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'I don't feel insulted': Constructions of prejudice and identity performance among Roma in Bulgaria

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Abstract

Drawing on studies showing that arguments about the nature of intergroup prejudice allow members of privileged groups to 'perform' a positive social identity, the present study explores how arguments about the nature of prejudice are produced by targets of prejudice in order to consolidate or challenge their own social identity. We conducted interviews with Bulgarian Roma and, based on a discursive psychology approach, analysed the way participants contested being assigned to a Roma-exclusive identity category, which they treated as produced by prejudiced beliefs of the non-Roma high-status majority population. Positive intergroup contact was used to demonstrate the absence of prejudice and counter Roma identity threat. Auto-stereotyping and disidentification, in turn, revealed how one's own situation is distinguished from the group. We discuss how identity performances founded on prejudice constructions work to maintain or challenge intergroup boundaries. We conclude that studies revealing prejudice constructions of minority groups can explain the sedative effect of positive intergroup contact on ethnic activism and help to reflect on integration strategies that would be compatible with social change in favour of disadvantaged minority groups.

Adrienne Giroud and Emilio Paolo Visintin contributed equally to this research and share first authorship.

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Bulgaria, discursive psychology, identity performance, prejudice, Roma

1 | INTRODUCTION

Despite a major normative shift towards anti-discrimination and racial equality (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995; Brown, Akiyama, White, Jayaratne, & Anderson, 2009), distinctions between social groups based on ethnicity or 'culture' remain. Durrheim, Quayle, and Dixon (2016) demonstrated how members of a privileged social group used arguments about the nature of prejudice to deflect accusations of racism and defend intergroup inequalities. To maintain their position at the top of the social hierarchy, members of privileged groups need to portray their advantage and treatment of minorities as unprejudiced. Durrheim et al. showed how constructions of prejudice – that is, arguments about what can or cannot be legitimately said about an outgroup – were used by members of privileged groups to consolidate or restore a positive social identity. A common example of this strategy is to attribute unequal outcomes to problematic behaviour or traits of the outgroup (see e.g., Augoustinos & Every, 2007 for discursive strategies that present negative views of outgroups as reasonable).

However, the extent to which targets of prejudice use identity-relevant arguments about the nature of the prejudice to rationalise or challenge their exclusion as members of a devaluated social category has been under-investigated to date. In this article, we explore constructions of ethnic prejudice by members of the Roma community in Bulgaria, a social minority who still faces harsh discrimination and severe inequalities. Situating our research at the intersection of the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and discursive psychology literature (e.g., Wetherell, 1998), we investigate how constructions of anti-Roma prejudice allow Roma people to consolidate, challenge, or restore a positive social identity.

Indeed, the situation of Roma in Europe dramatically illustrates the consequentiality of well-argued legitimisations of prejudice and exclusionary policies. Europeans' treatment of Roma minorities is quite unique in terms of long-term maintenance of ethnic distinctiveness despite interethnic blending, contact opportunities, and shared traditions, especially between Roma minorities and Slavic majorities in Eastern European societies. The characteristics of the Roma ethnos – nomadism, endogamy, 'antisocial' practices, immorality, and paganism, to cite but the most common (see Moscovici, 2011) – are depicted as signs of cultural backwardness. As a result of this social devaluation, mixed marriage and contact with Roma are taboo and the presence of Roma in society is considered a threat to (e.g., national) group identity (see Pérez, Moscovici, & Chulvi, 2007). Explicit racist attitudes towards Roma minorities in Europe have been demonstrated in public opinion surveys (e.g., Kende, Hadarics, & Lášticová, 2017), media content studies (e.g., Rowe & Goodman, 2014), socio-political analyses of institutional texts and talk (e.g., Simhandl, 2006), and analyses of discourse (Loveland & Popescu, 2016; Tileagă, 2005, 2006). The normative shift to anti-discrimination ideology has done little to undo the exclusion of the Roma so far.

Despite the growing interest in anti-Roma prejudice as a contemporary and enduring form of blatant racism, few studies have surveyed Roma minority members and analysed their attitudes or discourse about anti-Roma prejudice. Among the few, Bigazzi and Csertő (2016) surveyed Roma in Hungary and revealed two identity strategies – avoidance of contact with the Hungarian high-status majority group or denial of interethnic distinctiveness. In Slovakia, Reysen, Slobodnikova, and Katzarska-Miller (2016) found that the perceived impermeability, stability, and illegitimacy of interethnic boundaries with the non-Roma majority (see Tajfel & Turner, 1986) predicted Roma minority members' ethnic identification and desire to contest discrimination. In Bulgaria, Pereira and Green (2017) found that Bulgarian citizens with Roma origin used national identity markers (e.g., language, religion, traditions) in their discourse to secure and defend their inclusion in the national ingroup. In all three countries, the social identity of Roma and the threat of ethnic prejudice appear as two tightly intertwined realities.

The present analysis focuses on Roma discourse and more specifically on prejudiced and non-prejudiced treatment of the Roma as a central device for talking about the Roma identity. Our analysis is informed and guided (a) by

social identity and self-categorisation theories (see Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), which have mainly used quantitative methodologies to investigate strategies to manage social identities among disadvantaged groups, and (b) by discursive psychological literature (see Wetherell, 1998), which has analysed how prejudice and identities are constructed and negotiated via talk.

Before proceeding with our analysis, we first review literature showing how communication – and especially talk about prejudice – can serve identity performance functions. We then argue that prejudice-related identity performances might be especially useful for ethnic minorities who must manage stigma and exclusion. Whereas existing research has mostly focused on how majorities construct prejudice, we turn the spotlight on minority identity performances and the interdependence between majority and minority group identities.

1.1 | Prejudice as social identity performance

A crucial contribution of social identity theory to prejudice research has been to highlight the role that positive distinctiveness motive plays in social identification and intergroup differentiation (Tajfel & Turner 1986; Turner et al., 1987). Expressions of intergroup prejudice increase the salience of intergroup boundaries and usually involve descriptions of others in terms of degrading stereotypes.

Subsequent work (see e.g., the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects, Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998) demonstrated how the psychological shift from personal to social identity has a profound effect on individual behaviours. A social identity may be made salient by features of the situation or developed strategically by social actors pursuing political agendas (see e.g., Reicher, Hopkins, & Condor, 1997). Moreover, Klein, Spears, and Reicher (2007) demonstrated that individual group members can also proactively express (or suppress) behaviours that are 'relevant to those norms conventionally associated with a salient social identity' (p. 3) to achieve situation-specific relational goals. Different aspects of a social identity can be performed depending on whether the audience is comprised of ingroup or outgroup members (Klein et al., 2007, see also Barreto, Spears, Ellemers, & Shahinper, 2003). For example, minority group members can decide to make their group identity more or less visible (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013), or they can strategically adapt majority group traits, mannerisms or preferences in order to challenge their negative stereotype (Pereira & Green, 2017). Crucial for the present study, Klein et al. (2007) stated that everyday expressions of intergroup prejudice are typical occasions for social identity performance, which support both the public consolidation of social categories and the personal, psychological endorsement of group membership. Prejudice-related identity strategies typically occur when majority groups defend their privileged status against threats from minorities (see Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

Examining the strategic character of identity performances, Durrheim et al. (2016) drew attention to the way arguments about what is and is not prejudiced or racist are powerful resources for achieving group identity goals and for mobilising social action (see also Reicher, 2012). In their analysis of UKIP Brexit campaign materials, Durrheim et al. (2018) illustrated how UKIP leaders used racial imagery to convince voters to leave the EU, but were able to deny racist accusations and mobilise substantial support by carefully constructing their depictions as truthful, not prejudiced.

Prejudice-related identity performances have become important tools for managing social change in many societies where arguments about who and what is truly prejudiced are used to explain events, sanitise tarnished identities, legitimise actions, and mobilise support. The enactment of a carefully figured and sculpted non-prejudiced identity has thus become 'part of the dynamic process by which the status quo is changed or preserved' (Durrheim et al., 2016, p. 18).

1.2 | Identification with an ethnic minority group facing prejudice

The negative psychological consequences of prejudice and discrimination from the perspective of their targets are many (e.g., Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Crucial for the current research, being the target of prejudice increases consciousness of belonging to a disadvantaged social

category or group (see e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). Experience of negative social identities is dealt with via different psychological strategies, ranging from disidentification with the discriminated group to collective action-oriented attitudes (Taylor et al., 1990; see also Curtin, Kende, & Kende, 2016).

Importantly, categorisation by self and others as well as identification as members of a stigmatised minority are complicated and controversial processes. For example, regarding Roma, survey research (Csepeli & Simon, 2004; Rughiniş, 2011) and Roma specialists (Okely, 2011; Tileagă, 2015) have pointed out that external social categorisation as Roma does not necessarily overlap with self-identification as Roma due to the contextual and nation-specific nature of the Roma identity categories and to the complexity of the Roma intracommunity ethnic distinctions. Indeed, the prominence of poverty, of certain professions, and of religion for example differ across Roma communities.

Because disadvantaged social categories are socially constructed rather than being fixed, objective realities (Wetherell, 2009), the role of natural talk and public discourse in identity restoration strategies is crucial (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001).

Recent literature has reported that ethnic minority individuals – especially members of native, non-migrant minorities – contest categorisation as members of an ethnic-exclusive group (Blackwood, Hopkins, & Reicher, 2013; Hopkins, 2007; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson, & Sammut, 2014). For example, Blackwood et al. (2013) interviewed Scottish Muslims about their encounters with airport authorities. Participants complained about being misrecognised by authorities as Muslim instead of Scottish *and* Muslim (see also Hopkins, 2007). Howarth et al. (2014) found that British mixed-heritage youths resisted ethnic categorisation – a discourse illustrated by the quote 'It's only other people who make me feel Black'. When opposed to a national majority group, ethnic minority members often present themselves as occupying some hybrid position in-between ethnic and national categories. While self-definition discourses as a member of an ethnic minority group are multi-faceted, they are not necessarily oppositional. Accordingly, Verkuyten (1997) analysed discussions between Turkish people living in the Netherlands, finding that they expressed a tension between their need to 'fit in' with their 'host' (or home) society and their need to honour their cultural origin. Similarly, Merino and Tileagă (2011) found that young Mapuches, a Chilean indigenous minority, described themselves as members of the minority but also objected to such categorisation by majorities whose use of the term was deemed to be prejudiced.

Indeed, minorities often attribute majority depictions of them to prejudice. The experience of prejudice is an everyday challenge for ethnic minorities who interact with majority group members, often in social contexts dominated by the norms and attitudes of a majority group. In response, minority members develop (counter-) arguments about the origin and the nature of prejudice, which may, we argue, also be treated as prejudice-related identity performances. As preliminary evidence of this, Hopkins and Greenwood (2013) reported how British Muslim women verbally anticipated Islamophobic prejudice when talking about the hijab, and took steps to resist this by British identification and developing counter-stereotypical discourse about their religious and gender identities. More recently, Greenland, Andreouli, Augoustinos, and Taulke-Johnson (2018) observed that minority group members tended to 'minimize both hard and soft forms of discrimination' preferring not to see themselves as victims of discrimination (p. 548). Their work extends previous research on the personal/group discrimination discrepancy (Taylor et al., 1990) by illustrating how the perception of my group but not myself as a target of discrimination is rhetorically managed.

In sum, the common denominator of ethnic minority members' discursive accomplishments is that they usually take a stance on prejudice in the making of their social identity. When communicating with outgroup audiences, ethnic minority members perform identities that are designed to anticipate and resist prejudice about their group, and to make something else of prejudice (see similar conclusions in the work of Benston, 2013 about African-Americans' reparatory performance of their "blackness"). Based on previous observation that Roma identity is bound by prejudice (see Bigazzi & Csertő, 2016 for a study using questionnaire data), the present study explores how arguments about the nature of prejudice are produced by Roma, in order to consolidate or challenge their social identity and explain attitudes of the non-Roma majority.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Participants

The data used for this study were English transcriptions of 10 semi-directive individual interviews that were collected in Bulgaria following a survey on interethnic relations between the three largest national subgroups: the ethnic Bulgarian majority, and the Bulgarian Turkish and Roma ethnic minorities. The participants who confirmed belonging to the Roma minority were provided with the opportunity to volunteer for an interview in exchange for a 15 Leva incentive (corresponding to circa 7.5 euros). The interviewer was able to reach nine of them.[1] The interview sample was further completed by an additional interviewee recruited directly by the interviewer with the support of an NGO that collaborated with the survey agency. The sample was composed of five men and five women aged between 18 and 70 years and all gave written consent. Interviewees all spoke Bulgarian as their native language and lived in Stara Zagora in the centre of Bulgaria.[2]

2.2 | Procedure

Semi-directive interviews were conducted by a trained Bulgarian ethnologist, whose longstanding experience in interviewing and studying Roma was key. He had excellent knowledge of the different regional Roma subgroups and vocabulary, as well as skills in interacting with illiterate participants. Interviews were conducted in Bulgarian and lasted between 30 and 50 min. The conversations took place on the street, in public places (or more rarely in participants' houses), and sometimes in the near presence of a participant's partner (especially for female participants) or neighbours.

Since Roma*ness* is a politicised issue in Bulgaria and Roma ethnicity is frequently inferred from physical appearance, the interviewer was instructed to begin with a non-judgmental probe that referred to participants' self-reported Roma ethnicity[3] in the initial stage of the survey. The interview protocol then moved the discussion to the participant's national identification, interethnic contact, discrimination, and to discussing future perspectives on interethnic relations in Bulgaria.

The conversations were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim with annotations providing contextual information, and then translated into English by a professional agency external to the research project.

2.3 | Analytic strategy

The content of the collected discourse was rich and covered a broad spectrum of research topics complementary to the survey questionnaire. The data were thus used in a previous publication that focused on common-sense categorical knowledge (i.e., the social representation of Gypsy) used to talk about the category of 'Roma'.[4] For the present study, in contrast, interview transcripts were approached by focusing on the way the Roma category probed by the interviewer was qualified and identification was performed through arguments about the nature of anti-Roma prejudice experienced in intergroup encounters.

We examined how the Bulgarian Roma identity category was co-constructed and negotiated as part of an interactive process between the interviewer and the interviewees (Merino & Tileagă, 2011; see also Potter, Edwards, & Wetherell, 1993; Wetherell, 2008). Therefore, we considered identity and prejudice not as fixed realities but as formed and negotiated in discourse. Expecting that arguments about anti-minority prejudice play a role in minority group identity formation, we paid particular attention to *relational* accounts of Roma identity that may favour or blur the boundaries of the Roma minority. In line with psychological discourse analysis (Billig, 1987; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), interviews were thus read and reread in order to progressively identify recurrent terms, themes,

and arguments that emerged in each individual interview and to reveal participants' constructions and theories about prejudice. During this procedure, the rhetorical and interactional aspects embedded in the discourse were also outlined. In a second step, we analysed to what extent the arguments and relational accounts that emerged were common to different participants. As a result, we identified two discursive practices: (a) how participants anticipate and dodge the identity of a target of prejudice (i.e., the Roma identity) and (b) how participants deny being a target of prejudice.

Below, we present a series of extracts from interviews that illustrate how the sampled Bulgarian Roma interviewees evoked different constructions of prejudice in relation to their self-identification as Roma and to the category of 'Roma'. The extracts selected for the purpose of the present article highlight constructions of prejudice and Roma identity performance practices that appeared recurrently in our data, although we do not make an assumption about their validity in other national contexts. Note that interview participants were given pseudonyms.

3 | ANALYSIS

The analysis is presented in two sections. In the first section, we examined how interviewees anticipated their stigmatised ethnic identity. Specifically, we considered how interviewees anticipated negative stereotypes and prejudice from the ethnic Bulgarian majority when asked about their (Roma) ethnic belonging, how they acknowledged discrimination against Roma (but not personal discrimination against themselves), and considered discrimination as a cause of Roma's antisocial behaviour. In the second section, we considered accounts denying prejudice and instead claiming positive intergroup relations.

3.1 | Anticipating and dodging the identity of a target of prejudice

The first and most evident constructions of prejudice evoked by Roma interviewees were observed in interview opening exchanges, and following the interviewer's invitation to the participant to confirm the ethnicity declared some weeks earlier (see Appendix for transcription conventions):

Extract 1. (Female, 18 years old)

Interviewer: During the survey, you have said that you are Roma, that you think of yourself as Roma person.

Dora: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: What does it mean for you to be Roma? What defines you as a Roma woman? What [differentiates] you from others?

Dora: Well, absolutely nothing. We are people like people.

Interviewer: And why do you say you are Roma and not Bulgarian for example?

Dora: Well, because our nation is like that, I mean, because Bulgarians constantly [say] 'filthy Gypsies'. They offend us, right, (…)

Extract 2. (Male, 24 years old)

Interviewer: You are Roma.

Ivan: I am Roma, yes. And a Gypsy is a Gypsy. Gypsy is as quoted. Stupid.

Interviewer: As a way of life?

Ivan: Yes, a Gypsy is a Gypsy. He is stupid, he has no mind, he only thinks of stealing the easiest way and to live overall easier. But Roma is something like me, a person who fights with life, has aims in this life and struggles to be a normal citizen. To live the normal way and for no discrimination.

In Extracts 1 and 2, interviewees endorse the Roma identity category cued by the interviewer and at the same time they deny and contest the validity of the proposed ethnic distinction (see also Figgou & Condor, 2007; Howarth et al., 2014; Merino & Tileagă, 2011). Dora claims that nothing differentiates the Roma who 'are people like people'. Ivan uses the distinction between Roma and Gypsy denominations, limiting social devaluation to the Gypsy denomination.

If Roma are not a distinct people, why identify as Roma? In both of these extracts, the basis for identification is a constructed prejudice (see Durrheim et al., 2016, 2018). Both Dora and Ivan develop an account of being a target of prejudice by mimicking Bulgarian racism. In Extract 1, Dora parallels interviewer's probe 'why do you say' and uses reported speech to tell the interviewer what 'Bulgarians constantly say' (i.e., Filthy Gypsies). She thereby clearly constructs her identification as Roma and her talk about the category of Roma as a discourse that answers another (prejudiced) discourse. In Extract 2, Ivan impersonates a Bulgarian way of thinking: 'A gypsy is a Gypsy. He is stupid, he has no mind, he only thinks of stealing'. Of course, these are exaggerated, hyperbolic, and contestable depictions of Bulgarians talking about the Roma minority (Dobai & Hopkins, 2020). They are constructions of prejudice. More than that: they are identity performances (Durrheim et al., 2016, 2018). They perform the identity of the prejudiced other as a tool for setting space for an alternative social identity as Roma. Moreover, although the category 'Roma' is itself contested, it is used here to both acknowledge and invalidate highly prejudiced portrayals of 'Gypsies' (see also Leudar & Nekvapil, 2000).

We identified a second way in which our participants used constructions of prejudice to ground their social identification. In these instances, rather than claiming membership of Roma ethnicity, participants distanced themselves from the troubled category.

Extract 3. (Male, 24 years old)

Interviewer: Would you tell me what happened to you, when you have faced discrimination?

Ivan: It hasn't personally happened to me, but it is obvious, man! If I noticed sometimes (.) right (.) not personally to me because I am not somebody [important], but I am always standing tall, well dressed, clean, you know, with nice clothes and sports shoes. I am always fixed so they can't look at me in a bad way. (...)

Extract 4. (Female, 18 years old)

Dora: (...) and I like it very much that they [i.e., Bulgarian friends] perceive us, the Roma people, as good people, because we don't lie, we don't steal, we are just family friends, I could say that, with his [her husband's] colleagues.

Extract 5. (Female, 18 years old)

Interviewer: Has there been a problem when the one who receives your application for child support asks 'What do you want, what are you doing here?'

Dora: Well, no, when you can write, when you treat them nicely, obviously, and they treat you well.

In the above extracts, interviewees argue they are capable of efficiently avoiding prejudice and interethnic misperceptions when encountering Bulgarians (E3, 'so they don't look at me in a bad way'; E4, 'I like it very much that they *perceive* us… as good people'). Personal (E3, E5) or collective (E4) Roma identity is framed as disconfirming an ethnic stereotype (Greenland et al., 2018). Strategies for distancing from prejudice and stereotypes rely on keeping a low profile (E3, 'not being someone important'), dressing appropriately, being clean (E3), and also on 'not lying' (E4), 'not stealing' (E4) and being 'just friends' (see also Bigazzi & Csertő, 2016 for preference for assimilation among part of Roma population in Hungary).

In Extract 5, the interviewer describes an episode of aggressive and discriminatory behaviour ('What do you want, what are you doing here?') by the Bulgarian majority. Dora, in turn, uses an individual mobility narrative (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), avoiding the identity of the target of prejudice by presenting herself as a disconfirming case, that is, someone who can write and who is therefore treated well. Similarly, in Extract 3 the interviewer's question assumes discrimination against Roma, but Ivan claims not being personally a target of discrimination because of his personal characteristics (Greenland et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 1990).

Extract 6 illustrates a third way that prejudice constructions feature in identity performances of targets of prejudice. In contrast to the previous strategies, here this older female participant identifies with young Roma victims of prejudice. She is not personally a target of prejudice but sympathises with the prejudice fellow ingroup members' experience (Taylor et al., 1990).

Extract 6. (Female, 63 years old)

Darina: (…) youngsters are going there, making request applications and they see the dark skin, they don't let the applications but tear them up. This is not nice. Not nice. Kids here are starving, young men are starving, look at them

sitting, not working. Starving. They go collecting bottles. Weeeeell, the Roma dig in [the trash bins]. Is it nicer to steal? You can't steal, right? And when you steal you go right in the jail. And, and they collect iron, bottles, they sell them to feed their families, but what are we to do? That is what life is like to us. (…)

Before, I will tell you now. If he [Zhivkov, i.e. a former communist ruler] stands from his grave, he will put all of Bulgaria right. (…) Truth I tell you. Everything will be alright, because there was no stealing, no killing, no hunger. At 12 we go to work from Lozenets to Petkene[5] we go to work. We walk to work but you walk calmly.

Job discrimination faced by the contemporary young generation of Bulgarian Roma was frequently cited, especially by older participants, to rationalise the stereotype of the Gypsy as a lazy and aggressive person who does not want to 'work', 'steals', and 'digs in trash bin' (see also Hoffman & Hurst, 1990 for the rationalisation function of stereotypes). Rather than disavowing the stereotype, Darina (E6) treats it as a reality, one brought about by discrimination that keeps young 'dark skin' Roma out of work. It is discrimination that accounts for the counter-normative behaviour of Roma (see also Kamans, Gordijn, Oldenhuis, & Otten, 2009). This is born out by the recent political transition leading to expressions of nostalgia for the communist regime. If there were no prejudice, as during communist years, 'everything [would] be alright'. Roma would have access again to education, work, and housing and there would be 'no stealing, no killing, no hunger'.

In Extract 7, revealing a fourth way of evoking prejudice, Dimitar acknowledged prejudice and the interviewer heard him taking offence. Dimitar recognised prejudice but presented himself as being thick skinned and resilient.

Extract 7. (Male, 25 years old)

Interviewer: Ok, however, what makes you feel Roma, when you are asked if you are Bulgarian, Turkish or Roma?

Dimitar: I mean I don't feel (.)

Interviewer: What makes you (.)

Dimitar: (.) I don't feel insulted that way you know?

Interviewer: I'm not saying that it is an insult. It's not.

Dimitar: I don't feel insulted.

Interviewer: But something has to make you feel (.) Roma.

Dimitar: Well (.) in general. (...) Yes. Everyone is Roma, who does the Roma things. I mean they make a lot of children, how should I put it – things that Bulgarians are not keen on (.)

Prejudice and the Roma identity are negotiated between the interviewer and Dimitar. Countering the Roma identity category by defining what does not count as prejudice, Dimitar constructs prejudice as a matter of individual sensitiveness. While also invoking behaviours stereotypically associated to the Roma minority, Dimitar does not refute them. The rhetorical question 'how should I put it' reveals his attempt at framing interethnic prejudice as a matter of individual susceptibility, which he is not personally concerned about ('I don't feel insulted'). The formulation, 'Bulgarians are not keen on', in reference to stereotypical behaviours of some Roma ('they make a lot of children'), reveals his euphemising of prejudice that he reduces to a matter of personal taste or cultural habits of the majority (see Greenland et al., 2018; Greenland, Augoustinos, Andreouli, & Taulke-Johnson, 2020).

Identity performances considered in this section are grounded in constructions of prejudice. By (a) contesting the Roma identity category for being shaped by prejudice, by (b) making statements about one's personal capacity to control the emergence of prejudice and conform to majority norms, and by (c) rationalising the origin of Roma's anti-social behaviours, interviewees perform an active and more positive version of the Roma identity where they are not just passive targets of prejudice, but integrated Bulgarian citizens.

3.2 | Disclaiming being a target of prejudice

In contrast to the above extracts illustrating how interviewees spontaneously invoked prejudice by denouncing the arbitrariness of the interethnic distinction, other extracts revealed disavowal of experiencing prejudice grounded on accounts of positive interethnic relations, thereby indirectly also relying on prejudice constructions:

Extract 8. (Female, 66 years old)

Interviewer: During the survey with my colleagues you have said you were Roma. What makes you feel Roma?

Margarita: I do not separate myself from my nation. It doesn't matter whether I am Roma or Gypsy, it's the same to me. I am Gypsy by descent (...) The Bulgarians don't separate[6] at all from us, the Roma people and here in the neighbourhood we get along really good.

Extract 9. (Female, 63 years old)

Interviewer: But is there something that is different for the Roma compared to Bulgarians? Any custom, anything?

Darina: Look now, we are trying like this with Bulgarians.[7] My daughter-in-law [is] Bulgarian. We are not separating [from Bulgarians by not marrying them]. My brother got hooked with a Bulgarian woman. My son got hooked with a Bulgarian woman. We are mixed, you see. We don't have any differences. But there are Bulgarians that make a difference.

In Extract 8, Margarita evokes positive contact in terms of non-segregation and harmonious cohabitation (see Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006 for intergroup contact theory; see also Kamberi, Martinovic, & Verkuyten, 2017; Pereira, Green, & Visintin, 2017 for intergroup contact between Roma and national majorities). Mirroring earlier extracts, the Roma versus Gypsy distinction is made, despite being presented as irrelevant ('It doesn't matter whether I am Roma or Gypsy') since interethnic relations are positive. In Extract 9, while the interviewer cues interethnic distinction, Darina replies listing examples of 'mixed' relationships and marriages in her family. Positive interethnic contact with Bulgarians is therefore invoked in terms of exogamy.[8] Non-segregation is however disclaimed by the 'we' versus 'they' phrasal constructions and by the use of the generic category of 'Bulgarians' to refer to the national majority outgroup. Indeed, the use of pronouns 'us' (E8) and 'we' (E9) suggests interviewees' attributions (here, of positive interethnic contact with Bulgarians) to Roma *including* themselves (see also Leudar & Nekvapil, 2000). Despite stressing intergroup harmony, this denial of being a target of prejudice still relies on the interethnic distinction between Roma and Bulgarians.

Besides, note that Margarita and Darina attribute those privileged intimate relationships to local circumstances (E8, 'here in the neighborhood'). 'Here' people are not prejudiced, while elsewhere, interviewees concede that prejudice remains and is mainly due to individual predispositions (E9, 'But there are Bulgarians that make a difference'), thereby denying the institutionalisation of the inequalities endured by Roma people. In addition, positive intergroup contact is also constructed as a privilege reserved to some exceptional Roma (generally including the interviewee), especially thanks to a job (E4) or to mixed marriages.

4 | DISCUSSION

Previous research has focused on advantaged, majority groups who challenged being 'prejudiced' or 'racist', revealing how arguments about the nature of interethnic prejudice in contemporary societies are related with restoration and performance of a positive social identity (Durrheim et al., 2016, 2018). In the current paper, based on social identity and self-categorisation theorisations and on discursive psychology literature (e.g., Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), we analysed discourse between Roma interviewees and an ethnic Bulgarian interviewer. Our analysis showed how arguments about prejudice are related to the performance of the social identity of targets of prejudice.

First, our analysis describes how members of the Roma minority who endorse the Roma identity anticipate the threat of prejudice by depicting the discourse of a prejudiced and antagonist majority in sometimes crude and stereotypical terms. By being first to bring anti-Roma prejudice into the discussion, participants produce (alternative) knowledge about the nature of prejudice and about the Roma identity (Durrheim et al., 2016). Participants notably contest the Roma minority identity for being spoiled and bound to prejudice expressed by the non-Roma majority (Bigazzi & Csertő, 2016; Hopkins, 2007; Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Merino & Tileagă, 2011).

Nevertheless, denouncing prejudice exposes subjects to being perceived as plaintive victims, which may ultimately increase rather than decrease intergroup distinctiveness and prejudice (e.g., by benefiting from social programmes or aids). Apart from performing an identity as a target of prejudice, we also observed a second type of discourse allowing the performance of a more positive, non-victimised Roma identity, still related to arguments about prejudice. This discourse consists of denying being a target of prejudice, either by praising positive contact with the non-Roma majority or by confirming the negative stereotypes about the Roma while personally distancing oneself from it. The first strategy (i.e., stressing positive contact) illustrates how minority members perform a positive social identity by directly referring to, and altering one of, the fundamental aspects of anti-Roma prejudice, namely the taboo of intergroup contact (Pérez et al., 2007). The second strategy (i.e., autostereotyping and disidentification) illustrates the self/group discrimination discrepancy (Taylor et al., 1990), by revealing how one's own situation can be rhetorically and convincingly distinguished from the group.

In sum, by disclaiming the identity of a target of prejudice, our interviewees sought to perform a more positive identity as integrated Bulgarian citizens, far from the stereotypical image of Roma people. By highlighting the role of positive intergroup contact accounts in the identity performance of minority groups, our analysis also speaks, indirectly, to the research on the sedative effect of positive intergroup contact, that is, the association between positive contact with majority group members and reduced collective action among minority group members (Çakal, Hewstone, Schwär, & Heath, 2011). While our interviews confirm that constructions of non-prejudiced majority attitudes derived from positive contact experiences relate to minority members' disclaiming of (personal) discrimination and downplaying of grievances, our analyses also suggest that 'us' and 'them' categories are not psychologically abolished. We thus argue that the sedative effect of contact on minority groups' willingness to fight for equality should be nuanced in future research by considering the performance of alternative, more positive minority identity (see e.g., Pereira et al., 2017).

Some specificities of our research procedure need to be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. It is possible that the non-Roma interviewer was seen by Roma interviewees as the stereotyped other that induced the threat of prejudice anticipated by most participants. Also, during some interviews there were ingroup members within earshot. However, our analysis did not reveal signs of influence by such ingroup members. Importantly, we used data from semi-directive interviews, which can be considered as contrived data, that is, data which would not exist without the intervention of researchers (Potter, 1997). While the usefulness in distinguishing between contrived versus naturalistic data is highly controversial (Speer, 2002), with our interviews we cannot know whether similar discursive strategies would be used in more naturalistic settings (e.g., casual, non-structured conversations) and in dialogues or interviews between Roma (see Merino & Tileagă, 2011). We encourage future research to analyse whether similar identity construction strategies emerge in such settings.

Despite these cautions in interpretation of the emerged identity strategies, our data provide an original contribution to the literature by presenting the perspective of the Roma minority about prejudice. The discursive strategies that we present in this study illustrate how the concept of "prejudice" provides an identity framing also for stigmatised social minorities. Interestingly, this identity framing either counters (when minority members denounce being a target of prejudice) or nourishes (when they disclaim being a target of prejudice) the identity performances of majority group members who, in turn, seek to present themselves as unprejudiced and to legitimise existing social relations (Durrheim et al., 2018).

The way others look at us as members of a social category matters, and definitions of a group identity have concrete implications for group members' opportunities, access to resources and living conditions. The Roma community is probably one of the most dramatic contemporary illustrations of this statement. However, the Roma are also an interesting case of efficient collective resilience and survival strategies in the margins of the society, despite extreme group devaluation and dishonour associated with the Roma ethnic identity. The identity performance framework along with a discursive analysis show how emerging definitions of intergroup prejudice, from both majority and minority group perspectives, contribute to the maintenance of status quo in

group-based inequalities, but also challenge inherited social identities by allowing people to present alternative realities.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Among the nine interviews conducted based on the contact details from the survey, for one interviewee, age reported during the interview did not match with age reported in the survey, and therefore this interviewee was considered as a novel contact. The survey included 3-item measures of identification as Roma and as a member of the Bulgarian nation, with response scales ranging from 1 (*no, not at all*) to 5 (*yes, very much*). Among the eight interviewees who also completed the survey, identification both as Roma (M = 4.58, SD = 0.64, minimum = 3.33) and as a member of the Bulgarian nation (M = 4.42, SD = 0.75, minimum = 3.33) were high.

[2] The survey agency conducting the survey identified separate sampling points for the three ethnic communities, based on self-reported ethnicity as previously surveyed by the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute (http://statlib.nsi.bg:8181/isisbgstat/ssp/fulltext.asp?content=/FullT/FulltOpen/P_22_2011_SRB.pdf). Stara Zagora was chosen for the Roma interviews among the three regions where the survey was conducted for its particularly mixed ethnic make-up and the presence of an urban ghetto (called 'Lozenets') where Roma citizens live segregated from the rest of the local population. During the time when these interviews were conducted, ethnic conflict erupted in a site nearby this Roma ghetto. The situation escalated in July the same year (2014) with the public destruction of several houses considered by local authorities as an illegal Roma 'camp'.

[3] During this study, we used 'Roma' (also in Bulgarian language) to refer to the Bulgarian minority otherwise known as *Gypsies* or *Tsigani*. Roma is the politically correct and non-discriminatory label used nowadays by European authorities in charge of human rights and by NGOs active in Bulgaria.

[4] The previous study drew on the notion of themata from Social Representation Theory revealing how Roma-Bulgarians transformed the abstract notion of 'Roma identity' into a more concrete reality (Pereira & Green, 2017).

[5] The interviewee probably refers here to *Petko Enev*, located in the southern industrial zone of Stara Zagora, which was a poultry processing factory during the communist years where many Roma in this region were employed.

[6] The literal translation was 'The Bulgarians do not limit themselves'.

[7] The woman means that she will explain to the interviewer how the Roma are usually trying to connect with Bulgarians.

[8] Note that exogamy is described not only with ethnic Bulgarians but with Bulgarians of Turkish origin too. Here, we focused on mixed marriage and relationships with ethnic Bulgarians for the purpose of clarity.

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APPENDIX

Transcription conventions

[] Words and specifications not included in the original transcription and translation.

(…) Omission from the translation.

(.) Short pause in talk.