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Book Review: Obraz Romu v stredoevropskych masmediich po roce 1989 [The Presentation of Romanies in Central European Mass Media after the Year 1989]

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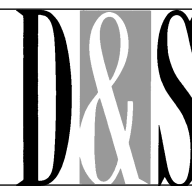
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Book reviews



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J. HOMOLAC, K. KARHANOVA and J. NEKVAPIL (eds), *Obraz Romu v stredoevropskych masmediich po roce 1989* [*The Presentation of Romanies in Central European Mass Media after the Year 1989*]. Brno, Czech Republic: Doplnek, 2003. 184 pp.

This is a collection of studies of mass-media discourse in three Central European countries. The studies concentrate on media texts from the 1990s, a period of transition from 'socialist' to 'neo-liberal' capitalist regimes. The articles analyse how the Romany ethnic minority is portrayed in the mass media. The collection consists of six articles dealing with the Czech media, one with the Slovak media, and one with the Hungarian media. Each article is written in Czech (except for one, written in Slovak), and each is followed by a summary in English.

The collection draws on analytical methods from ethnomethodology, stylistics and discourse analysis to show 'how are the actions of, or actions regarding, the Romanies formulated in the media and how the Romanies themselves participate in this formulation' (p. 6). The concept of 'Mass-Medial Dialogical Network' is particularly explored in most articles with the combination of 'Member Categorisation Analysis'. The editors' aim is not to show that the texts express racial prejudices or to list the usual stereotypes and preconceptions used in the media, but to show by what stylistic and linguistic means the category 'Romany' is created and sustained in the media.

To show the interconnectivity of media, the data were chosen at random on the basis of similar themes, not on the basis of prejudiced or racist language. This different approach to data collection is said to be of interest to the specialist audience not interested in the social psychology approach, which ends up just listing the stereotypes used in media. As a result of using concrete textual strategies used in communication with and about the Romanies, the editors believe that the studies could be used to 'make better the everyday mass medial practices' (p. 6).

Six of the articles analyse media discourse dealing with the same theme; a

criminal act perpetrated on the Romanies by members of the non-Romany population – usually members of the ‘skinhead’ movement. Two of the articles deal with the representations in the media of public documents regarding the Romanies. All articles analyse the concept of Mass-Medial Dialogical Network (MDN); the categorization of members of the MDN and the process of becoming a member of the MDN. Most of the articles found that the MDN was held together by the theme and sequence structures, especially ‘pair sequences’. The category Romany is described positively by the Romanies and negatively by ‘others’. But the analysis shows a certain paradox; although the journalists categorize and construct relational pairs on an other-than racial basis, for example, not labelling the criminal acts as racially motivated, they use the stereotypical labels for the Romanies, thus participating and sustaining a racial discourse. ‘Romanies–Skinheads’ is the usual relational pair presented as constantly in conflict. The other ‘pair’, ‘Romanies’ and ‘us’ (the majority ethnic group including the journalists), was presupposed in the media but never clearly stated, which further shows the efforts to conceal racism. The aim of most articles is not to criticize the representations used in the media. It is, however, possible, say the authors, to use the studies for such a purpose.

The collection is an interesting study into the representation of the Romany ethnic minority by Central European media. The language is accessible to a non-academic audience. The theoretical link between the articles is good but not all the proposed aims have been met. The structure of the articles is not very clear; with each article having its own style of presentation.

Most articles in this collection agree in their conclusions that negative labels for the Romanies are created and reproduced in the media, and that this is done indirectly. A weakness in the collection is that some authors are not willing to critically analyse the media discourse; something that would have made the collection much more interesting and place it deeper within the framework of ‘discourse and society’. As Jakubowicz (1994) points out in *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media*, ‘[o]ur understanding of the relations between different segments of society, even our sense of what the groups are and how we should conceptualise social difference, is formed partly by the labels and divisions repeated and reinforced by the mass media’ (p. 3). Media discourse plays an important part in forming and reflecting the discourse of the wider society; critical analysis is a necessary part of any analysis of such a discourse.

In his article ‘Media Representation of the Discrimination Against the Roma in Eastern Europe: The Case of Slovenia’, Erjavec (2001) also analyses categorization and contextualization in media discourse. However, categorization and contextualization form only part of a greater analytical framework. Erjavec combines these with theme analysis to clearly show how structure and categories used by the media legitimize and naturalize racism. Although the authors in the collection found that the main thread in the MDN was the theme, they do not attempt to analyse this concept. By not confronting the representations in the media the collection was not able to achieve its stated aim to ‘make better the

everyday mass medial practices' (p. 6). However, the collection succeeds in showing that the Romanies are subject to covert racist discourse in the media.

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NIELS ÅKERSTRØM ANDERSEN, *Discourse Analytical Strategies: Understanding Foucault, Koselleck, Laclau and Luhmann*. Bristol: Policy Press, 2003. xxii + 135 pp. ISBN: 1–861–3443–92.

This book is designed as a handbook for constructivist discourse analysts to forge their own theoretical accounts, through exploration of the analytical options offered by four key thinkers on the social as communication. It is a rather abstract and schematic book, describing each of a dozen strategies for constructing objects of study while including almost no examples and little critical assessment or synthesis. Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen is, though, wonderfully clear in that description, teasing out and clarifying the modes of analysis in the works of Michel Foucault, Reinhart Koselleck, Ernesto Laclau and Niklas Luhmann. The book's greatest strength is perhaps as a kind of comparative reference text to these strategies, once they are articulated and combined in terms of researchers' own agendas.

The book's rationale is the need to lure researchers away from a reliance on methodologically driven analyses, which Andersen criticizes as too often assuming the ontological priority of the empirical. Instead he emphasizes what he calls the 'second-order perspectives' of these four theorists, which together explore 'what possibilities for observation unfold when the concern is no longer given objects but, instead, the question of how problems, individuals, interests – all kinds of social identities – come into existence as and within communications' (p. xv). The book makes a strong case for such epistemological reflexivity, arguing that, far from being a retreat into theory, it enriches analysis. As Andersen points out, 'On the contrary, the indiscriminate use of preconceived categories and methods of first-order observations creates immunity from the empirical' (p. 116).

The book is divided into separate discussions of each thinker's analytical strategies. In this it is often clear and incisive, showing not just depth of understanding of the wide-ranging analyses each has developed, but the ability to formulate their often unstated analytical moves and logics. I found the discussion of the complementarity of deconstruction and hegemonic analysis in Laclau's