SOCIALLY INSENSITIVE MESSAGES, STEREOTYPES AND THE DISADVANTAGED OTHERS IN THE CZECH ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT:
Based on the theory of othering and the theory of stereotypes the author discusses a concept of the socially insensitive message. There are five key features defining such statements. Firstly, they latently communicate controversial meaning and are based on presumption that recipients will decode intended meaning on the basis of shared cultural knowledge. Secondly, they are based on the opposition of 'We X They'. Thirdly, they speak about the Others and define them. These Others are members of socially disadvantaged groups and they are reduced to a few stereotypical features in these messages. Fourthly, the socially insensitive advertising utilizes humour and principle of jokes. Fifthly, these principles are related to commercial advertising with and their key ambition is to ensure a profit or benefit for producers. Most of such messages are examples of hate speech. Several cases are discussed in detail based on the semiotic case study analysis; advertisements on consumer goods, media, and political ideas are among them. The author regards these socially insensitive messages as ignored in general and in the long term not reflected critically in contemporary Czech society.

KEY WORDS:
media stereotypes, othering, socially disadvantaged, socially insensitive messages, theory of the other

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Introduction

At the beginning of 2015, the events in Charlie Hebdo opened, among other things, a discussion about the freedom of speech in media or more precisely gave rise to the question whether freedom of speech is unlimited or whether there are certain boundaries (ethics, politeness or responsibility). Messages[1] that offended somebody, no matter that other people considered them as 'harmless' jokes, were published not only in this magazine, but also elsewhere.

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1   I use the term "message" in its broader sense as it is used in linguistics (remark by the author).

It is significantly different to speak about yourself than to say something about the Others. This text points out the phenomenon that has spread over the last decade[2] in Czech[3] culture. These are messages communicating very ruthlessly about the 'Others', yet the majority of them remains without any reflection, rejection or condemnation by the general public or intellectuals. I mostly encounter these messages in the commercial sphere and I call them generally 'socially insensitive messages'.

Both the Law of Advertising Regulation (No. 40/1995 Coll.) and the Ethical Codex of Advertising,[4] which was adopted by the Czech Advertising Standards Council appeal to polite and socially correct advertising. However, in my opinion many of these messages are in breach of this Law and the Codex. They even contain certain elements that contradict both of them. Even though I do not belong to the group of people that is offended by these messages, I find some of the current advertised messages insulting.[5] For this reason, I focus on their specification.

The goal of this text is to specify the phenomenon of socially insensitive messages. By applying the basic steps of the semiotic analysis on advertisements dealing with the duality of We and the Others, I indicate types of messages this concept is related to. Socially insensitive messages will be defined using chosen theoretical concepts, primarily the theory of representation, the theory of othering and the theory of stereotypes. Following the tradition of the critical discourse analysis (CDA),[6] I admit this text is not written from the value-neutral point of view as its goal is not primarily analytical or interpretative. It is not a standard empirical article, rather a reflection on the phenomenon that is currently present in Czech culture. My effort is neither to deconstruct commercials nor to argue about boundaries of good taste, responsibility, empathy, morality or political correctness of public communication. I cannot (and do not want to) tell what creators and their clients wanted to communicate via these medialized messages. On the contrary, I ask in a completely different way and I try to indicate what these messages say about Czech society.

Examples of Socially Insensitive Messages

There are many messages (not only in advertising) that in a certain way degrade individuals by using them as stereotyped signs.[7] One of the most common types is sexist advertising, which belittles one of the sexes.[8] Nevertheless, I leave it aside in this text because different social characteristics are used more and

more often (see below). The incorrectness of these messages usually stays without any public response – it is reflected neither by the general public nor professionals – because they are not breaking the law. Despite this, it is evident that some of the members of displayed groups (see below) or the recipients of these messages can be harmed or offended by them. However, their producers refuse the accusation that they degrade displayed subjects, and they claim these messages are not specifically targeted at anybody. According to them, the messages are based on jokes and exaggeration, and they are not supposed to be taken seriously.[9] The problem is that these commercial messages use a negative stereotypical representation of the Others who belong to socially disadvantaged groups such as people with a different skin colour, people of different races or religions, older people, sexual minorities, etc. Members of various ethnic minorities or older people are usually so stigmatised that they cannot avoid being discriminated by the majority in daily life. I give three examples of such advertisements below. Using basic steps of semiotic analysis, I focus on key signs, in which meaning is encoded, and messages that they latently communicate. In the semiotic analysis, I mainly work with the first, the second and the third level of signification described by Hartley and Fiske[10] or Barthes[11] and specified by Sedláková.[12]

The first example is an advertisement of a financial institution from 2009 which was published in both audio-visual[13] and print version.

Picture 1: "What love? I marry him for money"

Source: Komerční banka: Z jaký lásky? Pro peníze si ho beru! (Svadba). [online]. [2017-02-10]. Available at: <http://www.tvspoty.cz/komercni-banka-sporeni-od-komercky/>.

People discussing on the Internet considered the TV commercial funny and well done.[14] The main content, denotation of the spot, is a wedding ceremony. It works with two basic signs: *an engaged couple* and *their age*. While the bride is in her 20's, the groom's old age is not apparent till the wedding registrar (and camera) looks at him and asks whether he is getting married of true love. When the bride is asked the same question she answers with laugh: *"What love? I marry him for money."* The wedding registrar replies: *"In that case, everything is all right."* and the marriage is confirmed. While the bride is accepting congratulations, the groom steps aside and reveals his identity: *"Everybody takes me just for money. I am a commercial saving account from the Commercial Bank."*

This advertisement works as a metaphor. It replaces a financial product that would be portrayed in quite a complicated way by a sign – an older rich man. The bank probably wanted to show their good protection and loving treatment of clients through the message. However, the advertising message also works with the age of the engaged couple. The difference between them exceeds two generations which refers to the stereotype of getting married for money. This stereotype questions the relationship between two people with a high age difference and ridicules the groom at the same time: *"At the latent level, the message communicates that older people do not deserve real, unprofitable and kind relationships. Furthermore, it is possible to take financial advantage of them because they are honest and trusting. Therefore it does not take much trouble to trick them. A satisfied look on groom's face allows us to speculate that because he is in love he did not see through the trap. In addition, this behaviour is presented as legitimate, confirmed by the wedding registrar who is an authority figure representing the state."*[15]

The second example is the campaign for *International Education Society* (an operator of the Internet portal *www.skoly.cz*, which mediates information about different types of education) designed by the agency *Underline* in 2009. The agency used so-called guerrilla marketing in this case. That means a nonconventional advertising campaign that balances at the edge of the law and ethics and that pursues maximum effect for minimum costs. This was probably achieved because one week after the 'event', the traffic on the advertised server increased by hundreds of percent.[16] Workmen were used in this case – they were working near Wenceslas Square in Prague and were dressed in bright yellow T-shirts reading: *"I should have learned better!"*.

Picture 2: Campaign "Měl jsem se líp učit."

Source: UNDERLINE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SOCIETY: Měl jsem se líp učit. [online]. [2017-01-23]. Available at: <http://www.underline.cz/skolycz.html>.

The agency representative stated they followed the common Czech saying: *"If you don't study, you will end up with a shovel."*[17]

Is manual work so deterrent or humiliating? Are there only manual workers with no or just low education? Or does society of late modernity consider successful only white-collar workers? The advertiser profits from those whose income is usually around minimum salary, those who in the social ladder often stand just a few rungs above homeless people in this case.

The campaign has one more dimension. According to visible features, it is possible to label most of those workmen as Roma people.[18] The representative of *Underline* stated: *"We didn't choose them by the colour of their skin, it didn't matter to us. [...] By coincidence, they are the Romany."*[19] However, due to this alleged 'coincidence' the message based on the stereotype of an uneducated digger extended to another level of meaning by referring to so-called uneducable Gypsies. It was humiliating not only for the manual workers, because it degraded their work, but also for members of Roma ethnic group that the ideological discourse of majority often portrays as less intelligent and as bad pupils.

Although the campaign had been planned for three days, it ended after the first day[20] due to several reasons. Firstly, it immediately attracted attention and provoked a discussion and the workmen were bothered by increased attention from passing people and some of them felt humiliated.[21] On the other hand, some of them posed for the photographers. Nonetheless, their facial expression on the pictures indicates they did not understand the ridicule and insulting hints to their intelligence and job rank, or they did not take it seriously. Even in this case, the multinational company profits from individuals that represent the margins of Czech society. Roma people are usually considered socially weak and uneducated by majority. The cost of the advertising was negligible: those wearing the T-shirts were rewarded with a beer, a sausage and a pack of cigarettes. However, the campaign was considered embarrassing or humiliating only by a minority of recipients. Random people quoting it on the Internet, considered it mostly funny.[22] It was mainly members of the Roma ethnic group and experts on social topics who pointed out its poor ethical quality (e.g. Michael Kocáb, in that time the Czech Minister for Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation and the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions).[23] Paradoxically the creators of the advertising campaign were awarded several prizes including the one from the *IMC European Awards* for this campaign. The third example is from 2014.

Picture 3: Advertisement In our class it is the best: Class country skiing

Source: MEDIA GURU: T-Mobile po protestech z Polska stáhne spot. Released on 4th December 2012. [online]. [2016-12-05]. Available at: <http://www.mediaguru.cz/aktuality/polsko-se-pohorsuje-nad-vanocnim-spotem-t-mobile/#.VwQnMOKLS00>.

15   SEDLÁKOVÁ, R.: *Výzkum médií. Nejužívanější metody a techniky*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2014, p. 380.
16   UNDERLINE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SOCIETY: *Měl jsem se líp učit*. [online]. [2017-01-23]. Available at: <http://ibtl.aka.cz/pdf/underline-3.pdf>.
17   ROMEA: *Urážlivá kampaň skončila podle agentury kvůli hloupým otázkám novinářů*. Released on 8th October 2009. [online]. [2017-01-23]. Available at: <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravy/urazliva-kampan-skocila-podle-agentury-kvuli-hloupym-otazkam-novinaru>.

18   I am aware of the fact that the 'Gypsiness' was only ascribed to them (remark by the author).
19   ROMEA: *Urážlivá kampaň skončila podle agentury kvůli hloupým otázkám novinářů*. Released on 8th October 2009. [online]. [2017-01-23]. Available at: <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravy/urazliva-kampan-skocila-podle-agentury-kvuli-hloupym-otazkam-novinaru>.
20   The campaign took place on 7th October 2009 (remark by the author).
21   ROMEA: *Urážlivá kampaň zneužívající Romy rychle skončila*. Released on 8th October 2009. [online]. [2017-01-20]. Available at: <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravy/urazliva-kampan-zneuzivajici-romy-rychle-skoncila>.
22   They were asked this question: *"What do you think about the campaign in which the Romany workmen were wearing T-shirts with the text: 'I should have learned better'?"* From the total amount of 27 471 voters, 21 757 of them considered it funny, 3710 humiliating and according to 2004 people it was embarrassing (for more information, see: iDNES: *Měl jsem se líp učit, hlásala reklama na trikách romských dělníků*. Released on 8th October 2009. [online]. [2016-10-10]. Available at: <http://zpravy.idnes.cz/mel-jsem-se-lipucit-hlasala-reklama-na-trikach-romskych-delniku-psw- /domaci.aspx?c=A091008_121812_praha_pje>).
23   iDNES: *Odbory: Trička romských dělníků poníží všechny, kteří dělají rukama*. Released on 9th October 2009. [online]. [2016-10-10]. Available at: <http://zpravy.idnes.cz/odbory- tricka-romskych-delniku-ponizuji-vsechny-kteri-delaji-rukama-1jn-/domaci.aspx?c=A091009_132042_domaci_jw>.

It is a pre-Christmas TV commercial of a mobile company. A Polish-speaking seller of old junk masked as a tree fooled a skier in the forest by selling him a product of low quality (the phone the skier bought from him had broken immediately). In contrast with the previous ones this case started a debate about ethical aspects of this commercial and a discussion about insulting Polish people in general. After the protest of the Polish Embassy against it, the commercial was withdrawn.[24] The Arbitration Committee of The Czech Advertising Standards Council consider it unethical as well. The representatives of the creative team stated their intention was not to belittle Polish people and that the commercial was based on exaggeration and absurd situation.[25] In this case, it is a 'joke' that works with the national stereotype of a dealer that can obtain and provide any goods but of a poor quality. However, the commercial ceases to be funny if the recipient is familiar with skills of some sellers from the Communist era. Since the target group consists mostly of people born in 1980s or later it is not very likely to happen (maybe not even the creators were aware of this meaning). No matter that some Polish people, according to *iDnes.cz*,[26] considered the commercial funny, it does not change the fact it carries an insulting message about the Others.

'Funny' Advertising

As stated by Koszembar-Wiklik,[27] in order to capture potential consumers' attention the current advertising creators use topics that used to be taboo, including eroticism, death or violence. For advertising it is nowadays common to cross boundaries of politeness, good taste or social norms. Simultaneously, according to marketing theories, one way to create successful advertising is to use humour because it can catch the attention easier and it helps the recipient to remember the message (e.g. Vysekalová et al).[28] It is the combination of these two features that characterises socially insensitive messages as well.

Neither the individuals nor the things are funny themselves. They become objects of humour because of the way they are perceived by producers and recipients of the jokes. The joke is considered good if it maximises comic at minimal costs; using as smallest amount of signs as possible. The point of the joke is only implied; it is necessary to deduce it. According to Borecký,[29] it is necessary to interpret it hermeneutically because the point of the joke cannot be stated openly. Very often it is not possible to decode the point of the joke unless we know the background or wider social context because every communication has a socio-political dimension, as Fiske claims.[30] Our knowledge of the cultural frame and our experience with other texts that analogically represent the subject contribute to decoding the point of the joke. Preferred decoding of such texts (jokes) requires relatively specific knowledge of represented objects and stereotypes that are present in the given culture. That is based on mutual sharing of interpretative frames between producers and recipients of such communication. Many jokes employ political incorrectness and implicit stereotypes that need to be decoded; otherwise they could be considered racist, sexist, ageist, etc. It is important that at the moment of their 'narration/listening to' everybody is aware of the fact that the message is a joke based on a stereotype and everybody works with it in that way. The problem arises when not everybody is aware of that. Moreover, in the case of socially insensitive advertising, negative stereotypes are used in advertisements which are supposed to make profit. Moreover, they may even be used unconsciously (or not completely consciously) and most probably without extensive reflection on their impact on the different/displayed Others.

We and the Others

The essence of humour itself can be explained by three approaches: the relief theory, the superiority theory, and the incongruity theory.[31] In the examples we have discussed above, we can apply the superiority theory, according to which people are mostly amused because they feel superior to the object of the joke that they actually despise. By contrast sympathy for the object excludes humour. According to Bergson, the essence of comicality is the fact that it gives the impression of gaining superiority over another person that is ridiculed by it.[32] Another opinion says that an object can be somebody or something that we do not know very well or we do not trust and by ridiculing that person/thing we gain control over them.[33] This is the classical duality that distinguishes between us and the different ones, the strange ones – the Others.

In the middle of the 20th century, Simone de Beauvoir wrote in her book *The Second Sex*: *"Woman is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute. She is the Other."*[34] She depicted the essence of the concept of the Other that forms the fundamental duality of human thinking.[35] In order to be able to think about ourselves and our group, we need somebody else in relation to whom we can distinguish ourselves from. An opposition based on distinguishing between me/us and not me/not us arises from this.

Pickering's influential book *Stereotyping* published in 2001 shows what the Other means from the perspective of the politics of representation. He focuses on its anchoring in structures of power and emphasises the power inequality of positions that the signifier and the signified take not only symbolically but primarily socially. Defining ourselves through the Others builds on inequality and at the same time it creates it, confirms it, and reproduces it: *"The Other is always built as an object for purpose of gaining the subject that is in need of the objectified Others to reach full self-definition. (...) Distinction/Difference exists to subordinate its objects and assign them to their 'natural' place at the command of those who reconstitute themselves this way as subjects."*[36] Marking somebody as 'the Other' is an evaluating process of symbolic determination through which we classify and control it. It uses the mechanism of creating a difference that is determined as completely essential; however, it may be just a difference. This one is constructed as an unacceptable variation of what we consider important, healthy, pure, natural, normal, ours. It becomes the essence of the difference and its identification sign that acquires the character of stigma as described by Goffman.[37] Stigma is by rule visible. That is why it immediately declassifies its owner and helps to place him where he belongs according to those who can label. Therefore the identity of the Other depends on emphasised distinction and on what was projected in him/her from outside. The Other is the one we speak about.

According to van Dijk, when we perceive others, mostly people from different ethnics or cultures, we tend not to see what we have in common but exaggerate the differences which distinguish us. During their evaluation we emphasise our good qualities and their negative features, and by contrast we overlook our negative aspects and their merits.[38] By pointing out their distinction we create boundaries between Us and the Others who are simultaneously excluded as e.g. second-rate, possibly dangerous, abnormal or illegitimate. This process is primarily used to strengthen the cohesion of our own social group that forms its identity.[39] It is about

24   MEDIA GURU: *T-Mobile po protestech z Polska stáhne spot.* Released on 4th December 2012. [online]. [2016-12-05]. Available at: <http://www.mediaguru.cz/aktuality/polsko-se-pohorsuje-nad-vanocnim-spotem-t-mobile/#.VwQnMOKLS00>.
25   iDNES: *Hleďte si raději své soli, vzkazují Polákům autoři reklamy pro T-Mobile.* Released on 5th December 2014. [online]. [2017-01-05]. Available at: <http://ekonomika.idnes.cz/raklamni-agentura-se-ohradila-proti-stiznostem-polske-velvyslankyne-1e1-/ekonomika.aspx?c=A141205_154802_ekonomika_ozr>.
26   iDNES: *Hleďte si raději své soli, vzkazují Polákům autoři reklamy pro T-Mobile.* Released on 5th December 2014. [online]. [2017-01-05]. Available at: <http://ekonomika.idnes.cz/raklamni-agentura-se-ohradila-proti-stiznostem-polske-velvyslankyne-1e1-/ekonomika.aspx?c=A141205_154802_ekonomika_ozr>.
27   KOSZEMBAR-WIKLIK, M.: Controversial Themes in Advertisements: On Manipulating the Emotions of Audiences and Extending the Boundaries of the Social 'Taboo'. In *Communication Today*, 2016, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 23.
28   VYSEKALOVÁ, J. et al.: *Psychologie reklamy.* Praha : Grada Publishing, 2012.
29   For more information, see: BORECKÝ, V.: *Imaginace, hra a komika.* Praha : Triton, 2005.
30   FISKE, J.: *Introduction to Communication Studies.* London : Routledge, 2001, p. 177.

31   These are not mutually exclusive (for more information, see: BERGSON, H.: *Smích.* Praha : Naše vojsko, 1993).
32   For Bergson, it is also a form of a corrective mechanism that can ventilate social pressures at the same time (remark by the author).
33   According to critics of the superiority theory, this is the reason why it cannot explain smart or distinguished humour (remark by the author).
34   DE BEAUVOIR, S.: *Druhé pohlaví.* Praha : Orbis, 1967, p. 10.
35   *"No group ever defines itself as the One without immediately setting up the Other opposite itself."* (For more information, see: DE BEAUVOIR, S.: *Druhé pohlaví.* Praha : Orbis, 1967, p. 10).
36   PICKERING, M.: *Stereotyping.* Basingstoke : Palgrave, 2001, p. 71.
37   For more information, see: GOFFMAN, E.: *Stigma.* Praha : Slon, 2003.
38   This phenomenon was described in the concept of the ideological square by van Dijk (for more information, see: VAN DIJK, T. A.: Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis. In *Discourse and Society*, 1993, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 251. [online]. [2016-10-10]. Available at: <http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Principles%20of%20critical%20discourse%20analysis.pdf>).
39   Stereotyped Others are used by the majority as mirrors of themselves. Therefore it is not a coincidence that in various cultures different groups are given very similar characteristics. For example, characteristics such as too vivacious, noisy or unrestrained, too fertile, musical, lazy or stupid, these are according to Czech culture attributes of Roma people; in the United States they were given to Afro-Americans and in Holland to Surinamese people, etc. (for more information, see: HELMREICH, W. B.: *The Things They Say Behind Your*

executing symbolic power through which the process of social exclusion occurs at the same time, writes Hall.[40] This process leads to creating groups of socially excluded Others, constructed as insufficiently conformist and questioning the social arrangement of the society or disturbing social stability.

The process of othering, which defines someone as the Other, needs to appear natural. The difference that it defines socially must be confirmed and naturalised by repetition at the same time. Only when the difference is established as natural the stereotypical representation in its background is masked and covered. Likewise, what we consider 'normal' is a social construct. Even the arbitrariness of normality is masked in order to contribute to political effectiveness of the representation and it serves as a regulating tool of disciplinary power, according to Pickering.[41] What is normal gets meaning only in contrast with abnormal or pathological defined in the process of making the difference that is created as deviant. As well as normality, the difference is an ideological category assigned by a dominant social group. Therefore Pickering brings the attention to the side of those, who are the subjects of othering. Together with the representation of difference marked as womanhood, blackness, old age or Gypsiness an equally ideological discourse of manhood, whiteness, youth or 'Czechness' arises. The created own representation of me or us is necessarily stereotyped and ideological just as those that are used for signifying the Others.

Stereotypes about Us and the Others

Defining stereotypes as a form of rigid relationship to different groups, to which a certain attribute is blankly assigned, we usually refer to the book *Public Opinion* by Walter Lippmann from 1922. According to him, stereotypes:[42] *"Are ordered, more or less consistent pictures of the world. (...) They may not be a complete picture of the world, but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted. In that world people and things have their well-known places and do certain expected things. We feel at home there."*[43] These pictures work as socially shared and prepared schemes that form our perception and evaluation of the surrounding world[44] and the Others. They usually do not come to existence based on personal experience, and if so, they generalize it.[45] They are not complex enough because they overlook some of the objects' features for the benefits of others. That is why they present a convenient way of dealing with the amount of information, which we gain about the surrounding world, but they do so for the price of selective and simplified approach to evaluated objects. Social and cultural identities are taken away from the stereotypized objects, because the variability of their features is reduced to several chosen ones that are used to their representation and which reflect dominant optics of evaluation.[46] As Bhabha wrote: *"The stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested fixated form of representation."*[47]

According to Allport,[48] the main function of stereotypes is to justify and rationalise our actions towards other groups. Via stereotypes, values of "our" society are projected on the Others. Similarly to the process of othering stereotypes are used by the dominant group for preserving the social setting and the status quo. Stereotypization happens from the privileged perspective via relationships of power, states Pickering.[49] During this process, stereotypes reduce the complexity of the group; they consider it completely homogenous and its members identical. They choose only certain features that they take out of context and assign them to everybody/everything included in the given category; the characteristics assigned to them are presented as natural. By reducing the individuality, the stereotype enables classifying of people/phenomena under very general (and often) humiliating categories that are shared in the interest of a certain group. The place of an individual in the social reality is defined via stereotypes, which strengthens the impression of social order and confirms the hierarchy of relationships of power. Due to this stereotypes contribute to creation of the feeling of security and superiority and therefore they are, according to Pickering, very often completely uncritically accepted. Pickering also focuses on a dilemma that is hidden in the concept of the stereotype. This is related to the changeability of the life in modernity, in which we are flooded with new pieces of information, but afterwards it often turns out that not all of them were accurate. Therefore he deals with the question whether stereotypes are indispensable helpers for orientation within a multilayer social reality[50] or whether they are too simplified reductions that are overlooking particulars individualities on purpose. In order to understand the concept of stereotypes it is necessary to distinguish the process of stereotypization from the process of typization. Typization is an essential concept of Schütz's phenomenological sociology but also of Berger's and Luckmann's constructivist approach that follows it.[51] Simply said, it is a basic process of creating meaning and classification of schemes helping with orientation in the reality. These categories are always more general than the individual objects we include in them; typization and stereotypization have this in common.

Their three key differences were described by Hall. Primarily, the stereotype not only reduces individual phenomena to only several characteristics, but it also presents them as natural, given and fixed, no matter they are determined and assigned by the culture. Secondly, stereotypes work through relationships of power and dominance. They have the power of classifying and use the strategy of separating and excluding. *"It determines a symbolic boundary between 'normal' and 'deviant', 'normal' and 'pathological', 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable', what belongs here and what does not, what is 'different'; it separates 'members of the group' from 'outsiders', 'Us' from 'Them'."*[52] That is how the process of stereotypization creates an imaginary community involving 'us' whereas others, different ones are pushed away as bad or unclean and potentially dangerous. Thirdly, stereotypes are linked to distinctive power inequality and ethnocentric power executed over subordinate groups.[53] It is a tool for maintaining social and symbolic order. Stereotyping is a practice of Foucault's power-knowledge, classifying people according to norms and constructing excluded ones as the Others. The Others are used as a tool for determining ourselves that happens through their symbolic exclusion. The power concentrates in the representation of the Other created via symbolic systems (e.g. language) and reproduced in the given discourse.

According to Hall, stereotypical representations work at two levels, therefore they always show only a half of the truth. The first manifest level works as a cover to mask hidden or suppressed disturbing images that cannot be expressed, because they are problematic (racist, ageist, sexist, etc.). The proper meaning lies in the second level. It articulates what was not said or shown, what refers to the idea that is implied, but cannot

Back. New Brunswick : Transaction Publishers, 1997).
40   HALL, S.: The Spectacle of the Other. In HALL, S. (ed.): *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London : Sage, 1997, p. 259.
41   PICKERING, M.: *Stereotyping*. Basingstoke : Palgrave, 2001, p. 173.
42   Dyer specifies stereotypes through four basic characteristics: process of ordering, a 'shortcut', referring to 'the world', and expressing 'our' values and beliefs. We interiorise stereotypes in the process of socialisation in connection with both negative and positive feelings. From the psychological point of view stereotypes are special kind of attitudes, patterns of perceiving and judging of that what they relate to. We need to distinguish between hetero-stereotypes (about groups of the Others) and auto-stereotypes, which say something about us (for more information, see: DYER, R.: *The Matter of Image. Essay on Representation*. London : Routledge, 1993; NAKONEČNÝ, M.: *Encyklopedie psychologie*. Praha : Academia, 1997, p. 223).
43   LIPPMANN, W.: *Public Opinion*. New York : Hardcourt, Brace and Company, 1922, p. 95.
44   With a reference to Plato's allegory of the cave, Lippmann states that we do not directly know our lived world. We have only the knowledge mediated indirectly through pseudo-environment created by the media. (For more information, see: LIPPMANN, W.: *Public Opinion*. New York : Hardcourt, Brace and Company, 1922).
45   For example, Bethlehem or Helmreich point out stereotypes (about ethnic groups and national groups) can be confirmed via empirical experience of some individuals. This experience is then exaggerated and it generalizes the given group understood as homogeneous. (For more information, see: BETHLEHEM, D. W.: *A Social Psychology of Prejudice*. London, Sydney : Croom Helm, 1985; HELMREICH, W. B.: *The Things They Say Behind Your Back*. New Brunswick : Transaction Publishers, 1997).
46   Pickering speaks about politics of representation. Its key practices include: "speaking for" and "speaking about" the represented ones, the possibility to choose, to arrange, to press for certain ideas of various Others and to create their image. When we emphasise something and suppress something else we contribute to their idealisation, demonization or their exclusion. (For more information, see: PICKERING, M.: *Stereotyping*. Basingstoke : Palgrave, 2001, p. xiii).
47   BHABHA, H. K.: *The Location of Culture*. London : Rutledge, 1994, p. 75.

48   ALLPORT, G.: *The Nature of Prejudice*. Garden City : Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958, p. 87.
49   PICKERING, M.: *Stereotyping*. Basingstoke : Palgrave, 2001, p. 4.
50   GILMAN, S.: The Deep Structure of Stereotypes. In HALL, S. (ed.): *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London : Sage, 1997, p. 284-285.
51   For more information, see: BERGER, P., LUCKMANN, T.: *Sociální konstrukce reality*. Brno : Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 1999.
52   HALL, S.: The Spectacle of the Other. In HALL, S. (ed.): *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London : Sage, 1997, p. 257-258.
53   It was already Lippmann who in 1922 reflected power inequality between the person who applies a stereotype and the one stereotyped by it. It does not mean that the subordinated people could not share their superiors' stereotypical images. Usually they do not possess tools to spread them widely, and through them they cannot outclass those in power. But Fiske implies that quite similar behaviour is a place of resistance of socially weak against powerful or rich people (for more information, see: LIPPMANN, W.: *Public Opinion*. New York : Hardcourt, Brace and Company, 1922; FISKE, J.: *Television Culture*. London, New York : Routledge, 1987).

be verbalised.[54] It is no coincidence van Dijk claims that the new racism can be mostly uncovered exactly (and only) at the latent level of the message. Even though it is not acceptable to openly communicate racist messages in the current Western societies, this does not mean that they would disappear from the public discourse. On the contrary, the new racism has embodied into substile hidden forms and symbolic discriminating practices that are not communicated openly, but between the lines. It is present not only in the everyday communication of the general public but also in political discourse and media content including the news. The elementary levels that help it to reproduce are socially shared representations, stereotypes, prejudices and ethnocentric ideologies that are very often silently accepted by the majority.[55]

Socially Insensitive Messages

Let us get back to the main goal of this article, which is to specify socially insensitive messages. Referring to theories stated above (primarily the theory of othering and the theory of stereotype) I consider the message as socially insensitive if it shows following characteristics:

- These messages communicate **controversial meaning**. However this primarily intended meaning is not communicated fully and thus only its part is expressed openly. Their producers assume[56] that the combination of used signs will serve the recipients as a clue helping to fill in the meaning and they will decode latently suggested meaning[57] based on culturally shared connotations, for example. However, many latently communicated meanings are for several reasons 'problematic' (racist, sexist, ageist, discriminating, insulting, etc.).
- These messages communicate about the Others and **put them in contrast with Us** (We, the consumer majority X They). The role of the Others is played by individuals that belong to socially weak, marginalised or other disadvantaged minorities in the given culture. They carry a certain 'otherness' that became a stigma, based on which they are identified and excluded from the group of 'us'. They are, for example, the 'abnormal' (homosexuals) the 'less integrated' (socially weak or excluded) the 'colourful' (Black people, Roma people or Hispanics), the 'less intelligent' (uneducated, uneducable), the 'less young' (older age), the 'less rich' (poor, unemployed, homeless), the 'less healthy' (physically or mentally impaired) or the non/believers (Muslims, sectarians), etc.
- These messages communicate about the Others **not directly** (as about particular individuals) but rather as about members of a representing category[58] reduced to several stereotypical signs. They use signs that are linked to negative connotations and emphasise negative stereotypes (alternatively myths in Barthes's sense) present in the given culture. Furthermore, their circulation confirms and naturalises them and simultaneously reproduces the ideology of the majority hidden in them.
- They usually communicate the intended controversial meaning via **humour**. These messages are built on jokes[59]; use of double meanings is not an exception.

- They are **commercial messages** (in the broadest sense) that are supposed to make profit or generate some benefits to the client (financial, political or symbolic). It needs not to be an advertising on material goods but it can be on political ideas, management decisions or messages of non-profit subjects, etc.

Instead of Conclusion: Insensitive Messages about Us

The process of creating difference and labelling the Others is primarily reflective of those who are defining them, therefore of Us. Likewise the main function of the stereotyped representations which are used to mark the Others is not degrading those individuals but expressing our own individuality. Stigmatisation and discrimination of the Others are in this process rather subsidiary and to a large extent unintentional consequences of the effort to define ourselves or another reference group. The last thing that needs to be done is to explain why I call these messages insensitive.

It is primarily medialization of stereotyped representations that have become instruments and executors of symbolic exclusion[60] in the society of late modernity. The media participate in the process of defining socially un/acceptable, ab/normal or what is ours/theirs. Media-stereotyped representations provide the members of a social group not only with instructions on how to think about the Others but simultaneously they influence the way how the excluded think about themselves. In the process of stereotypization and othering excluded people are forced to look at themselves from the point of view of those who define them. This results in recognising oneself as the Other and creating double consciousness.[61] According to the social role theory, the concept of mirrored I and the labelling theory, individuals form their identity to a large extent as a reaction to expectations addressed to them even if these refer to negative or disadvantaged categories. Stereotyped images that the media reproduce can be interiorised by those who are represented by them in this way.[62] At the same time they are usually disadvantaged in their everyday life due to their otherness, which is related to a visible sign that stigmatises them.

We cannot expect from all advertisers (let alone from all who communicate) to take into account those who they communicate about. Moreover, creators of messages do not even have to be aware of latently communicated meanings of their messages. According to the semiotic approach, the 'responsibility' for decoding the meaning of the text (in the broadest sense) lies on the side of the recipients. Their way of decoding determines which meaning they will uncover and emphasise.[63] Because messages consist of language signs, which are inherently polysemic, it is possible that the recipient will decode a meaning that its producer did not intend (or did not think through) at all. For example, products of popular culture work on this principle as described by Fiske[64] or Jenkins.[65]

It is necessary to bear in mind that socially insensitive messages show strong power imbalance which occurs at two levels. The power imbalance, which is inherently present in used stereotyped representations, is intensified due to the fact that the authors of messages belong to the majority or the elite social group that has the possibility to say something about the Others. Through this they define them, determine their place in the society, their social roles, identity and lives. By contrast, those about which they speak are discriminated or excluded people with a minimal chance to speak about themselves, because they usually do not have necessary tools and possess only a minimal share of the power. However, and that is the key point, such commercial messages are made in order to profit from displayed objects that become a source of either financial or symbolic income of the client. Moreover, I believe that every author should be ready to take responsibility for issued messages.

54   HALL, S.: *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London : Sage, 1997, p. 263.
55   VAN DIJK, T. A.: New[s] Racism: A Discourse Analytical Approach. In COTTLE, S. (ed.): *Ethnic Minorities and the Media*. Buckingham, Philadelphia : Open University Press, 2000, p. 34.
56   For example, Padín shows that members of a group different than white Americans are represented stereotypically because creators of media content in their messages use both prejudice of official institutions and prejudice of recipients, to whom they send it. Similarly Sedláková wrote that commercial media very often balance on the edge of correctness and give their recipients what they think the recipients want to hear along with opinions taken from public opinion polls. (For more information, see: PADÍN, J. A.: The Normative Mulattoes: The Press, Latinos, and the Racial Climate on the Moving Immigration Frontier. In *Sociological Perspectives*, 2005, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 49-75; SEDLÁKOVÁ, R.: *Obraz Romů v televizním zpravodajství – příklad mediální konstrukce reality*. [Dissertation Thesis]. Brno : MU, 2007).
57   In a certain sense, we could talk about preferred reading, which directs recipients decoding a text towards preferred meaning intended by the text's producer (for more information, see: HALL, S.: *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*. [online]. [2016-12-15]. Available at: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/history/cccs/stencilled-occasional-papers/1to8and11to24and38to48/SOP07.pdf>).
58   Commercial messages work with typified characters (a caring mother, an unrestrained young man, a diligent housekeeper, etc.) in general. In the case of different social categories the power inequality that is essential for communicating messages about minorities is not so important. They are rather types than stereotypes (remark by the author).
59   However, the message might not be decoded by recipients as funny or amusing (remark by the author).

60   The process of social exclusion performed by the media can happen, for example, via provoking moral panic, as described by Cohen (for more information, see: COHEN, S.: *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. London : Routledge, 2000).
61   See, for example: FANON, F.: *Black Skin, White Masks*. London : Paladin, 1972.
62   Studied, for example, by Gillespie (see more in: GILLESPIE, M.: *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change*. London : Routledge, 1995).
63   For more information, see: FISKE, J.: *Introduction to Communication Studies*. London : Routledge, 2001.
64   See also: FISKE, J.: *Television Culture*. London, New York : Routledge, 1987; FISKE, J.: *Reading the Popular*. London : Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989.
65   See: JENKINS, H.: *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London, New York : Routledge, 1992.

The examples of the phenomenon called socially insensitive messages that I have stated above were on consumer goods with a very limited lifespan. However, before the election in 2010, a similar rhetoric got into the political discourse. Furthermore, at this level, it was used quite seriously and referring to the diverse Others was not only implied.[66] I will not analyse the political marketing in this text as it is a special category. However most of these slogans meet criteria of the socially insensitive messages and simultaneously reflect the increase of xenophobia in Czech society. In the second half of 2015, many socially insensitive messages were published on front pages of newspapers or broadcast on TV in coverage of migration topic.[67] I will give one more example here.

In this case,[68] it is a commercial message as well; however, it may not be distinguishable at the first sight by the general public because it is a cover of a periodical.[69] Precisely, the cover of the 20th issue of the *Reflex* magazine published in 2015. This cover is a collage[70] that should amuse and catch the attention of potential readers (see point iv in the previous chapter). This collage works with different objects that function as signs. The main signs are: a bust of a middle-aged man who has a darker skin colour; a lifebuoy; water and headlines: *"Do we want them?"*, *"Europe is clueless about refugees"* and *"JDX warns: don't buy erection boosters."* Besides these I identify secondary signs such as: the blurred silhouette of the Charles Bridge; comic book bubble *"I will be good Czech!"*; swans and a floating plastic bottle. It is obvious that the cover communicates something about the Others, in this case immigrants (see point ii above). Due to the polysemic character of used signs they can be interpreted as very racist and sexist[71] (see point i) .

The portrayed man floating in the lifebuoy in the Vltava river[72] does not say anything about him, but he was used as a sign representing immigrants (see point iii) coming to Prague (implied by the Charles Bridge). Although the lifebuoy indicates that we will not drown the incomers, the empty plastic bottle in the front implies simultaneously that it is just a waste that is floating in the water. This accentuates the stereotypes of classical colonial racism, which marked black people as dirty, smelly, subordinated, and inferior. However, the collage works with another similarly degrading stereotype. It asks *"Do we want them?"* through the headlines and at the same time it answers: *"don't buy erection boosters"*. The combination of these two signs supported with the image of a physically well-formed naked body connotates the stereotype of a sexually potent black man (see point iii), who will not need to use such medicaments. *"Europe is clueless about refugees"*, but it seems Czech women will handle them (for them they *"will be good Czechs"*). No matter that the meaning was only implied.

This collage is a very socially insensitive message because through stressed racist and sexist stereotypes it caricatures and belittles differently suffering people, who are protected by rights guaranteed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms and who are coming to Europe from areas devastated by war. These people are in contemporary Czech society viewed as one of the biggest threat,[73] but at the same time they are also in the lowest rungs of the social ladder. It does not matter that the creators of the collage could say that the above-stated interpretation is an example of the oppositional reading and it is not a meaning preferred by them;[74] it does not mean that the signs from the cover cannot be interpreted in this way. As other stated examples of the concept that I have tried to define above, this one says something about latenly shared attitudes of the Czech people. These are examples of the new racism and the hate speech[75] at the same time. These are evidence that hate speeches contribute to social exclusion of particular individuals or groups because they intimidate, stigmatise and deprive them of dignity. Hate speech endorses prejudices and can trigger not only discrimination but physical violence as well. Besides this hate speech arouses fear and anxiety among social groups and its members and increases polarisation of the society what is also evident in the Czech society recently. In next years, Czech society will carry the responsibility for the long-term influence of socially insensitive messages that are more and more publicised but also silently overlooked by the majority and its representatives.

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iDNES: *Hledte si raději své soli, vzkazují Polákům autoři reklamy pro T-Mobile*. Released on 5th December 2014.

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66   For example, ČSSD stated in their billboards *"More safety; less dirt."* and *"Away with drug addicts, homeless people and gamblers."* ODS used the following motto: *"We will take away financial support from all who don't want to work."* Strana práv občanů Zemanovci declared *"...zero tolerance to junkies"*, etc. Similarly SNS went to the election with question: *"Until when do we have to pay extra for Gypsies?"* At the end of 2014, Tomio Okamura, one of the most known Czech politicians, claimed: *"parasitizing and maladjusted migrants will be expelled"* (remark by the author).

67   According to findings of the *Media Tenor Agency*, the migration was one of the most broadcast topics in main TV news in 2015 (see also: MEDIA TENOR: *Prohlášení v ČT24 5. 1. 2016 od 17:06*. [online]. [2016-01-05]. Available at: <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10101491767-studio-ct24/216411058280105>).

68   Due to the limited extent of this article I mention only an elementary interpretation of used signs not a detailed analysis (remark by the author).

69   HORÁK, V.: *Špatná obálka může dobré číslo zabít, ale špatné nezachrání*. [online]. [2016-04-21]. Available at: <http://strategie.e15.cz/zurnal/spatna-obalka-muze-dobre-cislo-zabit-ale-spatne-nezachrani-438644>.

70   *Reflex* uses the strategy of controversial pictures on its covers regularly. This cover was not an exception (remark by the author).

71   Alternative interpretations work, for example, with the idea of an economic migrant; due to simplification I do not mention it (remark by the author).

72   By the way, being depicted in the water is almost 'literal' illustration of metaphor that describes coming of migrants as an *inflow* or a *wave* (remark by the author).

73   Lots of researches from the last two years show it (for more information, see: KRUPKA, J.: *Voda je třetí největší problém po běžencích a válce*. Released 24th February 2016. [online]. [2017-01-25]. Available at: <http://www.mediar.cz/voda-je-treti-nejvetsi-problem-po-uprchlicich-a-valce/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_campaign=4a11a31056-Newsletter_2016_02_25&utm_medium=email&utm_tcrm=0_796408a0ec-4a11a31056-97738933>).

74   I cannot (and do not want to) speculate what was the intention of a designer of this cover. Probably he used those signs on purpose (maybe in good faith) because it is an exaggeration that everybody will understand and find it funny (remark by the author).

75   Hate speech is in social sciences understood as *"degrading, threatening, harassing or stigmatising speech which affects an individual's or a group's dignity, reputation and status in society by means of linguistic and visual effects that promote negative feelings, attitudes and perceptions based on characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity and age"* (for more information, see: LIKESTILLINGS OG DISKRIMINERINGSOMBUDET: *Hate Speech and Hate Crime*. Oslo : LDO, 2015. [online]. [2017-02-22]. Available at: <http://www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/hate_speech_and_hate_crime_v3_lr.pdf>).

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