains and watches of his mates, a young man explains in bad German that Roma lie and steal in Germany and then celebrate in Romania. Another man, sitting at the head of a family table, sums it up: “Our most important values: owning expensive cars, having money, travelling, and having fun.”²² Cut to a huge mansion and Dan Stanescu, who presents himself as king of the Roma and gives a short statement dressed in a suit and wearing a crown.

Sequence 6 (20’38:25’45; advertisement break 23’37:25’23): Some of the footage with the charges against Michael Goman is repeated. It is expanded by footage from Wiesdorf, another city quarter in Leverkusen, where the camera team visits a house investigated for carpet fraud; the inhabitants respond angrily to the questions. Cut to an interview with Wolfgang Greiss, the shop owner, who lays out the weapons he claims one needs to possess in this area in order to survive. Cut to images of youngsters, their faces pixelated, who have been driven out from a shop and who act threateningly towards the camera team. “The criminal machinations of the Goman extended family and other Roma clans are damaging the reputation of an entire people.”²³

Sequence 7 (25’46:28’55): “And yet most Roma live an honest life”²⁴ There is a sudden change of tone in the voice-over commentary matched by a bird-eye’s view of lush green meadows and a small town. Cut to a hard-working Roma family in the vicinity of Sibiu, tinkers who have preserved their craft and traditions. We learn about their work, values, ancestors, traditional costumes, marriage rites.²⁵ The voice-over informs us that “The Kaldera family follows the tradition and has close ties

22 “Unsere wichtigste Werte: wertvolle Autos zu besitzen, Geld zu haben, zu reisen und uns zu amüsieren.”

23 “Durch die kriminellen Machenschaften der Großfamilie Goman und anderer Roma-Klans leidet der Ruf eines ganzen Volkes.”

24 “Dabei leben die meisten Roma ein ehrliches Leben.”

25 Marriage rites among Roma from Eastern Europe, and especially the custom of arranged marriage, is a favorite topic for German TV reportages, as we can see from two recent ARTE productions: *Re: Gekaufte Bräute – Bulgariens Roma-Heiratsmarkt* (2017, dir. Volker Heimann) and *Die geschlossene Welt der Gabor* (2020, dir. Julia Csabai). Such ethnographic reportages pick out small Roma communities, stylizing the people as cultural relics of the past while implicitly asserting the superiority of the viewer, who, by assumption, is part of the modern world. This modern viewer is initiated into all the details that surround the act of marriage: it is arranged, the participants are minors and often kindred (incestuous), it is a common law marriage rather than one consecrated by the church or legalized by the official authorities; the films thus implicitly assert that the community lives in a parallel pre-modern patriarchal world which follows its own rules and laws. See here also Tremlett and Breazu.

with its home region.”²⁶ The wife says to the camera: “Why should I go complaining abroad when I can work and live just as well here? It is better that way.”²⁷ Their neighbor, also a tinker, has become a millionaire working in Italy and France. The filmmaker asks how he has made this money, to which the father replies that he does not know. The voice-over concludes: “Who gets how much money, and when, remains a family secret among the Roma.”²⁸

Sequence 8 (28’56:31’47): A big family who lives in desolation in Baia Mare in Romania. The father declares he is ready to give up his citizenship and move to Germany. The voice-over concludes, “Germany, people here believe, is the land of unlimited opportunity.”²⁹

Sequence 9 (31’48:32’53): In the span of one minute, we are introduced to an instance of successful integration in Berlin. Quick cut to footage from 2011, which shows bins overflowing with rubbish. The Romni Diana Stavarache recalls: “God, what was going on here. The rats used to walk all over the place. When we had barbecues here, they were always around.”³⁰ The woman next to her chimes in, “They were part of the family.”³¹ The two women break into a laughter. The social worker Anna-Maria Berger, also Romni, explains that Roma groups have different dialects and professions; the voice-over wraps up the scene with: “The small exodus of 600 Roma to Neuköln is a move into the German welfare state, where child benefits and Hartz IV quite legally bring much more money than work in the home country.”³²

Sequence 10 (32’54:44’15; advertisement break 36’18:37’54): In the span of over nine minutes, we learn about the inventor of the so-called grandchild’s trick fraud, Akadiosh Lakatos. The footage from the court trial informs us that he repeatedly has obstructed the court’s decision.

26 “Familie Kaldera pflegt die Tradition und sie ist heimatverbunden.”

27 “Warum soll ich im Ausland jammern gehen, wenn ich genauso gut hier arbeiten und leben kann? Es ist besser so.”

28 “Wer wie wann zu wie viel Geld kommt, bleibt bei den Roma ein Familien-Geheimnis.”

29 “Deutschland, so glaubt man hier, ist das Land der unbegrenzten Möglichkeiten.”

30 “Gott, was hier los war. Hier sind die Ratten spaziert gegangen. Wenn wir hier gegrillt haben, waren sie immer dabei.”

31 “Sie gehörten zu der Familie.”

32 “Die kleine Völkerwanderung der 600 Roma nach Neuköln ist euch ein Umzug in den deutschen Sozialstaat, in dem Kindergeld and Hartz IV ganz legal viel mehr einbringen als die Arbeit in der Heimat.”

Sequence 11 (44'15: 48'48): In the span of four and a half minutes, we get to know a group of Roma musicians living in Romania, who have kept their tradition for generations. They are presented as hard-working, happy to live in their native land, and proud to call themselves 'Zigeuner.'

Racism in the Cloak of Ethnographicity

To present the content structure of the film at a glance, I have further summarized the eleven sequences in the form of key words or headlines and listed them with reference to their duration in time. This form of presentation makes it easy to establish, for example, that there is only one story in the entire film which shows successfully integrated Roma in Germany. It is placed close to the end (Sequence 9) and lasts only about a minute. In this notably short sub-story, though, the focus is not on the successes in the present but on the problems of the past. The flashback—in which the topic of rats resurfaces for the fifth time—reveals that the filmmakers' main goal is to reinforce the already established link between Roma and rats-attracting piles of garbage. This is the motif which runs through the entire film and which encapsulates its dangerously racist message; by implication and suggestion, the film renounces the status of Roma as human beings.

S1 – Introduction (ca. 1 min.)

S2 – The crimes of the Goman family; the case against Michael Goman in Köln (ca. 6 min.)

S3 – Living on and off the landfill in Klausenburg; two stories with rats (ca. 4 min.)

S4 – The downfall of Marxloh; Emir Yücel combating the invasion of rats (ca. 5 min.)

S5 – An opulent Roma fest in Romania; the Marxloh connection (ca. 2 min.)

S6 – Carpet fraud in Wiesdorf; Roma shoplifters and the armed shop owner (ca. 3 min.)

S7 – The traditional family of tinkers near Sibiu; the neighbor with the mansion (ca. 3 min.)

S8 – The desolate Roma family in Baia Mare who dream of living in Germany (ca. 3 min.)

S9 – The successful integration of Roma in Berlin; a recollection about rats (ca. 1 min.)

- S10— The trial of Akadiosh Lakatos, the inventor of the grandchild's trick fraud (ca. 9 min.)
S11— Traditional Roma musicians in Romania, proud to call themselves 'Zigeuner' (ca. 4.5 min.)

If we are to summarize the fabricated cultural knowledge concocted through careful selection of speech acts and visual material in this documentary, we can say that the film, feigning ethnographicity, instructs the viewer about three types of groups. First are the criminal bands, the so-called family clans who are engaged in organized crime in the West and especially Germany. Their behavior is shown to be morally repulsive: not only do they take advantage of trustful German pensioners and the social system but they also obscenely display their ill-gotten gains and squander them for extravagant parties and status symbols (Sequences 2, 5, 6, 10; altogether ca. 20 minutes). The second group consists of Romanian Roma who either live in abject poverty in their home country or have brought ruin and rats to their German abode; these people are presented as physically repulsive: in four of the stories, it is suggested that they are accustomed to living on a par with rats and can pose a health threat to their neighbors (Sequences 3, 4, 8, 9; altogether ca. 13 minutes). The third group, in the antigypsyist logic of the film, are honest, hard-working Romanian Roma who have stuck to their traditional ways of life and their native land (Sequences 7, 11; altogether ca. 7.5 minutes); these people stand out with their pre-modern way of life. It should be noted and heavily underlined here that there is not a single story in the film which shows that the Roma newcomers are not just well integrated but make a contribution to the German economy and its social system.

By choosing to focus on the above-described stories and exclude stories that showcase the Roma contribution, the filmmakers implicitly renounce the possibility of Roma acting as responsible and productive fellow citizens. This is the indirect answer the film offers to the unstated question: Where do the Roma in Germany come from? Why are they so different? Almost every film on the 'gypsy' theme, be it a documentary or a fictional film, since the dawn of cinema has revolved around this question (see Mladenova *Mask*, 259–318). With few exceptions, all films are propelled by an unceasing ethnographic curiosity about the Othered minority as a whole. Filmmakers may present individual protagonists—imaginary characters in fictional films or real protagonists in documentaries—but seldom do these protagonists stand for themselves

as individuals. In the majority of cases they are seen, selected, and studied always in relation to the entire minority, as providing a key to its Otherved world; as Nichols observes, “[e]thnography uses the actions of the one to signify the actions of the many [...]; the value of the individual’s actions lies in its generalization, its typicality within the culture in question” (*Reality* 218, 220).

In relation specifically to the SAT.1 reportage, one may wonder why neither the filmmakers nor the viewers seem to see a problem in the fact that the film creates a natural link between people who have nothing in common and who are unaware of each other’s existence. The investigation of prosecuted (Polish) Roma who have lived for decades in Leverkusen is edited together with a social reportage about a man living off a landfill some 1,300 km away in Klausenburg and then edited together with an ethnographic portrayal of tinkers whose life unfolds in rural Romania. Why do the filmmakers expect that if your neighbor is a tinker like yourself, you should know where his money comes from, and why do they so readily jump to the incriminating conclusion about Roma in general, namely: “Who, how, when comes to how much money remains a family secret among the Roma”?³³ It is difficult to imagine an investigative reportage about, say, large-scale German tax evaders in which the viewers are instructed about traditional German values, costumes, and beer-drinking rituals as well as about the various livelihoods of families from the German diaspora. And if you do not know how your German neighbor has financed his mansion, no one will think of attributing this to your German inclination to keep family secrets.

When it comes to Roma, however, by way of an implicit claim to ethnographicity, filmmakers can attribute almost any deviant characteristic to the minority, placing it in the mythical underworld of darkness. In the case of the reportage in question, we see that it can easily bring together as supposed patterns of culture and present under the label of ‘Roma’ or ‘Zigeuner’ various criminal activities (the grandchild’s trick, shock calls, carpet fraud, child benefit fraud, gang-related fraud, dubious real estate transactions); daily life on a landfill; festive family gatherings; insider voices who allude at the dubious business affairs of their fellow Roma or who provide general statements about Roma values, dialects, and the signification of the contested ethnonym ‘Zigeuner’; a statement from a self-appointed king; traditional Roma

33 “Wer, wie, wann zu wie viel Geld kommt, bleibt bei den Roma ein Familiengeheimnis.”

trades (tinkers, musicians, bear tamers); traditional Roma grooming and costumes, including those for wedding ceremonies; and various daily practices, such as cooking and washing clothes. In a backhand manner, it is suggested that both abject poverty and criminal activities are ethnographic elements of Roma culture; thus, poverty and criminality are ethnicized as characteristic features of the entire minority, while Roma are criminalized as a group.

The hunger for 'gypsy' spectacle with its rites and rituals and turbulent noir storylines is what most, if not all, 'gypsy'-themed art works cater to, from classical novels through opera and theater to contemporary film. At this point, it is illuminating to draw a comparison between the SAT.1 reportage and the US-American fiction film *King of the Gypsies* (1978, dir. Frank Pierson). In both films, the material—in the one case, documentary and in the other case, fictional—is organized by the same master narrative, which situates and ethnically isolates the minority in the shadowy underworld of criminality. In *King of the Gypsies*, the director Frank Pierson resorts to very similar motifs and strategies of representation: we have an insider voice (the young 'gypsy' and future king David, played by Eric Roberts) who makes the viewers privy to the ways of the 'gypsies,' the patterns of their clandestine culture, and in a fit of rebellion exposes the various scams his fellow 'gypsies' pull while the large family is making a painful transition from traditional nomadic way of life to modern city life. In Pierson's film, 'gypsies' are portrayed as incorrigible remnants of feudalism, forming clan structures around self-proclaimed kings and heritage lines. They are shown to be in conflict with all institutions of the modern state: the police, the court, the school, the hospital. We are told, again by means of authoritative insider voices, that they are opposed to skilled, productive work. Instead, to earn their living, they have devised a whole array of dishonest practices that are couched in truth-claiming ethnographicity and include, but are not limited to, scamming, divination, and insurance fraud. The central conflict in the film revolves around the practice of arranged marriages, the implicit message here being that, in keeping with their archaic patriarchal culture, 'gypsies' treat women as goods for sale, with little or no consideration for their will and feelings (see also Mladenova *Mask*, 171–188). The parallel to *King of the Gypsies* shows that the SAT.1 reportage follows a typical antigypsyist narrative formula; the similarities between the two films also indicate that, at the level of narrative structure, no distinction can be made between fictional and documentary film form.

Furthermore, in response to Kaspar Pflüger's statement, quoted earlier in this article, to the effect that the broadcast is journalistically impeccable, it should be said and underscored that this SAT.1 reportage is made in breach of basic ethic and legal standards: the faces of one child (in Sequences 2 and 6) and several adults are filmed and shown without consent. In many cases, the protagonists give clear verbal and non-verbal signals that they do not want to be filmed, which are not respected by the filmmakers. Feigning empathy, the filmmakers have exploited the trust and vulnerability of their protagonists. It is apparent that the very poor Roma in Klausenburg and Baia Mare have agreed to tell their stories in front of the camera in the hope that they will receive help; the proud musicians and tinkers from Romania are by no means aware that their stories will be used for a film that links them with the dealings of Michael Goman or Akadiosh Lakatos and frames the entire minority as backward, criminal, and socially deviant.

The most dangerous element in the film is its incitement to hatred and its unspoken instigation to vigilantism. The reportage is not based on a real police investigation, nor does it rest on an official verdict; it rather presents a collection of dispersed accusations and insinuations, obtained by means of an unabashedly intrusive, unethical, and frequently aggressive style of filming. The German court is shown to be inefficient and unable to convict the criminals; the shop owner and the pigeon breeder are portrayed as defenseless in the face of the newcomers. The viewers are thus led to the conclusion that self-administered justice is a legitimate answer. The instigation to hatred and violence is achieved in an indirect manner, which leaves the viewers with the feeling that they have come to this conclusion on their own.

The SAT.1 production is a disturbingly racist film. In a perfidious way, it disavows the humanity, the belonging/integrability, and the contribution of Roma; obliquely, after the famous motto "Once you know one, you know them all," the film incriminates and discredits its protagonists and, by extension, the entire minority. Under the cloak of ethnographicity, using the indexical authority of documentary footage and its claim to objective truth, the filmmakers are able to present select individuals with a criminal record or select desolate families and to overlay their images with the authoritative "Voice of God" style of narration which claims truth-knowledge of the twelve million who make up the minority. Another recurrent and effectively suggestive strategy is to elicit incriminatory statements from Roma themselves; many such statements are included in the documentation. In a feigned attempt to give a

more balanced portrayal of the minority, the filmmakers have included some seemingly positive stories (three, in all), but all three stories are discredited. What the film has bracketed out is just as telling. There are no stories of Roma who lead the lives of productive, hard-working modern state citizens, and through this strategic omission, the film narrative precludes the possibility of Roma being part of modernity and nationhood, or if we put it in mythic terms, to be part of the upper world of light. They are perceived and portrayed in a documentary mode either as remnants of an archaic past or, if modernized, then as criminals, that is, as belonging to the netherworld of darkness. In terms of the symbolic order, the option of belonging/integrability is deemed unavailable for Roma. Packaged cleverly as an ethnographic document, the SAT.1 reportage is a textbook example of the technique by which racist fictions are substantiated, with recourse to documentary images leading to an essentialist and deeply degrading account of a minoritized group; as such, the film has no place in a society that claims to uphold the democratic rule of law and ethical journalism.

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Image Credits

Fig. 1 TED-Ed.

Films

Der ewige Jude. Dir. Fritz Hippler. Terra Film, 1940.

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