

Antigypsyism in French Cinema: Why We Need Gadžology, and What Led to *À bras ouverts*?

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This paper¹ seeks to explain the difficulty of broaching the subject of antigypsyism in French cinema by shedding light on general cultural and legal constructs, French exceptionalism with respect to current events, recent trends in the local film industry, and one film in particular, *À bras ouverts* (2017), which emblematically brings to life all of these elements in a single example.

What follows is a brief synopsis of the film based on a review written by Boyd van Hoeij for the *Hollywood Reporter*:

Jean-Etienne Fougerole (Christian Clavier) is

a left-wing celebrity intellectual modeled on the equally wild-haired Bernard-Henri Levy. He has just published a new book called *With Open Arms*, about immigration issues, and is asked to defend it on television, where Barzach (Marc Arnaud), his right-wing opponent (who, for some reason, is gay), challenges him to actually open the doors of his own home if that's what required to allow for a much better integration of immigrants.

Put on the spot, Fougerole says yes, much to the dismay of his wife Daphne (Elsa Zylberstein), a prim heiress who thinks herself an artist, and their otherwise not very clearly defined teenage son, Lionel (Oscar Berthe). The same evening Babik (Weddings' Ary Abittan, an actor who is actually of Maghrebi-Jewish origin) and his extended Romani family knock on their door (...), ask for shelter and set up their derelict mobile home somewhere between the foot-deep geometrical pond and the property's hedges (...).

1 This paper would not have been possible without the contributions provided by Amandine Gay, a French-African feminist, filmmaker, actress and intersectional ally.

Fougerole's savvy publicist (Nanou Garcia) thinks this is something worth exploiting, so the family is allowed to stay, though Daphne worries about her valuables and locks them away when they need to leave the door open at night so their guests can use the bathroom. Lionel, meanwhile, drops all objections as soon as he has clapped eyes on Babik's virginal daughter and the apple of his eye, Lulughia (...). (...)

A scene follows,

in which the Fougeroles are invited over for dinner by Babik's family. It purportedly shows that they are grateful for having been taken in by a family of French Good Samaritans, but simultaneously, one guesses to amp up the comedy, the dinner consists of rodent stew made from moles poached from the Fougeroles' garden, aligning the Romani with the grimy and blind subterranean creatures and suggesting they need to steal in order to prepare a thank-you meal for someone. And as if the moles aren't enough, one of the Babik family members is a simpleton with really bad teeth – "no brain but he's nice," Babik explains – who is transported by the family in the trunk of their car, together with a massive pig that later ravages the Fougeroles' pristine kitchen, again suggesting the Romani are backwards and dirty. To make matters worse, it is suggested Babik is a selfish opportunist, as he turns away a second family of Romani that arrives, telling his new landlord: "You give them one hand and they take your whole arm!" They are also depicted as lazy throughout, simply enjoying their newfound wealth in white French suburbia. The film can't quite muster the same tone of mockery for Daphne, who has inherited her wealth and whose terrible work as an artist is only a pastime, though supposedly she has earned that right because her parents or grandparents worked hard for that money.

Equally wrong-headed is the Fougeroles' relationship with their butler, an Anglophone Indian named Ravi who is played by British-born actor Armen Georgian, of Middle Eastern extraction, in blackface (!) and a turban. Ravi is 100 percent servile to his white masters but looks down on the non-white visitors they have accepted into their midst. Since this supporting character has no real backstory or character development of his own to speak of, how else can this be understood other than suggesting that the white race is somehow superior to everyone else?

Even besides all the blatant racism and xenophobia, the film *an sich* is a mess. The acting is broad but not all the actors play in the same register, with Zylberstein clearly on another planet than Clavier, and Berthe so subdued he doesn't feel like the son of his parents at all. The female characters are all completely flat and their behaviour makes absolutely no sense; Daphne's actions seem inspired more by plot necessities than any kind of consistent moral compass, however misguided it may be. The need for a happy ending also makes all the preceding bigotry seem very strange; is the message that Romani are dirty and lazy but they throw a mean party (just don't touch the food!), play good music and are therefore worth marrying? The can't-we-all-get-along vibe of the film's last reel feels about as genuine as a cannibal's promise to finally become a vegetarian.

De Chauveron never explores the subject of racism and xenophobia in any meaningful way, instead just hoping to score laughs by relying on the exact same clichés and gross generalizations that are the breeding ground for racism and perceived differences. Beyond committing the capital comedy sin of not being funny, this movie is also morally disturbing.²

Based on that description, what does the 2017 release of the film *À bras ouverts* reveal to us about antigypsyism³ in French cinema and in public discourse in France? Usually the first step in dealing with a problem is to acknowledge it. Before attempting to address the specific form of systemic and institutional racism known as antigypsyism, I would like to start by assessing the state of affairs at a higher level concerning the general understanding of racism and discrimination by French authorities. In France, the concept of race is considered obsolete, when one considers the constitution. What does that really mean? In order to explain how such concepts are applied in a French environment, let us provide a few historical facts for context and then look at a contemporary example in action. When the new constitution was written, after the Nazi occupation in 1946, it was deemed necessary to use the word "race" to show that there is no place for racism in the values of the French Republic. Discrimination on the grounds of (racial) origin is illegal. In

2 Van Hoeij, Boyd: With Open Arms ('À bras ouverts'). Film Review, The Hollywood Reporter, 21.4.2017, accessible at: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/open-arms-996253>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

3 The definition of antigypsyism as used in this paper is that of the Alliance Against Antigypsyism and can be found here: Antigypsyism – a Reference Paper, accessible at: http://antigypsyism.eu/?page_id=17. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

July 2018, the word was removed from the constitution⁴ in a highly symbolic act to delegitimise that cultural construct which is not scientifically based, and to reaffirm the values that are at the heart of the constitution, a major component of French identity. This was a partial response to the current role of identity politics and the need to address them with a specifically French solution. A salient example of how this concept is applied in action, however, demonstrates institutional racism in its utmost form.

In December 2017, as the government was setting up a commission called the CNNum (National Digital Council) to advise the president on more inclusive digital policies,⁵ it made an intentional decision to include Rokhaya Diallo in the council, a French journalist and filmmaker of African descent, in an attempt to include a diversity of opinions and connections in order to better reach those communities most affected.⁶ Soon after her appointment, however, a member of parliament from *Les Républicains*, a mainstream political party on the right (not the extreme right), along with a number of others strongly opposed Ms. Diallo's presence in the CNNum, specifically because her previous outspoken opinions regarding the need to tackle institutional racism were not acceptable. The idea of systemic racism emanating from government offices is divisive, according to them, and these parliamentarians argued that at present, France needs unity.⁷ (The terror attacks of January 8, 2015 at Charlie Hebdo, November 13, 2015 at the Bataclan in Paris, and July 14, 2016 in Nice contributed heavily toward the mind-set working against identity politics). The governmental decision-makers in charge of the commission accepted these arguments and removed Diallo from her post.⁸ In other words, the government reasoned that institutional racism emanating from the state does not exist and, hence, proceeded to remove a black woman from this commission that was created to ensure marginalised communities would be reached.

4 L'Assemblée supprime de la Constitution le mot "race" et interdit la "distinction de sexe," *Le Monde*, 12.7.2018, accessible at: https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2018/07/12/l-assemblee-supprime-dans-la-constitution-le-mot-race-et-interdit-la-distinction-de-sexe_5330615_823448.html. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

5 Le gouvernement demande le départ de Rokhaya Diallo du Conseil national du numérique, *Le Nouvel Obs*, 14.12.2017, accessible at: <https://www.nouvelobs.com/societe/20171214.OBS9259/le-gouvernement-demande-le-depart-de-rokhaya-diallo-du-conseil-national-du-numerique.html>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

6 Soumahoro, Maboula, In France a Woman Has Been Dismissed for Her Anti-Racism. Where is Our Égalité?, *The Guardian*, 27.12.2017, accessible at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/27/france-anti-racism-dismissed-feminist-rokhaya-diallo>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

7 See: Le gouvernement demande le départ.

8 *Ibid.*

She was dismissed for the very reasons she was appointed, because of her well-known orientation toward helping her community. In the end, the specific goals of the commission were overlooked, because to help one's community was perceived as more un-French than it was helpful in accomplishing the goals of the commission. It was perceived as un-French, divisive and not unifying, in that it was oriented towards a particular community and by default, not in favour of the concepts of universality and indivisibility; i.e. it would not help all French citizens equally. In other words, they concluded they can fire her, because she is black and standing up for blacks' rights, and that they cannot be racist for doing that, in part because they are upholding French values and French law, which have abandoned the concept of race.

So how do we start to talk about antigypsyism, a specific form of systemic institutional racism, which is defined to include discriminating social structures and practices (including those by state-run institutions), "which have a degrading and ostracising effect and which reproduce structural disadvantages,"⁹ when such talk can lead to banishment from policy-making institutions? The elephant in the room is not visible to the ostrich that has its head buried in the sand: institutional racism being the elephant and a number of powerful actors on behalf of public institutions being the ostrich refusing to acknowledge such a concept at all costs. In other words, there is no acknowledgment of the problem. That is why it is fitting to use a fictitious science, gadžology, to provide a reflection on such an absurdity that may be considered stranger than fiction. By poking fun at the way Roma/Sinti/Gypsies have been placed into various "scientific categories" for centuries, by examining the French from a similar point of view under categories they would also definitely not create for themselves, I hope to make some sense of a unique 'white' French cultural heritage imprint on the film industry from the point of view of an outsider. Sarcasm is necessary to temper the absurdity of the situation, so that the current reality is taken seriously while bearing in mind a subaltern's point of view.¹⁰

Perhaps, before we start our analysis of antigypsyism in cinema, we should extend our analysis a bit further on this higher level. Moving on from a general understanding of the concepts that dominate contemporary French culture as well as the culture of governmental institutions and the legal concepts that sustain them, let us look at the French film industry in general. To do this, we might want to take into account the amalgamation of a variety of different segments and what aspects of culture prevail among them. We can divide them into any number of segments, such as film critics, their readers,

9 See: Alliance Against Antigypsyism: Antigypsyism, section 1.1.

10 The author is referring to himself as a subaltern in this case.

those working in film production, those in the financing side of the industry, and of course the general cinema-going public. The public itself could be further segmented into urban and rural.

Why distinguish between these groups of people? Because it is one of the principles of gadžology¹¹ to employ this segmentation. As any good gadžologist knows, not all gadžos are the same. They are individuals and do not like to be heaped together into the same category or tarred with the same brush, a noble trait in the savage world of film production.¹² The point here being that whereas non-Roma anthropologists studying Roma have endlessly assumed the roles of defining which viewpoint to take, how to segment the groups being examined and how to draw conclusions from different value-systems and different sub-groups of Romani peoples, we can do the same with the French gadžo. Furthermore, the irony here is that the French perceive themselves as indivisible. They do not recognize any sub-group categories. The Jacobins ideologically divided and conquered all French peoples with the goal of preventing any single people in France from uniting within their communities, in order to retain an indivisible nature as being solely French. To look at the French as an outsider without understanding this internal logic of theirs or simply disregarding it may result in misunderstandings and misinterpretations. A gadžological (Romani pseudo-anthropological) perspective may even help other gadžos (non-French) to understand the French gadžos. Unlike a simply non-French anthropological view of French culture, a deconstruction with some help from gadžology will allow us to place the construct of power into scope in our examination of the French as an object of a Romani examination. We are (not) simply looking at those in the French film industry as if they were Gypsies under the microscope of the French anthropologist's lens.

Unlike the English language gadžo media covering the French cinematic scene, the French language gadžo media show that the majority white French gadžo does not (constitutionally or otherwise) recognize himself as different from any other French citizen (versus French people of African, Arabic or other regional origins). Although he is distinctly represented along with other racialised citizens through his portrayals of himself in French cinematic comedy, he does not see his self-portrayal as anything other than universal, i.e. not racialised. The French gadžo press never makes this point, as it is blind to this phenomenon. This, in and of itself, is a position the white French gadžo takes on overtly as his own way of combatting racism. There is no rational

11 Tidrick, Heather: "Gadžology" as Activism. What I Would Have Ethnography Do for East European Roma, in: *Collaborative Anthropologies* 3 (2010), pp. 121–131.

12 Roma have often been referred to as noble savages by anthropologists in the late nineteenth century through to WW2.

way, however, to deny his portrayals of himself in French cinematic comedies as anything other than in a racialised fashion.

Moreover, these portrayals of various ethnic groups, including the white French gadžo majority population, all continue to exist in French cinema thanks to various forms of public funding. The state, which has abandoned altogether the concept of race and is therefore above racism, finances an industry which produces racist material and perpetuates racism. The French film industry, predominantly run by white gadžo male directors and producers, receives state funding to create films which display racism and stereotypes in an uninhibited fashion without questioning where those stereotypes come from or what type of effect is created in the minds of the spectators. The common welfare of citizens is not currently a transparent criterion necessary to trigger the spending of public funds (nor does the potential to cause common harm seem to be a reason to prevent spending) in the case of film.

Despite the situation in public institutions and private industry, a significant number of people in the general public and some individuals working in powerful public institutions can acknowledge institutional racism. This includes the majority of the thirty-member panel who resigned from the CNNum to protest Rokhaya Diallo's dismissal.¹³ When we speak of institutional racism and its acknowledgement in France, we must also recognise that different people (especially non-white French gadžos) have different knowledge and their perceptions can be based on different methods of reasoning and motivation. In the case of subsidies for the film industry, we have an inquisitive Romani mind examining the conundrum of agency factors affected by self-interested motivations, and the fact that not very many other people are asking these questions has allowed this behaviour to continue for decades. We should take all of this into consideration before proceeding with any specific analysis of individual French films.

Let us now start our more specific examination of *À bras ouverts* (*Herein-spaziert* in German), with a look at how journalistic media and film critics perceived the film. It is common practice in the film industry that film critics are provided with advanced screenings, but not to *À bras ouverts*. This signalled that they could definitely expect to be dealing with controversial forms of expression that could potentially be very negatively received, again, as was exactly the case with the preceding film by the same director, *Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au bon Dieu?* (*Monsieur Claude und seine Töchter* in German), which included many of the same cast and crew. The producers of the film, desperate to protect their financial investment, could not risk negative media coverage,

13 Chrysafis, Angelique: French Race Row Erupts as Feminist Forced Off Advisory Body, *The Guardian*, 20.12.2017, accessible at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/20/french-race-row-erupts-as-feminist-forced-off-advisory-body>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

and with good reason, as the film had received generally negative reviews, as did its predecessor. With the exception of one positive review in *Figaro*, a leading right-wing establishment newspaper, no one recommended going to see *À bras ouverts*. The general consensus: Not only was it not funny, it was a bad film.

The creators of the film state that their aim was to make fun of the elite leftist family and its hypocrisy of unattainable ideals – essentially, to portray the right side of the political spectrum as having a more common-sense perception of reality. The critics' consensus was that they did not achieve this goal, mainly because the diversion of portraying extremely racist stereotypes of Roma was so intense that the premise was lost. The racist stereotypes were too many and ongoing to be considered funny. They also did little to advance the story, thus high-jacking the plot, and leaving the audience wondering what had just happened, never sufficiently returning to make this point. Some film critics reviewed it extraordinarily harshly. Gaëlle Moury of *Le Soir* in Belgium called the film dangerous¹⁴ essentially for these reasons. Hendy Bicaise in *Slate* magazine dedicated a significant amount of space going into great detail; he lists at least ten points describing ridiculous situations and over-the-top stereotyping of Roma,¹⁵ thus reinforcing the general consensus.

Unlike *Qu'est-ce qu'on a fait au bon Dieu?*, which was the largest grossing film of 2014 in France and the sixth biggest hit of all time in France, with over twelve million tickets sold, *À bras ouverts* barely achieved 8 % of that amount with just over one million tickets sold in 2017. It was a total flop. What happened? Gadžo journalists did a very thorough job of defending the Roma. Some even went on to explain how unfair it is to the Roma who do not have a media presence of their own to tell their own stories, to compete with and defend themselves from more powerful media that spread disinformation about them. A recent report by the national human rights commission or CNCDH,¹⁶ stated that Roma are statistically the most rejected and most discriminated group in France. This statistic was cited in one of the harsher critiques of the film published by *Le Nouvel Obs*, a traditionally left-leaning publication.¹⁷ Did

14 Moury, Gaëlle: *A bras ouverts* Un film pas drôle, voire dangereux, *Le Soir* (Belgium), 4.4.2017, accessible at: <https://plus.lesoir.be/88686/article/2017-04-04/bras-ouverts-un-film-pas-drole-voire-dangereux>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

15 Bicaise, Hendy, "À bras ouverts" n'est pas seulement un mauvais film, c'est une œuvre inacceptable, *Slate*, 26.3.2017, updated 5.4.2017, accessible at: <https://www.slate.fr/story/141872/bras-ouverts-film-inacceptable>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

16 La Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'Homme: Rapport sur la lutte contre le racisme sous toutes ces formes 2017, 22.3.2018, accessible at: <https://www.romeurope.org/rapport-2017-de-cncdh-letat-racisme-france/>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

17 Thomas, Marlène: "A bras ouverts," la comédie qui présente les Roms "comme des sauvages," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6.4.2017, accessible at: <https://www.nouvelobs.com/>

the public who ignored the critics for the first film pay attention this time? Can we say that this was an awakening? Hardly. I do not think that these are reasonable assumptions, nor do we have evidence to support such statements. What actually happened: A white French gadžo who succeeded in obtaining public funding in 2014 for an uninhibitedly racist and successfully commercial production received approval for funding of a second uninhibitedly racist film in 2017. Who would have suspected he could fail to actually tell a story with his film, when he had such a successful track record? When such funding is so easy to obtain for people like him (white male French gadžos on the inside of the film scene), could it contribute to laziness, a sense of entitlement, and/or lack of accountability in using such funds wisely?

According to Caspar Salmon, this seems to be so. This was just a blip on a trend of uninhibited racism that can be traced back to 2008, when the best-selling French film of all time, *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*, was released.¹⁸ He refers to it as an amiable simplistic film set in rural post-industrial northern France. Its success proved there was an appetite for a simpler type of film in rural France, far from dealing with the complexity of identity. Salmon believes it is also a result of mediocre production and lack of competition in the comedic film market. Since the 1970s this industry has remained restricted to certain groups of actors/directors related to the troupe of *Le Splendid* – of which Christian Clavier, who plays in the starring role of *À bras ouverts*, was a member. Salmon further explains that French film has recently become a battleground for a certain type of politics.¹⁹ There is an ongoing conflict over who receives money for filming and the insiders seem not to be aligned along political or ideological lines between left and right, but rather between insiders who are protected from outside competition. Nevertheless, more pressure coming from the right and extreme right on the flows of money toward film and film production are having an effect. How these special politics are being played out will not be examined thoroughly in this paper, though two important examples should be noted here with respect to describing the trend from 2008 mentioned above. First, traditionally right-wing held city councils removed advertisements of Alain Guiraudie's film *Stranger by the Lake* (2013), provoking cries of censorship related to homophobia.²⁰ At approximately the

societe/20170406.OBS7651/a-bras-ouverts-la-comedie-qui-presente-les-roms-comme-des-sauvages.html. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

18 Salmon, Caspar: When Did French Comedies Become so Reactionary?, BFI Film Forever, 20.4.2017, accessible at: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/when-french-comedy-so-reactionary>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

19 Ibid.

20 By removing advertisements and reducing ticket sales, they are also reducing the amount of public funding available in the future in support of artistic endeavours. The funds for public

same time in relation to this, Marion Maréchal Le Pen, a former leader within the French right-wing party *Le Front National*, now *Rassemblement National* or *RN*, called for a stop to all subsidies for French films: (perhaps funding for simple films with racist content is a way of appeasing the extreme right and preventing a change in the status quo for insiders, French white male gadžos, in the film industry?). Secondly, in another case which took place earlier, a right-wing group called for a boycott of the broadcast of Céline Sciamma's *Tomboy* (2011) when the film aired on television. The reason for the boycott was that the film was caught up in the government's stance on gender theory, an ideological area of contention for the traditional right-wing.²¹

I would like to interject here using my gadžologist framework: Gender theory and how it is perceived by different groups of French gadžos can provide an interesting view of language and thought processes in France to outsiders. In other words, I am going to put French gadžos into categories that are easily recognised by non-French peoples (like boxes and categories), and the relevance of the vocabulary discussed below will reinforce my arguments when speaking later about the terminology of antigypsyism in France. While it is often unsurprisingly those French gadžos who are opposed to modern gender theories who also identify themselves as being on the right of the political spectrum, what should be noted is that French gadžos in this part of the political spectrum also make a clear distinction between the usage of the French word *genre*, which means gender and has a neutral meaning with no connotations, and the English word "gender" which for them has become loaded with negative connotations in French usage, since it refers to modern gender theories and gender identities. The English word is used this way in French and thus it gives a virtually new meaning in French usage to the word, compared to the direct translation that could more easily be used in its place, *genre*. Furthermore, while I refer to the left and the right of the political spectrum, I do so in a way that French gadžos would still use themselves today. However, the traditional left and the traditional right no longer exist in the current political landscape of France. Xenophobia and restrictions of freedom are increasingly supported by the supposed left, while the right is taking on social issues in a less nationalistic tone. At the same time, uninhibited Trump-style racism has also become more socially acceptable overall on both sides, and has seemed to be heading towards normalisation over the past eight years.

Cyprien Caddeo addresses this shift to the right in society in his article on French comedy films in the journal *Le Vent Se Lève*. He explains a concept

support of film production are financed through ticket sales (taxes). Furthermore, fewer ticket sales for gay-themed films could be tracked statistically and might be used to argue against future funding of similarly themed films.

21 Casper: French Comedies.

used by white French gadžos: When things are perceived as just a little racist, they seem to be acceptable. This sheds light on the commercial success of the previous film by De Chauveron, as it appears to be a reflection of reality in French society.²² It is ok to make fun of everyone a little bit. The supposition being, “That’s really what everyone does, isn’t it?” He goes on to list a number of examples of blatant racism in the film that are far from being just a little bit racist, essentially and consistently portraying all foreigners in a bad light. It reflects a shift of society to the right. Caddeo also points out that despite claiming to make fun of everyone, the characters of middle class white gadžo people who come from the right neighbourhoods are never the objects of ridicule or even questioned. So much for making fun of everyone. Perhaps this criticism led to the creation of *À bras ouverts*, to make fun of white French gadžos, even though he failed to do so. This is precisely the overlooked (non) racialisation²³ of white people mentioned earlier, visible through the lens of gadžology, which is happening. They just do not get it.

Whatever the reasons and whatever the result, it had no bearing on De Chauveron receiving financial aid. *À bras ouverts* is listed as having a financial grant request approved in the CNC’s 2016 annual report *La Production Cinématographique*.²⁴ This film received public funding of 590,339 Euros from the CNC (The National Centre for Cinema and Animated Images). While films whose applications for public funding are approved do get published in the CNC’s annual report, the actual amount of funding received is not made available except by special request.²⁵ Funding for work combatting discrimination, hate crimes and hate speech is complex and more difficult to access than funding for this type of film, which the state funds generously, if you are an insider. As far as criteria for obtaining public funding for film production are concerned, there is currently no transparency with respect to when artistic license encroaches on hate speech, or when damage from harmful stereotypes may exceed harm resulting from censorship. When major media representations of Roma that support antigypsyist images receive over half a million

22 Caddeo, Cyprien: *Comédies françaises dites bonjour à l’humour de droite décomplexé*, *Le Vent Se Lève*, 27.12.2017, accessible at: <https://lvsl.fr/comedies-francaises-dites-bonjour-ahumour-de-droite-decomplexe/>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

23 Non-racialised/racialised as they are always above race, universal, and never portrayed with any negative or absurd stereotyping. What is the racial stereotype for white people in France? It is to recognise that this is also a racial stereotype.

24 Guerrieri, Jean-Pierre/Jardillier, Sophie/Canetti, Nicole/Danard, Benoît/Sartori, Danielle: *La production cinématographique en 2016*, Centre national du cinéma et de l’image animée: Direction des études, des statistiques et de la prospective, Direction du cinéma, 1.6.2017, accessible at: https://www.cnc.fr/cinema/etudes-et-rapports/etudes-prospectives/la-production-cinematographique-en-2016_305551. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

25 Correspondence from the CNC confirms the amount, as per special request.

Euros for just one film in one year, how much more needs to be spent on public awareness campaigns to combat these harmful stereotypes? This question needs to be asked especially since pogroms against Roma in shantytowns near Paris in March 2019 were caused by simply using stereotypes present since the Middle Ages via social media.²⁶ Thanks to antigypsyist rhetoric from politicians and media having become normalised over the past two decades, such stereotypes seem to be no longer questioned by much of the population and are quite rapidly leading toward the next stage on the road to genocide.²⁷

As the concept of race has been abandoned, there is also no disaggregated data on the type of people working within the public authorities who are awarding public funds. We can nevertheless make a very rough analysis of the people who are receiving funding, and we do indeed see a predominantly white male *gadžo* recipient pool of this funding. How can we address these unilateral funding structures without using official equality data? If ethnic minorities and migrants are excluded from public bodies, who will fight for more inclusive policies? Who will raise the issue of institutional racism if critical voices like Diallo are banished? It seems all the extreme right are really confused about who controls and who benefits from the current situation, and this contributes to the overall complexity of addressing antigypsyism in the French film industry.

One final element I would like to add to the discussion of antigypsyism in France is the usage of vocabulary. As was noted earlier, certain political factions have succeeded in demonising progressive concepts by associating foreign words with them, to create a distance between what some may consider traditional French values with French words and “otherness” with foreign words introduced into the French language, as is the case for the word “gender.” This demonising of foreign concepts, creating suspicion and negative connotations generally, is not exclusive to the case of this English word. For this reason, we need to examine what understanding a French *gadžo* has of the definition of “Rom,” whether or not they have even heard of the film *À bras ouverts*. The word Rom, as it is commonly used today, was introduced into the vocabulary of the French in the 1990s, as a wave of more politically and economically conscious Roma from Eastern Europe moved westward into

26 Roms et rumeurs de rapt d'enfants: un petit pogrom entre amis, France Culture, 27.3.2019, <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/lhumeur-du-matin-par-guillaume-erner/lhumeur-du-jour-emission-du-mercredi-27-mars-2019>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020].

27 Antitsiganisme: le président de “La Voix des Roms” demande un plan national de lutte efficace, Le Journal du Dimanche, 16.6.2019, accessible at: <https://www.lejdd.fr/Societe/antitsiganisme-le-president-de-la-voix-des-rroms-demande-un-plan-de-lutte-national-efficace-3904729>. [Accessed: 24.4.2020]; Stanton, Gregory H.: The Ten Stages of Genocide, accessible at: <https://www.genocidewatch.com/ten-stages-genocide>. [Accessed: 27.7.2020].

France. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, they often chose to refer to themselves as Roma rather than *cigan* (pronounced the same as the French word *tsigane*). As migrants from Romania and Bulgaria arrived and accumulated on the outskirts of Paris, as well as other major cities, looking for work and setting up shantytowns, the dwellers of these slums became known in France as *les Roms*, regardless of whether their true ethnicity was Bulgarian, Romanian or Romani. Approximately fifteen to twenty thousand people arrived and have been present in squats and shanties for the past twenty years. These are systemically socially excluded citizens, mostly from Romania and some from Bulgaria, not all necessarily self-identifying themselves as being ethnically of Romani ethnicity. It is this population that is generally referred to as *Roms* in France. This is due in part to the lack of education about who the Roma are in the public-school system, but even more so due to the spreading of misinformation and half-truths by journalists who did not know any better, didn't bother to find out, or didn't care to follow through by doing an accurate job of reporting or editing. Consequentially, the word "Rom," like the word "gender," has with such usage come to have a negative connotation. Both are foreign words recently introduced into the French language. The point here is that the word "Roma," in most of the rest of Europe and North America has successfully replaced *cigan*, *Zigeuner*, and Gypsy in in major media. These words have been successfully dropped from most languages in mainstream media sources outside of France²⁸ because of their negative connotations, as in the verb "to gyp," for example. The word Roma comes from the Romani language and represents a small political triumph in the emancipation movement by becoming the politically correct word of choice designated by most Romani peoples themselves.²⁹ The French gadžo media and governmental institutions, however, have managed to turn around this positive result of promoting the usage of the word "Rom" from the Romani emancipation movement in other countries, into a derogatory slur of foreign etymological origins in common daily French usage.

To further complicate the situation, the French word *tsigane* however, is seen as neutral and free of any negative connotations. The word *tsigane* is all-encompassing and can refer to different groups like Gitanos, Manouches and others. The French have one of the most diverse Roma populations (which they refer to as *tsiganes*) in Europe. Throughout its history, France had various waves of Romani immigration starting from the fifteenth century through to the twenty-first century from Spain, Hungary, Romania, the

28 Except Italy, which similarly to France uses the word Rom as a pejorative while keeping Zingari in a more positive light.

29 Or Roma and Sinti in Germany; more importantly, these comparisons are given here to demonstrate the situation in France.

former Yugoslavia, Algeria and elsewhere. All have come to settle in France. Today, they and their descendants are estimated to number approximately five hundred thousand, though no official statistics exist. The descendants of those immigrants are French citizens and are considered as just French.

These patterns of immigration are not common knowledge. Many people do not make any association between the “Roms” in the shanty towns and the *tsiganes* who are French citizens. The French *tsiganes* often distance themselves publicly from the new arrivals, while the stigma is so strong that most French people prefer to hide their *tsigane* identity, if they have one, which partly explains why there is not much outreach or solidarity exhibited by the French *tsiganes* and the recent migrants, a further manifestation of antigypsyism in society. What is also relatively unknown by the general population is that roadblocks hampering social inclusion of the people currently in shanty-towns is related to national security policies,³⁰ coupled with overall failures of national housing policies. What they do know, however, is what they see in the media: images of impoverished EU citizens called *Roms* being a nuisance, begging, stealing, and living in illegally occupied spaces. Whether it be via provision of news or fictional entertainment, the media portray these recent immigrants from Romania and Bulgaria as a nuisance, known as the *Roms*, never as *tsiganes*. The French language, by means of a colonial racist concept, takes a word (like “Rom” or “gender”) that is used in a positive sense, and because it is foreign, can twist its meaning into something pejorative when in common French usage, as perpetuated by the mass media. Whether this happens despite or because these words are foreign, whether this happens out of ignorance because journalists and editors are uninformed or because they deliberately choose to create a new concept, is debatable. Nevertheless, it is happening. Unrelated to common French experience and therefore foreign, words like “Rom” and “gender” become negative, because mass media ignore published bodies of work that make the link between definitions of peoples (like *Roms/tsiganes*) or concepts (like gender/genre). Words like “*tsigane*” end up having a much more positive connotation than any foreign word like “Rom,” despite “Rom” being the term of choice of a people to describe itself.

How can any Romani look at this situation in France without a sense of humour, pointing out the irony of the situation? It is absurd. There is a total state of denial in this cultural vacuum created by French exceptionalism.

30 The European National Roma Integration Strategy for France is one of forced evictions carried out against Romanian and Bulgarian migrants by the police under the orders of the Ministry of Interior; Kullmann, Ádám/Kushen, Robert/Rövid, Márton/Szendrey, Orsolya/Zentai, Violetta: Civil Society Monitoring on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies and Decade Action Plans in 2012 and 2013. Summary Report, Budapest 2014, pp. 19–24.

Without a sense of humour, we would probably pull out all our hair and perform other acts of self-harm in a state of PTSD,³¹ and justifiably so.

Therefore, when speaking to the French gadžo, one must first determine what kind of French gadžo you are speaking to: one who is aware of the reality of who the Roma are, one who strictly follows the word of the law and does not recognize difference among French citizens, one who is unaware but willing to learn, or one who has been convinced that the popular perception portrayed in mass media is basically correct and sticks to the definition which refers exclusively to those recent arrivals as being the only *Roms* in France. Once you determine this, you can move on to explain who the subject of your discussion really is, if you ever want to broach any subject related to Roma in France. In every case, however, you always have to explain who the Roma are, because even those who have a good understanding will be the first to expect that even you do not understand who you are talking about if you do not clarify that in advance. This is France, the land of philosophy, complexity, and exceptionalism. The Roma are, in fact, a much larger, more complex and integral part of French and European society than is commonly understood by most people, including Roma themselves. If you do not understand which type of gadžo³² your audience is, you will only create more confusion, because your basic assumptions for having a fruitful conversation will not be starting at the same base line. Only after setting the context to explain all of this, can you finally begin to address the topic at hand of how antigypsyism currently manifests itself in a French context or just begin to explain the concept of antigypsyism. Most importantly, you risk being excluded from policy-making circles if you dare to address institutional racism directly... We still have a long way to go before pulling the ostrich's head out of the sand. Disseminating knowledge about antigypsyism in French society today can be considered an avant-garde project.

31 Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome.

32 The tongue-in-cheek references to gadžos are supposed to mirror what has often been the approach of anthropological studies of the Roma categorizing them according to a so-called self-designated label of "Gypsy" in isolated units that have nothing in common across Europe today and the overarching implication that to do so would be a form of nationalism. The classification of individual objects in isolation and arguing against any transnational relationship between groups of Roma/Gypsies is precisely the opposite of what happened in the nation building exercise which created France after the Revolution of 1789. Even in the form of superficial ironic analysis, the revelation of such a Romani point of view should help the reader to discover that the cultural relativism of French authorities toward institutional racism is best revealed from a foreign point of view and should be questioned, given that reinforcing power towards public institutions against minorities is resulting from the denial of institutional racism in the French context.