

THE POLITICS OF OTHERNESS STEREOTYPES IN HUNGARIAN MEDIA

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This analysis explores the dynamics of media cultures of Hungary which joined the EU in 2004. The problem of media presentation of minority images arises when media producers intend programs to produce certain effects and, in actuality, these shows produce other effects. This problem is most acute with respect to stereotypical majority images of the Gypsy/Roma minority

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Analiza razkriva dinamiko medijske kulture na Madžarskem, ki se je Evropski uniji pridružila leta 2004. Do problemov pri medijskih predstavitvah podob manjšin pride, ko ustvarjalci občil oddaje namenijo določenim učinkom, dejansko pa oddaje ustvarijo drugačne učinke. Ta problem je najhujši ob stereotipnih podobah, ki jih ima večina o ciganski/romski majšini.

Ključne besede: *postsocialistični mediji, madžarska televizija, razmerja med večino in manjšino, stereotipi o Romih.*

Media studies¹ in post-socialist and post-EU enlargement contexts illuminate the ways in which individuals are vested not only with judicial competences, obligations, and entitlements (or lack of them) bestowed by the state and media empires, but also with particular modes of status, authority, and prestige endowed by the media market. Moreover, media production and consumption is an arena in which majority-minority interests, ideologies, and practices of the markets, states, and the EU collide and collude. In these intersecting spaces, producers, state officials, and policymakers as well as consumers rearticulate and re-circulate identities, values, and meanings to create political and cultural identities. This analysis explores the dynamics of the media regimes and cultures of Hungary, which joined the EU in 2004. Rather than privileging the EU, the state, or the market, I examine the interchanges among them by asking how they both influence and reflect majority and minority consumer views. In particular, I investigate how media production and consumption is involved in creating subjectivities and public identities, shaping sociability, and belonging. What is clear is that the notion of “Europeanization” necessarily involves domestication of EU media directives. However, by renegotiating neoliberal values and engagements of these directives, the various local consumers remake Europe as Europe remakes them. This is what Manuel Castells may have in mind when he discusses the configuration of a global public space as dependent on the “global/local communication media system” (Castells 2008: 89). In an insightful study, Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) pinpoint three major models of the globalized media

¹ This essay is a revised version of an earlier study (Kürti 2008). Research in Hungary has been supported by the EU SUSDIV. EURODIV project Diversity in Arts Production.

systems in Europe and North America – the polarized pluralist, democratic corporatist, and liberal models – to explain how the media play a different role in the politics in each of these systems. However, the authors do not consider the post-socialist media system, and I offer evidence that, when viewed from the perspective of majority-minority relations, Hungarian media culture cannot easily be situated within the polarized-pluralist (or “Mediterranean”) media system, but represents a specific case of its own.

To begin, it is prudent to remember how the transformation of media has served majority and minority relations by manipulating ethnic or national stereotypes. Sacha Baron Cohen’s 2006 low-budget “mockumentary” comedy *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* is a case in point. In one of the opening scenes, viewers are invited to enter a decrepit and disorderly peasant cottage. The male host shows his bed ornamented with two stuffed bunny dolls, a television set, and a VCR. While leaving the room, the camera pans towards the window and we see a cow eating in front of it. He yells at the animal in broken Slavic: *Be quiet!* Outside, he stands next to a bleached-blonde woman, whom he passionately kisses on the mouth for several seconds, and then we are told that she is actually his sister “the number fourth prostitute in all of Kazakhstan.” In his film, Cohen does not use professional actors, but real people that Borat Sagdiyev, his alter-ego Kazakh TV reporter, met during his fictitious journey. The movie has been hailed as a real success as well as a distasteful exploitation of various cultures and ethnic groups. However, the film’s instant status as a critical hit and blockbuster at the box office across North America and Europe, grossing over 257 million dollars worldwide in less than six months, and its nomination for various film awards, tells another story.

In contrast to its financial success, *Borat* is in fact replete with negative depictions of “Kazakhs” (the main character’s homeland ethnic majority), Gypsies, and Jews. The movie has frequently been accused of promoting anti-Gypsy prejudice, but not only that. The scenes supposedly shown as Borat’s Kazakh village were actually filmed in the impoverished Roma (or Gypsy, a term considered derogatory by many) village of Glod, Romania. It was reported by *USA Today* that poverty-stricken villagers were offered up to five dollars to bring a cow into their house and perform various acts that ended up degrading them for the amusement and profit of others. Cohen has claimed that the Romanian Roma participants were paid double the rate recommended by the Romanian film office for extras. To no avail, several villagers have decided to sue the makers of the *Borat* film for thirty million dollars for abuses of their human rights. Expertly handled, fusing fiction with nonfiction and documentary styles, the film pushes the boundaries of taste and decency to create uneasy massive discomfort, and in the process reveals both the light and dark sides of its subjects. *Borat* has become a success for another reason as well: it signals a dramatic shift to the absurd “mocumentary” style by using ethnic and national stereotypes and a western obsession with a superior cultural taste.

As this offensive scene reveals, cross-cultural misunderstandings and ethnic stereotyping are often juxtaposed in the media for the benefit of profit-making, a point I want

to highlight by focusing on Hungarian media images of the Roma. By analyzing special programs, I focus on the role of the media, in particular mainstream television shows that serve or subvert cultural dialogue. By the end of this paper, I hope it will be clear that transformation and the current situation of mainstream television in Hungary has not produced the desired effects and that majority ethnic sentiments are reflected in the altered media structures to the benefit of nationalist programming and not necessarily cultural dialogue across social space (Mezzoleni, Stewart and Horsfield 2003).

POST-SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION OF THE MEDIA

From literature to cinema and from music to sports, Hungarian culture has produced some impressive results and can boast several outstanding representatives in both the immediate and more distant past. Not surprisingly, the political and economic transformations after 1989 created equally noticeable and sometimes questionable developments in the country's cultural sphere as everyone followed the general trends towards privatization and the development of civil society. During the 1990s, Hungary's nationalized media experienced tremendous privatization pressures. Book, record, and newspaper publishing was one of the more visible successes: joint ventures proliferated as a result of large-scale privatization. Although some state-run companies did experience a healthy dose of "downsizing" in their workforce and budget, most were privatized, only to reappear in the publishing market with renewed vigor. Such fluctuations notwithstanding, the number of new newspapers, magazines, and books published in Hungary has been steadily increasing (Gulyas 2003).

A similar development can be detected in television. The hallmark of censorship for thirty years, Hungarian television was split into a pluralistic network complex after 1997, a date signaling the lifting of state control of broadcast frequencies (Sükösd and Bajomi-Lázár 2003; Révész 1996). On the more positive side, however, growth in local television and radio stations in regional cities, operating as private or semi-private systems, is a welcome addition boosting the sense of civil society as well as media capitalism.

As some analysts have argued, the arts in general are still under the centralized control of the state and its various bureaucratic bodies. Furthermore, the media – as an independent variable – now act as the single most important tool in forming social attitudes, values, and cultural dialogue. This is why, as some have put it, the media in their central European setting are still a powerful tool in the hands of the state and its planners. For one, the state still very closely monitors the private media through laws and regulatory bodies, and through economic and financial means. The media industry now is mainly based on a three-tiered system: first there are the state-owned and state-funded networks (MTV1, MTV2, Duna, and Duna-Autonomia). The introduction of Duna TV was one of the major achievements of the early 1990s. Today, it is the most popular channel outside of Hungary, eagerly watched in Hungarian communities in neighboring countries especially because

other networks are unavailable there. Duna TV is also the only non-government television company receiving large state subsidies that provide a sound financial foundation for this otherwise non-profit network. Similar to Duna TV, other state-run channels continue to be hampered by structural difficulties, overstaffing, and mediocrity, aspects of the new media that cannot be solely explained by financial shortcomings alone.

The second group is composed of private or commercialized networks. This conglomerate includes such giants as the German RTL Klub, and the TV2 channels, two stations that were hailed as liberators from state (socialist) media culture, a characterization stemming from the first initial years of diverse cultural production they aired. The third group comprises smaller local television stations and cable operators (ATV, HIRTV, etc.) whose status and standing is mixture of both: a “blessing and a curse,” to use a phrase from a cable owner-operator. These local broadcasters – local, regional, cultural, and ethnic – serve important community functions because they enhance and strengthen community spirit and collective identities. They are fully integrated into the capitalistic media economy because they operate under market constraints. At the same time, they are also vying for a place in the ruthless state funding scheme because they need extra funding to remain in operation. As a result of the political division of the country’s cultural landscape, many of these small stations are hopelessly short on capital, technology, and qualified personnel. The income they generate is hardly enough to make ends meet, and in order to produce quality programs they constantly need new equipment to meet local needs. This, however, is not a get-rich-quick scheme because the local market can never offer enough return for the owners to invest. This also shows that autonomy has its price: a fully independent media that is independent from money and a political agenda hardly seems attainable at the moment. Therefore, television stations are now aligned very closely with the existing ideological divide that determines the country’s political life: they are either left-liberal leaning (such is the case with ATV), or right-wing (HIRTV), or fundamentalist religious channels (BudapestTV). Most independent small broadcasters – many of whom are local cable operators or community broadcast companies – are hopelessly engulfed in a bitter rivalry for viewers that acts as a counterforce in their programming and cultural activities. With regard to cable television, Budapest alone boasts eight major stations, some with nation-wide affiliates. Although these channels represent much wider audiences and publicity bases, this numerical rise in media diversity does not seem to cater to viewers as a whole but to viewers of various subcultures. However, none of these cable operators have attempted to create a minority Roma program. Not yet.

Despite this enormous growth, however, not all major television programming is a profitable business. In 1998, for instance, TV3 – a station largely owned by American investors – abandoned its initial idea of expanding into a national station and went out of business altogether in 2000. With all these changes in the number of television stations and ownership, the period under discussion saw major transformations in the quality of media programming: many new faces were introduced to Hungarian viewers to keep up

with the growing demands for reporters, show managers, and media hosts. Former stars disappeared only to reappear again in new shows introducing new programs at the various networks competing for viewers. News programs – not the boring, colorless, static, and state-manipulated ones that Hungarians had no choice but to watch for thirty years – have developed along lines imitating western European news styles with fast-paced newsreel programs. However, what is an unfortunate characteristic of current Hungarian television is the abundance of American-style talk shows, serials, and sitcoms, and the disproportionately high number of mindless films and game shows (Wyka 2007). Since the creation of the new television culture, all stations are attempting to gain more and more viewers, often by luring audiences with games. The emergence of this new style of entertainment industry has created its own stars and media moguls. Perhaps nobody signifies the rise of this new media culture better than Sándor Fábry or Sándor Friderikusz, talk-show hosts whose eccentric and absurdly pompous weekly programs elevated them into the ranks of Hungary's millionaires.

However, there are some troubling signs that high-level politics and centralized cultural policies are negatively affecting the Hungarian media, especially television (Wyka 2007). At the beginning of 2000, the Orbán-Torgyán-led coalition government initiated a series of steps to rearrange public media broadcasting. Specifically, the supervisory bodies of both the radio and the main government television stations were reorganized. The opposition parties attempted to bloc these unilateral decisions, but to no avail. The center-right coalition managed to create an almost hundred-percent government party commission (*Hung. kuratórium*). This certainly creates a bad feeling in Hungary among media intellectuals. In fact, Freedom House has rated Hungary's one-sided media below average. A telling development since 1990 is easily witnessed from this recent government reshuffling: during every regime change, Hungary's media, education, and arts have come under direct attack.

Such reorganizations of the media, however, have adversely affected the nature of television programming and, in particular, the art of film and video-making. More sitcoms, talk shows, and news hours do not necessarily mean that programs are better and higher quality. These shows often recycle the same types of programs in a vicious competition for viewers and commercial sponsorship, a well-known aspect of television in the West for decades.

More important is the fact that the once-famous Hungarian film industry is now gone; in its place are many smaller studios vying for state funding and visibility on the European screens. Hungary's film production is still impressive despite the decentralization and privatization after 1990: Hungary's annual feature-film output closely approximates those of Greece, the Netherlands, and Norway according to the *Statistical Yearbook: Film, Television, Video and New Media in Europe* (1999: 79–81).

Whereas in 1988 Hungarian filmmakers produced forty feature films, in 1997 only sixteen were released, and among them only eight were Hungarian financed (only one from strictly private funds); the rest were supported by international investors. In comparison, in 2006, twenty-seven new feature films were produced, and at the annual Hungarian film

week in 2007 eighteen new features were screened. Viewing the films produced in the past ten to fifteen years, one senses that filmmakers are increasingly involved with copying glossy, commercialized, and sensationalized western productions in order to increase ticket sales, leaving the experimental, cutting-edge, and documentary styles to a minority of die-hard artists. If anything, this trend has been reinforced recently. Aside from state funding, Hungarian filmmakers are now able to compete for funding as EU artists. In 2006, Eurimages offered total support of 1,307,900 euros for production and distribution. Although state subsidies were radically cut, Hungarian filmmakers are still able to produce a number of feature films, and they manage to compete successfully in international film festivals, just as they did before 1989. What testifies to the vitality of artistic cinema is the fact that in 2008 Kornél Mundroczó's *Delta* received the prestigious FIPRESCI prize at the Cannes Film Festival.

The installation of such a plural model of public and private broadcasting has been one of the single most important media developments in post-communist East-Central Europe. This basically should have meant that the state allowed a certain freedom of the airwaves through the creation of public service channels. In line with implementing a new European democratic system – parliamentary decision-making, a multiparty system, general voting, a constitutional court, and so on – the state took directing public service broadcasting upon itself. Freedom of the airwaves also meant that political control over commercial broadcasting was removed and commercial broadcasting was allowed. Yet state control certainly remained; forms of intervention include laws regulating access to government information, media ownership, and regulating broadcasting content (Wyka 2005). These, however, should not confuse anyone because public-service broadcasting can easily be called state media and the commercial simply “foreign” broadcasting. Thus, the plurality of broadcasting in Hungary is a conglomerate of state (public), commercial, and local civil operators. A less fortunate side-effect is the concentration of media ownership and not its dispersal, a problem that seriously hampers democratic media programming (Baker 2007). Naturally, there are other factors influencing broadcasting, not the least of which are the colonization of the media market by foreign media groups. The effects of ownership are also felt in the content, forms, and structures of programming. Economic and political pressures are also an added side-effect of foreign control of air time. However, there is a much more serious aspect: the role and responsibility for the reproduction of stereotypes by the political, educational, and media elites because they control the majority of public discourses (van Dijk 1991, 1993).

MAJORITY AND MINORITY RELATIONS

One of the primary areas most visible in post-communist Hungary is its continually strained majority and minority relations. The over-politicized nature of relations between the major-

ity and the Roma minority has perhaps been one of the most serious differences in the way ethnic affairs are handled by post-socialist Hungarian governments. What especially signals this troubled relationship is the marginalization of the Roma, who are not considered to be part of the country's majority ethnic makeup either by the state administration or the population at large, and consequently do not have the means to participate in its cultural and media world. Following the general political trend in Europe, in Hungary the population that has been referred to as Gypsies (Hung. *cigány*) has now been renamed Roma, a term that has gained significance as the new politically correct ethnonym (Engebrigtsen 2007). This designation is questionable by many – both inside and outside that community – because many organizations are still referred to as Gypsy rather than Roma. As much ethnographic research has revealed, among themselves the Roma still use various earlier designations such as Sinti, Beás, Wlach, and Romungro. These terms recall historical periods when groups entered the Hungarian area of the Habsburg Empire during the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries as well as various tribal, ethnic, and occupational ethnonyms. At the moment, however, there is a terminological confusion especially because some of the minority political organizations themselves utilize Gypsy as their self-designation, a term that has increasingly gained a negative overtone among the populace at large.

Obviously, Hungary's half-million Gypsy/Roma citizens continue to be one of the most problematic social groups with rising unemployment, marginalization, and criminality (Kürti 2003, 2002, 2001). Crime, poverty, drug use, illicit trades, and prostitution are among the most obvious occupations that Roma men and women use to make ends meet in a society that rejects their integration. It must be stated that in the 1990 census only 142,683 individuals admitted having Gypsy/Roma identity, in contrast to the 1 million citizens that are Roma.

Since the early 1990s, various Hungarian governments have attempted to cope with discrimination against the Gypsies by identifying the most pressing tasks: the social, cultural, political, and economic elevation of the marginalized and poverty-ridden Gypsies of Hungary. However, as the 1998 local elections indicated, the Gypsy/Roma community has been experiencing a serious identity reassertion that may result in an increased recognition of Roma identity in the future. Important in this were the creation of the Foundation for Hungary's Gypsies (MCK), the Roma Research Institute, the Roma News Agency, the Gypsy Coordinating Council, the Gandhi Foundation, and the Foundation for Hungary's National and Ethnic Minorities (Tabajdi 1996; Galyas 2003).

Together with the founding of a host of other cultural associations, newspapers, and media programs, these achievements are only a drop in the bucket of majority and minority relations that remain antagonistic and highly charged. Attacks on Gypsies and hostile attitudes towards them have been rampant throughout the past decade, forcing many Roma families to migrate or alternately to remove themselves even more from the majority population, a sad progression of nationalist hatred and racist bigotry that will be hard to eliminate in the coming decades (Furmann 1997; Kürti 2003). Surely, programs

to eradicate such occurrences and to educate new Gypsy elites may be implemented at the national level. However (and this is equally important), unless general educational programs are created for both the schools (starting in grade schools and not just at the college level) and the general populations at the local level, it is most likely that Gypsies, and other refugees and migrant workers as well, will continue to face harsh treatment, racist rejection, and vengeful attacks.

No doubt, minority language broadcasting may be one of the most meaningful forms of symbiotic relationships between majority and minority citizens. This is especially so because nowadays watching television is an essential part of leisure activities for a large percentage of the population. However, Roma language programming, together with other minority broadcasting (for example, Slovak, Romanian, or German also exists with minimal airtime) is still rare, unlike such broadcasting in Welsh, Basque, or Irish (see Grin and Vaillancourt 1999). Out of the few successes, the glossy magazine *Amaro Drom*, the Duende Gypsy Theatre, and Radio C (the only Roma radio station) must be mentioned, all of which have survived past financial crises, rejection, and criticism on the part of majority citizens (Kerényi 2003).

All over the former Eastern Bloc, the media industry is experiencing both a sense of rejuvenation with a post-communist identity and the creation of a new management-sponsorship mentality. The media-music industry has managed with great deal of difficulty to lift itself up after the initial shock of the early 1990s all across the former Soviet bloc. The media industry is coupled with a more or less mediocre copy of the international pop music scene, with small but noisy groups adhering to specific genres and operating within the confines of their subculture (folk, satanic rock, nationalist, country, etc.).

In contrast to classical music, with its top position in the world in selling classical records worldwide, Hungarian pop culture contains ethnocentric and sexist elements. Music and media are fundamentally intertwined, producing images and messages that are wholly antithetical to the values of post-socialism, Europeanness, human rights, and civil society. New images available from television, cinema, and popular music are replete with negative and stereotyped portrayals of young men and women, whose number one goal in life is to “make it” regardless of the means and costs involved. For example, in a popular television singing contest called Mega Star, young men and women are lured into believing that there is an easy life to be had in the media industry. Young women are under pressure to live up to the majority heterosexual mentality by being fit, thin, and dressed like an overtly-eroticized Barbie™ doll. Young Roma men and women, to offer another example, are portrayed solely as fun-loving and carefree, and possessing expensive consumer goods, fashionable clothes, and money. In this wonderland-mentality, young Roma live in a joyous environment, drive cars, sing native folksongs, and perform fancy dances. In fact, several Roma men and women have been featured in the Mega Star programs. One of them (named Caramel) has become one of Hungary’s newest Roma celebrities. Needless to say, such an in-vitro existence has little to do with the plight of the Roma, a destitute, marginalized,

and jobless ethnic group that makes up seven to eight percent of the country's population living below the poverty line.

The Roma are not alone in this. Foreigners, such as Japanese tourists or Chinese migrants, are portrayed as living in their own world without any thought as to what the host society is all about. The Japanese are portrayed as rich but silly tourists or businessmen, as in the short-lived television comedy *Micuko*, for example. An episode titled "The World with a Slanted Eye" featured one of Hungary's top television personalities made up as an Asian-looking woman that spoke broken Hungarian and found herself in various phony situations. The Chinese are shown as living in a completely isolated secret ethnic subculture with strange customs, criminality, and questionable business practices. Similar misconceived programs are also present with regard to neighboring populations: Romanians, for instance, are continually referred to as lazy, dirty, and untrustworthy people, and Serbs do not fare any better. Since 9/11, there has also been a strong anti-Arab sentiment.

However, the most pressing problem of the new media industry in Hungary is undoubtedly the country's most numerous disenfranchised minority population, the Roma (Cunningham 2004). Films about the Roma are a special genre of their own, producing stereotyped images, stories, and characters. To be sure, Emir Kusturica's *Time of the Gypsies* was an instant international hit with amateur actors, many of whom were Gypsies, playing lead characters. In part this is the result of the often fascinating Balkan world music played by Goran Bregović. This was repeated in 1995 with another smash hit, *Underground*. However, Kusturica's film and Bregović's music were not a ready-made model for others to imitate – yet many directors in Hungary have been attempting this. *Tündérdomb* (Fairy Hill) was one such cinematic attempt. Directed by András Szőke in 2000, this rendering of Gypsy life utilizes the well-known television personality and comedian Sándor Fábry, who plays the local community's Gypsy leader. The non-Roma showman's caricature of a Gypsy is completely misplaced. The film offers glimpses of several characters' lives in a Gypsy village by revealing how they get by these days. However, the controversy resulted not only from the stereotyped imagery of Roma culture, but also from casting the showman Fábry in such a role. The utilization of non-Roma actors as Roma is of course not new; this tactic has been part of the entertainment business world for decades and Hollywood has a long record of using white European and American actors and actresses as ethnic characters. However, Fábry's appearance was more than problematic. In his weekly television comedy hour, he appears in the role of Vendel Lakatos, a smart-ass Roma wheeler-dealer that makes jokes about the Roma way of life. In one of his most distasteful acts, he proudly boasted that his daughter had met Saddam Hussein in the desert and performed fellatio on him. Even though he tries to play a Gypsy man, his aggressive jokes are not ironic self-stereotypes, but ethnocentric and racist stereotypes. For this reason alone, the film was immediately condemned by Roma activists.

Another recent feature film, *Dallas Pashamende*, directed by Róbert Pejó in 2004, is the story of a young man that returns to his village – actually a garbage dump site in the

Transylvanian part of Romania – to attend his father’s funeral. Originally the shooting started in Romania, but an outcry on the part of some Roma leaders caused it to change to a location to Hungary. In fact, Romanian officials attempted to stop the filming claiming that it was causing environmental damage. Political controversy aside, the film does not offer any new or worthy ideas about Gypsy life, even though it received an award at the Berlin Film Festival for its artistic merit. It is merely a rather mediocre portrayal of a Gypsy community, with the worn-out stereotypical images of alcoholism, fights between men and women, and young people wanting to break out but forced to live on the edge of society as petty thieves and criminals.

In contrast to this kind of filmmaking, there are dissenting views. One especially deserves attention: Kriszta Bódis’ 2004 documentary *Amari Kris* (Our Judgment), a 39-minute film about a collective judiciary custom among the Roma. In the film we meet several families engaged in an imbroglio over controversial matters. It masterfully introduces the viewer to the survival tactics of a tribal tradition in the twenty-first century. At the end of 2004, the international jury of the Dialect Film Festival in Budapest awarded a special prize to the filmmaker for an authentic candid look at a traditional Roma family court. Despite the fact that such a cinematic study is very rare even among documentary filmmakers, it was doomed to fail. While Roma activists and artists hailed the documentary, this time objections came from ethnographers. Their unsympathetic criticism identified two problems: one had to do with the “directed” nature of the documentary, and the other concerned the artistic rendering of such a family court that does not, according to them, really exist anymore among the Roma. The filmmaker and director, Kriszta Bódis, vehemently denied these accusations and was adamant about releasing the film for the general public (interview on the official internet site of the Hungarian film association, <http://www.magyarfilm.hu>, accessed on 30 May 2007). The objections, however, had done their damage: the film was not shown at the annual Hungarian film festival, and was consequently never released.

This cannot be said about Árpád Bogdán, a young Roma film director whose first feature film *Boldog új élet* (A Happy New Life, 2007) was introduced at the annual Hungarian film festival in 2007. This bleak autobiographical film concerns a young Roma man that, after leaving the state orphanage, tries to integrate into society. However, he is rejected both by the majority and by his ethnic kin. Despite its moody and bleak portrayal of Roma life in Hungary, the film received critical acclaim by the jury, but its subtext of Roma life was just too close to home to majority viewers, which is one reason that it basically disappeared from the theatres.

Such films are rare, and opportunities for Roma to enter the media are limited. The Roma Media Center has already raised serious concern about the lack of educated Roma professionals working in the media. There are few Roma individuals employed in radio and television, a situation exacerbated by the fact that Roma youth – thanks to divisive and discriminatory schooling in Hungary – do not have the chance to enter higher education

institutions and consequently lack the opportunities to receive professional training. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that stations along the line of Radio C (the only Roma radio station in Hungary) or various internet sites be set up for and by the Roma themselves. When one commercial presentation featured a young Roma man dressed as Santa Claus in 2002, many feared that this would cause a backlash and create more ethnic stereotypes. On the contrary, the viewers asked expressed their agreement that such advertisements create a more balanced and positive environment for cultural dialogue to take place between majority and minority viewers (Sümeği 2007). Following this, a model from the BBC was utilized in order to create a “diversity database,” a list of professionals of Roma origin that could be used as experts in various media programs. The actual result of these developments will be a litmus test of how well media democracy is progressing in Hungary in the future.

STEREOTYPES AND ANTI-ROMA IMAGES: *THE BIG ROMA WEDDING*

Despite the enormous changes in ownership, music and media are fundamentally intertwined, producing images and messages that are wholly antithetical to the values of Europeaness because ethnic and gender stereotypes are rampant in most former Soviet bloc countries (Deltscheva 2004; Ibrischeva 2006; Rajacic 2007). Films about the Roma are a special genre on its own, producing stereotyped images, stories, and characters.

Popular stereotypes of the Roma – a preference for the easy life, disdain for work, living as criminals and as prostitutes, and an almost insane love of dancing and music – continual pervade popular media as well as Hungarian society as a whole (Pogány 2004; Ringold 2004). This is in stark contrast to the real-life struggle of the Roma across the European continent following the fall of the Berlin Wall (Guy 2001; Guy, Uherek, and Winerova 2004). In Hungary, Roma artists and singers have been in the limelight occasionally and with some trepidation, a fact exacerbated by the migration of some Roma families to Canada, Brussels, and the Nordic countries during the 1990s. These flights were shown on national television: majority viewers, however, looked at the Roma with disdain and with a certain element of sarcasm. Most claimed that those Roma that did not like to work and did not wish to live in Hungary were actually looking for an adventure and a way out of the chaotic and hard life Hungarians are experiencing these days.

In this milieu, television programs about the Roma are interpreted by majority viewers as no more than an extended joke on their lifestyles. Jokes on the Gypsies – who actually often outsmart their Gajo (non-Gypsy) counterparts, but nevertheless are presented as lazy and living off the fortunes of non-Gypsies – have been known since the nineteenth century in Hungary, when they first appeared in mass publications, journals, and caricatures. Gypsy stereotypes are rampant in bawdy and competitive situations in which the listeners already know that the Gypsy hero will be foolish in trying to outsmart his rivals. Obviously, such

rivalries between ethnic groups are not new: in Russian jokes the Chukchi are ascribed such qualities; similarly, in Canada the Newfies, in Romania the Oltenians, and in the US the Irish, Jews, and Poles are laughed at by majority viewers (Boskin and Dorinson 1987; Davies 1990). This should not, however, mean that ethnic stereotypes embedded in ethnic jokes should be elevated into nighttime television programs. Democratic television should have as its slogan the idea that not everything that is for sale should be sold. Yet this seems not to be the driving principle of consumerist television, a case well illustrated by a top-ranking show called *The Big Roma Wedding*.

Bazi nagy roma lagzi (The Big Roma Wedding, BRW) is a prime example of moronic mockumentary similar to the *Borat* phenomenon. Showing a group of middle-aged rock musicians parading as petty Roma criminals in an urban slum, BRW is an extended stereotypical joke on Roma characters. The show is the brainchild of the group Irigy Hónaljmirigy (or IHM for short; roughly translated, 'Jealous Axillary Gland'), a band that was formed during the jubilant year 1990. In BRW, the musicians-cum-Gypsies are shown to be living on the edges of society, and their only occupation is how to make ends meet every day. As wheeler-dealers, they are not even afraid to do business with the Ukrainian mafia. The rock group that provided the original story and the music used rap music for most of the scenes. In one, a young pregnant Roma girl is featured with the lyrics: "Hey, black chick, there's a problem now, but for us this is not rare, the presence of the hymen is very rare." This slur obviously refers to the very high rate of juvenile pregnancies among the Roma and implies a sexual code assumed by society at large.²

Despite, or perhaps because of, this, BRW was an instant hit on Hungarian prime-time television when it was aired by the independent TV2 on 30 March 2003. According to AGB Hungary, an independent media polling firm, the program did manage to reach the most important primetime audience (the 18- to 49-year-old bracket), out of whom almost three million watched the program. This number is about fifty-seven percent of the entire primetime audience in Hungary on any given night!

National record aside, BRW instantly resulted in heated controversy because some Roma groups opted for open conflict by organizing demonstrations outside the television station's building. Other Roma organizations and civil rights groups voiced their objection to the decision to create an ethnically debasing stereotyped program. Aladár Horváth, a well-known critic of the media and a leader of the Gypsy civil rights movement in Hungary, summarized his views that "the Gypsies in *The Big Roma Wedding* are portrayed as people that steal, lie, beat up their women, do not use contraceptives, eat crows, and are uneducated because they do not finish grade school."

The producers of the show tried to play it safe to begin with: they used one of Hungary's best-known Roma faces, the singer Győző Gáspár. As the controversy unfolded, Győzike

² The group's homepage is <http://www.mirigy.hu/> and the fan site is: <http://irigyhonaljmirigy.fan-site.hu/>. However, *The Big Roma Wedding* material cannot be located on any of the sites. Nonetheless, several clips have been circulated on YouTube in the past.

(his nickname, roughly translated as ‘Vic’) was attacked by both the critics as well as Roma leaders. “Why should I have rejected this offer to play myself in BRW? I am a performer whose mission is to entertain people. That is my vocation,” he objected. Gáspár was the lead-singer of the former Roma group Romantic. When egged on by a reporter about whether he had any idea about the negative stereotypes in BRW, he said:

I didn't have the faintest idea about what I was supposed to do. They called me and said that there was a role for me in a parody about a Roma wedding. I trusted the members of this rock group, I did not want to ask them: do you want to portray Gypsies in this program? I do not think that this is a bad portrayal at all. It is a story about a fictional Roma family that does not feed prejudice.

Obviously, Gáspár does not hold the view that media content may influence viewers and could influence their choices as well as cultural orientations, an aspect that is not that different from the views of average US viewers (Prior 2007). Moreover he thinks he has the right to speak like this: in 2005 he was man of the year for RTL Klub, Hungary's other main private television station. This station created the *Győzike Show*, a one-hour weekly comedy program showing Gáspár and his entire family leisurely conducting its business as always. Making him a national star and a rich man, as well as a hero of scandalous actions and statements, the show portrays the media world in which a few Roma have found a safe haven but at the same time their language and behavior reveal many stereotypical images associated by the majority non-Roma with Roma life.³ The Gáspár home is equipped with several cameras that follow them – day and night – recording their actions and conversations. Győzike is the real head of the family, who makes decisions even if he has to fight and yell constantly, as he does most of the time. As expected, his wife and two daughters fight back equally viciously. This reality-like program highlights many of the family brawls that often spill out into public and continue unabridged throughout the streets, the supermarket, or in the family car. The ostentatious living-style, the feeding frenzy of the girls, and the phony world of show business are all elements that provide stereotypical images about how this one Roma family manages on a daily basis.

Many of Hungary's Roma activists do not feel that this type of elevated and phony lifestyle provides a positive image of what Gypsy life is really about in Hungary. János Daróczy, producer of the Roma Magazine for national television, has sounded an alarm-bell by saying: “Anyone in show-business knows that every single shot is carefully designed to achieve the most. I must send a message to everybody: we, the Roma, are not like that.” (<http://www.romapage.hu>, 6 January 2006). This is in stark opposition to the fan club that has developed around Győzike, which is also similar to *Borat*.⁴

Interestingly, the rock music group that created the entire program did not see the

³ Much of the information about Gáspár rise to fame can be found on the homepage: <http://www2.jump.tv.com/se0/gyozike/gyozike.htm>.

⁴ There is a *Borat* fan club in Hungary; see <http://jagshemash.blogter.hu/>.

reason for such objections. Tamás Sípos, the lead-singer of IHM, said that he was surprised by the public outcry against their program and cited the enormous popularity of the show. In addition, he countered charges by claiming that “anyone that knows us should know that we were not led by any racist or anti-assimilation ideas. Our film parody is nothing else than a funny mirror of a few extremist individuals among us.” On 11 April 2003, Hungary’s National Radio and Television Commission (ORTT) made a landmark decision: channel TV2 was penalized for airing BRW (Ocskó 2003). It paid a heavy price: it was forced to shut down for 30 minutes during primetime. The commission specifically stated:

The program portrayed the Roma minority negatively with ethnic characteristics such as criminality, prostitution, drug abuse, and overt sexuality. Such programming is especially bad because it will contribute to rekindling existing stereotypes and legitimizing discrimination against the Roma by members of the majority society.

What complicates the picture of stereotyping is the fact that under the heading of multiculturalism ethnic stereotyping becomes an accepted standard, often within the framework of reality-like TV programs (Borat, BRW, and the Győzike Show, for instance). Here, various kinds of stereotypes are used, including those self-stereotypes that are usually formed from characteristics and attributes that are accepted in the ethnic community. There are also stereotypes that usually embody negative characteristics and are not desirable and less acceptable in the ethnic community. In the case of BRW, audiences knew that they were watching a comedy, and could laugh at the old stereotypical jokes; in the case of the Győzike Show, they are tantalized by the more-than-real closeness to a Roma family whose star status cannot be questioned. They are real, and they are accepted – some Roma/Gypsy viewers also take pleasure in such a cynical portrayal of their ethnic community. Clearly, media portrayals of Gypsy artists and entertainers are nothing new, but their elevation to prime-time television where millions can watch them behave and act like circus animals is certainly the product of the globalized multicultural entertainment network culture that has emerged in Hungary during the past decade.

What the Győzike Show and BRW reveal is that nowadays the Roma in Hungary, just like those elsewhere in Europe, have to face complex negotiations in positioning themselves in relation to the altered sense of Roma identity as well as to their experiences as citizens of a newly democratic nation-state. In this process of negotiation, the Roma are becoming aware that the eternal and pre-given community they imagined is just an imagined and socially invented community. The constant movement between cultural worlds – being distant from what is seen on the television, being part of another life experience in Europe, but still being connected to their own dispossessed world – contributes to this reflection process across cultural spaces. In this process, they understand television as the best place to recover their ideal image of Gypsy identity, but at the same time they know very well that this idealization is rooted in a past that has gone, or perhaps was never there. As a result, the sense of synchronization with events in Hungary through television has contributed

to an alienated sense of being. Through their cultural detachment, Roma become aware of the constructed nature of Hungarian realities, to which majority and minority television channels contribute a great deal.

As several earlier studies suggest, there are several media issues around which stereotypes are created: the threat to culture (the minority are too different and do not want to conform), and aggressive and criminal ethnic minorities that take away national wealth and live off society (Van Dijk 1991, 1993). The important question to ask is how media stereotypes correspond to social reality. Three viewpoints could be compared:

1. Stereotypes have no connections with reality, but they do help differentiate one's own group in a positive way and justify activities towards out-group members.
2. Stereotypes have some truthful connections with reality. The problem lies in the generalization of this truthful background to all group members.
3. Stereotypes can create reality. Based on mechanisms of self-fulfilling prophecies, stereotypes can impose a definite style of behavior on group members.

As scholars have suggested, the impact of such stereotyping can be countered in the media by creating intercultural dialogues based on the following discursive strategies:

- Individualization of issues and values. This may prompt audiences to identify stereotypes not with members of the ethnic community, but solely with the individual actor(s), so that categorization of the entire ethnic group loses its significance (Ashmore, Jussim, and Wilder 2001).
- Placing members belonging to different groups in groups that can work as though they belong to the same group (Gaertner et al. 1990). This was actually achieved once in Hungarian television in 2005, when an advertisement featured a Roma Santa Claus.
- Counter-typization may serve to present members of other groups with characteristics that contradict stereotypical expectations and negative characterization.
- Encouraging cooperation in order to acquire common goals (excluding accentuation of ethnic identity) may be one of the most effective mechanisms for fostering social cohesion. Another possibility for integration is stressing different group loyalties, but emphasizing that these groups have some common redeeming characteristics. Finally, self-stereotypes can be challenged by self-irony and by maintaining a balance of different opinions. These may be attempts by both institutions concerned and individuals that subvert or counter such stereotypical programs.

CONCLUSIONS

East-Central Europe is rich in its diversity and variety of cultures, religions, ethnic groups, and languages. Film and television broadcasting in this region was state controlled for many decades. After 1990, the emergence of satellite broadcasting in addition to other transnational information and communication technologies created a melting pot of cultures in

the region. Such broadcasting can potentially contribute to attempts at regional unification and cross-border communication with great political and economic benefits for the countries and cultures involved. However, along with this, there is a threat of uniformisation of culture, intolerance of differences and ultimate loss of many of the cultural practices unique to this part of the world. East-Central Europe, for instance, consists of dozens of different nationalities, and of religious denominations including Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish, and many other newly imported practices and beliefs that cut across state, national, and cultural borders. Similarly, national reawakening and ethnic rejuvenation together with migrations in the past two decades have led to a situation in which ethnic, national, religious, and linguistic affiliations are more visible today than ever before. Parallel with these developments, the emergence of new forms of media and their roles have been justifiably questioned by many scholars. It is obvious that these political developments may contribute to cultural dialogue and the preservation of cultural identities, but they may also become the source of conflicts within and outside the countries. The roles of broadcasters in celebrating differences, cultural diversity, and plurality as well as in reducing ethnic conflicts and prejudices are of paramount importance. Yet, quite often, they play the opposite role in whipping up passions, increasing intolerance, and creating distasteful ethnic stereotypes. Together with this, media concentration of ownership has prompted some scholars to refer to the Berlusconiization of East European media (Wyka 2007).

This study has focused on ethnic stereotypes by highlighting aspects of Hungarian popular culture in the past decade. Specific, it draws attention to the stubborn majority-nationalist value system operating in the media and how the largest minority in Hungary, the Roma, are denied equal access to public media participation. This unevenness is part of the larger picture: the majority imagination and cultural policy reproduced by the existing media hierarchy is based on (and has been for some time now) a general nationalist orientation with elements of racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and ethnic stereotypes. However, I also show how new artists attempt to carve out their own space in cultural institutions, media forms, and cultural endeavors to counter dominant policies and practices leading to a more balanced multicultural understanding and social cohesion.

The Big Roma Wedding, as analyzed here, is clearly no match for the global success of *Borat*, nor could it ever achieve a scandalous elevation into the international limelight. At the same time, and in a much more modest way, the number of viewers in Hungary makes this film a good candidate to be placed in the hall of shame in denigrating a minority group. However, the public outcry and the cultural dialogue that followed reveal that democracy is firmly implemented and that the media are not all that powerful.

There cannot be any doubt that today's transnational and multicultural media environment increases choices and provides opportunities for cultural expression and dialogue, which facilitates the flow of information at the global level. However, during the last decade we have also witnessed a concentration of ownership and a limitation of access and

content sources. At the same time, a plethora of analyses have shown that media practices and content are far from what is desired. That is, in contrast to their admitted principles, they are marginally democratic, balanced, and civil (Wal 2002).

In fact, as several studies have demonstrated, the decade of changes in the media after the collapse of the communist system in East-Central Europe has brought little democratization to traditional broadcasting. Several structural tendencies in these countries have been identified that create an almost unmanageable obstacle to the development of a more democratic media system in the region (Farkas 1997). The imitative tendencies may be grouped into two broader groups: (1) those imitating the external environment, primarily Western Europe and the US, including Italianization, denationalization and privatization, commercialization, and inter- or trans-nationalization, and (2) those “imitating the past”; that is, the former system of state socialism with renationalization, and nationalistic and religious exclusivism. Consequently, the developments in these countries have led to the establishment of a kind of “political capitalism” and created a system of “paternalist commercialism” in the media, with the state (government) often acting as both a powerful political and economic actor (Splichal 2000).

I wish to argue here that a centralized top-down policy is not necessarily useful for combating internal and external stereotypes because it is often based on a very existential and essentialized view of social hierarchy and nationhood. By looking at Hungarian film and television, it becomes fairly obvious that national images are produced by the citizens from below as well as the state through the national audiovisual paradigm. This essentializing conception of identity and difference is based on an ethnocentrically perceived homogeneous cultural map in which diversity and heterogeneity are not welcome. If it is, then it is through obvious pre-modern and populist stereotypes inherited from a bygone romantic era and annals of folklore studies. Old myths are revamped through reality TV-like programming to offer entertainment to majority viewers to whom the Roma, the Jew, or the foreigner is just a comic figure that is always the butt of jokes. It is not surprising then that popular culture in contemporary Hungary continually remakes cultural and national identity, which explicitly legitimates the uneven majority and minority relations of power in society (see, for instance, Gross 2002).

A caveat is in order. Clearly, this new anti-Roma attitude did not come to Hungary alone, nor did it only affect the former Soviet bloc countries. The tremendous worldwide movement of capital and the transnational flow of ideas and cultural objects obviously knows no borders. In 2000, the Roma gained international attention when they demonstrated outside the Czech Embassy in London against racism and discrimination against the Roma in the Czech Republic (Culik 2000). Yet it needs to be spelled out how these global changes influenced local developments and how, in return, towns, regions, and social groups experienced these or reacted to them. Specifically, it is also important to recognize that what is new in the Hungarian setting may not be completely new in Western European or North American contexts. Still, the specific similarities or differences need to be addressed in a

coherent scholarly fashion. In this rather unsystematic examination of the transformation of formerly communist Hungary into a democratic polity and market economy, I have shown how new institutions have been formed and how older ones were transformed. At the same time, I point to ways in which Hungarians have used their knowledge, culture, and community resources to resist political and economic change. Hungarian society is new in many ways, but it is faithful to its traditional former self in other ways.

Should public broadcasters pay more attention to ratings, even if this will inevitably entail a lowering of quality? Or should they remain loyal to what they have been doing all along, focusing on their core business of quality programming, even if this means that their audience is likely to become smaller in the years ahead? The issue of ratings versus quality continues to haunt public broadcasting as an unresolved dilemma all over the world. As Meijer (2005) suggests, public broadcasters can better achieve their objectives of quality programming by supplying good information and involving people in a democratic culture by paying careful attention to their audiences and also considering “impact” as a hallmark of public quality programming. The viewer-as-enjoyer should be taken just as seriously as the informed citizen and consumer. Some scholars view all this juxtaposition as a healthy sign of “glocalization” (Robertson 1995; Fiske 1997; Kürti and Langman 1997). Or, as Castell (2008: 90) put it more recently: “The current media system is local and global at the same time.” Yet, recent developments ostensibly reveal that such early optimism was not warranted (certainly not in the world of media) and should be critically analyzed in a specific setting regarding its meanings. The current technological divide and the unilinear power structures of media (and media practices) seriously questions capitalistic culture and multiculturalism as a symbiotic yet heightened consumer culture.

To be sure, media stereotypes of the Roma paraded as a unique or different cultural group under the umbrella of multiculturalism are not unique to Hungary alone. This can be easily witnessed by the recent objection of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO), an interest group that has circulated a plea for a more balanced and objective picture of the Roma (Ivanov 2006). What ignited this protest was the fact that at its plenary session in 2006 the European Parliament adopted a final report endorsing the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union. Two reports were approved dealing with the situation of both accession countries with regard to political and economic criteria. The reports draw attention to thematic areas in which continued efforts by the two countries are still required to improve standards. The concern of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) lies in the possibility that this accession is overshadowed by statements made against Roma communities. Geoffrey Van Orden, the European People’s Party MP, has stated that the EP:

recognises the many steps that have been taken to integrate the Roma and calls for even greater concerted efforts to improve their linguistic skills, to give them better access to higher education, vocational training and employment and to provide them with better healthcare and family planning, whilst

encouraging them to do all that they can to adapt to the wider society and to take advantage of opportunities made available to them. (Ivanov 2006)

What has outraged Roma civil leaders is the statement by Van Orden suggesting that the Roma themselves may be responsible for the attitudes of discrimination and social exclusion they face. For Ivanov, “This statement intimates that Roma face discrimination because their culture does not belong to the ‘wider society’ and thus that they are themselves guilty for facing discrimination and social exclusion” (Ivanov 2006). Implied in the quotation is the belief that Roma culture is incompatible with and disparate from European democratic principles and values, and that the Roma have to renounce their own culture in order to be “accepted” by the majority society. This statement thus also insinuates that the only way to avoid discrimination is not to resist assimilation into the majority society. The statement, moreover, denies the existence of multicultural values that rely on the conditions of mutual understanding and sound dialogue between equal partners, an idea that is favored by many minority leaders and not only the Roma. In essence, the Roma are reduced to the level of second-class citizens that are not entitled to choose for themselves. Such media views are testimonies that racism and segregation are the biggest obstacles to integration. It is alarming that such offensive statements against the Roma have persisted throughout the monitoring process of the accession countries. As one researcher comments, this problem is based on the following:

The formats and contents of TV programmes, films and shows have become increasingly homogeneous. The traditional function of television, to inform, has been twisted and has led to a “tabloidization of news” and infotainment. The competitive pressure has also changed the position of public service broadcasters and initiated a process of convergence of the public and the commercial systems, in particular with respect to their programming output. (Nenova 2007: 8)

Obviously, production companies and owners of media conglomerates have interpreted diversity and openness wrongly: they increased the number of channels and programs, but not the actual diversity of content (Arino 2004; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Wyka 2007). One of the main lines of action may be taken from UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, which clearly stresses the importance of encouraging the production, safeguarding, and dissemination of diversified content in the media and global information networks. To this end, it is paramount to promote the role of broadcasting in the development of quality audiovisual productions, in particular by fostering the establishment of cooperative mechanisms to facilitate their distribution.

Similarly, the Council of Europe, in its 2005 Kyiv Resolution No. 2 on Cultural Diversity and Media Pluralism in Times of Globalization, agreed on basic principles how the media should serve cultural diversity and media pluralism. In particular, ministers agreed “to maintain and promote cultural and linguistic diversity in the media, also in the interest of intercultural dialogue, paying particular attention to the interests of persons

belonging to minority groups and to minority community media.” This is one of the reasons why Hallin and Mancini’s typology (2004) cannot easily accommodate the present media system in Hungary or in fact those in the former Soviet bloc countries. On the one hand, it seems to operate as a pluralist one with the presence of many private channels and internet providers offering diversity and possibilities for cultural dialogue. On the other hand, there is still the state as a major stakeholder in the media with tight control of programming and content. An added difficulty is the presence of independent foreign corporations, which are also pushing their own agenda onto consumers by importing series, soap operas, and game shows. In contrast, truly liberal, concerned, and socially conscious media operators are still few and far between. There is undoubtedly a need for specific policies that would create an environment for majority and minority cultural dialogue in media programming, one in which national and ethnic concerns will be discussed with all the parties involved, not as token gestures for either majority or minority viewers, but as equal participants in the media with access to those controlling mechanisms where decisions are really made. Naturally, this is not a problem that can be solved single-handedly by Hungary alone. As the Roma rights activists Nicolae Gheorghe and Thomas Acton (1999) claim:

There is no substitute for having human rights everywhere; this is the logic of seeking to define Gypsies as a transnational rather than a national minority. It is not so much that the rights of ethnic minorities must be protected, as that ethnic majorities must be in themselves deconstructed.

Clearly, the time is ripe to create a healthier working atmosphere in central and Eastern European countries that claim to possess democratic political and media systems (Kymlicka 1995; Gross 2004). This is especially true in cases in which inter-ethnic slurs, xenophobic extreme nationalistic rhetoric, and even outright hostilities pervade everyday life. Events in early 2009 in Hungary – burning of homes or even revenge-type attacks on Roma – sadly illustrate that media stereotypes may have deep social and psychological roots.⁵

It goes without saying that scholars may use *Borat* to their own ends by deploying clips to highlight ethnic and cross-cultural dilemmas facing not only tourists and politicians, but scholars as well. Employing shop-worn images of poverty-stricken Gypsies, and utilizing sexist jokes or drab East European village scenery, *Borat* could profitably be screened in tandem with other feature films, documentaries, or ethnographic films from the same regions to highlight differences and the ways in which the culture industry knowingly perpetuates scenes and ploys to churn out laughter from the audience. *Borat* is undeniably funny at times thanks to its reliance on age-old ethnic clichés and half-truths. This tactic, too,

⁵ In 2008, the teacher Lajos Szögi was clubbed to death by furious family members when his car accidentally struck and injured a Roma girl. Following this event, several attacks on Roma property and families have been registered across the country. Burning of homes and a few “revenge killings” made national headlines in early 2009.

should be carefully explored and analyzed with viewers. Nonetheless, it remains a product of its time, no more hilarious than Peter Sellers in *The Party* (1968), *National Lampoon's Vacation* (1983) or its sequel *European Vacation* (1985), or, for that matter, Lt. Frank Drebin in the *Naked Gun* (1988), a hilarious comedy that at times equals if not altogether surpasses Inspector Clouseau. These films suggest that self-irony and self-stereotypes may after all offer more useful contexts for cultural critique than outright mockery. This, finally, may be *Borat's* inadvertent yet useful lesson to those willing to laugh through the narrative's sexist, elitist mise-en-scène. Its national Hungarian variants, as I have discussed above, are unfortunately cheap imitations and should be viewed as such.

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POLITIKA DRUGAČNOSTI.
STEREOTIPI V MADŽARSKIH MEDIJIH

Analiza razkriva dinamiko medijske kulture na Madžarskem, ki se je leta 2004 priključila Evropski uniji. Težava medijske predstavitve podob manjšin nastane, ko medijski producenti želijo, da imajo oddaje določen učinek, dejansko pa te ustvarijo drugačne učinke. Ta problem je največji, ko gre za stereotipne podobe, ki jih ima večina o ciganski/romski manjšini. Kar zadeva post-socialistična občila na Madžarskem, je jasno, da "evropeizacija" neogibno vključuje tudi podomačitev priporočil EU. Vendar skupaj s pogajanji med neoliberalnimi vrednotami in temi priporočili različni lokalni porabniki spreminjajo Evropo tako, kakor Evrope spreminja nje. Medijske študije v času po socializmu in po širivi EU osvetljujejo načine, kako so posamezniki ne le opremljeni s pravnimi kompetencami, dolžnostmi in pravicami (ali njihovo odsotnostjo), ki jim jih podeljujejo država ali medijski imperiji, temveč tudi s posebnimi statusi, avtoritetami in ugledom, ki jih prinaša medijsko tržišče. Poleg tega sta medijska produkcija in poraba prizorišče, na katerem se spopadajo in sklepajo zarote, interesi večine-manjšine, ideologije, prakse tržišča, države in EU. Na teh presečiščih ustvarjalci, državni uradniki, politiki in tudi porabniki preoblikujejo in razširjajo identitete, vrednote in pomene, da bi ustvarili politične in kulturne identitete.

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