

Paper Title: **Reality TV Without Class: The Postsocialist Anti-Celebrity Docusoap**

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Reality TV Without Class: The Postsocialist Anti-Celebrity Docusoap

Reality TV, class and postsocialismⁱ

He [Győzike] is a dumb, 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. (Győzike TV forum post)ⁱⁱ

Győzike [is] the gold playback-award-winner media Roma [...] who hoarded together millions as the lead singer of the band Romantic, as if his family hadn't already owned all of Nógrád County. Of course, the idea is not new. The model is undoubtedly MTV's *The Osbournes*, which depicts the domestic life, complete with rock music and door slamming, of Black Sabbath's former front man. The reality show, which operates with spoiled children and pets who shit on the Persian rug, cannot be transferred directly to Hungary, since we are missing that narrow social layer – not too populous even in the United States – that accumulates castles and yachts while jumping up and down on stage and then escapes with his remaining two dozen brain cells into a marriage, where he creates a bizarre human grouping that resembles a family except they yell a whole lot more.ⁱⁱⁱ

Watching reality programmes in foreign languages and settings often gives one a jolt of the strangely recognisable. This sense of unfamiliar familiarity has caused minor earthquakes in the case of some

postsocialist reality programmes. The Hungarian celebrity docu-sitcom *Győzike* (RTL Klub 2005–) shook the foundations of national identity by defamiliarising the unspoken bond between the nuclear family and its allegorical extension, the national family. The show adopts the hybrid format established by *The Osbournes* (MTV 2002–4) to document the daily lives of Roma^{iv} pop singer Gáspár Győző (nicknamed 'Győzike') and his family. It has been both a massive audience success and, as the comments above indicate, a universally ridiculed object of criticism and overt racism towards Roma minorities.^v It featured nine times in the top twenty most popular programmes in Hungary in its initial year,^{vi} with an audience share average rating of 46.1 per cent (amongst adults 18–49 years of age).^{vii} At the height of its popularity, in May 2009, *Győzike* reached a rating of 50.2 per cent, beating the popular soap opera *Between Friends* (*Barátok közt*) out of its long-time leading spot.^{viii} The emotional outburst stirred up by the programme, unprecedented in the history of Hungarian television, has brought into discussion the taken-for-granted racial and class parameters of the normative national family in the midst of radical socio-economic transformation.

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Reality programming is particularly conducive to making intercultural comparisons. Its worldwide explosion in the 1990s followed large-scale technological shifts in a changing regulatory environment, which favoured 'cheap, common and entertaining' (Murray and Ouellette 2004: 6) programming disseminated around the world. Reality programmes have also come under scrutiny across media, cultural and communication studies as important social texts that attempt to normalise class relations in a global neo-liberal era of technological and economic convergence and increasing state and corporate surveillance.

In 'post-welfare' societies such as the United States and the United Kingdom, income inequalities have greatly increased since the 1980s. Alongside the well-documented decline of the moral authority of, and economic control by, the state and other traditional institutions, reality TV has taken centre-stage as a technology of citizenship in a neo-liberal moral economy that validates the normative practices and choices associated with the middle class. Countless reality formats specialise in identifying good, responsible middle-class subjects and disciplining, transforming, shaming, punishing, and teaching those whose refusal to improve their self-care and behaviour incurs costs to the nation (Skeggs, Wood and Thumin 2007). Scholarly analyses of reality television often combine Foucault's emphasis on governmentality with Bourdieu's notions of the habitus and forms of capital. This framework allows one to track how the individual accumulates moral and economic value on reality TV (Skeggs and Wood 2009). Makeover or lifestyle television, in particular, has been argued to showcase how government has been dispersed into practices of governmentality. It offers a 'decentralized network of entrepreneurial ventures' (Ouellette and Hay 2008: 471) that is supposed to teach personal responsibility, the ethics of good citizenship and demonstrate how to acquire the right kinds of economic and cultural capital necessary for proper middle class status (Palmer 2004).

Despite calls for studying how reality formats can be both 'culturally specific and globally relevant' (Ouellette and Murray 2004:9), such studies cannot fully explain the class and race negotiations and citizenship models represented by *Győzike* and the subsequent, explosive responses to shows like it. Reality programmes produced in postsocialist Eastern Europe may derive from the same global economic and cultural flows as their American or Western European counterparts but they solicit very different spectatorial and critical responses,

which are overcharged with the local significance of socialist histories and the conditions created by the postsocialist transition. It is true that postsocialist economies have been undergoing (neo)liberalisation in the past three decades. Some of the new European Union member states can even be considered post-welfare societies. Nevertheless, Eastern European countries have followed a modified path to capitalism. Here we use *Győzike* as a lens to highlight two of the interrelated factors that are most relevant to understanding reality TV's stormy visualisation of race and class relations within the national family: The first is the novelty of commercial television after more than forty years of government-controlled media, whose standards of quality have been carefully monitored by a normative intellectual class. The second factor is the historical weakness of a propertied middle class and the resulting confusion as to what counts as normative cultural and social values. A popular reality show about celebrity Roma foregrounds this confusion of values rather than offering any direct path to self-education or improvement. The media uproar is due precisely to the fact that the show sets off profound anxieties about what constitutes proper class conduct and national citizenship.

First we reflect on the methodological and ideological difficulties of reading a postsocialist Roma celebrity reality docusoap as a social document. Then we draw on a combination of textual analysis, online audience responses and critical press responses to extract from the *Győzike* phenomenon an understanding of postsocialist class and race relations as they emerge at the interfaces between global neo-liberalism, postsocialist nationalism and reality programming. We discuss the relevant class registers that emerge within the show and its reception: those of the ethnicised underclass on the one hand and the intellectual vanguard of what sociologists János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi (2006) call the 'cultural bourgeoisie' on the other. In the process, we must engage with Anglo-

American theories of reality television as a global phenomenon *and* local approaches to postsocialist television, both of which are limited by their own ethnocentrism.

The challenges of studying postsocialist reality TV

Taking reality television seriously in postsocialist Eastern Europe presents unique methodological, disciplinary and ethical obstacles. One reason is that radical media transformation has been characterised by a negotiation between the state and commercial broadcasters over what remain primarily national, rather than segmented, niche 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 1989. Since they were launched in Hungary in 1997, RTL Klub and TV2, the two most successful commercial broadcasters, quickly colonised the landscape with their imported and domestically produced entertainment programmes, many of which are reality formats. 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' programmes and favoured talk shows, competitive reality programmes and locally produced soap operas.

In response, commercial programming has been universally dismissed by critics for lowering cultural standards and corrupting national citizenship. The programmes are rejected for their affective appeal and debasement of a literature-based national culture in favour of distracting audiovisual infotainment, often blamed on American forms and ideologies. Reality programmes are identified as the trashiest form of television. While the critical outrage about the quality of commercial television is justified on the whole, the refusal to take such programmes seriously as proper objects of analysis also reveals a defensive class position taken by – often formerly dissident – intellectuals. The

intellectual elite is in danger of losing the national leadership roles with which it has been historically charged, a role essential to securing its position within the postsocialist 'cultural bourgeoisie'.

The pseudo-documentary display of ordinary people on reality TV and the defensive critical rejection of such spectacles often make these shows all the more raw and unabashed outlets for a variety of views and emotions that were formerly subject to state censorship. Programmes such as *Győzike* constitute a synergy between the objectionable racial and class quality of their protagonists and the objectionable cultural quality of reality TV. The moral disapproval of such shows is due to the fact that they visualise the intimate connection between these two converging kinds of illegitimacy within the national public sphere. *Győzike* presents a special complication in postsocialist class relations because it lifts 'the Gypsy', normally a representative of the racialised underclass, into a celebrity position where the national normative class values of the future are usually modelled and determined.

Another major obstacle to including postsocialist reality television in wider comparative research is the relative obscurity of local national languages and traditions, compared to English or French-speaking television. As we noted, East European critics, who are the insider experts of these cultures, usually try to distance themselves from a doubly demonised association: forms of commercial television deemed unhealthy for national culture, and ethnic minorities deemed parasitic for the national body. Scholars in Romani Studies, who tend to be familiar with local languages and pride themselves on offering an alternative, positive image of Roma minorities, are also dismissive of television. Romani Studies, grounded in sociology and folklore, often operates with a somewhat anachronistic and idealised image of the Gypsy as a figure unaffected by contemporary popular culture, and turns its ethnographic attention towards the authentic, folk Gypsy encapsulated

in the phrase 'Gypsy way of life' (Tremlett 2009). Popular culture has not significantly entered these discussions and only a smattering of articles deal with the rising popularity of Roma celebrities (Imre 2006, 2008). Roma reality stars and shows constitute inappropriate objects for Romani Studies scholars as much as for national critics. Instead of serving as a valuable resource for understanding cultural hybridity, Roma reality TV then faces a double stumbling block: a profound investment in a Eurocentric ideal of high cultural value and a commitment to the authentic Roma who is essentially different from national majorities.

The final challenge to taking *Győzike* seriously is that 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. Since serious studies of East European popular television are scarce, we are also aware of the methodological responsibility of creating precedent. We have tried to translate the separate professional and personal motivations that led us to the same object into a multi-layered methodology which integrates cultural studies with an attention to political economy, studies of nationalism and race, and questions of genre and text with ethnographic audience research.

Love-to-hate: situating Roma celebrity and reality TV in Hungary

The rise of racist discrimination against Roma minorities and their continuing poverty have become depressingly familiar themes in the postsocialist region (Stewart 1997; Ladányi & Szelényi 2006; Imre 2006; van Baar 2008). In the most recent instance of government-led xenophobia, in August 2009, Sarkozy's French government offered 300 Euros to individual Roma people to go back to Romania or

face enforced eviction. At the same time, the globalisation and commercialisation of East European media cultures has also enhanced the appeal of Roma popular entertainment, particularly hip hop (Imre 2008). However, the resurgence of anti-Roma violence that accompanies the region's experience of deepening global economic crisis has shown that the appearance of Roma celebrity has done little to improve the minority's massive deprivation or to challenge the moral majority's perception of Roma people as a problem.

Therefore, the choice of a Roma family to star in a reality show may therefore seem like an unlikely recipe for success. Nevertheless, shortly after *Győzike* appeared on Hungarian television screens in 2005, it became one of the most watched shows of recent times. Győző Gáspár first came on the media scene in 1999 as the front man of the pop group *Romantic*, which mixed Roma melodies with rap in their songs. *Győzike* also 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 to generate media interest in the programme. He also took a cameo role in the satirical comedy show *My Big Fat Roma Wedding (Bazi Nagy Roma Lagzi TV2 2003)*. This programme ignited much controversy for its crude Roma stereotypes and resulted in sanctions against TV2 by the state's agency for media regulation (ORTT)^{ix}. It also put *Győzike* in an ambiguous political position as someone willing to compromise the cause of the minority for national celebrity.

The advertising for the new reality show *Győzike* used this chequered history as an enticement.^x The weekly 90-minute primetime programme, aired on RTL Klub, TV2's rival^{xi} and Hungary's most successful commercial channel. It began in February 2005 and five years later, in October 2010, the show was on its ninety-seventh episode, with stories about the family's lives appearing consistently on the front pages of the tabloid press.

Despite the high ratings, the Hungarian public and media reaction to the show has been a love/hate relationship, or, rather, a love-to-hate relationship. Győzike and his wife Bea were voted favourite TV personalities in 2008 by the readers of the Hungarian celebrity gossip magazine *Hot*. At the same time, the magazine reported a wider survey of 15-69-year-olds, in which the couple were voted the least liked celebrities.^{xii} Whilst this magazine presumes an adult readership, (as does the show's later viewing time of 9pm), it appears that there is a children's fan base as well. A survey amongst 1,500 primary school students in Southern Hungary in 2007 revealed that a third of the children considered Győzike as their role model.^{xiii}

However, Hungarian cultural critics and Roma activists have widely condemned the show.^{xiv} For example, prominent Roma activist János Daróczy^{xv} 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'. (2006 quoted in Kürti 2008:16)

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The media storm around the show raises the question whether reality television can help complicate the stereotypical, bifocal lens that invariably produces either the 'noble' or the 'savage' Gypsy. As in other Eastern and Southern European countries, there are scant Roma characters on Hungarian soap operas or dramas,^{xvi} while news and documentary programming tend to focus on the criminality and social exclusion of certain Roma communities. (Messing 2008) However, from the start *Győzike* did not fit into either of these formats. The show opens with a slow pan over snow-covered hills and a panpipe tune on the soundtrack, echoing a romantic documentary style. The camera shows the grey communist blocks of a town, home to Győzike and his family, identified in a subtitle as 'Salgótarján

2005'. The Hungarian audience would know that Salgótarján, an industrial town northeast of Budapest hard hit by recent deindustrialisation and high Roma unemployment is not romantic at all. But the aesthetic marker of a proper documentary is only evoked to be sharply abandoned for surprise effect as the camera closes in on a large mustard-coloured 'modern' home, whose style is coded in Hungary as *nouveau riche* (see Figure ii). This is clearly not a romantic documentary about marginalised Roma people. The sense of comedy amplifies as the camera cuts to a close-up of Győzike's face as he is staring in the distance apparently lost in thought. The music speeds up and turns into a fast, popular Gypsy tune. We discover, through a shot of Győzike's legs, that he is sitting on the toilet with his zebra-striped pyjamas around his ankles and his bare toes tapping to the rhythm of the extradiegetic music. The show's distinctive main title appears as if it were the make of the pyjamas in a cunning marketing strategy that anticipates RTL Klub's consistent branding of the show and its ancillary merchandise as 'ethnic kitsch'. (see Figure iii)

Bea then appears in a fantastically non-traditional, shiny, red and black kitchen, wearing a fashionable off-the-shoulder top, stirring a mug 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, and then cuts to their eldest daughter, Evelyn, who is lying on a zebra-striped bedspread and yells to her father to hurry up in the bathroom or she will kick the door down. The younger daughter, Virág, appears wearing a cowboy hat, rocking back and forth on a hobby horse and waving an American flag. Each of these shots is freeze-framed, with the family members' names flashed onto the screen, evoking *The Osbournes*'s opening sequence and establishing the show's status as a mix of documentary observation and popular entertainment. These images 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 whose activities are at once banal and excessive. (Kompáre 2004) They perform their life on the show in an extravagantly decorated house which bears ample evidence of Győzike's well-promoted obsession with zebra stripes and gold. While the programme carefully avoids attaching price tags to the family's consumption habits, it presents an economically upper-class family with lower-class, or specifically ethnic, taste. Like Ozzy Osbourne, in this domestic setting, Győzike is reduced to a bumbling, often sentimental and childish character, whose repeated failures and 'ignominious body' (Kompáre 2004: 104) humanise him whilst providing many comic moments. He and his wife both conform to staple characters of the family sitcom even in the absence of such a generic tradition on East European television.

Many of the episodes focus on the couple's explosive marital tension which is only occasionally and temporarily resolved. The emotional display that characterises reality shows is generously exploited and clearly racialised: It points to the family's Roma identity, which provide Győzike and Bea with a license as well as an expectation to perform the Roma stereotype of the out-of-control, irrational, corporeally-driven racialised minority.^{xvii} These extreme public displays of emotion are still new and rare on East European television and represent a marked departure from the tame, (self-censored) and rational aesthetic inherited from state television. The lack of affective self-control is a major explicit reason for critical aversion and, it is safe to speculate, for private viewer fascination. The two Gáspár daughters, teenage Evelyn and preschooler Virág, are often brought out to serve as comic relief or as buffers when the couple's confrontations become violent.

Besides domestic affairs that, as John Corner (2002) describes, ambivalently hover between the fictional and the real in reality programming - 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 other family members to locations that range from Istanbul through Paris to Florida and inevitably cast them as representatives of the Hungarian nation. The other kind of narrative depicts events in Győzike's public life as a singer or aspiring politician, such as negotiations over performance gigs and his nomination for Roma community leader. Both kinds of storylines inevitably reflect on the couple's Roma identity and on the family's relationship to both the Roma community and the Hungarian national community

At first sight, the show would seem to be popular precisely because it delivers a familiar 'Gypsy circus' (Kürti 2008: 17), reproducing racist stereotypes and inviting viewers to laugh at the family's antics.^{xviii} However, Győzike is not an ordinary poor Roma but a media star with considerable power. The intensity of the public's reaction to the show has much to do with specific relations between postsocialist nationalism and budding media celebrity in the region. Győzike's regional accent, frequent use of Roma expressions, and references to the family's membership in a wider Roma community repeatedly bring into question their appropriateness as the national middle-class family. The following examples from online fora painfully highlight this perceived threat to the idea of Hungarian nationhood and point to the tortuous position of the Roma media celebrity in postsocialist times.

Online Audience Responses and 'the Roma Underclass'

The fact is that the majority of Gypsies live off crime (committed against Hungarians). They know how to make everyone feel sorry for them, but working hard stinks. All they know is 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!!!!!!!!!!

These are typical selections from the roughly 3,500 postings on the fan forum on one of the show's official websites.^{xix} For a programme 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 programme about 'show Roma' ('divatcigány'), who give the entire minority a bad name. The degree of hatred and fear revealed by the posts, replicated by thousands of other reactions in various similar online discussions, is shocking. The comments 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. These discourses are often encouraged indirectly by the state and directly by the declarations and policies of local politicians', which are often only slightly subtler in their racism than the quotations above (Kürti 2008).

These reflections issue commentary on the uneasy social relations between national and global identities forced to the surface by the television. They manifest what Appadurai (2006:51) calls the 'predatory identities' unleashed by globalisation: 'those identities whose social construction and mobilisation require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as we.' He elaborates,

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. (Appadurai 2006: 51)

The anxiety displayed by online responses is due to the fact that Győzike and his family evoke *both* the poor, welfare-bound ghost of the enemy within and a rich, transnational threat. János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi (2006) explain this dual class position in terms of a racialised underclass. Their structuralist understanding of the underclass synthesises two sociological theories: Julius Wilson's tracing of the emergence of the underclass to certain features of capitalist de-industrialisation during the last decades of the 20th century in inner-city Black American neighbourhoods, and Oscar Lewis's description of the culture of poverty among the most hopeless in developing countries, where race is linked with the culture of poverty (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006: 1-8). The processes of deindustrialisation, the shift from a Fordist to post-Fordist regime of production that led to the exodus of the Black middle class from the ghetto and increasing class differentiation within the African-American minority in the 1970s and 80s are analogous to those of the postsocialist economic

and political liberalisation and the transition from socialist redistribution to a market economy in 1990s. The Roma population paid a disproportionate price in the process since they were concentrated in industrial sectors with the most severe job losses following the fall of socialism, particularly in the north-eastern parts of Hungary, where Győzike and his family live.

The Roma population's postsocialist slide into an underclass position has been worsened by intense racial discrimination. At the same time, the formation of this racialised underclass was complemented by the rise into middle-class status of some upwardly-mobile Roma and a subsequent gap between the Roma middle and underclass (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006: 8-10). It is precisely the upward mobility of some Roma that warrants the underclass concept to describe those left behind. In Hungary, an increasingly neo-liberal society, race has taken on growing significance in splitting the Roma population into an underclass and an upwardly mobile middle class.

Overall, three processes may be complementing and/or reinforcing each other in Hungary:

The increasing fuzziness of the ethnic boundaries between Roma and gadjó^{xx}; an increasing reliance on racial categories in drawing those boundaries; and a process of underclass formation. (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006:144)

In the case of *Győzike*, the menace of cultural, racial and class hybridity represented by the wealthy celebrity Roma is exacerbated by the fact that this is a television family. It is created by an emasculating media regime of entertainment perceived as the enemy of national culture, at once feminising and racialising. The fascist vehemence of viewer comments, their call for racial purification is quite out of proportion with the spirit of light entertainment associated with a

television show. These comments reveal the majority's profound dependence on maintaining the illusion of the white nation's ethnic homogeneity.

Critical responses

Reflections in print and online critical journals are invariably outraged about 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, 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. Whilst worries about commercialising the public sphere are legitimate, a number of assumptions remain which bind together official criticism and fan responses much more intimately than it would seem. The overt racism of predatory identities and concerns over the rational national culture headed by a literate, national elite class are two sides of the same coin which differ only in style. Overtly racist 'fan' comments tend to equate Győzike with 'real Gypsies' and personalise their attacks through their own 'experiences' with Roma people. More sophisticated, critical comments – mostly by intellectuals who would reject 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 embodiments of collective norms. They defer their indignation from the protagonists and the minority they represent to the medium and the genre.

A well-respected cultural critic, for instance, talks about 'parasite media' in the high-brow literary and cultural journal *Elet és Irodalom* ("Life and Literature") and cites the *Győzike* show as his chief example.^{xxi} Critics' unanimous dismissal of commercial television derives from the special rights and

responsibilities historically bestowed upon intellectuals in small Eastern European nations. While the bourgeoisie, was central to building capitalist institutions in Western Europe, in Eastern Europe, *cultural* capital has dominated the history of nation-building and remains the main source of power, prestige and privilege in postsocialism (Eyal et al 1998:6). The socialist regime further stalled the development of an economic middle class. The major actors of building civil society and capitalism during the postsocialist transformation have been intellectuals, many of them former dissidents. They formed an uneasy alliance with those segments of the former socialist technocracy that were able to convert their skills and cultural capital to remain in the new managerial elite. The alliance is based on the shared ideology of civil society and economic rationalism, or managerialism: a governmentality that unites diverse fractions of the postsocialist elite within a hegemonic power bloc. (Eyal et al 1998) The postsocialist intelligentsia has thus formed an uneasy neo-liberal alliance with the technocratic managerial elite in the interest of developing capitalist and democratic liberal institutions under the notion of 'civil society'. As a result, 'intellectuals' emerged with a special ethical responsibility for society as whole as 'the searchlight into the future, the soul of the nation' (Eyal et al 1998: 56).

Intellectuals' hold on special class status has become tenuous in the course of postsocialist transformations which have brought about the disintegration of an idealised, homogeneous national public and initiated a subsequent crisis of authority for cultural and political leaders. *Győzike* sets off especially intense anxieties because the show threatens to expose the implicit racial and gendered parameters of intellectual exceptionalism. Whiteness and masculinity are also two of the central pillars of the rational, national public sphere. (Morley 2007). The liberal sympathy that public intellectuals have long displayed for the single visible racial minority has helped efface the racialised quality of this one-directional, hierarchical relationship. The repressed returns in *Győzike's* frequent, unfavourable comparisons in the reviews with 'proper' ways of representing Gypsies: filmic

documentaries about victimised, poor Roma. (Orkeny 2005; Bori 2005) The implication is that the true Roma is a victim, a member of the ethnicised underclass, 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 the passive victims of media exploitation. (Kolozsi 2005; Fáy 2001; Varró 2005; Darab 2008).

While traditionally intellectuals have been expected to speak for and down to a unified national public, that same public is now being directly addressed by ratings-driven media – most evidently in reality shows. In this context, Lajos Császi rightly calls the top-down intellectual tradition of judgment exercised by teachers, politicians and cultural experts profoundly paternalistic (quoted in Jenei 2006). Such a position seems to be animated less by an activist sense of responsibility than by a desire to increase the distance between the 'rabble' public and the shrinking number of intellectuals blessed with reliable aesthetic and moral sense, a way of 'reclaiming authority in the re-drawing of class relations' (Skeggs 2005: 968). This class disgust with low-class celebrity culture is somewhat hypocritical, 'simultaneously about *desire and revulsion*' (Skeggs 2005: 971 italics in original). Such a position also forfeits the possibility of building pedagogical bridges between high-brow and popular cultural forms.

Conclusion: class and postsocialist neo-liberal (ir)responsibility

As we can glimpse from the public reactions to the show, the class implications associated with reality programming are embedded in a specific historical trajectory and political context in the

postsocialist arena. Existing analyses of the class configurations of reality television are useful but only partially applicable to the specific conditions of postsocialism. The anxiety about, and the fascination with, the *Győzike* show are both due to the sense of profound transformation signalled by the very existence of Roma celebrity docusoap. In class terms, *Győzike* is a threat to national culture because it represents an emerging middle-class cultural and economic value that is inherently mixed. The economic middle class has long been a missing element in Soviet-controlled, allegedly egalitarian societies. *Győzike* causes heightened anxiety because the show dares to represent the nuclear Roma family as the national middle-class family. They are media stars who are without a hint of victim mentality – although some critics are eager to construct them as miserable victims of the media, or of the format. *Győzike* and his wife revel in displays of emotion, irresponsibility and excess. They are generous with money, go on foreign trips and shopping sprees, and throw lavish parties with hundreds of guests without showing guilt. *Győzike* uncomfortably evokes the figure of the excessive Balkan or East European man, a national and regional icon, the opposite of the (imagined) money-saving Western Puritan.

Győzike's unapologetic celebration of irresponsibility duly causes national concern along with secret admiration. In fact, the show associates irresponsibility with respectability. This respectability does not require the kind of cultural capital derived from Eurocentric national values represented either by an eastern intellectual class or a western economic middle class. *Győzike* does not need education, does not need to control his emotions, and does not even need to speak proper Hungarian to be successful and therefore respectable. The schizophrenic value schema behind this reality show is specific to the transition from cultures where intellectuals constituted a normative class to a form of neo-liberalism where the space occupied by the middle class in western neo-liberal 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 – but perhaps not to the untapped opinions of those 'ordinary' viewers who delight in the show. Unlike the self-censored views of adult viewers' responses cited above, the reactions of children and other fans to the show point to more fuzzy boundaries between the Roma and the mainstream white public. Therefore we argue that audience studies are fundamental both to understanding broad cultural shifts occurring in postsocialist landscapes and to recognising other 'ordinary' viewers, such as children, women, lower class groups and/ or Roma minorities as avid participants in Hungary's growing media industry who often remain under-valued and under-researched (see Bernáth & Messing 2002).

Whereas in the West the middle-class viewer addressed by reality shows easily distances oneself from the abject spectacle of traumatised individuals in need of televisual charity and self-help, in Eastern European national cultures the class distance between viewer and viewed spectacle, even of stars, is reduced and occluded. It can only be re-crystallised in racial terms, by foregrounding Győzike's Roma difference – a difference constructed and performed on the show for commercial purposes. In turn, however, such efforts at distancing are undermined by Győzike's demonstrated class success. *Győzike* celebrates the entrepreneurial individual who makes the best of wild postsocialist neo-liberal conditions registering seismic shifts in the nation's self-definition.

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Notes

ⁱ We use 'postsocialist' here to mean a period of economic, cultural and political transition and transformation across countries that were, in the mid to late twentieth century, a part of a socialist regime. We prefer 'postsocialist' to 'postcommunist' as the former was the self-designation used by Soviet-controlled governments and citizens while the latter is a homogenizing term imposed by Western powers and steeped in the divisive logic of the Cold War.

ⁱⁱ 'GyőzikeTv Fórum'. Available at: <http://forum.sg.hu/forum.php3?azonosito=gyozike> (Accessed: 4 October 2010)

ⁱⁱⁱ Szabo Z, 8 February, 2005 'Cigányok ideje'. ('Time of the Gypsies') in *Index*, a Hungarian-language online news source Available at: <http://index.hu/kultur/media/gyozi594/> . (Accessed: 4 October 2010)

^{iv} The term 'Roma' is mostly used in this chapter recognition of its acceptance in pan-European discourse as a substitute for the previous term 'Gypsy' which has been considered pejorative. However, it is contested as an umbrella term for minority groups that may more strongly identify themselves separately from 'Roma' and use terms such as Gypsies, travellers, Sinti, Vlach Rom, Ashkali etc.

^v Roma minorities are considered the largest minority in Europe today. The expansion of the European Union (EU) to include post-socialist states can be seen as a turning point in the history of the EU and its attitude towards Roma minority groups. The process of EU expansion has highlighted Roma as the largest and poorest minority group in Central and Eastern Europe, with calls for individual governments to deal with poverty and discrimination prior to European accession. Numbers of Roma in the recent post-socialist accession countries

range from approximately 8,000 in Latvia, to 600,000 in Hungary and about 2 million in Romania (Source: *European Union support for Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe 2003* (Brussels: European Commission:4).

^{vi} RTL Group Annual Report 2005, available via RTL Group web page. Available at:

<http://www.rtlgroup.com/www/htm/annualreport.aspx> (Accessed: 4 October 2010)

^{vii} 'RTL Group announces its audited results for the year ended 31 December 2005' available via RTL Group web page. Available at:

http://www.rtlgroup.com/www/htm/pressrelease_5FF713CD29834E139F376B89E1E0BA22.aspx (Accessed: 4

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^{viii} 'Szenzáció! Győzike lekörözte a Barátokat'. Available at:

http://www.est.hu/cikk/47650/szenzacio_gyozike_lekorozte_a_baratokat/ro409. (Accessed 4 October 2010)

^{ix} György, P. 'Gáspár Győző szerepei' **Error! Bookmark not defined.** *Népszabadság Online* 6 January 2006.

Available at: <http://www.nol.hu/archivum/archiv-389740> (Accessed: 4 October 2010)

^x 'Ugyanakkor megtudhatjuk azt is, milyen egy 'bazi nagy roma buli' Győzike módra' **Error! Bookmark not defined.** from 'Győzike show' 27 January 2005, Available at:

<http://www.rtlklub.hu/musorok/gyozike/cikk/238742> (Accessed: 4 October 2010)

^{xi} 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.

^{xii} See magazine: *Hot Top 100 Sztár: A száz legfontosabb magyar híresség* ("Top Hot 100 Stars: The 100 most important Hungarian celebrities"), 2008/1 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, Budapest: Euromedia BT.

^{xiii} 'Hmmm... - Győzike a példaképe minden harmadik somogyi általános iskolásnak' **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, February 9th, 2007, Available at:

<http://www.mtv.hu/modernkepmesek/cikk.php?id=183025>] (Accessed: 4 October 2010)

^{xiv} "Gáspár Győző szerepei' György Péter szerint kiszabadult a szellem a palackból - Az RTL

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<http://www.nol.hu/cikk/389740/> (Accessed: 16/02/07)

^{xv} 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).

^{xvi} The exception is the mixed-race (Roma/Hungarian) character of Nóra on the popular primetime soap opera *Barátok közt* ("Between Friends"), which marks the first Roma presence on fictional programming (Bernáth & Messing 2001).

^{xvii} 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' Willems 1997: 50)

^{xviii} 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 programme, which, if it is influential in any way, certainly doesn't deepen, but rather reduces discrimination.' Péter Kolosi, the RTL Klub programmeme manager, quoted in György, P. 'Gáspár Győző

szerepei' Népszabadság online 6 January 2006. Available at: <http://www.nol.hu/archivum/archiv-389740>

(Accessed: 4 October 2010)

^{xix} 'GyőzikeTv Fórum'. Available from: <http://forum.sg.hu/forum.php3?azonosito=gyozike> (Accessed: 4 October 2010)

^{xx} 'Gadjo' is a Romani term used for non-Roma people.

^{xxi} György, Péter. **Error! Bookmark not defined.** *Elet és Irodalom* Vol. 49, issue 22. June 3, 2006. Available at: <http://www.es.hu/pd/display.asp?channel=MUBIRALAT0522&article=2005-0605-2241-12PHRS> (Accessed: 4 October 2010)