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Love to Hate: National Celebrity and Racial Intimacy on Reality TV in the New Europe

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Abstract

This essay examines the love–hate relationship—overt hatred and secret love—that surrounds reality shows about Roma and other racialized celebrities in postsocialist New European nations. Taking the case study of the wildly popular yet universally despised Hungarian *Gyõzike* show and its national reception, it argues that the aversion to the cultural quality represented by reality TV and the aversion to the ethnoracial quality represented by the Roma and other minorities are thoroughly intertwined. Reality television has disclosed the unspoken role assigned to racial minorities to mark the whiteness of East European nations, a crucial but hardly discussed aspect of belonging to Europe. This study also demonstrates that understanding the role played by reality TV under the particular conditions of postsocialist nationalisms and media globalization requires expanding the focus of reality TV scholarship on post-welfare neoliberalism.

Keywords

postsocialism, The New Europe, reality TV, celebrity, race, Roma, nationalism, family

Television Entertainment and East European Racial Exceptionalism

On August 26, 2009, Madonna made a concert stop in Bucharest on her "Sticky and Sweet" tour. She performed with the Russian band Kolpakov Trio, made up of one

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Jewish and two Romani musicians. To her detriment, Madonna decided to open the concert by speaking out against the mistreatment of the Roma and other minorities in the postsocialist region. "It has been brought to my attention that there is a lot of discrimination against Romanies and Gypsies in general in Eastern Europe. . . . It made me feel very sad. . . . We don't believe in discrimination. We believe in freedom and equal rights for everyone." She was jeered by the majority of the 60,000 people in the audience, who only settled down once she started singing.

Even the brief media reports, which quickly made their way around the world, noted the arrogance and condescension of Madonna's ill-advised comments. She had clearly overestimated the political power invested in her as a pop star when she assumed that her watered-down message from the democratic West about universal freedom and equality would resonate in the notoriously complex situation of Eastern European Roma, of which she was admittedly ignorant. The intensity of the audience's reaction was no doubt due to the local scepticism about the political power of media celebrity. But the event also sheds light on the regionally and nationally specific position of racialized media stars. However awkwardly, Madonna treaded on a minefield when she closed the gap between the "lazy, poor, criminal" Roma minority and the Roma pop star—two figures that she perceived to be simultaneously embodied by the Kolpakov Trio.

While the ordinary Roma is a sadly familiar victim of abuse and exclusion, the Roma media star is a new phenomenon, who has transformed the figure of the traditional Roma musical entertainer from tolerated exception into admired, albeit ambiguous, celebrity. Madonna was, of course, not aware of the extent to which the coherence of Romanian nationalism depends on keeping the two figures distinct. For the audience, the band on stage stood only for the exception and erased the poor minority from sight. Madonna's projection of the one onto the other created an intolerable hybrid, a blurry image, which provoked a strong emotional response. The audience's sense of cognitive dissonance and subsequent indignation must have also been enhanced by the fact that the Kolpakov Trio were likely perceived as foreign (Russian), that is, at an even farther remove from the figure of the poor, criminal Romanian Gypsy. Madonna did not know that despite being designated by the European Union as the "European minority," the Roma do not constitute a universal and homogeneous ethnicity. While they are despised and persecuted everywhere, they perform crucial roles in sustaining class and racial divides within each national community. In Romania, which has one of the largest and most deprived Roma minorities,[1] a political campaign is continually underway to distinguish "Romanian" from "Roma" or "Romani" lest "real Romanians" are mistaken for Gypies abroad. Most recently, in March 2009, Intact Media Group launched a campaign in its daily paper, *Jurnalul National* ("The National Journal") to implement legislation forbidding Gypsies from identifying themselves as "Roma" abroad (Antoniu 2009).[2]

The minefield around the ethnoracial contours of East European nations into which Madonna stepped has been marked out even more dramatically by reality television, the main venue for the recent rise of racialized celebrities. Reality formats have proven

particularly successful in the rapidly changing, cash-strapped, and entertainment-starved Eastern European marketplace. By virtue of being hybrid platforms with a globally shared blueprint formula available for local appropriation, reality formats have been argued to trigger a rearticulation of national identities worldwide (Stetka 2009; Turner 2005; Waisbord 2004; Aslama and Pantti 2007; Frau-Meigs 2006; Dhoest 2004). In the postsocialist region, this new and unexpected mirror of national self-recognition has produced a Janus-faced image: it has both confirmed and unraveled national narratives and self-definitions (see Volcic, forthcoming).

Shows about Roma stars have ignited particularly heated public discussion about what the changing postsocialist nation is and should be because they forced into articulation the unspoken racial and class boundaries that have sustained national narratives of cultural and ethnic coherence and homogeneity. Media celebrity only recently emerged in the postsocialist region. Media entertainment itself is regarded as more distinct from and certainly inferior to the public sphere of politics and high culture than it is in the United States and Western Europe. I argue that it is no coincidence that the love–hate relationship of the public with reality television—secret love and overt hatred—crystallizes around shows about Roma and other racialized celebrities. The aversion to the cultural quality represented by reality TV and the aversion to the ethnoracial quality represented by the Roma and other minorities are thoroughly intertwined. This mutual determination has been recently brought to the surface in the course of radical shifts in the class structures of postsocialist societies. The majority of the Roma population, hard hit by the collapse of socialist industries and subjected to racial discrimination, have slid into an underclass position since the end of socialism. The formation of this racialized underclass has been complemented, however, by the rise into the middle class of some upwardly mobile Roma, many of them entertainers (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006, 1–8). Roma celebrities on reality docushows have visualized and brought into question the normalized whiteness of the postsocialist nation.

Eastern European nationalisms have received ample treatment in the social sciences. While the Ottoman and Habsburg empires ruled over a melting pot of ethnicities across shifting national borders, the role played by racial distinctions in national identification has been downplayed by historians much like it has been rendered irrelevant in national narratives themselves. In these narratives, "race" is generally occluded by "ethnicity," a term used almost synonymously with "nationality" with reference to linguistic and cultural identity markers. While these identity markers are understood to be as powerful as genetic codes, "race" itself is not part of the vocabulary of nationalism. It has a hidden trajectory in Eastern Europe because the region's nations see themselves as outside of colonial processes and thus exempt from postdecolonization struggles with racial mixing and prejudice. As a result, Eastern Europe may be the only, or last, region on earth where whiteness is seen as morally transparent—its alleged innocence preserved by a claim of exception to the history of imperialism.[3]

This racial exceptionalism, the East's function as an unapologetic reserve for unbridled—mostly unconscious—white supremacism, serves as a proof of Europeanness,

a way to disavow the colonial hierarchy between Western and Eastern Europe and to make up for the region's long-standing economic and political inferiority. While the kinship ties that guarantee national bonds in the East are officially understood to be the result of shared languages and cultures, the implied cohesiveness and hegemony of these cultural nationalisms (Leerssen 2006) in fact rests on a racial agenda shrouded in the invisibility of whiteness. The organicity and ethical transparency of shared "cultural" values is guaranteed by the unspoken but taken-for-granted superiority of whiteness. The result is the contradiction that whiteness as a moral category—itself a product of imperialism and racism—provides immunity to charges of imperialism and racism. Until recently, even the Roma—the largest visible minority—have been persistently categorized in ethnic, rather than racial, terms. In socialist states' strategies, this was clearly not to foreground the constructedness of ethnicity and the hybridity of the Roma but to disavow the violence of racism.[4]

The postsocialist opening of national borders and media to the flow of diverse images, ideas, and people has begun to burst the bubble of racial exceptionalism. The illusion of white nationhood is under attack by migration from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East as well as tourism and other people flows from all directions. The post-Wall opening of the borders and the staggered inclusion of ten postsocialist states in the European Union in the mid-2000s triggered a well-documented migration of people within Europe as well. The core EU countries' retreat behind the walls of Fortress Europe from the flood of labor-seekers, migrants, and exiles from the East confronted Easterners with their own effective second-class status and racialization—the realization that in the eyes of the West, they have never been better than, or even different from, the Roma.

Reality television, in particular, has disclosed the unspoken role assigned to the Roma to mark the whiteness of nations from the inside and that assigned to other, "foreign" racial minorities to safeguard it from the outside. In the following, I show how celebrity reality TV has exploded these national racial regimes. I begin with the methodological difficulties that confront a joint discussion of race and popular postsocialist reality TV. Then I contextualize the racial and class discourses that circulate within and around the rise of Roma celebrity through an analysis of the wildly popular Hungarian *Győzike* show and its national reception. Finally, I discuss the recent appearance of Black African celebrities on reality television and the distinct racial positions they occupy in relation to the Roma and to the white moral majority.

How to Study Postsocialist Reality TV?

As a major field of television globalization, reality programming is particularly conducive to making intercultural connections. Its worldwide explosion in the 1990s followed large-scale technological shifts and a changing regulatory environment, which favored "cheap, common and entertaining" programming disseminated around the world (Murray and Oullette 2004, 6). Reality programs have also come under

scrutiny in discussions across media, cultural, and communication studies in relation to the shifting spaces and meanings of the public sphere, democracy, and citizenship in a neoliberal era of technological and economic convergence and increasing state and corporate surveillance.

Notwithstanding the analytical merits and theoretical insight of such research, and despite calls for understanding how reality formats can be both "culturally specific and globally relevant" (Murray and Oullette 2004, 6), there remains a disconnect between reality TV's spectacular success around the world and the specificity of discussions about neoliberal responsibilization, governmentality, class, gender, and emotional labor to "post-welfare" states (see Oullette and Hay 2008).[5] While these issues are not irrelevant in globalizing postsocialist cultures, they are inevitably filtered and refracted through the national, which remains the primary reference point. Even within Europe, while researchers have pointed out reality programs' relevance to national self-recognition, the specific difficulties of studying television in Eastern European nations have not been addressed.

To argue for taking reality television seriously in Eastern Europe presents unique methodological, disciplinary, and ethical challenges. One reason for this is the circumstances created by radical and swift media transformation, which has been characterized by a negotiation between the state and commercial broadcasters over what remain primarily national, rather than segmented, markets. State broadcasters first had to compete with and then give up their hegemony of four decades to commercial channels in the years following the fall of socialism. In Hungary, RTL Klub and TV2, the two most successful commercial broadcasters, quickly colonized the landscape with their production and importation of entertainment programming since they were launched in 1997. When finally given the choice, viewers turned away from state television's serious news shows, political discussions, talking heads, art films, and other national "quality" programs and favored talk shows, competitive reality programs, and locally produced soap operas.

In response, commercial programming across the region has been universally dismissed by critics for lowering cultural standards and corrupting national citizenship (Volcic, forthcoming). Postsocialist institutions of cultural criticism generally despise commercial television for its affective appeal, its perceived reduction of a literature-based national culture and democratic citizenship to distracting audiovisual infotainment, and its derivative, American forms and ideologies. Reality programs are identified as the trashiest form of television entertainment. But the refusal to take such programs seriously makes them all the more raw and unabashed outlets for a variety of views that were formerly subject to state and intellectual (self-)censorship. Shows about nonwhite celebrities constitute a synergy between the objectionable racial quality of their protagonists and the objectionable cultural quality of reality TV. The moral outrage against such shows is due to the fact that they visualize the intimate connection between these two converging kinds of illegitimacy within the national public sphere. They make it hard to couch nationalism's racist dynamic within the universalistic

European humanism of high-quality national culture embraced and espoused by otherwise liberal and well-intentioned intellectuals.

Another major obstacle to conducting wider comparative research that includes postsocialist cultures is the relative obscurity of local national languages and traditions, compared to English, Dutch or French-speaking television. East European critics usually wish to distance themselves from a doubly demonized association: forms of commercial television deemed unhealthy for national culture and ethnic minorities deemed parasitic for the national body. Scholars in Romani Studies, who are least prejudiced against the Roma, also tend to be dismissive of television. Despite being an interdisciplinary field, Romani Studies often operates with a somewhat anachronistic and idealized image of the Gypsy unaffected by contemporary popular culture and turns its ethnographic gaze toward the authentic, folk Gypsy. Roma reality stars and shows constitute inappropriate objects of study for both national cultural critics and Romani Studies scholars. Instead of serving as a valuable resource for understanding and benefiting from cultural hybridity, Roma reality TV faces a double stumbling block: a profound investment in a Eurocentric ideal of high cultural value and a commitment to the figure of the authentic Roma, who is essentially different from national majorities.

While research in communication studies has begun to map the transformation of postsocialist media industries, it has concentrated on issues of policy and the normative national public sphere at the expense of ideology, identity, programming content, aesthetics, affect, and audiences. Empirical studies would be valuable tools to explain the love-to-hate relationship of audiences to Roma and other racialized stars in reality shows. The few available studies, mostly statistical surveys, are fraught with difficulties, however. A proper evaluation of most such surveys would have to go well beyond a statistical assessment and analyze the data in the context of the crisis of white national identities. In a simplified but indispensable psychoanalytic language, the silenced dimension of race in these surveys (the effect of the white Eurocentric national superego) tends to censor expressions of identification with the Roma (the effect of a colonized "Roma" national unconscious). Therefore, in my discussion of the *Győzike* show, I bring together several different registers of public reactions and analyze the pattern they weave together without privileging any as entirely trustworthy.

Roma Celebrity and Reality TV

As the poorest and most deprived European minority, the Roma are the subjects of countless European Union, state, and local policy regulations as well as ethnographic studies and documentary films. The majority of the Roma have clearly been the losers of the post–Cold War transformations, caught in a vicious cycle of poor educational and job opportunities and violent social exclusion (see Stewart 1997; Ladányi and Szelényi 2006; Imre 2006). The current global economic crisis ignited the latest wave of violence against the Roma. In Hungary alone, seven racially motivated murders were committed during the first six months of 2009, with no perpetrators arrested. The

economic crisis has increased far-right nationalism and raised explicit racism and anti-Semitism to a level unprecedented since World War II in the region. Perpetual scapegoats for the region's marginality within Europe and for its recurring crises of national sovereignty, the Roma have only been tolerated as musical entertainers for centuries. At the same time, the globalization and commercialization of Eastern European media cultures has also enhanced the appeal of Roma popular entertainment and created Roma pop stars (Imre 2008).

The local versions of *Pop Idol* have provided many Roma musicians with instant nationwide exposure. Roma singer Vlastimil Horváth won the 2005 season of *SuperStar* in the Czech Republic, in the same year as Caramel, a.k.a. Ferenc Molnár, won *Megasztár* in Hungary. While their ethnicity was at the center of public debates about whether the rise of Roma stars will elevate the status of the entire minority, the singers themselves have been eager to renounce the burden of representation. Their reluctance is understandable in light of the fact that Roma entertainers are easily exploited by both commercial media and state politicians for the economic and political capital they represent. Embracing selected, "model" representatives of the minority has long been the state's divide-and-conquer strategy. It has been revived in postsocialist states' management of Roma pop stars, often to demonstrate progressive ethnic policies within the European Union. For instance, Ibolya Oláh, who finished a close second in the 2004 season of *Megasztár*, sang a patriotic song on behalf of Hungary in the European Parliament in Brussels in 2005. Nowhere are the ambivalences about the politics of Gypsy stardom more evident than in Czech Television's (the state broadcaster) choice of the popular Roma band *Gypsy.cz* to represent the Czech Republic in the 2009 *Eurovision* contest after the failures of more traditional Czech musicians in earlier years. Lead singer "Gipsy" claimed he represented the Czech nation as much as the Roma around Europe, but the conflict between these two affiliations is unmistakable. While he compared the national political potential of his *Eurovision* performance to the election of Barack Obama for president, he also hoped to mobilize the transnational Gypsy vote to make those "Nazis" back home "shut up."

Perhaps the most successful case of Roma celebrity is Bulgarian *chalga* (regional pop-folk) singer Azis, or Vasil Troyanov Boyanov, one of the most memorable contenders of *Eurovision* 2006. Azis is a gay Roma drag queen, a superstar with a trans-Balkan appeal, who is equally popular among gay and straight, Roma and non-Roma audiences. His career highlights have included running for Parliament as a representative of the Evroroma (Euroroma) party in 2005 and a well-publicized participation in the Bulgarian *VIP Big Brother*, alongside his husband (Ridenour 2009).

The most recent development, celebrity docusoaps about Roma musicians, have earned a much more mixed reception. Vali Vijeile ("the Stormy Man") or, by his actual name, Valentin Rusu, is a popular Romanian *manele* (urbanized Gypsy pop-folk style) singer. His prime-time docusoap *Aventurile familiei Vijelie* ("*The Adventures of the Vijelie Family*," 2005–) is produced by Prima TV, one of the first commercial channels in Romania. The *Győzike* show (2005–) airs in prime time on Hungary's most successful commercial channel, RTL Klub, and revolves around Roma pop singer Győző

Gáspár, affectionately called Győzike, and his family. Modeled after *The Osbournes* (MTV, 2002–2005), both programs have been massive audience successes and universally ridiculed targets of criticism at the same time. From overtly racist rants to highbrow disdain, the emotions that have poured into public discussion in response to these shows reveal profound anxieties about what constitutes the racial and class boundaries of the national family and its allegorical extension, the postsocialist nation. Roma celebrity introduces a collective cognitive dissonance. It visualizes intolerable hybridity, which in turn threatens the racial hierarchy that props up deeply entrenched distinctions between high and popular, national and transnational culture.

Győzike

Győző Gáspár rose to fame in 1999 as the front man of the pop group *Romantic*, which mixed Roma melodies with rap. He subsequently appeared as a celebrity contestant on the Hungarian version of *Big Brother* (*Nagy Testvér*, TV2, 2003). Already established in public as an affable character, Győzike's Roma identity was played up for media interest on the program. He also took a cameo role in the satirical comedy show *My Big Fat Roma Wedding* (*Bazi Nagy Roma Lagzi* TV2, 2003). This program provoked much controversy for its crude Roma stereotypes and resulted in sanctions against TV2, RTL Klub's rival commercial broadcaster, by the state media regulation agency, ORTT ("Botrányos" 2003). The show placed Győzike in an ambiguous political position as someone willing to compromise the cause of the minority for national media fame.

The advertising for the new reality show *Győzike* used this checkered history as an enticement ("Ugyanakkor" 2005). The weekly ninety-minute prime-time program aired on RTL Klub[6] in February 2005. It promised a series that would contain eight episodes that follow the family's everyday lives. Five years later, in June 2010, the show finished its last season, with stories about the family's lives appearing consistently on the front pages of the tabloid press. The show featured nine times in the top twenty most popular programs in Hungary in 2005 (RTL Group annual report 2005) and achieved an audience share average rating of 46.1 percent among adults eighteen to forty-nine years of age (RTL Klub audited results 2005). It reached the peak of its popularity in week 20 of the eighth season, in May 2009, when it had an audience share of 50.2 percent, beating the popular soap opera *Between Friends* (*Barátok közt*) out of its long-time leading spot (Szenzáció).

Each episode opens with a slow pan over snow-covered hills with a panpipe background music, echoing a romantic documentary style. The grey communist blocks of a town appear, identified in an intertitle as "Salgótarján 2005," home to Győzike and his family. The dissonance between the upbeat music and the dreary landscape evokes a sense of parody. This is amplified as the camera pans down to a large, new mustard-colored house and then suddenly cuts to a close-up of Győzike's face as he is staring in the distance, apparently lost in thought (Figure 1). The music speeds up and turns into a fast, popular Gypsy tune. A shot of Győzike's legs reveals that he is sitting on a

Figure 1. Győzike contemplates.

toilet, with his signature zebra-striped pajamas around his ankles and bare toes tapping to the rhythm of the extradiegetic music (Figure 2). The show's main title appears over the pajamas as if it were a clothing brand, in a cunning marketing strategy that anticipates RTL Klub's consistent branding of the show and its ancillary merchandize as "ethnic kitsch."

Győzike's wife, Bea, is then shown in a shiny red-and-black kitchen marked by its expensive but tasteless décor as "noveau riche." She is wearing a fashionable off-the-shoulder top, stirring a cup of coffee and shouting to her husband to come downstairs. Győzike yells back that he is "thinking." The camera returns to Győzike's yawning face in several close-up shots. A cut to their eldest daughter, Evelyn, displays her lying on a zebra-striped bedspread and threatening her father to kick the door down if he doesn't hurry up (Figure 3). To complete the family portrait, the younger daughter, Virág, appears wearing a cowboy hat, rocking back and forth on a hobby horse and waving an American flag (Figure 4). Each of these shots is freeze-framed, with the respective family members' names flashed across the screen. This introduction highlights the show's status as popular entertainment as well as a mockery of the traditional, grim style of Roma documentaries about suffering, poor Gypsies. The images—zebra stripes, shiny lacquered kitchen, American flag, cowboy hat, the shouting wife's fashionable dress, and blank-faced Győzike contemplating life on the toilet—all point to something other than the "cultural" or "poverty-stricken" Roma familiar from documentaries and anthropological texts.

Much like *The Osbournes*, the *Győzike* show features an "extraordinarily ordinary" family (Kompare 2004), whose activities are at once banal and excessive. They perform their life on the show in an extravagantly decorated house, which bears testimony to *Győzike*'s well-promoted obsession with zebra stripes and gold. While the program generally avoids attaching price tags to the family's consumption

Figure 2. Győzike on toilet.

Figure 3. Evelyn on zebra stripes.

habits, it presents an economically upper-class family with lower-class, or specifically ethnic, taste.

Not unlike Ozzy Osbourne, in this domestic setting, Győzike is reduced to a bumbling, often sentimental and childish character, whose repeated failures and "ignominious body" (Kompare 2004) both humanize him and provide many comic moments. His blunt and practical wife, Bea, has also received much media and fan attention. Many of the episodes focus on the couple's marital tension. This tension gets even more explosive than that between Ozzy and his wife Sharon and is only occasionally and temporarily resolved. The emotional display that characterizes reality shows is generously exploited and clearly racialized here.[7] It is a major source of public critical

Figure 4. Virág with American flag.

aversion and, it is safe to speculate, of private viewer fascination. The two Gáspár daughters, teenage Evelyn and grade-schooler Virág, are often brought out to serve as comic relief or as buffers when the couple's confrontations become especially violent. Extreme public displays of emotion are still new and rare on East European television, which has inherited a tame, (self-)censored, and rational aesthetic and code of conduct from the era of socialist state control. However, their Roma identity provides Győzike and Bea with a license as well as an expectation to perform the Roma stereotype of the irrational, corporeally driven racial minority.

Besides domestic affairs that, as John Corner describes, ambivalently hover between the fictional and the real in reality programming (Corner 2002)—such as Bea's pregnancy scare, Győzike's infidelity, generational conflicts among family members, disagreements about buying, cooking, and decorating, and money matters—the show features two other kinds of prominent storylines: One follows trips abroad taken by Győzike and various other family members to locations that range from Istanbul through Paris to Florida and highlights the family's role in representing the Hungarian nation. The other narrative line depicts events in Győzike's public, professional life as a singer or aspiring politician, such as negotiations over performance gigs and his bid for Roma community leadership. Both kinds of stories abound in reflections on the couple's Roma identity and on the family's relationship to both the Roma community and the Hungarian national family, even if such reflections are not always explicit or even intentional.

In its preoccupation with national family values and in addressing a specific national family rather than a niche audience, the show resembles European celebrity docusoaps more than *The Osbournes*. *The Osbournes* revolves around a globally established British pop star, whose appeal oscillates between the national and the transnational. However, in Europe, the docusoap tends to solicit viewer affinities along national cultural differences, despite the global mobility and adaptability of the format (Dhoest 2004).

For instance, the popular Flemish celebrity reality show *De Pfaffs* (*The Pfaffs*), broadcast on the national public service channel VTM, features former Belgian soccer goalie Jean-Marie Pfaff and his populous family. Similar to Ozzy Osbourne's, the tough public image of the head of household is replaced by that of a domestic softy with a pot belly, gently mocked by his wife, who really runs the family. But the importance of authentic Flemish family values is consistently underscored, rather than ridiculed, on the program. The Pfaffs may be a well-to-do celebrity family, but they also uphold the ideal of a decent, middle-class simplicity at the heart of Flemish nationalism.

Such differences among variations of the format also have to do with the national and regional trajectory of stardom. *The Osbournes* relies on a culture of global stardom that originates in Hollywood. In fact, Derek Kompare argues that the generic conventions of the family sitcom and those of the Hollywood documentary mutually reinforce each other in the construction of *The Osbournes* as a television family: real people, already established as stars, easily become constructed as television characters, around whom clearly sequenced episodic narratives can be woven, and whose "real," often profanity-laced dialogues are punctuated by visual and aural "stings" (Kompare 2004, 104). But while Ozzy's domestic persona is contrasted with his earlier, defiant rock idol image, Győzike as a musician has only a local, national reputation, and not a very good one at that. Furthermore, Győzike's regional accent, frequent use of Roma dialect, and references to his family's membership in a wider Roma community repeatedly undermine their appropriateness as the national celebrity family. Győzike is an anti-star, a resented and annoying celebrity, whom many consider a mere media creation.

Győzike and his wife Bea were voted both favorite and least liked TV personalities in 2008 by the readers of the Hungarian celebrity gossip magazine *Hot* ("*Hot* Top 100," 2008). Hungarian cultural critics and Roma intellectuals widely condemn the show (Gáspár 2006). Prominent Roma activist János Daróczi[8] said that Győzike's media celebrity "brings severe disadvantage to the Hungarian Roma." "I must send a message to everybody: we, the Roma, are not like that" (quoted in Kürti 2008). The media storm around the show raises the question why the reality television format suddenly politicizes Roma representation as an issue of national self-identification after decades of ethnographic documentary film production about Gypsies failed to do so. Much like in other Eastern and Southern European countries, there are scant Roma characters on Hungarian soap operas or dramas,[9] while news and documentary programming tend to focus on the criminality and social exclusion of certain Roma communities (Messing 2008).

Official socialist ideology suppressed conspicuous class differences and condemned Western media's consumerist, pop cultural seductions and constructions. Instead, in the absence of commercial media, celebrity was based entirely on merit and achievement (Munk 2009). When the postsocialist commercial media began to promote stars on television and in an increasingly tabloidized printing press, the celebrity continued to be figured as "one of us"—one simply recognized by many. The editor of

the popular tabloid magazines *Story* and *Best*, Miklós Òmolnár, comments on the intimate and locally specific operation of stardom:

> In Hungary, the star is the boy next door, who looks like someone we could pat on the shoulder when we see him on the street. He shops at the same vegetable stand and gets his groceries at the same TESCO as the rest of us do. [He] . . . gets caught by an internet magazine at TESCO as he is buying a television set with his pregnant girlfriend. It is unimaginable that an American or British star would go to TESCO to buy a TV on a Sunday afternoon. . . . The Hungarian star is a lower-middle-class petit-bourgeois, to use a vulgar-Marxist term." (quoted in Jenei)

As he points out, communication research shows that stars in Hungary tend to be made on prime-time TV. Viewers consider them as extended family members, virtual dinner guests at the table, or as people with whom one can strike up a conversation in the street. Stardom operates in a "virtual family environment," according to a more "provincial, intimate, national logic" than it does in the West.[10]

Given that Győzike does not look or sound[11] like the Hungarian boy next door, a popular prime-time reality show about a wealthy Roma family of media stars on RTL Klub sets off a great deal of anxiety about what constitutes the national family and, by extension, national culture. This anxiety becomes most pronounced when Győzike and his family travel on the show: in foreign countries, the family's local Roma distinction is all but erased and their identity is reduced to the main point of identification for the foreigners they encounter—the language they speak. The family simply represents Hungarians abroad. Their performance as tourists is familiar to Hungarians, who have long been represented as so many East European Borats, who do not know how to behave, have poor language skills, and have internalized their relative inferiority as the country bumpkins—the Gypsies of Europe.

When Győzike's rental car bumps into a redneck's pickup truck during the family's visit to Florida, the American man's expletive-ridden frustration over their mutual failure to communicate is matched by Győzike's colorful Hungarian swearing. Finally, a cop arrives to discipline the unruly, uneducated foreigner. For most Hungarian viewers, presumably, such a scene evokes an unsettling mix of identifications, in which shared national shame over Győzike's inability to communicate is offset by laughing with him in an imagined, intimate community of Hungarian-speakers. Unlike in the domestic episodes, however, it is not so easy to defer the humiliation to the Gypsy minority or to TV celebrities. In a later scene from the same Florida trip, Győzike and his family are resting on the beach. They are approached by a young American woman who had heard that Győzike was a Hungarian pop star. While the communication is still limited by the language barrier, it is now easier to laugh with Győzike: This time, he is positioned against a bikini-clad woman, who appears much less authoritative than the American men in the earlier scene and rather naïve in her giddy effort to meet

an exotic East European star. The gendered register of national identification is mobilized by the implication that the United States is represented here by the seductive but silly beach girl. While Győzike sings a generic Gypsy tune for her entertainment as they dance in the sand, he ridicules her shaved armpit and other curious American physical characteristics in Hungarian, confirming his intimate community with the masculinized national viewer.

The most obvious explanation for the show's popularity is that it is constructed and branded as a familiar "Gypsy circus" (Kürti 2008, 17) reproducing racist stereotypes[12] and inviting viewers to laugh at the family.[13] However, an interwoven analysis of critical and popular reactions and the available empirical research on audience preferences point to a more subtle understanding of the ways in which reality television mediates racialized national identifications in postsocialist Hungary. The first register of responses I consider are online reactions in the form of blogs, discussion lists, and other informal and mostly anonymous commentary. The second set include critical comments that serve a normative purpose in Hungary: reviews and reflections published by critics in print newspapers, magazines, and journals. The third source is ethnographic surveys and a set of ethnographic interviews conducted among children (both Roma and non-Roma), some of the most avid audiences of the show.

Online Audience Responses

> This [Győzike] is a stupid, primitive animal, who parades around on TV at our expense and all those idiotic Hungarians stare at him with their mouths open. Young people today need normal examples to follow, not a monkey-like freak dancing on stage like him. That stupid RTL suggests that the dumber you are the more famous they'll make you.

> The fact is that the majority of Gypsies live off of crime (committed against Hungarians). They know how to make everyone feel sorry for them, but working hard stinks. All they know his how to crank out all those little mongrels at 14 and then make them do the dirty work of stealing and then collect welfare for them. I did some research about these things even though, believe me, I really don't care, and I still believe that Gypsies are worse than anything else, they are the "black" plague of the world, the last filth, rotten rats, who spread stealing, cheating, lying. . . etc. . . . around the world.

> They are not humans. . . . They stink up the whole country. Why don't they get the hell out of here at last? I'd like to drown all the black kids and sterilize all the women to stop them from reproducing. They are like cockroaches. Even their names are disgusting. . . . I wish they were all killed by cancer, from the smallest newborn to the oldest stinking Gypsy. Death to them!!!!!!!!

This is a typical selection from the postings on one of the show's largest fan discussion sites. There are about 3,500 posts altogether.[14] For a program that is so eagerly and universally watched, it appears to have hardly any fans, or at least very few who would defend it in public. Even the self-identified Roma posters tend to dismiss it as a program about "show Roma" ("divatcigány"), who give the entire minority a bad name. The few positive comments one finds appreciate the show's amusement value, the fact that it allows viewers to laugh at Győzike's bumbling performance. The degree of hatred and fear revealed by many of the posts, replicated by thousands of other reactions in similar online discussions, is rightly shocking to Western liberal ears. The comments almost parodically reproduce patterns of ethnonationalism successfully erased from the Western vocabulary of politically correct talk about minorities: the Roma are lazy and repugnant parasites who shun work and drain collective resources. Their excessive procreation contaminates the pristine national body and threatens the survival of the rightful majority (see Kürti 2008).

It is remarkable that a commercial television show's online discussion forum provides such a release for frustrations directed against the Roma. Whereas fan communities have been argued to become spaces of mobilization for political participation, and even alternative, affective public spheres (see Hartley 2004; Hills 2002; Jenkins 2006; van Zoonen 2004) such arguments always face two substantial objections: the mobilization built around fandom hardly ever transgresses the narrative and ideological boundaries of a television series, actor, or auteur, and it is compromised by the politics of advertising. The outpouring of opinions around *Győzike* does the opposite: the comments tend to ignore what actually happens on the show and focus instead on the program's political and ethical significance for the national community, in which commentators are profoundly implicated.

Ironically, online reactions constitute precisely the kinds of mediated, affective public spaces suppressed in the Habermasian (ideal of) national and rational public sphere. Even though they could be dismissed as racist rants of ignorant viewers, most such reflections nevertheless issue commentary on larger issues of the racialized boundary between national shame and pride, and the uneasy relations between national and global affiliations mobilized by the television show. In this sense, they manifest what Appadurai calls the "predatory identities" unleashed by globalization, whose construction is not adequately theorized by traditional social sciences. Appadurai defines predatory identities as "those identities whose social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as a we" (Appadurai 2006, 51). He writes,

> Predatory identities emerge, periodically, out of pairs of identities, sometimes sets that are larger than two, which have long histories of close contact, mixture, and some degree of mutual stereotyping. Occasional violence may or may not be parts of these histories, but some degree of contrastive identification is always involved. One of these pairs or sets of identities often turns predatory by mobilizing an understanding of itself as a threatened majority. (51)

Appadurai's argument aptly explains the excessive resentment toward celebrity TV Roma in terms of the narcissism of minor differences. He takes up this Freudian concept to argue that globalization induces a deep anxiety about the national project and turns nationalistic identities predatory. These predatory identities adopt the cause of defending the majority against perceived threats from minorities, or "small numbers." Minorities' mixed status, languages, and ambiguity in relation to national citizenship, their movement across borders, and their financial transactions (real or imagined) all blur the boundaries of the nation and make minorities serve as flash points where social tensions about globalization are released. When minorities are wealthy, they evoke the threat of elite globalization. When they are poor, they are seen as symbols of failed forms of development and welfare. Since ideas of nationhood tend to rely on ethnic purity and suppress collective memories and experiences of plurality, ethnic minorities obscure the idealized boundaries of the national community. They are easily scapegoated for the failure of many states to achieve economic sovereignty under the circumstances of neoliberal globalization, which puts considerable strain on states to protect the interests of territorially defined majorities (Appadurai 2006, 44–45).

The anxiety displayed by the online responses is due to the fact that Győzike and his family, much like Madonna's comments, evoke in the same national televised space, in the same national identities, both the poor, welfare-bound ghost of the enemy within and the wealthy, transnational threat. This dual menace is exacerbated by the fact that Győzike is a celebrity creature of an emasculating media regime regarded as the enemy of national culture, feminizing and racializing at once. He is a celebrity television Roma in a region under continual colonization, where national sovereignty has never truly been more than an unfulfilled promise. As a racially hybrid figure in the increasingly hybrid space of national television, he is a glaring reminder of the permanent inaccessibility of the classical, white and high cultural, European national project. The ethnocidal vehemence of viewer comments, their call for racial purification—quite out of proportion with the spirit of light entertainment associated with a television show—reveals the majority's profound dependence on maintaining the illusion of the "white" nation's ethnic homogeneity.

While most "fan" comments veer toward hatred and violence, a small minority of commentators bypass the show's threat to national identities and concentrate on the family dynamic or on the respondents' identification with specific family members. Such comments—many of them on the show's central RTL Klub site[15]—tend to fall into two categories: some come from self-identified Roma viewers who live in the Transylvanian region of Romania. As both Roma and Hungarian minorities have been discriminated against in Romania since 1918, when a large part of Hungarian-speaking Transylvania was annexed to Romania at the end of World War I, it is feasible that such viewers would feel less implicated in supporting Hungarian national white supremacy and feel freer to express solidarity with the Roma celebrity. The other nonhostile category consists of messages that pertain to the three women of the family. Presumably written by other women, these comments are addressed directly to

Győzike's wife Bea and their two daughters. They assess the three women's appearance and style and dispense relationship advice for "dealing with" Győzike and managing the daily operation of the family. While the level of intimacy expressed in these messages presumes women's shared solidarity as the lynchpin that ties together the national and domestic family, it is also evident that such work takes place outside the public sphere and does not directly bear on the racialized threat that Győzike, the Roma patriarch, poses for the national family.

Critical Responses

Győzike must be the only television program in the world where the "press" section of the show's very own website, normally a vehicle of promotion, consists entirely of negative reviews. Reflections in print and online critical journals are invariably outraged by the show's "quality" and "values." However, while online responses by ordinary viewers target the ethnic minority with which Győzike and his family are identified, professional critics tend to tone down the racist edge of their criticism and focus instead on the show itself as the flagship of an alarming downward trend in national culture in general and television in particular.

While the worries about commercializing the public sphere are legitimate, and the lifestyle and emotional intelligence models displayed on the show are hardly wholesome by any standards, a number of assumptions remain unreflected in the hierarchical assessment by critics of the show—assumptions that bind together critical and ordinary audience responses much more intimately than it would seem. In fact, the anti-Roma racism of predatory identities and intellectuals' worry about the decline of print-based, rational national culture headed by a literate, national elite class are two sides of the same coin, which share more in their nationalistic anxiety over hybridity and ethnic mixing than they differ in tact, style, and perceived distance from the issues at stake. Overtly racist comments tend to equate Győzike with "real Gypsies" and personalize their attacks through their own "experiences" with the Roma. More sophisticated, critical comments by liberal intellectuals, who would be abhorred by charges of latent racism or discrimination against minorities, tend to interpret and abstract, while effacing their own personal investment and positioning themselves as the rightful spokespeople for collective standards. They defer their indignation from the protagonist and the minority he represents to the medium and the genre. However, the threat of ethnic hybridity presented by the suspect transnational ethnic minority, and the threat of cultural hybridity presented by transnational commercial television, converge in their perceived attack on national culture, understood as the joint product of ethnonational family ties and Eurocentric cultural values.[16]

Critics' unanimous dismissal of commercial television derives from the special rights and responsibilities historically bestowed upon intellectuals in small Eastern European nations. This special class status only strengthened during decades of intellectual-led opposition to the Soviet-controlled communist regime. However, it has become tenuous in the course of the postsocialist transformations. The globalization

of state-controlled media, in particular, undermined the ideal of a homogeneous national public and initiated a subsequent crisis of authority for cultural and political leaders. While intellectuals have been traditionally expected to speak for a national public, the public is now being directly addressed by ratings-driven media. Hungarian media sociologist Lajos Császi calls the top–down intellectual tradition of judgment exercised by teachers, politicians, and cultural experts profoundly paternalistic (Jenei 2006). One critic displays this paternalism blatantly: "With the appearance of commercial television, it has become clear what the Hungarian television viewer needs." He continues,

> You cannot expect quality from commercial television stations. I don't even think that a critic who writes for intellectual journals should write about the horrific programs of commercial television. . . . The interests of those who read criticism—or those who read at all—and the interests of TV viewers don't coincide. . . . I'd like to believe that we are not quite the way we think of ourselves based on all this: indifferent, poor and subsequently cynical; and shockingly tasteless. I'd like to believe. (Kolozsi 2005)

Such a position may be animated by a true sense of responsibility for national culture, but it is also a way of "reclaiming authority in the re-drawing of class relations," to borrow Beverly Skeggs's words (Skeggs 2005, 968). The disgust with low-class celebrity culture is "simultaneously about desire and revulsion," an inextricable blend of cultural pride and racialized shame. It forfeits the possibility of building pedagogical bridges between "high" and "popular" cultural forms (Skeggs 2005, 961).

The liberal sympathy that public intellectuals have long displayed for the single visible racial minority has helped efface the racialized quality of this one-directional, hierarchical relationship. The repressed returns in *Győzike*'s frequent, unfavorable comparisons in the reviews with "proper" ways of representing Gypsies: filmic documentaries about victimized, poor Roma (Bori 2005). The implication is that the true Roma is a victim, whose social position is fixed and can only be sympathetically revealed through the hard work of those who are able to see, understand, and show. This attitude is not essentially different from the racism of those who openly blame Gypsies for being backward and unwilling to assimilate. Gypsies are tolerable on reality shows as long as they are passive victims, for whose exploitation the medium can be blamed (Fáy 2001; Varró 2005; Darab 2008; Kolozsi 2005).

Ethnographic Audience Research

As Skeggs, Thumim, and Wood (2007, 2009) have shown, it is difficult to study reality television audiences even in contexts where television ethnography does enjoy some legitimacy. The difficulties multiply when it comes to studying postsocialist television audiences, particularly of a contested program such as *Győzike*. I have

argued that responses to the show tend to be channeled through feelings of national shame and (self-)hate over enjoying a cultural text that is so universally deplored by critics, and whose pleasures derive from identifying with a Roma family. Emerging studies of celebrity and fandom in Eastern Europe have pointed out that surveys of media celebrity reveal a range of reactions from skepticism to explicit hatred (Munk 2009). The only alternative results specific to the *Győzike* show come from a set of ethnographic interviews with a group of preteen children conducted by Annabel Tremlett (2008). It is relevant to turn to a younger audience not only because they are not likely to have fully internalized proper normative national reactions but also because they have been some of the most devoted fans of the show. Tremlett's interviews suggest that this is due to the cartoonish fashion in which the Gáspár family perform their everyday lives, which appeals to a younger audience. While younger daughter Virág's transgressions often take centerstage, Győzike himself also has an "infantile" appeal because of the gags and comic relief he regularly produces.[17] Rather than recreating the disgust/desire dialectic of adult reactions, the children, from both Roma and non-Roma backgrounds, embraced Győzike and his family as fun characters without positioning them as an ethnic "other." For the children, the main attraction of the program was its ability to make them laugh. Furthermore, when asked whether they would liken their families to Győzike's, the majority of them said yes. This suggests a sense of shared ordinariness within the national family, along with a shared (child-like) humor in transgressing "accepted" behavior. Tremlett's ethnographic study confirms not only that the show is watched in the context of family viewing but also that Győzike's family could very well represent the national family—a possibility the adult responses, both the overtly racist and the intellectual-liberal types, simply cannot contemplate.

One pitfall of research such as this is to romanticize children's responses by rendering their imaginations unfettered by politics. As we know from David Buckingham, interpreting children's talk in the course of ethnographic research presents its own special caveats. The influence of the researcher, of the group setting, and the inconsistencies of individual responses create so many contingencies that any meaningful generalization may seem untenable (Buckingham 1991). But even as we take extreme care not to assume that children's words are windows into their minds, the difference from the "adult" responses to the show is striking: the children watch the program primarily as a TV show. The anxieties about shifting national identities set off by Győzike are so overwhelming that the adult responses simply ignore the show's status as a television text that moves between fiction and reality. The children, however, whose memories are not overdetermined by a small nation's social, economic, and political transition from state socialism to capitalist neoliberalism, pick up and comment on the most immediate quality and effect of the program: its constructed, performative, playful dimension.

These three audience registers considered together show that the program's intense love–hate appeal goes far beyond the familiar opportunity to laugh at the Roma circus or voyeuristic recoil at the ways of rich Gypsies. It is grounded in the intimate fabric

of national cohesion within Eastern European cultures, a high degree of national intimacy: the kind of affective power that reduces the metaphorical distance between the national and the nuclear family and converts a shared sense of shame over inferiority within Europe into a sense of national belonging and pride (Imre 2009). Racialized stardom uneasily blends pride and shame, white superego, and Roma unconscious. It reveals an act of collective self-recognition, the implication that a Roma family can quite palatably represent the national family. In turn, this unacknowledged identification with the Roma national self calls for a violent rewhitening, an expulsion of shame by projecting it onto the racialized figure of the undeserving celebrity. National pride and shame, whose usual dynamic is to masquerade as mutually exclusive, are thus called into simultaneous presence by the Roma media star.

African Celebrities: The National Family's New Frontier

The Roma function as flexible ethnic boundary markers, both from the inside and outside, which is essential for the constitution of "white" nations. The Roma minority's ambiguous national status and hybridity have made it possible for viewers to exercise and disavow racism at the same time through the discourses and emotions that reproduce nationalism, to feel national shame through identification and disavow it through falling back on the nation's normative, violent whiteness. The increasing presence of visible racial differences in the streets and on the screens of Eastern Europe, however, has exposed the tenuousness of ethnoracial national boundaries and called for renewed efforts to fix them. Reality TV has at times quite blatantly staged the rewhitening of postsocialist nations, as on the Romanian version of *Extreme Makeover*, *Frumusete pe muchie de cutit*, where a middle-aged Roma woman was turned surgically white so that her half-Roma children would not be ashamed of her. The makeover was so successful that the woman's own mother did not recognize her in the end.[18] In postsocialist states, the makeover, which is central to the dispersed practices of governmentality that reality TV performs in the United States or Britain, is not so much to render the individual a more responsible middle-class subject but to clean up the nation's collective image by removing the taint caused by racial hybridity.

Another recent strategy of keeping in check the Roma's ambiguity and securing the borders of whiteness is juxtaposing Roma participants with Black African "celebrities." The Romanian show *Satra* or "*Gypsy Camp*," most closely related to Fox's *The Simple Life* (2003–2007), began in June 2009 at 10 P.M. Monday–Thursday on Kanal D, a broadcaster owned by the Turkish Dogan Media Group. Much like Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie go to live with a family on a farm, a small group of Romanian celebrities go to live with a Gypsy family for twenty-four hours at a time. Their job is ostensibly to experience the hardships and quirks of Gypsy life, carrying out tasks that Gypsies supposedly do, such as selling aluminum boxes or clothes from door to door. Instead of learning from the Roma, however, the guests invariably end up

"teaching" them how to adopt a civilized lifestyle. They stage various makeover fantasies that show the hosts, especially Roma women, how to dress, style, walk, and even dance properly.[19]

This script is only interrupted by the appearance of a black African man from the Republic of Congo on the show. Victor Yila is an engineer, athlete, and musician, a well-known media personality, who has long established himself in Romania and speaks the language proficiently. On the show, however, his function is to embody a racial category that is even lower on the national scale than that of Gypsies, by virtue of having a darker complexion and a foreign accent. He performs, with apparent willingness, the stereotype of the "native" familiar from imperial adventure tales. He endures various indignities even the Roma are spared, such as cleaning up after everyone and performing a tribal dance around the fire. His participation visually and metaphorically whitens the Roma. To articulate this new, more definitive degree of whiteness even more explicitly, the Roma take up the chain of colonial mimicry performed by all Eastern European subjects toward Europe: they display the proper white national behaviors toward the exotic, "tribal" African subject that the white celebrity guests display toward them on the program and in real life—they show disgust when Yila touches them and horrified curiosity at his appearance and speech.

Yila's role is matched by that of Lapite Oludayo, a black Nigerian singer-celebrity, known as "Fekete Pákó" ("Black Pákó") in Hungary, where he is the token African celebrity. He moved to Budapest in 1994 as a law student and has since become known as a musician and a media personality. His celebrity role is to act as Hungary's "village idiot," as an English-language Budapest daily starkly sums it up.[20] Despite repeated media attempts to mock and humiliate him, as if he were on a particularly cruel version of a national *Truman Show*, Pákó always comes back for more. In a 2006 interview that immediately went viral, the reporter posed him an ungrammatical question to intentionally confuse him.[21] When Pákó, who speaks near-flawless Hungarian, tried to save face and make sense of the question, the reporter walked off in feigned upset, throwing his hands up in the air at Pákó's hopeless inability to comprehend Hungarian. On another recent, scandalous occasion, in 2008, the right-wing radio station Bombagyár ("Bomb Factory") staged an interview with Pákó, in which he was set up to make pro-Nazi, anti-Semitic, and Gypsy-bashing comments and gestures. After the interview created national uproar, Pákó explained that he had been intimidated by the hosts into saying what they wanted, including citing names of Nazi leaders he had not even heard of. The hosts acknowledged this was true but still sued Pákó for slander, who was subsequently banned from appearing on the popular TV channels RTL Klub and TV2.[22]

The ban was lifted in the same year, when Pákó participated in the national version of *I'm a Celebrity . . . Get Me Out of Here*, a *Survivor*-like celebrity reality game format originally developed by Granada Television for Britain's ITV in 2002. The two back-to-back seasons of the Hungarian version, *Celeb vagyok . . . ments ki innen*, were set on a private reserve in the Argentinian rain forest and aired on RTL Klub in the fall

of 2008, to high ratings. Pákó's role, once again, was to be humiliated and ridiculed. After he was introduced in the show's promotional clip as the son of the jungle, an African naturally at home among creatures of the wild, it transpired that he was afraid of snakes. He was then forced to feel around for hidden objects among slimy creatures in a dark cave. The more desperately real his panic became the more wholeheartedly the two moderators laughed outside. Győzike was also among the celebrity participants of the show. Even though he and Pákó appeared in two different, consecutive seasons, as the only two racialized minority competitors, the comparison of their performances was inevitable. Similar to that of the Roma in *Gypsy Camp*, Győzike's difference was all but erased and his Hungarian-speaking whiteness all but normalized in light of Pákó's foreign blackness.

Conclusion

While reality formats are disseminated across televisual markets, their success is ultimately determined by their ability to mobilize audiences who share local histories and interpretive contexts. *Győzike* might be entirely comparable to *The Osbournes* or *The Pfaffs* in its narrative organization, its display of ignominious bodies, its televisual aesthetic of realism, even its production values. However, the intensity and ambivalence of its local reception can only be explained by a confluence of factors specific to the anxiety about nationhood and nationalism under the conditions of postsocialist economic and cultural globalization. These factors include the primacy of national belonging over neoliberal ideas of individual self-making and responsibilization, and the threatened class status of intellectuals, who continue to perform a central normative function in national cultures. I have focused on how these differences are articulated in shows about racialized celebrities and thereby foregrounded the disavowed but essential role played by race and racism in constituting cultural-linguistic nationalisms in the region.

Under the circumstances of the postsocialist transition, such programs provide confusing templates for the normative national family. Whereas in the West middle-class viewers addressed by reality shows are able to distance themselves from the abject spectacle of individuals in need of televisual charity and self-help, in the close national intimacy of Eastern European cultures the distance between viewer and spectacle is reduced and occluded. It needs to be recrystallized in racial terms, by foregrounding Győzike's Roma difference or, if that is not clear enough, Yila's and Pákó's Black African difference. In case of *Győzike*, such efforts at distancing are undermined by the Roma star's demonstrated class success. The *Győzike* show celebrates the entrepreneurial individual who makes the best of wild postsocialist neoliberal conditions but who continues to stand for the collective. The ambivalent responses to the show derive from the fact that this collective is becoming increasingly blurry around the edges.

Győzike is a threat to national culture because it represents an emerging middle-class cultural and economic value that is racially mixed. The economic middle class

has long been a missing element in Soviet-controlled, allegedly egalitarian societies. Intellectuals constituted a class charged with the cultural leadership of the nation during socialism, often in unspoken complicity with party leadership. This class leadership has considerably weakened in the postsocialist period. *Győzike* threatens to expose the implicit racial and gendered parameters of intellectual exceptionalism. A central, unspoken component of this exceptionalism is its whiteness. Eastern European nations and nationalisms are continually confirmed as truly European by placing inordinate value on a natural cultural affinity with (Western) Europe. The naturalization of high culture is "biologically" confirmed by the respective nations' natural, racial bonds. This work is performed by a class of intellectual agents within a range of state institutions. In the lack of direct participation in imperial histories that would make the racial underpinning of national high cultural values conspicuous, populations in the east have been left in state of naïve gullibility about racial assumptions, in what József Böröcz calls an unreconstructed state of whiteness (Böröcz 2001). Brought together in the hybrid media space created by *Győzike*, the normative responses of public intellectuals and the anonymous comments of ordinary viewers reveal the interdependency between race and cultural value in defining the Eastern European nation as a family.

The schizophrenic value scheme behind this reality show is specific to the transition from cultures where intellectuals constituted a normative class to a form of neoliberalism where the space occupied by the middle class in western neoliberal democracies is up for grabs. RTL Klub successfully placed a controversial hero, Győzike, in this no man's land. Győzike performs both Gypsiness and national whiteness, to both constituencies' great unease, suspicion, and fascination. There is very little collective historical awareness of racism here to expose this split identification. There is no subsequent white guilt and a compulsion to perform, at least surrogate, charity for televisual victims of neoliberalism. It seems that white guilt might be a luxury in itself in a transnational network of neoliberal capital, where citizens of more powerful states are expected to pay a premium for their economic superiority, achieved via violent imperialism, by performing charity and white middle-class self-blame. Conversely, small nation-states that have been historically positioned at the bottom of a global system of nested inferiorities are able to justify nationalism as a force that necessarily subordinates all alternative affiliations and sentiments, including guilt, to the needs of a culturally unified white nation.

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Notes

1. According to the 2002 census, the Roma numbered 535,140 people or 2.5 percent of the total population, being the second-largest ethnic minority in Romania after ethnic Hungarians. Of course, census figures are highly unreliable since many Roma are reluctant to identify themselves as such for fear of discrimination. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roma_in_Romania.
2. See Antoniu (2009). The measure was recently defeated in Parliament. I am grateful to Elena Panican for this information.
3. The iconic moment of shattering this illusion, usually realized in the course of travel to the West, has been dramatized in a number of films by East European auteurs, most memorably in Krysztof Kieszlowski's *White* (1994), which can be read as a racial allegory: the Polish man's revenge for being deprived of his whiteness (embodied in his masculinity) by his French ex-wife and, by extension, Western Europe.
4. On the relationship between race and ethnicity, see Gilroy (1998).
5. For an excellent example of studies that redirect attention from issues specific to postwelfare societies, see Kraidy (2009).
6. RTL Klub and TV2 both began broadcasting in 1997 and have dominated the Hungarian television market ever since. They both specialize in producing reality formats and broadcasting American fictional programming. RTL Klub is owned by the RTL Group, Europe's largest content producer for television and radio, majority-owned by German media conglomerate Bertelsmann.
7. Depicting ethnic minorities as essentially emotional—rather than rational—beings is a recognizable racist discourse, and one that has been attributed to Gypsies even as far back as the nineteenth century ("They were said to live by nature's clock and react instinctively to external impulses." See Willems (1997, 50).
8. János Daróczi is a member of a family well known for their Roma activism. He is editor of the *Roma Magazin* weekly TV show devoted to Roma issues, on MTV (Hungarian National Television).
9. The exception is the half-Roma character of Nóra on the popular prime-time soap opera *Barátok közt* ("Between Friends"), which marks the first Roma presence on fictional programming. See Bernáth and Messing (2002).
10. Of course, the emergence of the familiar, everyday celebrity has a crucial economic underpinning: cash-strapped postsocialist media economies are constrained to the production of nonscripted programming. The circulation of cheap formats is at least partly responsible for the global shift toward what Graeme Turner calls the "demotic turn" in celebrity culture, which, Zala Volcic explains in her excellent analysis of the Slovenian program *The Celebrity Farm*, well describes the cultural and economic context of postsocialist television celebrity (see Volcic, forthcoming).

11. He speaks with a strong regional accent that is also marked as ethnic and punctuated by Romani expressions.
12. The initial ads for the *Győzike* program, along with the opening credits, used music from Kusturica's film about a vivacious Roma wedding, *Black Cat White Cat*. *Győzike* has been heavily promoted along ethnic lines, using Gypsy stereotypes to publicize the show. See "Romakép-zavar" and "Botrányos TV2 műsor."
13. Indeed, after some complaints about the show's Gypsy stereotyping, RTL Klub issued a statement insisting that it was not a "Roma show" but a "comedy reality show." "The *Győzike* show is not Roma, but is rather an entertainment program, which, if it is influential in any way, certainly doesn't deepen, but rather reduces discrimination." Péter Kolosi, the RTL Klub program manager, quoted in "Gáspár Győző szerepei."
14. http://forum.sg.hu/forum.php3?azonosito=gyozike.
15. http://www.rtlklub.hu/musorok/gyozike/cikk/189507.
16. A well-respected cultural critic, for instance, talks about "parasite media" in the high-brow literary and cultural journal *Èlet és Irodalom* ("*Life and Literature*"), using the *Győzike* show as his chief example. See György (2006).
17. For example, in 2007, Kaposvár University carried out a survey among 1,500 primary school students in the region to gauge the relationship children had with education and the community. When asked whom the children considered as their role model, a third of them reported Győzike. See "Hmmm . . . ."
18. See for instance this excerpt: http://frumusete.protv.ro/video-elena-marghidan-este-de-nerecunoscut/20327/pagina-12.html. I am grateful to Elena Panican for this information.
19. I thank Alice Bardan for information on *Satra*.
20. *Pestiside*, June 26, 2007. http://www.pestiside.hu/20070626/hungo-celeb-roundup-pako-survives-triple-media-assassination-attempt/.
21. See the interview here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uUHjPHCiJU&feature=PlayList&p=8E4B7D1D5E0CEC47&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=30.
22. http://africanexaminer.com/blog2/2008/02/13/nigerian-singer-in-trouble-for-praising-hitler/.

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