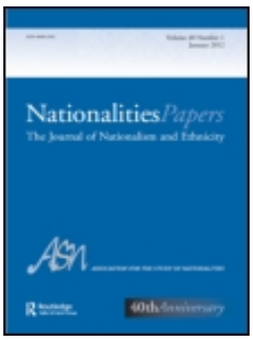

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The gypsy as vanishing mediator in Russian television coverage of inter-ethnic tension

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The article addresses the representation of gypsies in Russian television news bulletins and popular drama series over a 15-month period. It seeks first to explain the prominence of the media image of the gypsy relative to the size of the Roma population and second to account for the relationship between fictional and non-fictional modes of representation. Situating itself within the broader field of post-Soviet Russian identity studies and applying qualitative tools differentiated according to the arena of analysis, it looks at questions of lexicon, voice and viewpoint in relation to news and issues of characterization, fictional space and plot with respect to drama. The two apparatuses are linked through a shared emphasis on narrative, and in particular on its dual orientation toward the exceptional (what makes a story worth telling and capable of embracing "difference") and the typical (what enables it to represent and project "identity"). In its central argument it maps this dual "identity/difference" dynamic onto the gypsy's liminal status as both "of the self" and "of the other", and its mediatory function: the ability to serve as a proxy for ethno-cultural difference more generally, and to negotiate the tensions between the cultural and racial aspects of ethnicity.

Keywords: gypsies; Russia; television; Roma

Gypsies and the news: reality and myth

Any assumed separation between "real news" and non-news programming is fallacious. In an era of "infotainment", dramatic reconstructions and the mining of the news agenda by scriptwriters keen to give their work a social edge, the fallacy is particularly misleading (Thussu 2007). In fact, news and non-news broadcasting exist in a symbiotic relationship. Current events, first reported in news bulletins, are subsequently, and therapeutically, "worked through" in non-news genres (Ellis 1999). Meanwhile, news bulletins import styles, editorial practices and narrative structures to enliven their reports (the very term "news story" is revealing).[1] There is a perpetual circulation of meaning from news to non-news, as each exploits the other.

The symbiosis is particularly important in the context of the media's representation of inter-ethnic relations. News broadcasters strive to convey the real problems that these issues generate, but also to distance themselves from the inflammatory stereotypes that circulate in popular discourses inflecting non-news programming. Equally, documentary makers and television dramatists are drawn to the raw emotion of inter-ethnic conflict,

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yet seek to avoid becoming news stories in their own right by overstepping the boundaries of permissibility in this sensitive area.

Post-communist Russia has not been immune to such dilemmas. The controversy in early 2010 over the reality television serial, *Shkola* (*School*), almost banned by the Duma, is testament to this fact. The serial featured nationalist extremism and skinhead violence against North Caucasian pupils (Borodina 2010). Via Moscow's infamous "Manezhnaia Square" race riots, these themes burst from the peripheries to the center of the news agenda at the end of that same year.

Appropriately, *Shkola* pits a skinhead against a Dagestani boy. For North Caucasians have been a focal point in the rise of inter-ethnic tensions in Russian cities. However, the perennial image of the gypsy provides the most striking illustration of the symbiosis, given the relatively low official size of Russia's Roma population and discontinuities between that image's "news" and "non-news" manifestations.[2] Gypsies cede little to North Caucasians in the negativity that accompanies their presence in the news (both groups are tarred with the brush of "ethnic criminality").[3] Yet a romanticized image of the gypsy as exotic outsider has a long pedigree in Russian culture stretching to Pushkin's poem, *Tsygane* (*Gypsies*) (Lemon 2000). Via Chekhov, the films of the Moldovan director, Emil Loteaunu, and the enduring appeal of the gypsy song, it persists down to the present. In this variant, we encounter a gypsy whose passionate soul, restless spirit and mysterious affinity with nature offer a counterpoint to the dry rationality of modern, urban civilization. There is an orientalist version of the North Caucasian whose lineage can also be traced to Pushkin, but it was never as readily adaptable to mainstream customs as that of the gypsy. Moreover, the mystique of the Caucasus has declined since the brutal Chechen wars.

Like many ethnic stereotypes, that of the gypsy is internally contradictory and combines, alongside the idealized qualities, notions of dishonesty and a sinister association with the supernatural (popular fears of the "gypsy curse" and "the evil eye" – the negative corollary to the celebrated affinity with the mystical). So endemic is the myth that news reports must erase those tensions so as to benefit from the powerful resonance of the prejudicial attributes. Equally, if popular drama drawing on the gypsy's rural mystique is to renew itself with the fresh air of social authenticity, it must square the romantic idyll with the urban realities of narcotics trading and sexual exploitation blighting the contemporary *tabor* (gypsy encampment).[4]

Gypsy as mediator

The gypsy embodies the challenges and the potentials of the news/non-news dynamic. Invoking Barbero's (1993) conceptualization of mediation as "cultural circulation", we might say that a key factor facilitating this role is that intra-television mediations (from news to non-news and back) are the function of broader mediations linking official and vernacular discourses, state policy and popular sentiment, transnational form and local variant.[5] In the latter context, the gypsy community's status as a pan-European symbol of the excluded outsider is important. Gypsy mythology as described applies to the Roma throughout Europe. Yet in each nation, myths acquire local attributes. The mythology of the Roma as a transnational, itinerant people is a linear enactment of its semantic quality as mediator of the global and the national, a quality it shares with Jews. One peculiarity of the Russian variant of the myth is the extent of its assimilation into mainstream tradition.[6] It is therefore ideally placed to provide a site for the playing out of relationships with alterity: the *tsygan* belongs unambiguously neither to the self nor to the other.

Since part of contemporary Russian "self-ness" involves nostalgia for various more "folksy" pasts, the *tsygan* can also reconcile the rural idyll of the *kolkhoz* (as represented in Soviet documentaries about campaigns to settle gypsies on generous allocations of farmland) with alienating, post-Soviet, urban reality. The *tabor*'s associations with strong, authoritarian figureheads (the "baron") and antiquated attitudes to women mean that it can serve, too, as the locus for an exploration of changing gender relations. The Russian myth of the gypsy lifestyle highlights the arranged marriage. In its extreme version, this evokes a fascinated revulsion (girls of 11 undergo weddings to men twice their age); in its moderate form, it comforts males hankering after a traditional femininity.

Latter-day images of the gypsy as beggar and thief, combined with alternations between "Roma" and "gypsy" (*tsygan*) as forms of appellation, have several reasons, but among them is a confusion of cultural (tradition and way of life) and ethno-racial (blood lineage, language and physical appearance), echoed in the British tendency to use the term "traveler" to de-ethnicize the "gypsy issue".[7] The alternation of cultural and ethno-racial characteristics surrounding discourse on gypsies is linked to a final mediatory function. For the exotic appeal of the *tsygan* can be expressed as the articulation of an impossible, and thus disembodied, desire for the absolute difference of the ethnically "other". By eliding the image with characteristics relating to mundane lifestyle practices, that other becomes attainable, and so embodied. As we shall see, many serial plots revolve around romances between Russians and gypsies in which the alien is gradually familiarized.

Aims, context and framework

There are relatively few detailed analyses of television news representations of Roma communities.[8] A limited body of scholarly work in Russian on media discrimination against minorities touches upon the Roma, but focuses on the press and the Internet rather than television, and is mostly descriptive (Zvereva 2005; Kroz 2008; Shnirel'man 2011). There are a small number of excellent studies treating general media reporting on Roma communities in Eastern Europe, some dealing with coverage of discrimination against gypsies (Erjavec 2001), others tracing media complicity in the promotion of anti-Roma stereotypes (Vermeersch 2003; Ratajczak 2011). More work has been done on the representation of gypsies in European cinema (Malvinni 2004; Dobreva 2007), though much of it is nation-, genre- or director-specific and there are no comprehensive studies. The present analysis represents one of the first examinations of television news coverage of the Roma in any national culture, and the first attempt to bridge non-fictional and fictional modes.

Our analysis aims to relate the gypsy's multi-leveled mediatory function to the circulatory dynamic linking these genres, and thus the "real" to the "imaginary" in Martin-Barbero's understanding of mediation.[9] We map this function onto the negotiation of two further tensions: (i) national self-hood in its relationship with difference and (ii) culture in its articulation with ethnicity. Ultimately, we seek to place our study within the broader problematic of post-Soviet Russian identity. In exploring that problematic, we apply qualitative tools differentiated according to the arena of analysis, looking at questions of lexicon, voice and viewpoint in relation to news and issues of characterization, fictional space and plot with respect to drama.

The two apparatuses are linked through a shared emphasis on narrative, and in particular on its dual orientation toward the exceptional (what makes a story worth telling and capable of embracing "difference") and the typical (what enables it to represent and

project "identity"). The gypsy community's prominence in the Russian media's process of alternation between these poles, attributable to its liminal status, constitutes the national specificity of an otherwise unexceptional case. Since the process is continual, we have selected a cross-section of 18 months (from September 2010 to December 2011), recording all evening news bulletins supplemented by selected documentaries and discussion shows on Channel 1 and Rossiia, and focusing on news items featuring gypsies.[10] Many deal with issues affecting Roma communities elsewhere; others treat conditions in Russian gypsy camps. The relationship between these two types of story is important, which is why we need to treat them in parallel. We will also consider a talk show containing an embedded documentary and three drama serials featuring gypsy themes and characters (some of which were repeats of previous showings).

The news: from periphery to center

The main news story involving gypsies centered on the expulsion of East European gypsy migrants from France in autumn 2010, and the ensuing stand-off between Nicolas Sarkozy and the European Commissioner for Justice and Fundamental Rights, Viviane Reding. There was a renewal of interest in July 2011 when a scandal over the use of "slave workers" by UK gypsy camps emerged, and October 2011 when travelers were forcibly evicted from Dale Farm in Essex, England. The French crisis was reported across Europe and drew attention to similar conflicts between gypsies and national authorities elsewhere. In Russia, the story was covered extensively, generating several reports and talk-show discussions of the status of the Russian Roma. On *Vesti* (Rossiia's main news bulletin), there were a total of 30 stories dealing with the "gypsy problem", some up to 9 min in length. The French crisis was widely covered by the BBC.[11] However, a similar situation in Italy, the subject of several *Vesti* reports, went unmentioned on UK television. It is to the *Vesti* bulletin that we turn, since its coverage far outweighed that in bulletins broadcast by the other main national channels (Channel 1 and NTV). This is significant, since Rossiia normally has a more domestic focus than Channel 1.[12] The attention devoted by *Vesti* to the European gypsy problem indicates a perceived relevance for Russia itself (the Italian reports confirm that, unlike the BBC, which presented the story as a problem specific to France, Rossia was keen to Europeanize the problem).

Reports on the European gypsy migration crisis fall into two categories, each with a mediatory function: those which implicitly contrasted the negative treatment of gypsy communities elsewhere with the positive status of Russian gypsies; those which used the French situation to highlight similar problems in Russia. The latter subdivide into reports on the treatment and behavior of gypsies, and reports directed at inter-ethnic tensions more broadly.

The 30 Roma stories on *Vesti* between July and October 2010 belonged overwhelmingly to the Foreign Affairs segment of the bulletins, with only one focusing on the domestic Roma community (26 September 2010) and another one examining Russian gypsy reactions to the European situation (27 September 2010). Nonetheless, the sheer number of stories and the fact that the only report with a local focus is considerably more substantive than the others point to a keen, if implicit, domestic interest.[13] The non-Russian status of the European gypsy problem renders it a useful tool with which to probe issues closer to home.

Within the foreign category, the stories occupy multiple subcategories, as their headlines reveal: (i) *International relations* ("European Parliament demands an end to deporting of gypsies from France"; "Romania protests against deportation of gypsies from

France"); (ii) *The domestic politics of other nations* ("Sarkozy increases ratings at the expense of gypsies"; "Thousands of French people protest against deportation of gypsies") and (iii) *European migration* ("First group of illegal gypsy migrants deported from France to Romania").

The 30 stories cover a broad geo-political spectrum: from France, through Italy, to Eastern Europe. Romania and Bulgaria provide the fulcrum around which the crisis revolved, highlighting the New Europe's role as a bridge between Russia and the West – a two-way prism through which Russia projects its own anxieties onto continental Europe, and vice versa. The geo-political plurality of Foreign News subcategories is matched by a diversity in narrative focus, as indicated by other headlines: (i) international legal conflict ("French Authorities assure UN that they are breaching no rules in their handling of gypsy affair"); (ii) the threat of nationalist extremism ("French accuse Sarkozy of extremism"); (iii) the fate of individual gypsy families ("80 people in first group of French gypsy deportees"); (iv) migration challenges in Europe ("Aleksandr Tokarskii: gypsy problem cannot be solved") and (v) the implications for Russia's own Roma ("Moscow's gypsies write letter to Sarkozy"). The two common threads are (1) what the crisis reveals about Russia's stance on intolerance toward European minorities and (2) the implications of the problems created by the gypsy presence in Europe for Russia itself. In the last story ("Moscow's gypsies") the two threads converge.

Unusually for Russian television news (which predominantly favors the opinions of government officials and other figures of authority), the stories frequently feature comments from ordinary gypsies. A report (*Vesti*, October 14, 2010) on the Italian approach included a semi-investigative account of life on a threatened encampment in which the quotes of the inhabitants divide between those designed to elicit sympathy and those liable to reinforce prejudices

(1) "What are you filming? . . . You'd do better to film what I am eating: boiled rice", screams Khasima from Bosnia. "We've got no motorbike, no electricity, no water, nothing", the girl says.
(2) The police cannot check every camp. "Some work; others steal. That's our life", one gypsy woman recounts. "They grab everything they can carry. It's a real talent, of course!"

Viewers thus gravitate first toward the camp dwellers' predicaments, then toward the "indigenous" communities "blighted" by the social problems that the camps purportedly bring.

(Home and) abroad

The tensions that the self-other dynamic highlights pose challenges in Russia itself. The confusion applies to the extent of ethnicization. In a *Vesti FM* radio interview (August 23, 2011), Aleksandr Tokarskii, a Kishinev journalist, alternates between "gypsy" (*tsygan*) and the more ethnically specific "Roma", expressing preference for the Russian use of "Roma" but then abandoning that preference:

> Their gypsies (it's now politically correct to call them Roma here) differ from ours. The Russian Roma are well integrated and they are like first-year pupils compared with them when it comes to stealing money from fellow citizens. There are about 5 million gypsies in Romania.

The implication is often that of hypocrisy on the part of Russia's European neighbors who avoid ethnic labeling, yet display distinctly ethnic prejudices. This serves as a platform

from which state broadcasters trumpet Russian superiority. The claims to superiority go as far as endorsing familiar stereotypes of the gypsy as thief. Sometimes, criticism of French hypocrisy becomes an assault on European racial prejudice which connects the gypsy issue with France's equally brutal line on the Muslim veil controversy:

> Sarkozy is starting a new campaign for ethnic purity in the 5th Republic. Following his attack on Muslim attire, the French President, the son of a Hungarian immigrant, has declared war on gypsies. (29 July 2011)

Stories focusing on European Roma communities perform a triple mediation: that of Russia's attitude to Western Europe; that of Russia's relationship with its own gypsy communities; that of Russia's position on other issues and ethnic groups (migration; Muslims).

In *Vesti*'s coverage of the Dale Farm eviction in October 2011, criticism of the authorities is implicit. Although *Vesti* (October 19, 2011) acknowledges the encampment's illegal status, unlike BBC reports, filmed from the bailiffs' viewpoint, it is shot from behind the evictees as the police strong-arm their way into the encampment. The eyewitness accounts are all drawn from the gypsy community; none of the local residents or law enforcement agents is heard. And the comments are selected to generate sympathy with the brave struggle:

> They can lock us in our homes, but they can never control our minds and our hearts, because they are free, asserted the Irish gypsies.

Given the report's tenor, the reporter's terminological confusion is striking. The following all occur: "Irish gypsies", "gypsies from Ireland", "gypsies", "European gypsies", "Travelers" (*kochevniki*), "so-called Pavies" (an Irish appellation deriving from the large number of gypsy paving merchants). Hidden in this proliferation is the multiplicity of mediating functions that the gypsies perform. Their association with Ireland (unmentioned in the BBC reports) establishes the link with migration, whilst the label "European" reminds viewers of the problem's pan-continental reach.

Another British scandal centered on a travelers' encampment accused of keeping illegal immigrants in slavery. Details of their cruel treatment are followed by words of sympathy for the victims (*Vesti*, September 13, 2011). The fact that many of them were illegal East European migrants, including Russians, lent a domesticating coloring to the sympathy. Rather than over-emphasizing gypsy ethnicity to generate hostility toward their British "oppressors", the travelers are de-exoticized to remove any affinity that viewers might retain. In a *Vesti* commentary, Maksim Sokolov explains:

> There's no question of racism here. They have nothing in common with gypsies from India, but their romanticised image of [British] life, combined with their legal rights to offshore welfare benefits lead to similar consequences.

The de-ethnicizing gesture provides a tool with which to mock smug British opposition to intolerant practices of the sort (implicitly, at least) Russia has been accused of:

> Contrary to the grandiose words of the . . . anthem about how "Britons will never be slaves", police . . . have established that there are places where precisely this happens.

However, its universalizing dimension also creates affinity between Britain and Russia:

> So they all need to be bound by the iron yoke of the law on a fully international basis. Otherwise, these ugly stories will grow more and more common.

The primary mediation of the ethno-racial and the cultural is grafted on to a secondary mediation of the Russian self and its European others.

Our recording period included another major European incident. In September 2011, a Bulgarian gypsy baron remains unpunished after running down a 19-year-old resident of Plovdiv (Macdowell, *The Independent*, September 28, 2011). Local residents organized protests against a complicit police force, and, in an echo of the Manezhnaia events a year earlier, they were joined by football fans chanting nationalist slogans. Here, too, replica disturbances spread across the country. Again, popular outrage at the criminal corruption characterizing the murderer's community is highlighted. Unlike Russian reporting of Manezhnaia, there is no effort to disguise the inter-ethnic dimension to the protests, described throughout as "anti-gypsy", or the uniformity of the extremism animating the crowds (27 September 2011).

By projecting a domestic model onto the Bulgarian disturbances, *Vesti* invoked the specter of the anti-migrant concerns underlying the Moscow events, whilst distancing itself from the xenophobic actions of the nationalist protesters which it unambiguously terms as *mezhnatsional'naia rozn'* (inter-ethnic strife), a notion that applies to Russia only "virtually" (as something that happens elsewhere or threatens to occur in the future).[14] A year later, an incident in Finland in which gypsy gangs fought over the "right" to provide protection to Helsinki was covered on *Vesti* (October 17, 2011), whose report described it as Finland's first experience of "ethnic-criminal clashes" (*etnicheskie kriminal'nye razborki*).

It is the gypsy criminality "problem" which most preoccupies Russian journalists. However, they remain aware of the dangers of stoking anti-minority sentiment and this awareness filters into reporting strategies on incidents abroad. A *Vesti* report of September 19, 2010 on the French crisis focuses on a letter written by Moscow gypsies to Sarkozy. The report is a fly-on-the wall account of how one encampment is responding to events in Europe, interspersed with the reporter's lyrical musings ("how can one not love gypsies if all the world's songs are gypsy songs?"). However, as the baron phones his relatives in France, he makes a revealing aside:

> If we can't give some sort of support to the French gypsies, then we could probably also be told that people like us are not needed here.

Already providing a counterpoint to domestic incidents, the French Roma narrative now incorporates the Russian gypsies' perspective on the fate of their European brothers. This story translates the European Roma crisis into a local idiom, but also provides an interpretative key, ensuring that the crisis is read according to the code implicit in the principle of *mezhnatsional'naia rozn'*: as an indication of the relative harmony between Russian gypsies and non-gypsies, and a warning that those relations might subsequently deteriorate.

From ideal and reality . . . .

The sole domestic story in our corpus of 30 stories was the special report on social problems within a camp near Kimry. It did not focus on a particular event but rather on a long-term trend (suggesting that the problems are recognized as significant within the overall news agenda). Significantly, coverage of the domestic gypsy theme is limited almost entirely to Rossiia, for whose nation-building agenda the small numerical size of the gypsy community belies its mediatory capacity. The negativity attributed to the community also has a balancing effect on the highlighting of problems encountered by foreign gypsy communities.

The Kimry story begins uncompromisingly, equating the gypsy community to the problems brought by the foreign Other, and stressing its Hungarian provenance (*Vesti*, September 10, 2010). Its visuals deliver a grim picture of narcotics dealing and the degradation of local Russian youths (the closeups of discarded syringes are a recurring visual trope). It underscores alien practices within the community, including the marrying off of underage girls. Whether this phenomenon is highlighted in the context of anxieties over such practices in other communities (the media were full of commentary on the "unacceptable behavior" of North Caucasians following the 2010 race riots) is uncertain.[15] It is, however, telling that the treatment of gypsies in similar cases resembles the situation in France (though the report legitimizes this treatment by attributing it to court order rather than government policy).

The criminality is, however, dealt with in semi-humorous fashion, with a reassuring reference to gypsy "tradition":

> The gypsy tinkers are proud of the fact that they live honestly and don't earn dirty money. But theft is not a sin for them. Yes, stealing, but stealing how? You've got to do it properly, inoffensively. Not just pickpocketing on the streets but according to our gypsy traditions.

Nor is the report entirely one-sided. Most of the voices heard are Russians expressing outrage at the encampment, gypsy mothers bewailing their criminalized children or hierarchs speciously defending their lifestyle. But also included are the words of an eminent Roma academic, Nadezhda Demetr, warning against anti-gypsy prejudice. The juxtaposition of Demetr's voice with that of anti-Roma opinion points to the gypsy's capacity to negotiate the divide between the persuasive power that xenophobic prejudice carries in contemporary Russia and the equally prevalent fear of fomenting that prejudice.[16]

The related tension pitting romantic myth against harsh reality is captured in the image of the gypsy woman talking of "beautiful thievery" at the heart of a picture of degradation. This confirms the gypsy's role in raising to the fore the passions and fears surrounding ethnicity and race. However, the reverse applies when the mediatory imprecision attached to "gypsiness" masks the negativity of racial and ethnic difference. In July 2011, an incident of mass violence occurred in the Ural village of Sagra. A group of men from neighboring regions attacked Sagra by night. The assault was initially described as drugs-related. It later became apparent that a dispute over forestry ownership rights was to blame. In the meantime, rumors that the assailants were Azerbaidjani, then, more vaguely, "people of non-Russian appearance", were promulgated. This version was exacerbated by suspicions that the attack was permitted by a corrupt police force in collusion with the Azerbaidjani diaspora. Finally, *Vesti* (July 5, 2011) reiterated subsequent official denials that the fight had any ethnic dimension.

From the beginning, one mysterious aspect remained the ringleader's identity. He is described variously as Sergei Krasnoperov (his name), "Sergei-the-Gypsy" (*Sergei-tsygan*), "Sergei known as the Gypsy" (*Sergei, izvestnyi kak tsygan*), Sergei "The Gypsy"' (*Sergei* "tsygan") and simply "the gypsy" (*tsygan*). *Vesti* remained ambiguous about whether he was an ethnic gypsy or a swarthy Russian, but the appellation clearly gains resonance from the drugs connection:

> Krasnoperov settled in the village 9 years ago. First he lived separately and peacefully but then, the locals whisper, rumours that the gypsy was trading drugs began to circulate. (7 July 2011)

The fluid boundaries between reporting and reported speech in Russian allows the appellation to be applied without quotation marks, yet in a manner that does not commit the

reporter to endorse it. The rumors referred to, it would seem, are false, but the association between criminal assault and the dark world of narcotics-dealing remains. Krasnoperov is established at the center of a chain of meanings linking gypsies, Azerbaidjanis, drug taking, police corruption and anti-Russian violence. It is the gypsy appellation which binds the elements of the chain together, serving as an integrative code for the hybrid negativity of difference, even if the concept of "ethnic criminality", used repeatedly during coverage of the Moscow riots, is not employed here.

A similar example relates to illegal migration (26 May 2011). An underground encampment of Uzbeks and Tadjiks is discovered in Moscow. In a sensationalist *exposé* of their anti-social living conditions, and a clear example of "new racism",[17] the reporter refers to their descent into crime:

> A traditional gypsy business: the men deal in stolen goods and women with young children tell fortunes and beg on Kazan station.

Here, too, the gypsy serves as a translation mechanism for activities associated with illegal migrants in general (with no factual link to gypsies). Throughout the report the illegal settlement is referred to as "tabor".

The gypsy is both a mark of disembodied in-between-ness (a means of navigating between negative forms of alterity whose mediatory capacity derives precisely from its figurative status, its refusal to congeal) *and* a mechanism for embodying acceptable difference (the woman who thieves "aesthetically", rendering "human" the alien criminality of the Roma underclass). This latter function operates in the reports and documentaries focusing on social problems, often relying on the framing of scenes of degradation with the stereotyped mythologies of Romantic gypsiness. The idealized gypsy stereotypes provide the Imaginary (or fantasmatic) dimension to the Symbolic (or discursive) construct within which the community's social decline is articulated and the Real (the hidden core) of racist hatreds suppressed (Mitchell 2011, 405–410).

The schema structures an edition of Rossiia's documentary program, *Special Correspondent* (May 22, 2011). Thus, the title, "The Camp Disappears into the Zone", plays on Loteanu's 1976 cinematic melodrama, *The Camp Vanishes into the Heavens (Tabor ukhodit v nebo)*. "The Zone" is slang for the prison system, the destination of numerous Russian gypsies, as the program reveals. It consists of a documentary shot at Kimry, followed by a studio discussion involving the director, an official from the government's inter-ethnic relations department, a police officer, the nationalist author, Aleksandr Prokhanov, and two gypsy musicians.

Framed by ironic graphics depicting a gypsy caravan, the film is a partisan attack on Roma communities, drenched in sardonic anger at their protestations of innocence. It commences with the presenter's acknowledgement that, despite in-depth coverage of West European Roma criminality, Russian broadcasters have remained silent about similar issues in Russia. The next, evocative scene depicts a march on Kimry led by Orthodox officials and weeping mothers telling of the tragic death of children addicted to heroin sold from the *tabor*. The juxtaposition of the Orthodox cross and the closeups of discarded syringes is designed to incite antagonism toward a criminalized ethnic minority; the phrase "death of a small ethnos" (*gibel' malogo etnosa*) is cited repeatedly. What follows is a voyeuristic account of police raids, women taking the blame for the inevitable drugs hauls and abandoning their children for jail, whilst offering tearfully insincere promises never to reoffend, male jailbirds condemned to a life without work, girls married off at 12, a baron extolling the merits of theft and an exasperated reporter expressing contempt for the "excuses" he hears. All this is combined with expressions of outrage at the costs to

the Russian population, interspersed with nostalgic footage of Soviet efforts to "settle" gypsy vagrants.[18] The sarcastic use of a traditional gypsy musical accompaniment reinforces the "romantic ideal/harsh reality" trope.

In the studio discussion the documentary film director complains of "political correctness" when challenged for his one-sided view, and describing the reasons gypsies give for their predicament as "fables" (*basni*). The film is attacked by the inter-ethnic affairs official, who accuses the film-maker of stoking anti-gypsy sentiment and of ignoring those areas in which the authorities are cooperating with the Roma. He calls for greater media responsibility, arguing that selectivity can exacerbate the problems it seeks to expose. Prokhanov lays the blame at the door of unspecified external forces who are using narcotics to destroy Russia (in this scenario, gypsies are incorporated into the generality of Russia-as-victim). Here, then, the gypsy theme mediates the construction of a Russian identity founded on the notion of Russia's victimization by the West. The artists are passionate in their rejection of the film's implications and the police official's provocative reference to "gypsy diasporas".[19] Displaying shock at the Kimry situation, they plead for people not to extrapolate general "truths". The program concludes by presenting the theme as a figure for inter-ethnic relations and Russian nationhood as a whole.

Whilst bordering dangerously on the promulgation of anti-Roma prejudice, the program airs a wide spectrum of opinion, but excludes the encampment's own response to the accusations (the words the Roma speak are selected solely to reinforce the condition of degradation projected onto them). Despite the sympathetic voices, the image of the gypsy proper disappears in the crevasses between the romantic stereotype, the repulsive, bestialized other and the metonymic representation of the condition of Russia itself. The program further confirms the intermediary function of the image of the gypsy. It might also lend support to Mitchell's (2011) thesis that "race" is a secondary product of a primordial "rac*ism*".[20] The "Real" that is revealed is not that of the encampment's state of degraded criminality, but of a primary hostility toward physical alterity *per se*, expressed as an "exposé of gypsy delinquency" because of the Roma's ethno-cultural ambivalence.

To reality and ideal . . . .

The Kimry documentary exemplifies how non-news programming "works through" news issues of controversy. And like the serials we now turn to, the documentary is structured around the juxtaposition of a romantic ideal and grim, contemporary reality. The serials reverse the relationship: rather than portray a harsh reality framed by romantic tropes, they perpetuate those tropes in their story lines, but imbue them with the bitter aftertaste of contemporary reality. This relationship is the focus of our analysis of three such serials.

As fictional genres situated in the realm of desire, the serials naturally gravitate toward romanticized stereotypes, bearing the influence of the exotic imagery of "wild" dancing, of fortune-telling powers and of the various cinematic realizations of gypsy mythology which punctuated the Soviet period. The latter are important, not least because they also broach the fraught issues of national identity with which the gypsy theme is intertwined.

As the immediate precursor to the post-Soviet crisis in Russian national identity, the Brezhnev period saw the emergence of explorations of an artificially constructed Soviet self-hood on the point of fragmentation along ethnic lines. The frequent depiction in late Soviet cinema of gypsies, with their combination of exoticism and otherness, reflects this trend. Brezhnev-era films set in the nineteenth century, particularly literary adaptations, like Loteanu's *My Affectionate and Tender Beast* (*Moi laskovyi i nezhni zver'*, 1978), based on Chekhov, featured languorous cameo appearances by gypsy musicians

and dancers. More subtle was the popular television serial *The Gypsy* (*Tsygan* 1979), directed by Aleksandr Blank, succeeded in 1985 by *The Return of Budulai* (*Vozvrashchenie Budulaiia*), in which the gypsy hero is revealed to be the wartime father of a boy, following a romance with a Russian woman. Issues of paternal origin are interwoven both with World War II mythology, and with subcultural anxieties over miscegenation (a recurring theme in the serials, as we shall see), foregrounding the contradictions of Soviet-Russian identity.

The post-Soviet period has seen a return to stereotype. The new generation of gypsy dramas can be traced to the arrival on post-Soviet screens in the early 1990s of the Latin American soap opera with its long-running, but ultimately resolvable, plot lines, and its melodramatic narratives of young provincial girls finding true love and social advancement in new, urban environments. Post-soviet economic upheavals offered a fertile environment for the serial genre and Russian television generated its own variants, including those centered on gypsy themes.

The three serials we treat, all also made by, and shown on, Rossia, reflect a similar thematics as their titles indicate: *The Enigmatic Tomorrow of Fate* (*Sud'by zagadochnoe zavtra*), *The Gypsy Girl with the Way Out* (*Tsyganochka s vykhodom*), *Love and Separation* (*Liubov' i razluka*). The most recent was *Love and Separation* (2011; directed by Aleksei Kozlov). A year earlier (2010) saw the broadcasting of *The Enigmatic Tomorrow*, directed by Vasilii Moskalenko. *The Gypsy Girl with the Way Out* is the earliest of the serials (2008; directed by Aleksei Rudakov) but, like the others, it was showing in 2010–2011 when the Roma were prominent in the news. We look at them in reverse order.

In *Love and Separation*, which unfolds over eight episodes, a young teacher, Anna, marries a middle-aged police chief, Trekhin, but falls in love with a gypsy, Lacho, the driver of her wedding carriage. Lacho's community expel him from the *tabor* for refusing to marry the gypsy bride chosen by the baron, but he persists in pursuing Anna, getting her pregnant. She refuses an abortion and gives birth to a son whom Trekhin removes, driving Lacho away and attempting to have him murdered. Meanwhile, Trekhin's own wayward son accumulates debts, kills his father for refusing to help him, but blames Lacho, who is imprisoned. Finally, Anna proves Lacho's innocence and the couple are reunited.

The orientalized exoticism of the male gypsy hero renders him the archetypal forbidden object of desire. The dangers which such desire holds are moderated by the fact that the desiring subject is a provincial female, herself objectified from the male viewpoint, and by Lacho's ejection from his own community which de-ethnicizes him. The pattern of union, separation and reunion dramatizes in narrative form an alternation between identification with, and distanciation from, otherness. The way in which Anna "overcomes her feeling of alienation" (to quote the serial's website)[21] echoes the process by which viewers accommodate themselves to Lacho. The dominant identificatory viewpoint which "sutures" the audience into the fictional reality is suspended between desiring male and Anna as the representative of Russian self-hood.[22] The intertwining of gender and ethnicity facilitates the domestication process.

However, the narrative also permits an unfolding of the prejudicial fears of constitutive otherness at the heart of national self-identification. Lacho is partly criminalized during the story. His initial pursuit of a married woman sets the tone. In his campaign to win Anna back from Trekhin, he later sets fire to a hotel owned by Trekhin's unscrupulous associate who also has designs on Anna. Finally, he is wrongly accused of Trekhin's murder and endures the full weight of suspicion from Anna's closest female friend, Anfis'ka, who serves as a cipher for anti-gypsy prejudice.

Just as Anna's illicit desire for the ethnic other is moderated by the state of transition into which he has been thrust, and by the fact that, extra-diegetically, the romance is fictional, so Anfis'ka's fear of gypsy criminality is ameliorated by the fact that, intra-diegetically, Lacho's "crime" is an invention of the cynical Trekhin's son. In the alternation between romantic ideal and social reality, identification and counter-identification, police collusion with the world of crime is balanced by the Roma community's arranged marriages and under-age sex.

Central to the dénouement is the birth of Anna's illegitimate son. He is the embodiment of the miscegenation which is the semantic equivalent to the oscillation process and a vehicle for exposing the social reality of ethnic prejudice. He is taunted at pre-school with the racist nickname "tsyganionok" (little gypsy boy) as the serial directs its critical lens at anti-Roma sentiment. The narrative exploits the very structuring contrast between idealized image and grim reality of which it is a manifestation. When he is on the prison train to attend his trial, Lacho asks the guards if they wish him to read their fortune, as he ridicules their racially motivated stereotyping. Yet the serial's plot propagates those very stereotypes. Anna is herself subjected to the unnerving stare of the gypsy girl over whom Lacho preferred her and is presciently fearful that she has been given "the evil eye".

Ultimately, *Love and Separation* abandons its surface narrative (that of a love story targeting anti-Roma prejudice). Lacho's love for Anna and gradual de-ethnicization confirm his status as the "exception that proves the rule" about gypsy criminality. Unsurprisingly in light of these ideological tensions, it fails to tie loose ends such as the longer-term consequences of Lacho's expulsion.

Similar themes traverse *The Enigmatic Fate of Tomorrow*. Set in a Cossack village, the 15-episode narrative revolves around a soldier, Ivan, who returns to his village from the Chechen campaign to find that his fiancée, Nastia, is to marry Kostia, whom she does not love. The jealous Kostia has Ivan badly beaten, an act witnessed by a gypsy boy, Sanakai, and his betrothed, Rita. Still enraged, Kostia ignores a warning from the gypsy fortune-teller, Lachi, that he has "chosen his own fate". Meanwhile, his associate, Kurchavyi, attempts to ingratiate himself with Kostia by incriminating Ivan in the burning of a stable. When Kostia finds out, Kurchavyi kills him with a screw-driver stolen from Ivan who is charged with murder. Kurchavyi's crime is exposed, and Ivan is reunited with Nastia. A joint wedding (Nastia and Ivan, Rita and Sanakai) is organized at the *tabor*, which is also celebrating the discovery of the remains of a previous generation, executed by Nazi occupiers. However, the serial concludes discordantly: Nastia had earlier given birth to a stillborn baby surreptitiously replaced by the child of another woman. The woman later returns for her son, to the horror of Nastia who had loved him as her own. This sub-plot remains unresolved.

Like *Love and Separation*, *Enigmatic Fate* highlights the contradictory way in which culture, race and ethnicity are co-articulated in the Russian media. The setting invokes the Cossack tradition which has its own place in the repository of mythological archetypes on which Russian national identity draws (Kornblatt 1992). The serial is replete with scenes of bareback riding and references to the *ataman*. If gypsies belong at the periphery of that repository, Cossacks are closer to the core of Russian-ness in the many post-Soviet redefinitions to which it has been subject. However, the exoticizing of both Cossack and gypsy lifestyles draws lines of equivalence between them, creating an alternation of perspectives between one in which both Cossack and gypsy are "other", and one in which the Cossack is "self" and the gypsy "other".

This process is reinforced by the bifurcation of the gypsies into positive and negative manifestations (Sanakai and Rita, ensuring that justice is done for Nastia and Ivan; a rival

tabor, with its involvement in narcotics and kidnapping). Within the Cossack subject position, the viewer thus incorporates gypsy otherness within the boundaries of the self, then expels it, in a process pointing toward a resolution of differences and a revitalization of Russian self-hood. The process mirrors the distinction between the negative image of inveterate gypsy criminality which emerges from much domestic news reporting, and the romantic stereotype by which it is (ironically) framed.

Enigmatic Fate facilitates a complex intertwining of self and other in which each position becomes exchangeable. The spatio-temporal dimension of narrative, however, halts the alternation process. The dénouement is enacted on gypsy territory – the space on which the gypsies have resolved their quest for their ancestral origin. The presence of the Cossacks on that land prefigures a resolution of the biological subtext underlying inter-ethnic tensions.

In *Love and Separation* the gypsy male's passion for a Russian woman enables him to mediate between the two ethnic groups. This is a metonymic device in which the contiguity of gypsy and non-gypsy spheres leads to their mutual contamination. In *Enigmatic Fate*, the two spheres remain separate and their plot lines develop in parallel. However, the echoes between them point to a metaphoric resolution to the mediation problem. To bind the metaphoric halves, a further plot mechanism is deployed. From the beginning, when Ivan encounters Lachi, who foresees that his future is strewn with danger, through Lachi's prediction of Kostia's demise, to her warning about Nastia's tragic fate as a mother, the fortune-teller shapes the plot. Since, from the point that Lachi's first premonition about Ivan's fate proves true, viewers are privy to the authenticity of her powers, their position of epistemological authority is "focalized" through Lachi's viewpoint.[23] Yet *Enigmatic Fate*, too, fails to resolve its tensions. Whilst the collective origin of the gypsies is settled, the individual paternity of Nastia's child is not.

In our earliest series, *The Gypsy Girl with the Way Out*, a gypsy girl, Ligita, who lives with her stepmother, father and Sandra, her half sister, is courted by a Russian boy, Lesha. However, her hand is promised to Misha, son of the gypsy baron, Latso, to whom her father owes money. Lesha is beaten by Latso's henchmen, but Ligita refuses to marry the repulsive Misha. Her dancing talent offers her a "way out" and, whilst participating in a dancing contest in Moscow, she falls for Ivan Golovin, a Moscow ballet master. The remainder of the series tells the story of Golovin's and Ligita's love affair, hampered by the jealous Sandra who becomes involved in a drugs operation run by the baron of her *tabor*. The series concludes with a marriage and with Ligita finally reunited with her blood mother.

Laura Keosaian, who plays Ligita, features in numerous gypsy serials. Her Armenian nationality and appearance conform to the romantic stereotype of the passionate gypsy beauty but also reinforces that stereotype's capacity to negotiate Russia's relationship with its Caucasian other. Ligita's relationship with Ivan mirrors that between Anna and Lacho in *Love and Separation*. In the latter, the gypsy male occupies the liminal position between the *tabor* and the non-gypsy realm. Ligita, by contrast, is the gypsy female, driven from her *tabor* for illicit miscegenation. The recurrent trope of desire for the forbidden other is another common feature, as is the splitting of the gypsy realm into positive and negative hypostases.

Gypsy Girl foregrounds a structural phenomenon underpinning all of the dramas. Narrative, as we know, is constructed around the breaches of normality necessary in order to generate significance (White 1981). There are ideological implications for a narrative which traces the fate of a gypsy assimilated to the non-gypsy realm. This becomes the exception which proves the "rule" of non-assimilability. Moreover, the universalism connoted by romantic love, uniquely capable of conquering difference, operates against the

background that such love is "out of the ordinary". Accordingly, gypsy "difference" (the criminality and alien practices) is represented as the "everyday" backdrop to the main action. Within the paradoxical logic of fictional narrative, it is by *not* highlighting such phenomena and supplanting them with the exceptionalism of universal love that they acquire truth value.

Gypsy Girl reverses the non-fictional approach to narrative, where typicality is associated not with a mundane reality unworthy of narration, but with an everyday reality whose essential truth requires it to be told through the metonymy of the special news report (Hall 2003, 632). Narrative "intrigue" in news aims to capture the sordid "whole" of life in the *tabor* by foregrounding a "representative" part of it, the exoticism of romantic mythology providing a framing device to foreground the authenticity of the reported "facts".

Ligita's accession to the realm of non-discriminatory true love represents the victory of universal sameness over the particularities of ethnic difference. However, at the end, Ligita seeks out her mother, reunifying her with her blood origins, reconfirming her ethnic difference and signaling an irresolvable contradiction within the national self-identification process.[24]

Conclusion

The relative dearth of attention to the Roma issue in the domestic news is, as we have shown, compensated by the extensive coverage it receives in foreign news reporting and by the prevalence of gypsy drama serials. However, in both modes, the Roma theme is a proxy for ethno-racial difference generally. The repeated patterns in the dramas, with their obsessive juxtaposition of the particularity of blood origin and the universality of romantic passion, reflect this proxy function, as does the fact that our period of analysis saw not one in-depth news story devoted to criminality within other minority communities.[25]

The gypsy serves also to explore contradictions in attitudes to *non*-ethnic issues (political tensions with other nations; changing gender roles). This exploratory function acquires added impulse through the symbiosis of news and non-news representations. Fictional dramas test out news themes beyond the scope accorded to them within the restricted format of the bulletin, whilst also deriving authenticity from them. News portrayals of gypsies exploit fictional romanticizations of the Roma, sometimes to inflect reporting with mythological meanings, sometimes to distance themselves from those mythologies and enhance their own truth value.

Because of the multiple mediations Russia's gypsy community remains both over-represented (bearing the burdens of its proxy function) and occluded (displaced westwards into the European news domain; buried beneath layers of fictional archetypes). For, difference is inscribed at the heart of identity. Moreover, with an ambivalent status traceable to Pushkin's *Tsygane*, gypsies are situated on the threshold to alterity of a purer kind. The ethno-racial markers of difference they bear must therefore, paradoxically, be highlighted yet concealed. Shaped by circumstance, these mutually reinforced antitheses are, as Silverman (1988, 266, 273) argues, internalized within the Roma's own paradoxical identification strategies which rely on "demonstrating, hiding and exaggerating one's gypsiness" and on "keeping distinct whilst appearing to assimilate". Equally, ethno-racial features (the irreducibility of ancestral ties; the sensuousness of the body) and culture must be at once elided and separated. This is as true within the Russian self as it is between that self and the irreducibly other.

The gypsy is portrayed as "Europe's internal outsider" (Bancroft 2005, 1–20), perpetually liable to mutate into the more threatening "outsider as insider". In their

mythologized televisual manifestation, the Roma's itinerant lifestyle coincides with their capacity to move from the space of the self to that of the other, from sameness to difference, from tradition to modernity and from myth to reality. Post-Soviet articulations of the race/ethnicity relationship are, like their Soviet precursors, buried in terminological confusion over the distinctions between *etnos* ("ethnos"), *narod* ("people") and *natsiia* ("nation") (Shevel 2011). The Roma's apparent ability to negotiate this mire accords them a privileged function in the struggle to renew Russian self-hood.

On one level, the Russian case offers a case study in media stereotyping of Roma communities characteristic of the state of affairs throughout Europe, and conforming to the analysis of previous scholars (Vermeersch 2003; Ratajczak 2011). Thus, the "ethnic criminality" dimension is a notable, and regrettable, feature common to most European reporting on the Roma. However, the unusual degree to which gypsy mythology has, over the course of nearly two centuries, infiltrated Russian culture and national identity accords the image of the Roma the distinctive mediatory value explored in this article.

The value attains its apotheosis in the circulation of meanings between news and drama (a phenomenon urgently awaiting scholarly exploration in respect of other European national broadcasters). The medium shared by the two genres (that of the "small screen"), with its propinquity to popular cultural beliefs and traditions and its reliance on the emotive power of the visual image, lends the circulatory process particular dynamism. However, the process highlights divergence as well as convergence. We noted the contrastive approach to typicality as a point of tension between non-fictional and fictional deployments of gypsy narratives: whether as an essential metonymy of a wider reality (the news) or as the banal backdrop to the universal "truth" of non-discriminatory love (the fictional drama). Yet in intertwining the two representational regimes, the gypsy ultimately evades capture by either of them; the *tabor* vanishes into the heavens.

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Notes

1. For the narrative dimension to news stories, see Johnson-Cartee (2005).
2. The 2002 Russian census showed that there were 180,000 gypsies in Russia, though the Federal National-Cultural Autonomy of the Russian Roma claims that they now number more than a million. See RIA NOVOSTI (2002). Estimates of the Central Asian and North Caucasian presence in Russian cities range from four to six million (Laruelle 2007).
3. For the concept of ethnic criminality in Russia, see Beers (2008): for the stereotypical perception of inherent criminality within European gypsy communities, see Clark and Campbell (2000).
4. According to Paoli (2002, 33), the Roma dominate Russia's illegal drugs distribution system.
5. In referring to the circulation of meaning between official and unofficial culture, of which broadcast news and popular drama are respective manifestations, Barbero (1993, 99) claims that there is "no imposition from above which does not imply an incorporation of what comes from below". He later explains that "mediation" goes beyond the media themselves: "We are placing the media in the field of mediations, that is in a process of cultural transformation which does not start with or flow from the media but in which they play an important role" (Barbero, 1993, 139).
6. Lemon (2000, 31–32) claims that "the Russian romance with gypsies has no equivalent force in most other countries".
7. For the confluence of race, culture and ethnicity in discourse about gypsies, see Matras (2012).

8. Such publications are generally non-scholarly reports of human-rights agencies. For example, references to media coverage of Roma can be found on the website of the European Roma Rights Centre (www.errc.org).
9. Barbero (1993, 56) terms this "the real mediation, the function of a medium which mass culture fulfills day by day: the communication between the real and the imaginary".
10. These are Russia's two main national broadcasters. Although only part-owned by the state, Channel 1 has reverted to its traditional role as government mouthpiece. Rossiia is fully state-owned and is assigned the role of integrating local interests with the national perspective. We recorded their main evening news broadcasts over two years, annotating stories dealing with inter-ethnic cohesion with timings, headlines and content summaries.
11. The BBC provided detailed background information on the crisis on its website. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11027288 (accessed March 30, 2012).
12. During this period, there were only two stories about the Roma crisis on *Vremia* (the main bulletin of Channel 1), which normally has a more international outlook than *Vesti*.
13. The story aired on 26 September 2010 and was 7 min 53 s in length – over 5 min longer than the average *Vesti* story.
14. The phrase translates as "inter-nationality strife", but covers ethnic conflict. (The elision reflects the confused Soviet and post-Soviet policy surrounding race, nationality, and ethnicity.) It is outlawed under Russian law.
15. The attribution of "anti-social behavior" to minority communities in Russian official and popular discourse is analyzed in Shnirel'man (2011, 277–284).
16. An opinion poll (Levada Centre 2008) finds that the highest levels of hostility are focused at Gypsies (40%) and Chechens (36%) with other key racialized groups including Chinese (16%), Tadzhiks and Azerbaidzhanis (both 15%), Jews (12%) and Africans (11%).
17. "New Racism" describes the recent tendency to substitute crude biological racism with a more subtle determinism of cultural identity. See Barker (1981).
18. In 1956, a decree was issued threatening those who refused to settle to five years exile. See *Vedomosti Soveta SSSR*, 1956, no. 21. In the 1970s, the Roma were given their own theatre in Moscow and the right to social benefits.
19. The term "diaspora" normally refers to an ethnic grouping separated from its homeland. In Russia, it is regularly used to refer to Chechens and Dagestanis, all citizens of Russia, living within the Federation. For gypsies, who lack a homeland, the term is particularly inappropriate.
20. However, many historians argue that racism, rather than being primordial, is a modern invention, a by-product of a particular development of the human sciences in the nineteenth century when, out of curiosity, anthropologists attempted to identify biological differences between groups.
21. See http://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/ros/89276/content/ (accessed April 5, 2012).
22. Haywood (2000, 357) defines "suture" as "the effect of certain filmic codes that stitched the spectator into the film text".
23. Genette (1983) defines "focalization" as the way that third-person narrative orients itself toward the perspectives of its characters in order to reveal different levels of "omniscience" regarding plot outcomes.
24. Wodak et al. (1999) analyze the tension pitting the imperative to convey collective sameness against the need to recognize ethnic difference within national identification strategies.
25. In our recording period, NTV, which has a more populist orientation than Channel 1 or Rossiia, broadcast numerous such reports in its news supplement program, *Segodnia – itogovaia programma*, including ones on crime and illegal immigration, blood feuds between rival clans in Chechnia and North Caucasian "bridal kidnappings".

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