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Discourse, dominance and power relations

Inequality as a social and interactional object

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ABSTRACT This article focuses on some of the issues that arise when examining social inequality and similar notions such as dominance or group superiority as participants' concerns. It emphasizes the importance of understanding constructions of inequality in terms of how they are (1) situated, constructed and invoked in talk; and (2) oriented to and part of actions and ideological practices. These concerns are illustrated with an example from an interview with majority group members on ethnic issues. This shows how particular orientations to and descriptions of inequality are constructed and what they might be doing. Implications for the study of the discursive construction and representation of social inequality in talk and the nature of inequality as an object in interaction are discussed.

KEYWORDS action ● construction ● discursive psychology ● dominance ● inequality

INTRODUCTION

Questions of social inequality (and related notions) have constituted a central subject matter and have been extensively debated in research on social issues and social processes within sociology and social psychology. As some authors argue, traditional social psychology has largely ignored social inequality by choosing to focus on essential and objective group differences rather than on social context or power (Hollander and Howard, 2000). Scholars of ethnicity and politics, sociology and politics have been definitively more attentive to social inequality, but have chosen to focus on the macro, 'structural' aspects of social inequality and broader processes like social division, social stratification and differentiation. The study of

inequality has been largely defined as the study of its measurable extent, degree and consequences (Schwalbe et al., 2000).

In addition to that, when issues of social inequality arise there is a tendency to frame them around abstract sociological and political debates on ethnicity, minority rights, etc. For the traditional sociology of inequality, the question is *why* inequality exists and not *how* inequality is talked about and *what* are the meanings attached to it. The *why* is based on a taken-for-granted assumption that inequality exists (only) as an objective entity in society and that, therefore, it is the researcher's task to define its meanings and boundaries. There have been attempts, nevertheless, to go beyond the macro-level theorization of inequality.

Researchers working within the symbolic interactionist tradition have tried to emphasize the ways in which systems of stratification manifest themselves at the micro, interactional level, how people make sense of their world (and others). For instance, Anderson and Snow (2001) highlight the potential of the symbolic interactionist perspective to contribute to a more complex understanding of social stratification. In a review of interactionist research on inequality, these authors explore questions related to everyday manifestations of inequality, their consequences, and how people manage and negotiate 'inequality' as they go about their everyday business. In the same vein, Harris (2001, 2003) points to the necessity of investigating social life in situated social interaction by examining the range of symbolic and interactional manifestations of social inequality.

Micro-cultural sociological approaches like ethnomethodology have chosen to focus on understanding the workings of inequality within a framework that considers social inequality as something managed and accomplished in talk. Sex and gender inequality are a good example of how ethnomethodology has dealt with issues related to power and inequality. West and Fenstermaker (1993, 1995) demonstrate the power and inequality associated with sex and gender interaction and comment on the possibilities for social change in forms of such interaction. In terms of accomplishing gender, the idea of accountability is central. That is, members of society take notice of activities and place them in a social framework, as they are regularly 'engaged in descriptive accountings of states of affairs to one another' (Heritage, 1984: 136). These involve both activities that conform to accepted norms and those that might be considered deviant. As West and Zimmerman (1987: 126) put it, 'when we view gender as an accomplishment, an achieved property of situated conduct, our attention shifts from matters internal to the individual and focuses on interactional, and ultimately, institutional arenas' (see also Fenstermaker and West, 2002).

For instance, 'doing gender consists of creating differences between girls and boys and between men and women – differences that are neither natural nor biological' (West and Fenstermaker, 1993: 159). But once such differences become established, they are often regarded as natural, and

are difficult or slow to change. Ethnomethodological work on gender, race and class inequality has advanced a new understanding of 'difference' as an ongoing interactional accomplishment (West and Fenstermaker, 1995; West and Zimmermann, 1987). The analysis of 'situated conduct affords the best prospect for understanding how these "objective" properties of social life achieve their ongoing status as such and, hence, how the most fundamental divisions of our society are legitimated and maintained' (West and Fenstermaker, 1995: 33).

The problem for both symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists seems to be the persistent and pervasive assumption in traditional sociology (and social psychology) that inequality, and particularly social inequality, is something that only researchers are in a position to identify and talk about (see Harris, 2003). Following Zimmerman and Pollner (1970), it is argued that what is missing is an approach that treats the concepts of equality/inequality and related notions as a topic rather than a resource, an approach sensitive to the diverse meanings and interpretations of equality/inequality and to the specific interactional context in which they occur.

What is needed is an approach that cuts across the traditional individual/social dualism, as well as the traditional micro/macro division (Potter, 2003), an approach with a focus on the way both psychology and society are 'produced', that is described, invoked, categorized, for action and interaction (Potter et al., 2005). Drawing on insights from ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) and conversation analysis (Sacks, 1995), discursive psychology (henceforth DP) has put forward a way of understanding social inequality and notions such as domination, group superiority and group differentiation that has placed a strong emphasis on discourse, on the discursive practices of participants in particular settings (Billig, 1996; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

This article tries to illustrate how a DP approach can inform our understanding of the ways in which inequality and dominance are produced and reproduced in talk, both as 'social' and as rhetorically potent devices for the discursive management of category memberships, 'differences' and moral standings in the world.

DP is a broadly constructionist approach associated with a relativist meta-theory rather than a positivist one, which still dominates experimental social psychology (Edwards et al., 1995; Gergen, 1994). Discursive social psychology is constructionist in two ways. On the one hand, it starts from the assumption that individuals construct their own reality through the intermediary of the descriptions they use. As Jonathan Potter (1998: 235) argues, reality is not pre-ordered, pre-categorized in a way to being passively accepted, but it is 'constituted in one way or another as people talk it, write it, argue it and undermine it'. On the other hand, these very descriptions and accounts that people use in various situations 'are *themselves* constructed; that is fabricated in occasions of talk, or in specific

texts, from words, metaphors and a range of discursive resources' (Potter, 1998: 235, emphasis in original).

DP treats talk and texts as social practices and, as Derek Edwards (2003: 31) suggests, studies the 'relationships between mind and world, as psychology generally does, but as a discourse topic – as a participant's concern, a matter of talk's business, talk's categories, talk's rhetoric, talk's current interactional concerns'. It focuses on person and event descriptions in talk and text (Edwards and Potter, 2005). It examines 'how factual descriptions are assembled, how they are built as solidly grounded or undermined as false, and how they handle the rational accountability (or otherwise) of actors and speakers . . . how people deploy common sense notions of an "external" reality as a kind of setting for, and evidential domain for inferences about, a range of mental states and personal characteristics' (Edwards and Potter, 2005: 243).

The present article approaches a traditional sociological topic, the issue of social inequality, from a DP perspective. In a nutshell, the attempt is to 'respecify' concepts such as social inequality, power and dominance as participants' concerns, in terms of how they are managed, framed and enacted in diverse ways in talk. This 'respecification' is part of DP's general project (Edwards, 1997, 2005; Edwards and Potter, 2001, 2005; Potter, 2003; Potter and Edwards, 2001a, 2001b) and involves the reworking, reframing of topics, such as social inequality, as discourse practices. As Potter has argued, 'constructing the research topic as *discourse* marks a move from considering language as an abstract system of terms to considering talk and texts as parts of social practices' (Potter, 2003: 785).

Rather than seeing, for example, statements about inequality as reflections of what people carry around in their heads or as mere reality reports, participants are shown to flexibly and artfully work up or formulate the nature of actions, events and, ultimately, their own accountability through *ways of talking* (Edwards, 1997). As discursive psychologists have argued, these *ways of talking* are constructive and action oriented. They are *constructive* in the sense that they offer a particular version of things, rather than any other from other available versions. They are also *action-oriented* in the sense that they are constructed in ways that perform actions in and for the occasion of their telling (Edwards, 2005).

The aim of respecification is not a matter of finding ready-made (traditional) psychological and sociological topics and trying to respecify them. As Edwards (2005: 261) points out, it works, rather, the other way around. One starts with discourse and, in analysing it, one finds participants doing things for which psychology (and sociology, for that matter) has developed not only a technical vocabulary, but also explanations. For instance, very often, one might find people expressing opinions, offering causal explanations and justifications for their positions. In examining all these issues, DP has developed understandings that often go against how all

these things are theorized in psychology (or sociology). For example, the issue of *factual description* and *factual discourse* is a closely relevant topic that psychology (or sociology) ignores, but which DP has taken seriously as a topic of enquiry in its own right when one analyses, for instance, attitude-talk, or the way causality, agency and accountability are managed and made relevant in talk when handling a range of psychological business (Potter, 1996, 1998).

DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

The discursive psychological study of social inequality and notions such as power, dominance and exploitation has incorporated the main features of social constructionism. The questioning of commonsense understandings, the anti-essentialist and anti-realist stance, the focus on language as a form of social action, the focus on interaction and social practices (Burr, 1995: 5–8; see also Potter, 1996) are all concerns that DP has placed at the core of its empirical approach to social inequality. As an approach allied to social constructionism (Edwards, 2005; Potter, 1996, 1998, 2003), DP rejects the notion that the study of social inequality (or other social phenomena such as social change) are a matter of uncovering and ultimately altering the underlying structures of social life through the use of a grand theory or meta-narrative.

Rather, different discourses are seen as constructing social phenomena in different ways entailing different possibilities for social action. This epistemological move raises the issue of (unequal) power relations, and dominance, as a way of representing and constructing the 'social' (and the social actors) that may have an oppressive effect (within and) upon some groups in society.

What one is studying in approaching issues that come under the umbrella term of 'social inequality' are discursive practices of various kinds and of various content, *ways of talking* that reproduce dominance and unequal relations of power. These can only exist in social interaction, as people are constructing and account for (equal/unequal) states of affairs. The discursive turn in social psychology (see Harré [2001] for a recent account), with its attention to discourse, has been accomplished through a shift from the inner world of mental states and cognitive abstractions to the outer world of outward processes of language (in) use. This shift has wider implications for the analysis of social inequality and for the issue of what social inequality *is*. An analysis of social inequality from a discursive perspective should follow the same movement, from the study of the inner realm of cognitions and emotions of the individual towards the study of the outward understandings of inequality, of the public and accountable ways in which

equal/unequal social relations are constructed and talked about, the study of social and discursive practices that constitute, enact and reproduce social inequality. This shift should be accompanied not only by the awareness of the importance of discourse for the study of social inequality, but also of the social, political consequences of different ways of accounting.

DP views social inequality as both interactive and communicative, located within the cultural and discursive practices of society. It is through everyday language practices that relations of power, dominance and exploitation become reproduced and legitimated (Augoustinos et al., 2002, 2005; LeCouteur et al., 2001; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). When one is concentrating on action and discourse one starts to think about the ways in which constructions of 'inequality' can be used to do things (Potter et al., 2005).

A large body of discursive psychological studies have demonstrated how various discursive resources and rhetorical arguments are flexibly used and put together to construct notions of disadvantage and inequality in order to justify and legitimate current social practices. For instance, one of the first attempts to apply discourse analysis to the issue of social inequality was Wetherell et al.'s (1987) study of discourses concerning gender and employment opportunities in university students' talk. The notion of 'unequal egalitarianism' that the authors have put forward points to a dilemmatic discourse (Billig et al., 1988) of egalitarianism, one which accommodates contradictory interpretative repertoires (endorsing the principle of equal opportunities for men and women alongside practical constraints in realizing equitable gender relations and predominantly individualistic and psychological accounts of gender inequities) when accounting for work and career.

Analysing broadcasters' accounts on inequality in radio, Gill (1991, 1993) has documented the flexible and effective ways in which injustice in the workplace is justified and the status quo maintained. Among the justifications offered, the scarcity of women in the radio industry was warranted by suggesting women would not really want such work. Directing attention to psychological concepts such as desire, responsibility for (in)equality is seen to rest with women themselves, rather than prejudiced individuals or social institutions and practices. As Gill (1993: 78) argues, 'the idea that oppressed groups do not "really" want to change their position is one frequently drawn on by members of dominant groups in order to justify their actions or inaction'. This kind of accounting has the effect of rendering existing power relations (and presenting them as) natural and inevitable. Similar ways of masking oppression by rendering existing power relations natural and inevitable were found in other studies. For instance, Gough (1998), in a paper on men and the discursive reproduction of sexism, has identified similar broad patterns of accounting that reproduced male superiority – appeals to gender difference/dominance and egalitarian ideals. The

construction of gender difference was grounded in socialization, biology or the psychology of women repertoires.

Riley's (2002) analysis of professional men's constructions of equality and discrimination showed that equality was largely defined, in a rather 'idealistic' way, in terms of treating everyone the same, regardless of social category membership. Accounts of equality were based upon repertoires of 'interchangeability', 'individual ability' and 'pragmatism' that allowed the construction of a dichotomy between individualist–equality and structuralist–discrimination, minimized the gendered nature of men and women's experiences and negated the use of context in favour of the principle of individualism.

One of the most important contributions of DP to the study of social inequality was the study of racism, prejudice and discrimination in talk about 'others'. In their seminal analysis of 'race' discourse in New Zealand, Wetherell and Potter (1992) found that white majority group members (Pakeha) were skilful users of a range of liberal and egalitarian arguments that drew on principles such as freedom, fairness, individual rights and equal opportunity in their talk on (Indigenous) Maori–Pakeha relations. Their analysis detailed how the discursive resources expressive of a liberal and humanist ideology of 'difference' were flexibly organized in Pakeha talk so as to legitimate existing unequal social relations and to justify racist and discriminatory practices.

More recently, Augoustinos et al.'s (2005) paper on talk about disadvantage and affirmative action in student focus group discussions on 'race' relations in Australia has documented the rhetorical and discursive resources available to majority group members when they discuss Indigenous disadvantage and affirmative action. Drawing on previous discursive research on social inequality, the authors have shown how liberal principles such as individualism, merit and egalitarianism were recurrently drawn upon in order to justify and legitimate opposition to affirmative action in education. A self-sufficient, pervasive meritocratic discourse was identified, one which considers individual merit as the most important principle determining entry into (tertiary) education. The discursive features of a meritocratic and individualist discourse on equality/inequality and access to education are framed by the inherent ideological dilemmas and ambivalence that are produced by the contradictory (ideological) tension between the ideals of egalitarianism, on the one hand, and individualism, on the other hand. Nevertheless, as Augoustinos et al. (2005: 337) comment, 'despite these alternative accounts and internal contradictions the principles of individual achievement and meritocracy were recurrently mobilized by participants as bottom line arguments to oppose social programmes that sought to redress existing group inequities'.

This kind of research has shown how arguments about fairness, social justice and individual rights act as commonplaces defining the contours of

a liberal-individualist ideology that is central to Western democracies. Liberal principles, such as 'everybody should be treated equally' or 'you have to be practical' can be mobilized flexibly and in contradictory ways to do important rhetorical work: in some contexts, they can be invoked to justify change in redressing disadvantage and improving a group's status, while in other contexts they can be used to justify and legitimate existing social relations (see Augoustinos et al., 2005). The flexible combination of liberal principles for illiberal ends permits the production of a range of ideological dilemmas for members of any liberal democratic society as they discuss and debate notions of fairness, equality and justice (Augoustinos et al., 2002; Billig et al., 1988; Potter and Wetherell, 1989; Verkuyten, 2005; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

All these findings point to the pervasiveness of the contradictory and ambivalent nature of everyday sense-making practices around sensitive issues such as social inequality, disadvantage, racism and prejudice (Edwards, 2003; Tileagă, 2005a, 2005b; Verkuyten, 2001, 2003) and their social, political and ideological effects (Tileagă, 2006; Wetherell and Potter, 1992).

Discursive psychologists have also examined the discursive processes through which ethnic minorities are represented and made real in actual talk (Verkuyten, 1998, 2001; Verkuyten et al., 1994, 1995; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). A number of discursive psychological studies of racism have highlighted the way in which concerns about being heard as speaking from a prejudiced position are managed by constructing evaluations as mere factual descriptions, unmotivated by an inner psychology of ethnic or racial hatred (Edwards, 2003; LeCouteur and Augoustinos, 2001; LeCouteur et al., 2001). Constructions of an unbiased, egalitarian, tolerant identity and denials of feelings of prejudice are part of the common identity work of contemporary racist discourse (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1993, 1998; LeCouteur, 2001; LeCouteur and Augoustinos, 2001; Rapley, 1998, 2001). For instance, in a contribution on the language of prejudice and racism in political rhetoric, Mark Rapley (2001) points to the diverse rhetorical manoeuvres used in accomplishing discrimination without 'being racist'. The author describes what he calls 'doing equity' ('doing X without doing Y' – accomplishing discrimination without 'being racist') as a means of promoting discriminatory (prejudiced) positions, promoting a version of 'racism' by managing its absence.

Social inequality is a nice example of how, in everyday talk (and also in interview and focus group talk), members (participants) are pervasively attentive to topics that are also the business or interest of academic psychologists (Edwards, 2003; Rapley, 2001). DP does not aim to offer definitive statements about what 'real' inequality is or looks like. Social inequality is examined as an everyday phenomenon produced by members in talk-in-interaction; how participants bring off inequality as a social action. It

aims to examine society's conversations about social inequality 'as action-performative social objects' (Rapley, 2001: 232). Inequality is seen not as something preordained, whose contours are already established, self-evident and ready to be measured, but rather as an *effect* of discourses. At the same time, one should also mention that the sorts of social actions that can be seen as claiming membership in the category of those describable as 'doing inequality' are local, but also historical and imbued ideologically. The boundaries of these categories and social actions are routinely produced, reproduced, contested, reworked in discourses of equality/inequality. Discursive research has tried to map the themes and theories speakers use to structure and formulate a worldview when accounting for social inequality, in terms of a set of shared resources available to them and the ideological effects of using some organizations of discourse rather than others. People engaged in conversation with others construct and negotiate meanings and the 'reality' that they are talking about. The main focus of a range of discursive studies has been (social) inequality as a problematic, social inequality as a *to-be-accounted-for phenomenon*.

Social inequality is approached analytically as something that may be attended to, in various ways, in talk itself. Speakers' orientations, definitions, reactions are used as the main ground for determining meaning. Nevertheless, the discursive psychological study of social inequality should not be limited to describe and analyse what social inequality represents for the members of society, but should also include an 'investigation of the social and political consequences of discursive patterning' (Wetherell, 1998: 405).

The notion of ideology (or ideologies) plays a very important role in the discursive constitution and reproduction of social and political 'realities' (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999). For discursive psychologists taking a critical stance to the analysis of the discourse of racism, ideology is located in argument, in the process of argumentation, in the intricacies of discourse about social issues such as prejudice (or what it means to be prejudiced), discrimination or inequality, in the seemingly factual descriptions about 'others' (Augoustinos and Walker, 1998; Billig, 2002; Rapley, 2001; Verkuyten, 2001, 2003; Wetherell, 2003).

Understanding how specific representations of social inequality, and the issues of accountability linked to it, are constructed and sustained can provide clues for 'reconstructing' the existing 'ideological' representations pertaining to unequal power relations, the social and ideological consequences of specific discursive patternings, such as maintenance of the status quo, and the reproduction, naturalization and legitimation of dominance. The ideological content or import of a discourse is 'measured' by its *effects*. Discourses that categorize the world in ways that legitimate, maintain and perpetuate social inequality patterns and unequal relations of power are said to function ideologically. The focus is on both the discursive practices that construct representations of the world, social actors and social relations

and the role that these discursive practices play in protecting and reproducing the interests of particular social groups.

INEQUALITY IN ACTION

The question is how one should approach 'inequality' in ideological discourses. One way to do that is by looking at how speakers construct and invoke inequalities in their talk while being aware of the idea that constructions of inequality are part of actions. This can also be achieved by taking a closer look at the practices in which inequality constructions are employed, how specific descriptions of unequal social relations are constructed and used and what they might be doing, not only within a specific interactional context, but also within the broader political and ideological context.

The example that I focus on is taken from a corpus of 38 recorded semi-structured discussion/interviews with middle-class Romanian professionals (collected in the year 2001), both male and female, selected to cover a variety of social backgrounds in the region of Transylvania (northwestern part of Romania). This is part of a wider project aiming to compare and contrast the way Romanians talk about the Hungarian minority with the way they talk about the Romany minority, a discursive analysis of prejudice and moral exclusion in talk of nationhood, difference and 'others' (for more details see Tileagă, 2005a, 2005b). But before going any further, let me offer some context.

One of the defining elements of the Romanian political 'transition' was represented by the political appeals and counter-appeals of Romanian and Hungarian nationalism, which has increasingly saturated Romania's political field (until 2001 at least) (Gallagher, 1998; Tismăneanu, 1998). Much of this nationalistic debate has been centred on competing sociopolitical and economic claims in relation to the cultural and national status of the Hungarian minority (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1999). One other very important element was constituted by the widespread anti-Roma/Gypsy sentiment, which has had a very strong discriminatory character and was accompanied by outbursts of extreme violence (see ERRC, 1996, 2001). Issues such as the (contested) existence of prejudice and discrimination against the Hungarians, and respectively the Romanies, the issue of interethnic conflict, the issue of minority rights and other general issues related to politics, prejudice and culture were at the centre of public and political debate.

Prejudiced and discriminatory discourse against the Hungarian and Romany minorities has not only come from political, right-wing extremists, but also from across the whole Romanian civic and political spectrum (Hockenos, 1993). There is nevertheless a difference between prejudiced

and discriminatory discourses directed against the Hungarian minority and against the Romanies. As previous research has demonstrated (Tileagă, 2005c), the Hungarian minority is being positioned as a rational rival, actively involved in a political project with 'national' connotations. Insofar as Romanies are concerned, one can identify a different type of prejudiced and discriminatory discourse, one which does not place the Romanies on the same moral footing (and being part of the same symbolic moral order) as other groups in society, as they are being cast beyond difference, nationhood and comparison. As some authors have noted (see, for example, Mungiu-Pippidi, 1999), the presence of Romanies is an issue for Romanians and Hungarians alike, who are often united in their resentment and contempt for them, and share the same basic negative stereotypes. A recent Gallup poll has found that around 80 percent of Romanian respondents (including members of the Hungarian minority) believe that the vast majority of Romanies break the law. A large number of respondents would not want the state to support the growth of Roma communities, while others would forbid the access of Roma to places like bars, restaurants or shops (IPP/Gallup, 2003).

The interviews discussed generally 'controversial' issues regarding prejudice and prejudice-related issues in Romanian society. This empirical case considers the views of Valeria, a 25-year-old teacher, answering a question dealing with the problem of extending the rights and privileges of the ethnic and national minorities.

Excerpt (talking about minority rights):

Chris: Credeți că drepturile (.) privilegiile minorităților naționale și etnice ar trebui extinse? (.)

Valeria: Drepturile lor? (.) dacă ar mai trebui să fie extinse? (1.8) n:::u cred

Chris: °Gândiți-vă și la maghiari, și la germani, și la țigani° (.) și pe ei (.)

Valeria: Păi, tocmai asta este. (.) că (1) dacă (.) și din punctul lor de vedere se observă o (.) o dorință de a ameliora situația, atunci da (.) hai (.) să; le extindem, n-are nimeni problemă, atâta vreme cât asta nu duce la (.) conflicte, de exemplu, cum a fost atunci (.) Deci (.) mă refer de exemplu acuma la țigani, mă gândesc că ei practic nu au atâtea drepturi câte au (.) câte au germanii, câte au maghiarii (0.7) Dar (.) nefiind nici civilizați, ei nu știu să (.) să aibă pretenția

Chris: Să profite de asta (.)

Valeria: Da, nu știu nici să profite (.) pentru că ei se complac în situația respectivă (.) fiind așa cum sunt (.)

[. . .]

Valeria: Și dacă le oferi un loc de muncă, vine cât vine, după aia nu mai vine, preferă să stea pe stradă și să cerșească și să acuze, că uite el așa e pentru că n-are de lucru (.)

384 decât să tragă puțin și să ajungă până la urmă totuși undeva (.)
385 Sunt foarte mulți români cărora le merge poate mai rău decât
386 țiganilor, dar n-au ce să facă, asta e situația (.)
387 mai trag așa cum pot (.) și asta este (.) Dar (.) nu (.) nu au
388 (.) felul lor de a fi (mm)

360 Chris: Do you think that the rights (.) the privileges of national and
361 ethnic minorities should be extended? (.)
362 Valeria: Their rights? (.) If they should be extended more? (1.8) I do::nt
363 think so
364 Chris: Think of the Hungarians, the Germans and the Gypsies (.) they are
365 too (.)
366 Valeria: Well, this is the point (.) that (1) <u>if</u> (.) even from their point of
367 view one can notice a (.) a desire to ameliorate the situation, then
368 yes (.) okay (.) let's extend them (.) nobody has a problem with it,
369 as long as this doesn't lead to (.) conflicts, for example, as there
370 were then (.) So (.) I am talking for example now about the Gypsies,
371 I am thinking that <u>they</u> practically do not have as many rights as
372 (.) as the Germans, as the Hungarians (0.7) But (.) not being
373 civilized, they don't know how to (.) to have pretences (.)
374 Chris: To take advantage of this (.)
375 Valeria: Yes, they don't even know how to take advantage (.) because they are
376 complacent in that situation (.) being the way they are (.)
[. . .]
381 Valeria: And if you offer them a job, he comes for a while, after that he
382 does not come anymore, he prefers to stay on the street and to beg
383 and to accuse (.) that he is like that because he doesn't have a job
384 (.) instead to try a little and to get eventually somewhere (.)
385 There are a lot of Romanians who are less well off than the
386 Gypsies, but there is nothing they can do, this is the situation (.)
387 they try as they can (.) and that's it (.) But (.) no (.) they don't
388 (.) have their way of being (mm)

In the first lines of this extract, one can see the interviewer framing the issue of social inequality (specifically the issue of minority rights) as a matter of public debate and as a matter of controversy on which one is expected to hold opinions. As Pomerantz and Zemel (2003: 225) have recently argued, 'an interviewer's framing of the issue as a matter of public debate may be an attempt to be even-handed with respect to the various positions within the debate'. Note also that the question, instead of being phrased in a general way, asks Valeria about her personal 'view' on the topic of minority rights.

In lines 362–363, after echoing the interviewer's question and marking a 1.8 pause, Valeria offers a rather straightforward answer: 'I do::nt think so'. In line 364, the interviewer is offering further orientation to the matter under discussion. This can be seen as a sign that the interviewer treats Valeria's answer as unsatisfactory. He invites Valeria to think not just in

general terms, but also in specific terms related to specific ethnic groups: the Hungarians, the Germans and the Gypsies. The list that the interviewer offers seems to invite a comparison and also to imply that there might be some kind of differences between the listed groups insofar as the issue brought up in the question is concerned. One can see how issues around equality/inequality and offering justifications for it are brought forward by the initial question and the subsequent follow-up (lines 364–365).

Mentioning the Gypsies as the third element of the list (lines 364–365) seems to trigger an immediate reaction. After a short preface (lines 366–370), which sees Valeria talking about extending the rights of the Gypsies with the provision that they show 'a desire to ameliorate the situation' (line 367), Valeria concedes that 'practically' Gypsies 'do not have as many rights as (.) as the Germans, as the Hungarians (0.7)' (lines 371–372). At this point, one could say that by comparing the rights of the Gypsies with the rights of some other ethnic groups (the Germans, the Hungarians) Valeria could be seen as displaying reasonableness and understanding insofar as the Romanies are concerned. But, as the subsequent analysis shows, the 'problem' for Valeria is not to support the idea that Gypsies have fewer rights than the other ethnic minorities, but to demonstrate, in a rhetorical and discursive move of 'blaming the victim' (van Dijk, 1987, 1992), *why* they have fewer rights.

One can see that Valeria's remarks in lines 366–370 are nevertheless being qualified and this is part and parcel of a display of reasonableness. There is an oscillation between sympathy and blame, which is not used to build a seemingly even-handed and reasonable picture of the Romanies, but to allow for making the Romanies nevertheless accountable for their situation. An implicit 'differentiation' from the other mentioned ethnic groups is the backdrop against which conclusions are drawn. The issue of rights for the Romanies is being reframed as something that pertains to their 'culture' and their 'way of being': 'But (.) not being civilized, they don't know how to (.) to have pretences (.)' (lines 372–373) In lines 375–376, Valeria takes on board the interviewer's continuation of her previous statement: 'they don't even know how to take advantage (.) because they are complacent in that situation (.) being the way they are (.)'.

Their implied backwardness, which comes as a consequence of 'not being civilized', is invoked in order to put together a verbal portrait of Romany character and 'mentality'. Valeria is constructing an image of Romanies through a sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit 'differentiation' from other ethnic minority groups. The backdrop of this 'differentiation' is the implicit reference to a normative moral order, which generates its unadaptable, uncivilized, beyond the moral order antithesis. In doing so, the psychological (and social) distance between the Romanies and other ethnic groups is maximized, as is the distance between Romanies and the normative moral order represented by those groups. It is a process of drawing

moral boundaries that rests on an assumption of (complete and 'extreme') difference embedded within an 'essentialist' discourse: 'they don't even know how to take advantage (.) because they are complacent in that situation (.) being the way they are (.)' (lines 375–376).

The formulation: 'being the way they are' is very important in this context. One can read this as a rather extreme comment, which can be seen as an essentialist 'theoretical rationalization' (van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999). The focus is on the Romanies themselves, rather than on the activities they are involved in. Romanies do the things they do (in this case, they are not doing the things that they are supposed to do) *because that is the way they are*. This leads to a number of inferences regarding, on the one hand, the way the Romanies *are* and, on the other hand, what Romanies *do*. It is not just the characteristics of Romanies that are essentialized, but also their ontological 'being in the world'. They are reduced to the *essence* of their essence.

In a nutshell, this can be seen as an argument about what this Romany 'essence' permits. The implicit (general) conclusion is that it is not conducive to 'civilization', nor to 'adaptation' or 'assimilation', it is, *essentially*, a backward 'essence'. This is a very important element of the ideological representation of Romanies, as it is part of an imagining that excludes the Romanies from membership in the category 'civilized' and casts them beyond what is 'reasonable' in contemporary society, together with blaming 'them' for the way things stand.

There is another instance of this 'essentializing' process embedded in the rhetorical use of a 'comparison'/'differentiation' strategy, further on in the same interview. This time there is an explicit contrast between the Romanians and the Romanies on a social and implicit economic dimension. Again, a discourse of 'culture' as a way of being in the world intertwined with an 'essentialist' discourse is used to make the case for inter-group differences and cast the Romanies beyond the moral order. Valeria concedes that it might be that there are some similarities between Romanians and Gypsies insofar as their economic status is concerned. She even argues that 'there are a lot of Romanians who are less well off than the Gypsies' (lines 385–386). But there is also a very important difference to which she wants to draw attention: the idea that these Romanians might be poor (or very poor), very much like the Gypsies are, but 'they don't (.) have their way of being (mm)' (lines 387–388). As the previously analysed 'essentializing' description, it does not appear alone and it is more insidious and denigratory, as it is part (and outcome) of a comparison/differentiation pair.

The two kinds of 'essentialist' conclusions of Valeria's arguments (lines 375–376 and lines 387–388, respectively) not only work to justify and normalize the moral implications of the 'local' discriminatory policies directed towards the Romanies, but could also be read as being located within a broader moral space with general ideological consequences. In

order to understand the full implications of these kinds of accounts, one ought to look at the ideological position from which these accounts are spoken, the position from which the presence of Romanies is considered (see Dixon and Durrheim, 2000). One notices that the voice is that of an 'insider', someone who speaks, not necessarily from within 'her' (Romanian) community, but from within the universal community of the 'civilized', the 'settled', the 'normal' and the 'reasonable'. In this particular extract, this is done through explicitly enlisting other ethnic groups (and 'us') in order to make a point regarding what Romanies *are* and *do*.

In so doing, Valeria has constructed and put forward a perspective that is not only 'local', but which is that of the 'universally' civilized. The message that can be drawn from here is clear: it is not only that Romanies are unlike 'us', but they are also unlike any other 'foreigners' (they are also unlike any other nation). The *modus existendi* of Romanies is the antithesis of a possible *modus coexistendi*. All this works to prescribe an ideological position for Romanies, one that places them beyond the 'reasonable' bounds of society, beyond difference and comparison.

The process of 'differentiation'[1] of which Romanies are made part is not established on the premises of equal footing. The Romanies are the *marked* members in this process, the 'them' to be set apart from the reasonable and civilized 'we'. 'Abnormality', deviation, non-conformism is attributed to the 'other' as an essential property (see Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998; Verkuyten, 2001). The social relations and social formations of which the Romanies (with their intrinsic characteristics) are said to be part of are unequal relations of power. The 'differentiating power', to use Bauman's apt term, that drives this process gives way to 'extreme inequality', which is brought to the fore by the participants' use of a rhetoric of 'comparison' and 'differentiation'. The relations between the Romanies and the 'others' (a category that includes 'us'[Romanians] alongside other minority groups) are relations based on a Manichean logic. The Romanies and 'others' are the essential polar pairs of 'us' vs 'them', 'civilized' vs 'uncivilized', etc., which, ultimately, gives rise to the enactment of an 'extreme' discourse of difference.

The 'comparison/differentiation' pair constitutes a powerful rhetorical resource used not necessarily to accomplish a social diagnostic insofar as Romanies are concerned, but rather to pass a *moral verdict* (see McCarthy and Rapley, 2001). Thus, the only possible result of this ideological positioning is moral and social exclusion.

One can see how an 'inequality of rhetoric', which rests on notions such as (extreme) difference and moral exclusion, is turned into a 'rhetoric of extreme inequality' inextricably linked with issues of a contemporary (society) moral order, (ab)normality and discursive practices of exclusion. This kind of accounting also has an important relation to a broader theme, the social exclusion of Romanies.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This article has tried to indicate some of the ways in which social inequality and notions such as domination, exploitation, group superiority and group differentiation can be understood as participants' concerns. It has considered, in a rather preliminary way, the means through which inequality-talk is constructed, situated and oriented to action, how speakers construct and orient to inequality in their talk and how constructions of inequality are part of actions with a specific concern for issues such as unequal power relations and domination.

By using an example of talk about ethnic minorities (the Romany minority in Romania), this article has tried particularly to highlight how taking seriously the study of these notions as members' concerns requires the analyst to also take seriously the local and situated practices that they are embedded within. And not only that, but also the wider social and ideological context, as a close attention to situated practices will inevitably bring into focus issues of history, culture, politics of (moral) inclusion/exclusion as these things are reworked and reproduced as part of participants' practices.

As the previous detailed analysis has shown, discourses of equality/inequality, advantage/disadvantage are part and parcel of a type of discourse, which, among others, disavows forms of community. By comparing and contrasting the Romanies on different social dimensions with other ethnic groups the participants achieve the rhetorical, but also political and ideological effect of presenting Romanies as 'beyond difference', beyond comparison and the moral order. They are not seen as being part of the same (moral) 'community'. The 'community' of the Romanies has no moral and social 'equality' with other 'communities'. By virtue of the social categories and the ideological representation to which they belong, the Romanies cannot acquire the same social and moral footing as other social categories, and particularly not the one of the dominant categories (Lemke, 1995: 149).

One point worth emphasizing is that the analysis undertaken here is non-cognitivist (Potter, 2003). The focus is on discursive constructions and practices, which are understood in relation to actions and ideological effects (Tileagă, 2005a, 2006). These are not treated as a consequence of inner states or objects, so one would not assume that the speaker has a particular, freestanding, mentally encoded representation of 'social inequality' in general and of the Romanies in particular. Rather, inequality is conceptualized as a social and interactional object (Potter et al., 2005).

The analysis presented was conducted against a backdrop of concerns with issues such as social inequality, group differentiation and domination. It was performed with an interest in critical, political, emancipatory issues.

However, there should be an awareness of the possible 'dangers' of imposing such issues on the material before the actual analysis of instances where people orient to such issues and make them relevant in talk. One could argue that one of the weaknesses of focusing on members' concerns is that it can pull the focus of research away from the very real and important issues that stimulate research on such topics (Potter et al., 2005). Nevertheless, one major strength of examining members' concerns is that it can lead to novel understandings of representations, actions (representations in action) and what is, both socially and interactionally, relevant when one is approaching issues such as racism, social inequality and the reproduction of dominance. Analysing the ways in which inequality is part of interactional, social and ideological practices can provide clues to change, or at least question, existing views and state of affairs.

All the aforementioned concerns should become central to scholars of ethnicity and politics, scholars of the social (and moral) structure of intergroup relations, in their attempt to understand the social and ideological underpinnings of inequality, dominance and (unequal) power relations.

Appendix: transcription symbols

(.)	Micro-pause.
(2.0)	Pause length in seconds.
°	Encloses speech that is quieter than the surrounding talk.
<u>yes</u>	Underlining indicates stress or emphasis in the speech.
Rea:lly	Colons are used to represent drawn out speech.

Note

1 The central feature of this rhetoric of 'differentiation' is not one of 'shifting the onus', of defamation of other groups in order to put one's own social status in a better light, but rather a pattern that goes beyond 'differentiation' itself. It is not about downgrading, downplaying the Romany 'status'. It is about refusing them a place and being in the world.

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