

**Unveiling Societal Discourses: Online Commentary on Legal Protections for the Roma
Rights in Slovakia**

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Abstract

Slovakia was the first EU member state to be sued by the European Commission in 2023 over the educational segregation of Roma students. To obtain a better understanding of this prejudice, this thesis examines how significant discrimination against the Roma population in Slovakia persists despite the existence of countless national and international legislative frameworks intended to ensure equality. Utilizing qualitative content analysis to investigate internet comments under articles on violations of Roma rights, prejudice in education, and worldwide criticism of Slovakia's treatment of the Roma, this thesis examines the sociocultural discourses surrounding Roma rights. The results show a widespread anti-Roma sentiment that is characterized by negative stereotypes, attribution of blame to the Roma for their marginalized position, and the perception of the majority as the discriminated one. Furthermore, the discourse becomes more nuanced with holding the government responsible for the situation and the perception of the Roma as not responsible. However, instead of alleviating some discrimination from the Roma, this is used to further the societal divide. Attempts to alleviate systematic prejudice are made more difficult by criticism of the government for poor management and mistrust of foreign criticism. These findings increased the understanding of prejudice and highlighted Slovakia's societal divide, which is a necessary step in attempting to promote a more inclusive society.

Keywords: Discrimination, Roma Rights, Societal Discourse, Slovakia, Qualitative Content

Analysis

Unveiling Societal Discourses: Online Commentary on Legal Protections for the Roma Rights in Slovakia

In 2023, Slovakia became the first EU member state to face legal action from the European Commission due to the segregation of Roma children in schools (Lee, 2023). The country faced international criticism for discriminatory practices towards the Roma and failure to abide by calls for improvement (Rorke, 2022). Despite these calls, around 42% of the Roma live in segregated “ghettos” often separated by artificial or natural barriers and lacking basic infrastructure including access to water, roads, or electricity (Kusá, 2011). Over 65% of Roma children attend racially segregated schools and face mental misdiagnoses and inadequate educational opportunities (Amnesty International & ERRC, 2017). Roma are victims of heightened policing, police brutality, disproportionate sentencing, and overrepresentation in prisons (Macaj & Zalesak, 2023). They face significant health inequalities including lower life expectancy, high infant mortality, and limited access to healthcare (OECD/European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2019).

These statistics prove persistent discrimination of the Roma, despite the extensive national and international legal frameworks designed to guarantee equality, fundamental rights, and freedoms as well as oblige the state to protect and preserve the national minority. This divide between the law and society can be understood through Rosenberg's perspective which argues that the law itself cannot change societal attitudes due to deep-seated societal conflict rooted in cultural attitudes and perceptions (Olson, 2017).

Thus, the historical context is crucial as these cultural attitudes stem from the social and legal discrimination against the Roma that dates to the 14th century (Wogg, Pawlata, & Wiedenhofer, n.d.). This includes discriminatory legislation aimed at the complete suppression of

their ethnic specificity and the stigmatization of the Roma, which led to attempts at eradication during World War II. At this time a legal basis for vilification, prosecution, forced labor, imprisonment, and apprehension was created resulting in the Roma Holocaust when around 300,000 European Roma were murdered (Macsó, 2018 & Danihel, 2001). During the Socialist Regime Roma faced discriminatory policing, forced assimilation, and involuntary sterilization (Wells, 2000). However, they also received financial and material support from the government including free furnished apartments which only resulted in an immense rise in tensions with the majority who did not receive the same support (Helsinki Watch, 1992). Positive attention to ‘the Roma question’ only arose during Slovakia’s bid to join the European Union in 2004 which was first rejected due to the neglect and discrimination of the Roma (Macsó, 2018).

Consequently, the ratification of Roma Rights is quite contemporary and encouraged by external factors instead of genuine social change. While legal realism highlights the circular relationship between law and society, suggesting that society can be molded in the reflection of the law, the effectiveness of the law stems from its application and interpretation within the social and cultural context (Gilmore, 1961). This suggests that a cultural shift towards a more cohesive and accepting society is needed for the law to be truly effective.

The effectiveness of Roma rights frameworks can be strengthened or weakened by societal attitudes and cultural beliefs that are conveyed in discourse. By examining the recurring themes in these discourses, we can gain insight into prevalent areas of opposition, the public's acceptance or rejection of legal protections, and the underlying causes of prejudice. The main purpose of the legal protection of Roma stems from their capacity to shape societal norms and behaviors to create a more inclusive society (European Commission, 2020). If the discourses reflect a disregard or disagreement for Roma’s rights, it shows a need for more integrated and contextual laws.

Unfiltered insights into societal discourses, attitudes, and prejudices about the Roma and their rights can be obtained from the internet comments posted under relevant articles. This information is crucial for understanding the social context in which these legal frameworks function as well as for identifying prevalent perceptions that might not be apparent through more formal channels and structured interviews.

To investigate societal discourses surrounding Roma rights, the research on the topics of *social perceptions of the Roma* and the *current lived and legal situation of the Roma* need to be explored. Although both topics are the subject of numerous research, their intersection has yet to be discussed in academic discourse. This research gap is important because understanding this intersection between legal frameworks and social discourses is necessary for developing effective policies as the current interventions are insufficient. To be able to explore additional aspects of this relationship that could otherwise remain unknown, it is necessary to examine how these concepts intersect. This thesis will focus on the societal discourses surrounding Roma rights because the prevalent themes and attitudes have rarely been researched. Yet, a comprehensive understanding of attitudes towards the rights of a minority is needed to overcome the persistent marginalization and othering of the Roma.

The study conducted by Miškolci and Kováčová (2020) through the means of qualitative content analysis (QCA), found that the public perceives Roma as criminals, to be privileged, and denied the existence of discrimination. However, only one sub-question has been dedicated to the construction of current policies toward the Roma with the rest of the research focusing namely on hate speech. Aside from this research, this intersection has been widely understudied. The negative findings reflecting deep anti-Roma sentiment in Slovakia, prove the importance of further research on this topic. Building on this knowledge, this research will examine the societal discourses

focusing specifically on Roma rights providing a deeper understanding of how these online discourses reflect and reinforce societal prejudices and the difficulties in bridging the gap between legal safeguards and societal acceptance, in addition to confirming the existence of widespread anti-Roma attitudes. This thesis adds to a more complex understanding of the ongoing discrimination against the Roma by narrowing the focus of research on societal discourses surrounding Roma rights.

Despite advancements in literature, the relationship between societal discourses and Roma rights is lacking, especially in light of the international criticism Slovakia received. To address this, this research utilizes QCA to analyze societal discourses in online comments under newspaper articles as it is crucial in addressing systemic inequality and promoting social change (Duxbury, 1998). This approach allows for the collecting of uncensored public discourses from varied viewpoints which may lead to a more accurate representation of the discourse. QCA also quantifies and identifies prevalent themes and attitudes as well as uncovers more contextual meanings of the texts. This can inform legislation and policies aimed at the promotion of equality by providing more effective guidance. Moreover, this research aims to increase awareness of the current and historical discrimination that led to the creation of social perceptions to promote social inclusion in language.

Other research utilizing content or discourse analysis mainly focuses on hate speech online or in politics as well as on the negative framing of the Roma in the media. Numerous studies focus on how the media frames the Roma and anti-Roma rhetoric (Slavíčková & Zvagulis, 2014; Kroon et al., 2016; Tomova, 2012; Sedláková, 2021; Fikejzová 2022; Eijsink 2015). These studies demonstrate that media depictions of the Roma often perpetuate negative perceptions and further marginalize them. Similar studies were conducted on hate speech on the internet, with a focus on

the refusal of the Roma community, stereotyping, and othering (Petranova, 2018; Chovanec, 2021; CMECIU, 2016; Pavlova, 2023; Miškolci & Kováčová 2020).

Numerous studies show how prevalent hate speech is in internet comments and demonstrate how this perpetuates the negative perceptions of the Roma. Many focus specifically on hate speech on Facebook utilizing different research methods (Patakyová, 2018; Kluknavská & Hruška, 2019; Papcunová et al., 2023; Dizdarevič, 2021; Berecz & Devinat, 2017). These findings show how social media platforms have the power to normalize hate speech and spread discriminatory attitudes.

The anti-Roma sentiment is further normalized and reinforced through hate speech in political discourse as shown by multiple studies conducted using discourse and content analysis (Žúborová & Borárosová, 2017; Kluknavská, 2014; Zvada, 2022; Townsend, 2014). These studies show how political discourse has an immense impact on public opinion and helps to justify discrimination against the Roma.

Research has been conducted regarding not only the current legal situation of the Roma but also the rhetoric utilized by the actors (Martínez Guillem, 2011; Farget, 2012; Schneeweis, 2015; Timmer, 2010; Delcour & Hustinx, 2015). These studies have highlighted the intricacies of legal discourses and the frequently contradictory nature of legislation meant to defend the rights of the Roma. Some studies utilized discourse and content analysis (Vermeersch, 2006 & Ambjörnsson, 2020).

This thesis aims to address the gap in the literature by addressing the following research question:

What are the prevalent themes and perceptions expressed in the societal discourses surrounding the rights of the Roma, particularly in online comments?

Utilizing the insights from existing studies, this question will be answered through qualitative content analysis of online comments left under articles related to Roma Rights in Slovakia to capture the societal discourse surrounding Roma Rights. Particularly articles on the topics of; the breaches of Roma rights, discrimination of Roma children in education, international response to the Roma situation in Slovakia, and segregation of Roma. Focusing on these articles allows for access to an audience that is at least partly aware of the discrimination and Roma's rights. Meanwhile focusing specifically on the discourse surrounding Roma rights not only addresses the gap in the literature but also provides a clearer and more relevant understanding of the perception of the rights or their breaches.

Theoretical framework

This section explores the notions of the social construction of identity and otherness, anti-Roma rhetoric, and antigypsyism, particularly in the form of segregation. The discrimination against the Roma is shaped and sustained by these interconnected concepts. Furthermore, each section concludes with a sub-section that identifies relevant frames derived from the literature. These frames are used to identify pertinent themes that will be used during the coding process in qualitative content analysis.

The Social Construction of Identity and Otherness

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism argues that what is often perceived as objectively real is socially constructed and formed through cultural, mental, and linguistic attributions created and reinforced in social interactions (Nickerson, 2023). People tend to overemphasize specific categories in these interactions, even when these categories fail to reflect real differences. This theory highlights that all social categories are embedded in historical and social influences regardless of whether they are true or innate. As a result, social groups are seen as "the other" due to distinctions like race or ethnicity and are frequently associated with negative attributes. These attributions are believed to be innate as they are deeply embedded in social consciousness through historical events, cultural norms, political dynamics, media portrayals, and societal discourse (Staszak, 2008).

Creation of the Other and Ethnocentrism

The Other, in this case, the Roma, are socially constructed by the dominant group, the majority, so they can differentiate themselves from the marginalized out-groups (Gergen, 1995). This process is further explained in Social Identity Theory (1979), which argues that people divide themselves into ingroups and outgroups, show prejudice bias towards the outgroup, and display a

superiority bias, favoritism, and ethnocentrism towards their ingroup (Lurker, 2009). Ethnocentrism describes the propensity of groups to assess other cultural or ethnic groups according to the norms and values of their group. Ethnocentrism is evident as the majority population considers its cultural standards and values to be superior to those of the Roma. The majority population views the Roma way of life, customs, and behaviors as inferior or a threat to their own cultural identity and social stability, which results in unfavorable attitudes, prejudice, and mistreatment against the Roma because of this ethnocentric worldview (Hammond & Axelrod, 2006). Ethnocentrism serves to uphold the social differences that exist between majority and minority groups, fostering conflict between them as well as sustaining injustice and prejudice against the Roma. Realistic Group Conflict Theory argues that prejudice and discrimination arise from rivalry for limited resources. This suggests that prejudice and negative sentiments towards the out-group arise when groups believe they compete for these resources (Magalhães & Costa-Lopez, 2023). This is highly relevant in the case of Slovakia as the Roma have historically received vast financial and social support including free housing furniture, and other social support which led to a steep increase in rivalry with the majority who did not receive such benefits (Macsó, 2018).

The Role of Blame in Othering

Furthermore, blame plays a significant role in the process and outcome of othering and further reinforces the difference between the dominant group and the marginalized other (Crețan et al., 2023). The dominant group usually attributes the blame for perceived social injustices or shortcomings to the out-group, portraying them as the source of issues or threats to the security of the in-group. This assigning of blame serves to justify the severe mistreatment and discrimination that the outgroup endures while preserving the dominance and cohesion of the dominating group (Hogg & Abrams, 2007). The dominant group reinforces the divide between "Us" and "Them,"

upholding preexisting beliefs and justifying prejudiced behavior by attributing negative characteristics or behavior to the minority group. Blame is often a tactic employed to maintain power dynamics and strengthen the social order of the in-group (Scambler, 2020). This is especially prevalent with the Roma who are often blamed for their disadvantaged situation and for rejecting European neoliberal modernity (Crețan et al., 2023). Considering the centuries of marginalization, the creation of negative stereotypes, and the visible distinction from the rest of the society it becomes challenging for out-group members, the Roma, to claim their own identities since they are determined by the norms and concepts of the dominant group (Staszak, 2008).

Social discourse plays a crucial role in upholding negative stereotypes and societal divides mainly through ethnocentrism, othering, and blame attribution. These concepts are used to uphold negative preconceptions and justify the discrimination of the outgroup. Ethnocentrism which reinforces the belief of the cultural superiority of the ingroup, often leaves the outgroup feeling like outsiders and allows them to be blamed for their marginalization. Furthermore, this upholds the societal power dynamics and social structure of the in-group. Thus, comprehending these concepts is essential to analyze societal discourses surrounding the Roma Rights in online comments. This research may shed light on underlying social structures that sustain discrimination by examining how these discourses perpetuate prejudice and resistance to Roma Rights. This is crucial in attempts to develop adequate policies and legislation to combat discrimination and promote a more inclusive society.

Relevant Frames

From these concepts, several relevant frames arise. Blame and responsibility frames identify who the comments blame and hold responsible for the current situation as previous research showed blame attribution is a part of the othering process (Hogg & Abrams, 2007). An

accountability frame that identifies whether the comments acknowledge the existence of discrimination can be either historical or current discrimination as research shows an ongoing denial of the existence of discrimination (Scambler, 2020). Ethnocentrism and othering frames which identify whether the comments include signs of othering and perceptions of cultural superiority (Lurker, 2009). Lastly, the resources frame will be used to identify the presence of rivalry for resources which relates to the existence of prejudice (Magalhães & Costa-Lopez, 2023).

The Anti-Roma Discourse

Anti-Roma sentiment refers to negative stereotypes and biases held by individuals or organizations towards the Roma. It is a direct form of discrimination that can express itself in different forms, including verbal abuse and social exclusion (Sam Nariman et al., 2020). This leads to anti-Roma discourse which is further interrelated with ‘otherism’ and how social group categorization is represented through language (Rahman, 2014). While these concepts are strongly related to the above theories of social constructivism and othering, this section focuses on the historical and political contexts of these societal processes.

Anti-Roma rhetoric has strong historical roots in Slovakia and is very prevalent in current society. It is reinforced by the media reports, politicians, and political campaigns, the prevalence of hate speech and negative societal discourse, and the general acceptance of such negative attitudes.

According to Štefančík and Stradiotová (2022), political hate speech, particularly used by the extreme right further enhances the othering of the Roma by creating a strong perception of us vs. them. They frame the Roma as an enemy to national security and cultural integrity and communicate utilizing terms such as “others,” “strangers,” “gypsies,” “animals” and others. They further reinforce the perception of the Roma as abusers of social systems and people who use their

children for financial benefits and petty crimes. The media further reinforces anti-Roma sentiment as reports on the Roma mainly represent the opinion of the majority (Cangár & Kotvanová, 2003). Most of the reports are centered around crime, social problems, and psycho-social characteristics and feature prejudice and stereotypes that are not perceived as racist due to their popularity among most of the population (Cangár & Kotvanová, 2003). Rarely ever, are there any positive mentions of the Roma (Kyuchukov, 2012). In understanding anti-Roma rhetoric, it is important to note that the term “gypsy” or “cigáň” in Slovakian is a common way to refer to the Roma in conversations even though many consider it a slur (ERRC, n.d.). Moreover, a “gypsy” is commonly perceived as a “gypsy” and not a Slovak of “gypsy” ancestry which only further allows for negative attributions and othering of the Roma (Ulč, 1988).

Anti-Roma rhetoric strongly coincides with the placement of blame on the Roma and outright rejection of any responsibility for the marginalization of the group (Kyuchukov, 2012). The lack of ownership of the current and historical discriminatory practices stems from the negative stereotypes of the Roma and socially constructed perceptions of the Roma as single-handedly responsible for their current position (Kóczé & Rövid, 2017).

Relevant Frames

The relevant frames arising from this section include the international criticism frame which aims to identify whether the comments challenge international criticism as previous literature shows rejection of responsibility (Kyuchukov, 2012). Stereotypes and perceptions frame aims to identify and quantify common stereotypes and whether these are reflective of the anti-Roma rhetoric as all the theories point to the relevance of negative characteristics attribution in the process of othering (Štefančík & Stradiotová 2022). Lastly, a slurs and racist language frame identifies the use of slurs and language that suggests racial purity and/or superiority which research

shows is relevant in distinguishing between the “Slovaks” and the “non-slovak” Roma (Cangár & Kotvanová, 2003).

Antigypsyism and segregation

Antigypsyism is defined by the essentialization and homogeneity of certain social groups, the attribution of negative traits to them, the promotion of violent acts, and discriminatory societal structures (Kyuchukov, 2012). Antigypsyism is a type of racism characterized by an ideology of racial superiority and a dehumanization tactic fostered by prejudice throughout history. It is an intersection of stereotypes, myths, and the rejection and omission of historical oppressions including forced assimilations, segregation, attempts at eradication, and discriminatory laws and policies (Davidová, 2012). This systemic discrimination that manifests through institutionalized racism, as well as hate speech, violence, exploitation, stigmatization, and other forms of violence, is ingrained in the institutions and societal structures, leading to the continued subjugation of the Roma (Council of Europe, 2012). Similarly, antigypsyism is strongly related to the previous concepts but needs to be explored with ethno-racial segregation which is highly relevant in the Slovakian context.

Moreover, ethno-racial segregation is a vast issue in Slovakia caused by the negative framing of the Roma and antigypsyism. It refers to the spatial concentration of the Roma in marginalized communities which further perpetuated inequality due to limited access to resources (Filčák & Stager, 2014). It is a historically developed concept currently reinforced by white flight (Šotola et al., 2018). This is particularly relevant in education, as white parents often pull their children out of schools with Roma students (Amnesty International, 2017). These concepts demonstrate the need for more significant social reforms since they reflect deeply ingrained biases and structural disadvantages that endure regardless of legal frameworks.

Relevant Frames

The relevant frames arising from this section include the segregation frame which identifies support for the segregation or maybe even the expulsion of the Roma as the research shows how prevalent this still is in Slovakia (Filčák & Stager, 2014). Historical frame which identifies all references to the past treatment of the Roma and whether the comments use historical references to contextual or justify the current situation as literature shows the tendency to reject the existence of historical discrimination (Davidová, 2012).

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research design to critically examine the discourse surrounding Roma rights. It will utilize qualitative content analysis to analyze social media comments from popular Slovakian newspapers to uncover prevalent themes and attitudes in discourses surrounding the Roma rights, their breaches, and international criticism of Slovakia's handling of these rights. It aims to gain a deeper understanding of the complex societal dynamics by understanding the discourse surrounding the rights of the marginalized population.

Research Design

This thesis will employ qualitative content analysis (QCA). In comparison to content analysis which focuses on simple quantification of contextual elements, QCA also investigates the hidden meaning behind texts which is crucial for this research. This method is suited for reducing qualitative material, which is necessary due to the number of comments, while incorporating the subjective interpretation of text data through methodical coding and theme or pattern identification (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Using an inductive methodology, it produces descriptions or typologies in addition to subject expressions that represent their perspectives on the social environment. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the social perceptions. Rather than concentrating just on the statistical importance of texts, it stresses the identification of distinctive themes that express the range of meanings connected with the phenomena (Ivankova, 2023).

Research Sample

The data will be collected from comment sections of 3 main NewsPaper outlets in Slovakia, namely Sme, Pravda, and Dennik-N (Tasr, 2023 & Teraz. sk, 2019). All three are daily newspapers

published both electronically and in print. Sme and Pravda are both older newspapers dating back to the communist times while Dennik-N was founded in 2015. In terms of political alignments, Dennik-N leans towards centrism meanwhile Sme is liberal-right, and Pravda is liberal-left (*Slovakia*, 2016). Newspapers were chosen over tabloids despite the popularity of the tabloids due to the thematic nature of this research and the newspaper's focus on reporting more objectively in comparison to sensationalist tabloid journalism (BBC, n.d.).

The comments will be gathered from Meta (Facebook) as all the newspapers have Facebook profiles under which readers can leave comments, it is the most popular social media platform among Slovakian users, and it has the highest engagement among other social media platforms (Ivankova, 2023). Articles are selected based on their focus on Roma rights, breaches of their rights, or international criticism of Slovakia for the failure to protect Roma rights. Articles published between 2020 and April 2024 will be considered to reflect recent societal attitudes and perceptions

Considering the sampling for QCA consists of purposefully selected samples that can inform the research questions being investigated, the comments due to their sheer amount, will be filtered based on their engagement, namely the top 50 comments of each post will be used for analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Operationalization and Frames

Operationalization utilizing QCA involves counting and translating societal discourses and perceptions into measurable and observable indicators through thematic analysis. Individual themes will be used as coding units (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Considering QCA utilizes both deductive and inductive reasoning. The themes will be informed by existing literature and relevant frames for analysis identified in the theoretical framework, while allowing for space for new

themes to arise directly from the data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Regular checks during the coding process will be done for consistency and the potential research bias is addressed in the positionality statement. The preliminary frames were discussed in the theoretical framework, while the final frames can be found in the appendix.

QCA will be utilized to thematically identify and organize prevalent attitudes. This approach initiates with counting themes and includes the analysis of both overt and latent meanings expressed in online comments. This methodology guarantees an elaborate investigation of social discourses about the legal safeguards for the Roma and thus aligns with the nuances of the research aim (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Coding will happen in two phases, first, a code frame for identifying only relevant material and a second frame for the actual analysis (Schreier, 2012). Comments that include no main messaging such as nonsensical texts or just emojis will not be considered.

The data will be imported into ATLAS.ti. upon review and familiarization. Pilot and full coding will be conducted while keeping detailed notes of the process and any changes to the codes. Coded data will be explored for specific patterns and trends. The findings will be interpreted within the context of the theoretical framework and research question. Implications will be considered, and results will be reported using quotes from the material for a better insight into the discourse.

The data was first analyzed using over 90 codes to categorize all attitudes and gain a detailed understanding. Later, the number of themes was reduced using a code tree and identifying the most prevalent themes that were relevant to the research question. The code tree can be found in Appendix B.

Privacy and Ethics

Privacy and confidentiality are some of the most important ethical considerations, especially in research regarding topics such as racism and anti-Roma sentiment. In terms of confidentiality, the data is being collected from a public platform that is accessible to anyone. However, to protect the privacy of the people who are leaving comments, the comments will be strictly anonymized.

Reliability and Validity

In qualitative content analysis, reliability is cause for academic discussion with some rejecting it altogether while others propose a modified concept of it (Schreier, 2012). While some themes to focus on were derived from the relevant literature, the coding was done inductively, stemming from the data. The codes were defined, clarified, and adjusted during the pilot coding. Pilot coding was conducted to test the codes on a sample of the material to ensure the quality of the codes before the overall coding run. This resulted in more refined and relevant codes that were clearly described in a codebook to guarantee consistency during the analysis. To uphold validity, the coding is made as transparent as possible with clear definitions that are available to the reader and can be found in Appendix A in the appendix, and the researcher's reflexivity is addressed in the positionality statement (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Positionality

As a Slovakian, I witnessed and observed anti-Roma sentiments and rhetoric firsthand, in media and even in daily conversations. Seemingly, the anti-Roma sentiment is not only common but also more supported than judged. Considering I pursued my education abroad, I was exposed both to the national stereotypes and to the international criticism of Slovakia. I researched the breaches of human rights of the Roma in education and reproductive health. When sharing my

research in Slovakia, I met with a lot of perspectives that suggested that perhaps the Roma are responsible for their situation and that the breach of their rights is somehow justifiable. This motivated my research throughout my academic career as I aspire to spread awareness of the way the Roma are treated in Slovakia internationally and educate about the importance of preserving basic human rights within Slovakia.

However, I recognize that my positionality as not only a Slovakian but also as a student of Social Inequalities, I have a background that may shape my perspectives and lead to biases in conducting this research. While my lived experience may provide valuable insights, it may also influence my interpretation of data and writing. Therefore, I will approach this research with the utmost commitment to ethical research practices and focus on maintaining reflexivity by acknowledging and reflecting on my biases. I would also like to recognize the power dynamics of this research and strive to conduct this study centering on the respect, dignity, and agency of the Roma.

Results

The discourse surrounding Roma's rights is deeply negative and reflects a general societal dissatisfaction and a societal divide. The results were obtained from 28 newspaper articles' comment sections retrieved from the 3 most popular Slovak newspapers. These articles focused on the themes of the topics of breaches of Roma rights, discrimination of Roma children in education, (international) response to the Roma situation in Slovakia, and the segregation of the Roma.

The most prominent pattern that came forward from the data is that in the discourse, the Roma are strongly constructed as the societal other through anti-Roma rhetoric, attribution of negative stereotypes, and departure advocacy. This distinction between "us," the majority, and "them," the Roma, is upheld and justified by the perception of the majority as the discriminated one, blame attribution and reinforced by the rejection of criticism and negative attitudes towards future improvements (Crețan et al., 2023). That said, the other themes emerged from my data that suggest that some nuancing of this general pattern is called for: the perception of the state as responsible and the perception of the Roma as *not* responsible. Although this suggests a critical reflection on systemic discrimination, my results seem to suggest that the opposite is true as the state is blamed *in addition to* and not instead of the Roma. While support for the Roma is occasionally expressed in the comments, it is frequently combined with racist remarks or used as an excuse for discrimination.

Anti-Roma Rhetoric Stigma

This section explores derogatory language used when referring to the Roma, often perpetuating negative stereotypes and language. Language is used to form and establish social

identities (Joseph, 2004). The Roma identity is essentialized and categorized through negative stereotype attribution, anti-Roma discourse, and antigypsyism (Davidová, 2012).

There are many stereotypes presented in the discourse, such as the Roma as squandering resources including financial, and material help in comments such as *“those apartments were new and now they are completely burned out, destroyed, without water and electricity...dirty bare walls and a pile of garbage, up to the 3rd floor from the back...”* in an article in which the Pope criticized the situation at Lunik IX. Lunik IX was originally designed to help Roma families integrate into society by offering housing and basic amenities but later became a segregated ghetto as the majority quickly moved away and almost all Roma in the city of Košice were moved to Lunik IX (Nový Čas, 2012). Considering the Roma were given new, even furnished housing which is now considered the biggest Roma “ghetto” in Europe, it is the biggest argument behind the perception of the Roma as squandering resources. (Chrenková, 2023).

They are also perceived as lazy, sharing a cultural devaluation of work, and having children primarily to receive financial support from the government all relate to the perception of Roma living at the financial expense of the majority. These opinions are communicated in comments such as *“Roma are responsible themselves because they're lazy to work”* or *“an ordinary person is led to education, work, upbringing... Roma are led to social benefits”* and *“sterilize every woman after 3 children, and they'll stop multiplying and sponging off the state.”*

Other stereotypes include the Roma being, filthy, characterized by littering, lacking cleanliness and sanitation practices, thieves and pickpockets, criminals, vandalizing, inheritably possessing negative values, and alcohol/drug addicts. These are present in comments such as *“they lack education and work skills, and then they complain that no one gives them jobs, girls give birth to more children by the age of 15, living off benefits... not to mention some hygienic habits of*

children in schools... and children don't go to school regularly.” Others such as *“their children will beg and their parents will wait around the corner for dessert wine and drugs.”*

This negative stereotype attribution suggests that the discrimination against the Roma is perceived to stem from their alleged negative characteristics rather than racism or prejudice. This perception may further enable the majority’s ability to distance themselves from the marginalized outgroup portray feelings of superiority and use negative stereotypes to justify the mistreatment of the Roma that the Roma are later blamed for (Gergen, 1995, & Hogg & Abrams, 2007).

Unfortunately, there are many comments utilizing racist statements such as *“they just need to be whipped”* or *“menagerie. Wouldn't it be better to take them to Peru to the jungle [...] There they can jump, swim, scream, and shit outside, and no one will mind.”* Some express a belief in the racial superiority of white people in comments such as *“If someone is going to fuck us over (not for 5 korunas but for a dignified life), let it at least be a white person.”*

Additionally, many comments utilize the slur *“cigán”* meaning *“gypsy.”* In the Slovakian context a *“gypsy”* is not considered of Slovak ancestry (Ulč, 1988). This is strongly reinforced by departure advocacy as many argue for the Roma to leave Slovakia in comments such as *“as they should be expelled back to India, where they come from...”* It is also a common response to international criticism as many such as *“the best thing would be if every MEP who vehemently beats their chest for a better life for the minority would move three or four families from the settlements into their own home...clothe them, feed them, and give them pocket money too!”* urge the criticizing party to take the Roma with them. Anti-roma rhetoric strongly coincides with not only the rejection of responsibility for the marginalization but also the use of racist slurs (Kyuchukov, 2012).

Attribution of blame and responsibility

This section explores the frames that came forward in the discourse including the attribution of blame and responsibility to various actors including the Roma, and the state. The identified patterns in the data show that the “other” is constructed through anti-Roma rhetoric while the majority distances themselves from the marginalized outgroup, portraying favoritism (ethnocentrism), and justifying the marginalization of the outgroup. The discourse not only blames the Roma for their marginalization but also frames the majority as the discriminated one. In-group favoritism is portrayed through the perception of the majority as the discriminated one. The outgroup marginalization is justified by the hardships the Roma impose on others, attributing the blame to the Roma and outright rejection of any responsibility or even the existence of discrimination (Kryuchkova, 2012). In this context, it is important to understand how deeply rooted anti-Roma rhetoric is in Slovakia as the Roma are often blamed for their situation by politicians as well as the media. This reflects in the societal discourse and results in the denial of the existence of racism or discrimination itself (Štefančík & Stradiotová, 2022).

Attributing Blame to the Roma

Attributing blame to the Roma is used to further justify *the severe mistreatment* and discrimination the outgroup endures while preserving the dominance and cohesion of the dominating group (Hogg & Abrams, 2007). Many comments such as “*they could go to school but they don't want to, they could work but they don't want to,*” believe that the Roma chose not to integrate themselves and comments such as “*the mess they made are what they live in, those who work hard reap the rewards*”-portray the belief that the situation of the Roma is reflective of who they are and thus they are to blame. There is also a prevalent belief that the Roma make no effort

to improve their situation reflected in comments such as *“they want to lag behind, they don't make an effort.”*

Meanwhile in articles related to discrimination against Roma children in schools, comments such as *“their future is destroyed primarily by parents who have many children, even though they cannot take care of them”* reflect the belief that Roma parents are to blame for their child's misfortune.

Blame in the process of othering plays a significant role as the Roma are portrayed as a source of issues and threats to the majority. This concept of blame attribution is taken even further as not only is blame used to justify the maltreatment of the Roma, but it is also used to portray the majority as the discriminated one. Thus, the discourse further marginalizes and alienates the Roma from society as the majority is perceived to be at the same level of suffering leading to even less support for the Roma (Crețan et al., 2023).

Perception of the Majority as Discriminated

The perception of the majority as discriminated against stems from feelings of unfairness towards perceived privileges the Roma receive in the form of social support, as the majority do not receive the same support. This is shown in comments such as *“Roma get a new house or apartment which, after a few years is destroyed. A white person doesn't get a house or apartment but must take out a mortgage for 30-40 years.”* Furthermore, there is a common perception that the majority also suffers from hardships and poverty and does not receive the same support, while the Roma live at the financial expense of the majority and engage in opportunistic behavior, exploiting resources. This very prevalent perception is shown in comments such as *“They have been sucking the state dry their whole lives, living off our money. The Pope should have visited a factory to see how people toil there just to barely survive from month to month, instead of looking*

at those freeloaders!" highlighting the perception that the majority is working hard and still poor, barely surviving while they perceive the Roma as freeloaders. This is highlighted in comments such as *"they will never be different. Just exploiting our system, asking, taking, and not working. And, of course, just having children. They are then the source of income. And we work for them."* This reflects ethnocentrism as the majority shows a clear prejudice towards the Roma outgroup and (cultural) superiority bias towards the ingroup. In this context, cultural superiority stems from the perception of the majority as the hardworking one while the Roma are considered to live at the expense of others (Hammond & Axelrod, 2006). The dissatisfaction can be further explained by existing literature and concepts such as Realistic Group Conflict Theory as the negative feelings arise from the competition for limited resources (monetary support) (Magalhães & Costa-Lopez, 2023). The anger seems to stem from the perceived inequality between the Roma and the majority as the Roma are often seen as prioritized over others. This can be seen in comments such as *"What the hell kind of discrimination are we talking about? Their whole lives they have only had advantages and money without work and worries..."* The perceived prioritization of the Roma stems from the social benefits and legal protections they receive. This in turn may threaten the majority's superior position (Lurker, 2009). To counteract this, the "other" is associated with strongly negative and often innate characteristics upheld through anti-Roma discourses (Staszak, 2008).

The Perception of the majority as the discriminated one is further reinforced by the belief that proximity to Roma imposes burdens on others due to their perceived negative behaviors, argued in comments such as *"the most discriminated group? That's how all the "white" people living near settlements might describe themselves. Every day, something is stolen, dismantled, left in disarray, or destroyed."*

Perceptions of Discrimination

The perception of the majority as discriminated against, and anti-Roma rhetoric strongly correlate with the denial of responsibility and discrimination based on race or in general (Kyuchukov, 2012). The belief that the Roma are segregated due to the hardships they impose on others is further portrayed in comments such as *“Nobody wants neighbors who don't pay for anything, light a fire in their living room in winter, and constantly throw garbage out the window. Everyone has a choice. I know Roma who works and lives normally. And no one excludes them from anything.”* While others such as *“I don't have the impression that Roma are discriminated against in Slovakia! Quite the opposite!!!”* and *“Who supposedly discriminates against them? No one is taking this option away from them; they are welcome to work, and there is plenty of work available”* argue that the Roma are not discriminated against.

Response to (International) Criticism

The denial of discrimination is further communicated in comments under articles about international criticism of the situation of the Roma in Slovakia. The comments portray a strong refusal of any criticism claiming that any empathy is based on the lack of knowledge/personal experience in comments such as *“MEPs who condemn the ongoing discrimination against Roma residents don't know what they're talking about. If they were to live near them for at least one week, then they would see the reality.”*

The feelings of unfairness towards shame and responsibility distribution as well as othering of the Roma is prevalent in comments such as *“Yes, it is a shame. Let the nomads be ashamed. What do we have to do with it?”* as there is a linguistic distinction between the Roma (the nomads) and the majority (we). The majority's absolute rejection of the criticism that places blame on the society and not the Roma can be explained by othering and mainly by blame attribution and the

socially constructed and upheld view of the Roma as single-handedly responsible for the situation (Kóczé & Rövid, 2017).

Perception of the State as Responsible

The picture becomes more nuanced as a new perpetrator arises as some believe the state is at fault for perpetuating the situation and not adequately solving it. While blaming the Roma for their maltreatment perfectly aligns with the literature, the role of the government is a rather new factor and nuances the “us” versus “them” distinction. Some comments such as *“We need to take the opposite approach—not giving various benefits and allowances to anyone (not just Roma) for nothing. If children do not attend school, if they [the Roma] pollute watercourses and the environment around settlements, if they build illegal structures, and if they do not properly care for their children but instead spend child benefits on alcohol, then we should cut those benefits and give them nothing. Most of them are parasites who have no intention of getting a job because why should they? The state must take care of us!”* argues for a different approach, in this case, to stop providing financial benefits to the Roma unless they adapt to majority norms. This comment also relates to the perception that if the state benefits do not become conditional to behavior, the situation will never improve.

Others believe that state representatives steal money aimed at improving the Roma situation portrayed in comments such as *“It would be very interesting to find out whose accounts all that aid for the Roma has ended up in over the decades.”* Comments such as *“This system suits everyone because political parties base their campaigns on it. [...] As long as the approach of politicians and respect do not change, there will always be significant discrimination”* portray the belief that the system itself perpetuates discrimination. Here, the above-mentioned political context is highly relevant as politicians often employ anti-Roma rhetoric, especially in election campaigns.

This is due to the government's involvement in political hate speech in the form of anti-Roma rhetoric and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, especially during election times (Cangár & Kotvanová, 2003).

However, rather than leaning away from othering the Roma and critically examining the system, within these discourses, the Roma and the state are both blamed for the current situation. This may be attributed to the extremely tense political situation in Slovakia, including corruption scandals and anti-corruption protests (EuroNews). The situation culminated in an assassination attempt on the Prime minister in April 2024 (Mindžák et al., 2024). Slovakia displays low trust in the government and the West and is leaning more toward Russia and old socialist ideologies (Huttner, 2022). These ideologies are visible in comments such as *“under totalitarian socialism, everyone had to work because there was a law against parasitism, [...] and children had to complete compulsory [...] Today, in a democratic system, they have more benefits, receiving social and family allowances, which reflects on their poor quality of life”* that proclaims the superiority of the previous regime.

Historical references are an interesting notion arising from the data, as seen in the above quote. These mostly reference the socialist times or the times of Maria Theresia. This relates to antigypsyism as while it is fostered by historical prejudice, it leads to the omission of historical oppression. In the comments, historical references were only used to describe the material support and time the Roma received to integrate but failed to acknowledge the vast discrimination the Roma faced (Davidová, 2012).

Support for the Roma

Moreover, one of the frames arising from the data was comments expressing support for the Roma, although the support was limited and often conditional. Out of 1040 quotations, only

71 expressed support. Some comments such as *"If any of us were born into the conditions in which those children live, we would be in the same situation. It is a cycle of poverty that breeds more poverty and deepens further,"* expressed support and the belief that the situation of the Roma is caused by their circumstances and not their characteristics.

The expressions of support were mostly expressed for the Roma children under articles about discrimination in education such as *"Our society creates lost causes, and when they grow up, people still blame them, saying it's their fault."*

Even within this code group, the perceptions were not always positive as while the comments expressed acknowledgment for the Roma who conform to the majority norms, mostly in education and employment, these beliefs were predominantly expressed in-between or after negative declarations about the Roma such as *"why are the gypsies who live normally, work, and study different from the others who do nothing, steal, do drugs, and just have children, and we are supposed to feel sorry for them?"* These expressions of support were mostly to justify colorblindness and/or justify blaming the Roma for their living conditions by recognizing the exceptions and thus pointing out the Roma do have a choice to live differently if they chose to do so. Another code reflects the belief that there are very few integrated Roma in comments such as *"respect for the exceptions - there are very few of them."* Consequently, even in cases where positive comments are made, they frequently serve to perpetuate negative stereotypes and assign blame to the Roma for their circumstances.

Discussion

The section will focus on the analysis and implications of the findings and examine how they relate to academic literature, emphasizing the complexity and nuance found in the discourse surrounding Roma rights in Slovakia. In addition, it will consider the limitations of the research and offer recommendations for additional studies to advance knowledge and inform policy. Lastly, it will discuss the research's wider ramifications for those bridging societal gaps and advancing inclusivity.

Scientific relevance

This research aimed to address the existing gap in the academic discourse and shed light on the current divide between law and society in Slovakia by analyzing the discourse surrounding the rights of the Roma in Slovakia. It aligns with the literature on the social construction of identity and othering, the results of this study show how the discourse socially constructs the Roma as the “other” and justifies or even denies their marginalization using anti-Roma rhetoric and antigypsyism.

The scientific relevance of these findings stems from their ability to add to the academic discourse as they uncovered a more nuanced version of the social construction of the other through the exploration of the role of the state and the expression of support for the Roma. Most importantly it uncovered the belief that the Roma are not being discriminated against based on their ethnicity but the perception of the majority as the discriminated one. This finding is novel because it contradicts conventional narratives of discrimination by implying that the majority sees itself as the group that is discriminated against, motivated by ethnocentrism, blame attribution, and resource competition, perpetuating the Roma marginalization and othering (Štefančík & Stradiotová, 2022, Magalhães & Costa-Lopez, 2023 & Hammond & Axelrod, 2006).

These factors seem to be unexplored in literature which highlights how complex and contextually dependable societal othering is and challenges the conventional narrative of othering by pinpointing the perception of the majority as the victimized group. This indicates that the dynamics of society are more complicated than previously believed, encompassing not only overt prejudice against the Roma but also a perceived danger from the majority who believe their wealth and status are in jeopardy. Additionally, the discovery that some social groups blame the government for the predicament of the Roma provides a new perspective by implying the government's incapability contributes to the discrimination of the Roma and the majority. These discoveries broaden our understanding of the mechanisms behind persistent discrimination by demonstrating that larger political and historical contexts impact social othering in addition to being directly ingrained in interpersonal biases.

Societal relevance

The societal relevance of this research is significant as the results highlight deep-seated mistrust in the government which further complicates attempts and legal efforts to improve the situation of the Roma in Slovakia. This mistrust, as well as societal inclination and nostalgia towards old socialist ideas, reflects how multifaceted the factors that influence social discourse, and perceptions of Roma rights truly are. Although the perception of the state as responsible and the Roma as not responsible creates hope for sympathy with the Roma, it is not the case. Instead of critically looking at the role of the state in the systemic oppression of the Roma and thus alleviating some blame from the marginalized group, the discourse seems to view them both as mutually reinforced and responsible. Thus, the finding that statements of support for the Roma are often conditional, embedded in racist language, and used as an excuse for colorblindness highlights how prevalent and deep-rooted anti-Roma sentiment is.

Furthermore, this study uncovered deep-seated anti-Roma sentiment, anti-Roma rhetoric, and denial of the existence of discrimination and even framing the Roma and the state as responsible for discriminating against the majority. It also uncovered the purely conditional support expressed for the Roma only when it served to justify courtliness and criticism. The societal divide and mainly the perception of the majority as the discriminated one and the Roma as responsible perpetuates the discrimination of the Roma obstructs social inclusion and emphasizes the complexity of the discrimination the Roma face as they are vilified by the state as well as the society.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this research may be that it was actively conducted in two languages. The comments and articles were all collected in Slovak but were analyzed using English codes and later translated to English to be quoted. While the researcher is fully bilingual, there might be some meaning, context, and nuance lost in translation during this process. The interpretation of the data may be impacted by this possible loss of context and nuance, since some idiomatic or culturally unique terms may not have exact English translations. As a result, some nuances in the comments may be missed or misunderstood, resulting in a depiction of the social discourse that is less accurate as misinterpretation might occur in cross-linguistic research.

Moreover, it must be recognized that this research was solely based on Facebook comments. Relying only on Facebook comments could distort the results in favor of more extreme or outspoken viewpoints since those who publicly comment on Facebook may have stronger opinions than others who choose not to comment out of concern for their privacy or fear of negative consequences. This could lead to a lack of diversity in viewpoints and an overrepresentation of negative attitudes. Thus, it is important to note that a Facebook commenter might not be

representative of the entire Slovakian population and the comments only provide a snapshot of the societal discourse.

Considering the research was conducted by one researcher, it is based on a limited amount of newspaper articles and comments. Further access limitation stems from only part of the online discourse being publicly available, as the posts can be shared privately on people's profiles or in messages leading to unobtainable insights (Olmstead & Barthel, 2015). The restricted range of examined comments and newspaper articles might not encompass the entire intricacy of society's perspectives regarding the Roma, which could result in partial or prejudiced findings.

Additionally, comments are only short snapshots of personal opinions and only fragments of public discourse, often lacking contextual understanding of the commentator (Ochieng et al., 2016). The comments are also left under public forums, often including the name and picture of the commentator, this might demotivate people with opposing perspectives to participate in the public discourse out of fear of backlash. The lack of contextual knowledge about the motivations and backgrounds of the commentators makes it more difficult to analyze the data because it is difficult to determine the larger social and cultural contexts that shaped their perspectives.

Recommendations for future research

Rectifying the bilingual aspect of this study through techniques such as back-translation which includes having a different translator retranslate the data into the original language would allow for the identifying and correcting of any potential misconceptions of a loss of meaning or context. This is especially relevant for research such as this one, studying complex social and cultural issues to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings that are not obstructed by linguistic obstacles. Moreover, it is recommended for future studies to include different research methods and direct data sources such as focus groups and interviews, to address the contextual

limitations of solely using social media comments and present a deeper understanding of public discourse. Utilizing focus groups and interviews could provide a rich contextual understanding and in-depth insights that could validate the findings of qualitative content analyses that focus on identifying and quantifying the main themes (Gill et al., 2018). The comment sections often referenced negative personal experiences with the Roma and even claimed negligence of opinions of non-Roma people living in proximity to Roma settlements. This additional research method can help address these concerns and gain a deeper understanding of personal circumstances and feelings of unfairness communicated by the majority.

Furthermore, involving several researchers can also improve the breadth and depth of the investigation while reducing the impact of individual biases.

Considering the results of this thesis, a recommendation for future research would be to select a specific theme within the societal discourse and perform deeper analyses of it. Specifically, the negative societal attitudes towards future improvements are rooted in the lack of hope for improvement, and future recommendations based on ethno-racial segregation call for further investigation. This theme was not thoroughly explored but is relevant to efforts aimed at rectifying the situation and creating a more inclusive society. The ethno-racially segregated recommendations for the future shown in the comments are arguably a source of concern. While this research may provide some contextual understanding of these perceptions, their causes remain unexplored and may be influenced by other factors such as mistrust of the government. Future research on these negative perceptions could be significant in identifying possible steps and effective strategies to address the societal divide and finding a joint way forward.

It is vital to acknowledge these constraints and their consequences to improve future studies and methodologies in order to guarantee more precise outcomes in future studies.

Implications of the research

Based on these findings, the recommendation for the national government and NGOs would be to focus on the societal divide and mainly to address the divide and perceptions of unfairness, thus addressing the criticism aimed towards the state. The recommendation for international human rights bodies and NGOs would be to contextualize their interventions to the Slovakian setting to not drive further divides. Understanding the current societal divide and the influences of social, political, and historical contexts remains relevant to how the situation is perceived by the majority who feel discriminated against. These contextual influences also serve as an explanation for the rejection of outside criticism and interventions. Unless this divide is addressed, further material or even legal support may lead to further societal divides.

Conclusion

Slovakia's ongoing discrimination against the Roma is a complex issue rooted in social, political, and historical contexts. The results of this study reveal the deeply rooted anti-Roma sentiments and stereotypes that obstruct the progress toward equality. These negative attributions and perceptions of the Roma as lazy, anti-social, opportunistic, and even as a burden to be in proximity to, are strongly related to the perception of the belief that the majority is the one discriminated. This is reinforced through ethnocentrism and the beliefs of the cultural superiority of the majority, blame attribution to the Roma, or the state, and resource competition as the majority believe the Roma receive an unfair amount of monetary support that others do not. All these aspects lead to the marginalization and othering of the Roma and reinforce the societal divide and fight for resources.

Based on these findings, more complex and contextual efforts are necessary to bridge the societal divide and defend and uphold Roma rights as relying on just legislative frameworks, whether they are national or international, is insufficient. The blatant prejudice that the Roma experience, as well as the protective attitudes of the majority, must be considered in any attempts at repairing this divide. This is paramount in attempts to foster a more inclusive society.

Overall, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the social dynamics at play in Slovakia as it provides valuable insights for policymakers, local governments, NGOs, and scholars working towards a more inclusive and equal Slovakia, by uncovering the complex mechanisms through which discrimination is maintained in societal discourse.

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Appendix A

Together 581 comments were analyzed using 5 code groups, 15 main codes, and 47 sub-codes codes resulting in 1040 quotations.

Codes and Code Groups from the Qualitative Content Analysis of Online Comments

Frame – Main code – Sub-code	Number of quotations
1. ATTRIBUTION OF BLAME AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR HOW BAD THE SITUATION IS	
1.1. Believe the Roma are responsible for the for the Roma issue in Slovakia	(90)
1.1.1. Believe the Roma choose not to integrate themselves into the society	20
1.1.2. Believe the Roma are solely responsible for their situation as it reflects who they are and their own incompetence	23
1.1.3. Believe the Roma make no effort to improve their own situation	35
1.1.4. Believe the parents are to blame for the poor situation of the Roma children	13
1.2. Perception of the Majority as the discriminated one	(207)
1.2.1. Believe the Roma receive financial and material for free while the majority (hard working people) do not receive the same support	56
1.2.2. Believe the Roma live at the financial expense of the majority	31
1.2.3. Believe that the Roma engage in opportunistic behavior, exploiting resources, whether financial or material, and benefits provided for them by the state	47
1.2.4. Believe that proximity to the Roma community imposes burdens on the majority due to perceived negative behaviors of the Roma	14
1.2.5. Believe the Roma are being prioritized over the rest of the population (are privileged and overly protected by law)	17
1.2.6. Believe the rest of the population also suffers from hardships and bad living conditions	24

1.2.7. Believe the majority is who is being discriminated against	19
1.3. Believe the state is responsible for the situation	(65)
1.3.1. Believe the state system is at fault of perpetrating the discrimination of the Roma	6
1.3.2. Believe the money that is intended to help the Roma is being stolen by representatives	28
1.3.3. Believe the state does not adequately address the situation.	17
1.3.4. Believe that the state's continuous financial support perpetuates Roma unemployment and/or lack of improvement and advocates for the cessation of such benefits	14
1.4. Believe the Roma are NOT to blame	(70)
1.4.1. Express support for the Roma	26
1.4.2. Believe that the situation of the Roma is caused by their circumstances and not by their characteristics	4
1.4.3. Believe that there are very few well integrated Roma	7
1.4.4. Acknowledge the Roma individuals who conform to majority norms and/or seek employment	33
2. ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMPROVEMENT	
2.1. Recommendations for the future	(30)
2.1.1. Comments providing ideas on how to fix the situation	10
2.1.2. Believe that the situation can be fixed if we leave out prejudice and work together	9
2.1.3. Believe that those who criticize Slovakia should act and take responsibility for the improvement of the situation	11
2.2. Negative perceptions towards future improvements	(42)
2.2.1. Believe the majority has done enough to support the Roma already	22
2.2.2. Believe that the situation is hopeless, and no improvements can be made	21
2.3. Departure advocacy	(57)

2.3.1. Believe that the Roma should depart from Slovakia to their supposed place of origin (India)	8
2.3.2. Believe that those who criticise how Slovakia handles the situation should take the Roma with them (to whichever country the critiquing party came from)	49
3. STIGMA	
3.1. Negative perceptions of the Roma	(106)
3.1.1. Perception of the Roma as lazy	10
3.1.2. Perception of the Roma as filthy, characterized by littering, lack of cleanliness and sanitation practices	29
3.1.3. Perception of the Roma squandering recourses including free financial and material help, resulting in wasteful and reckless use	44
3.1.4. Referring to historical references to show that the Roma received material help in adequate conditions but ruined it	15
3.1.5. Perception of the Roma as inheritably possessing negative values	7
3.1.6. Perception of the Roma as involved excessive alcohol, cigarette, drug and gambling consumption (and sometimes drug dealing)	18
3.1.7. Believe that the Roma own illegal settlements, reflecting the stereotype that they live in substandard homes	6
3.1.8. Perception of the Roma as criminals and vandalizers	10
3.1.9. Believe in the stereotype that the Roma engage in mistreatment and sometimes even consumption of pets and mainly dogs	11
3.1.10. Believe that the Roma are actually better off and/or wealthier members of the society	11
3.2. Believe that the Roma share a cultural devaluation of work	19
3.3. Negative perception of Roma Fertility and Child Support	(30)
3.3.1. Believe that the Roma families have an excessive number of children	20
3.3.2. Believe that the Roma have children primarily to receive financial support from the government.	9

4. RESPONSE TO (INTERNATIONAL) CRITICISM	
4.1. Comments questioning the credibility and knowledge of the criticising party	(98)
4.1.1. Believe that the criticizing party lacks relevant knowledge regarding the situation and/or Slovakia	67
4.1.2. Believe that the way Slovakia is portrayed in the media due to the situation with the Roma is shameful and/or angers them	9
4.1.3. Disparaging comments aimed at the criticizing party	23
4.2. Claims of lack of personal experience	(56)
4.2.1. Believe that empathizing with the Roma is caused by the lack of relevant knowledge and personal experience	24
4.2.2. Believe that those who criticize how the situation is handled should come live with the Roma	18
4.2.3. Believe that the perception of the criticizing party is based on inaccurate information and/or lies	14
5. PERCEPTIONS OF DISCRIMINATION AND ATTRIBUTION TO NON-RACIAL FACTORS	
5.1. Attribution of discrimination to Non-Racial Factors	(53)
5.1.1. Believe segregation is caused by the overpopulation of the Roma and not by racism	7
5.1.2. Believe the negative perceptions of the Roma are caused by their behaviour rather than their ethnicity	26
5.1.3. Believe the Roma remain segregated because they are possessing anti-social and undesirable characteristics	22
5.2. Comments utilizing racist language and/or slurs	(45)
5.3. Perceptions of discrimination	(26)
5.3.1. Believe the Roma are not being discriminated against	18
5.3.2. Believe that the claim of discrimination is based on a lie	8

Appendix B

The Code Tree

