Roma Music and Transnational Homelessness

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We are the Gypsies in this world, brother.
We’ve lived here in peace for a long time,
Without wealth, without even a country.
We’ve come from India, but we’re at home everywhere.

LL Junior, Mi, Romák/We, the Roma

LATCHO DROM AND THE MUSIC OF THE DIASPORA

In his article on the relationship between cultural identity and diaspora, Stuart Hall compared the formation of Caribbean identities to the work of Derrida’s *différance* in language: Being of a certain essence is always becoming, just as, in the deconstructionist model, absolute difference is always a sliding difference, on its way to new meanings without completely erasing traces of other meanings. By the same logic, imposing a single imaginary coherence on an area as fraught with dispersal and fragmentation as the Caribbean would be impossible. Rather than shared authentic origins, it is precisely the layers of colonial ruptures and discontinuities that constitute Caribbean identities. Hall turns to the notion of play to evoke the instability and permanent unsettlement that characterises diasporic cultural identities. Besides the full palette of skin hues one encounters in the Caribbean, he argues, the complexity of this cultural play can be most powerfully experienced in Caribbean music.¹

The organic relationship between the two senses of play Hall discusses – diasporic dispersal and unsettlement on the one hand and musical play on the other – is a useful way to think about the politics of authenticity and hybridity within contemporary world music in relation to transnational mobility and migration. My intention is to use Hall’s joint discussion of musical and identity play to rethink Roma music and the ‘musicality’ of the Roma in relation to European nationalisms and to the flow of popular world music across transnational markets.

‘The Gypsy’s’ inherent musicality has long been established in popular representations, embraced by many Roma themselves as something that functions on the level of a collective genetic trait. More recently, however, the figure of the ‘musical Gypsy’ has taken on a new, overtly politicised role in emerging Roma identity politics in post-communist Europe. A number of young Roma musicians have drawn on Afro-Caribbean musical expression, particularly hip-hop, to reappropriate the degrading, romanticising stereotypes in which the link between Roma identity and music has been contained, and turn such stereotypes into a critical tool against nationalistic discrimination and European exclusion. At the same time, as I will argue, the new avenues of transnational mobility and global media access do not automatically lead to a political intervention in the relations between national or European majorities and Roma minorities. While Roma musicians’ engagement with other racialised hybrid musical flows does constitute a qualitatively new form of political expression, the dangers of commercial cooptation by the world music market, entrapment in inherently racist national languages and surveillance by the nation-state continue to lurk.

Tony Gatlif’s 1993 film, *Latcho Drom* (*Safe Journey*), is a milestone in the recent political re-evaluation of Roma music. The film follows the story of the Romany people’s legendary migration and dispersal from India: it is told entirely in music and images, with scenes set in Rajasthan, Egypt, Turkey, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, France and Spain. As Jennifer Bean writes, also evoking Hall’s article on cultural identity and diaspora, *Latcho Drom* takes seriously the play of difference in identity, which is most obvious

... in the musical register, as a site of complexity that exceeds the simple, binary oppositions – past/present, them/us – so often found in cinematic and other visual forms of representation... Here the Gypsy’s musicality functions not as subsidiary support for the image track, nor as an extra-diegetic component, but as the central driving force from which all other elements derive.\(^2\)

*Latcho Drom*’s insistence on narrating almost entirely without spoken language mirrors the Roma’s resistance to collective re-legitimisation by a sanctioned history of modern nationalism. What Bean calls the film’s ‘relentless mobility’ also defies territorial nationalism. This is achieved as much by shots of moving vehicles and communities as by fluid editing that alternates panoramic shots of changing landscapes with intimate close-ups of dancing hands and feet. Motion and music ironically register here as the very essence of Romany identities. The music retains recognisable similarities across the long journey, however, and the locally inflected, multilingual lyrics reveal shared experiences of collective play within exclusion and persecution. The same play of identity-in-difference that provides the ground for Caribbean identities also provides the ‘authentic’ ground for Romany history, an ironic sense of safety and stability in a migratory existence that could not be further from a ‘safe journey’.

I want to emphasise the political implications of the value reversal that Gatlif, a Paris-based Romany filmmaker of Algerian descent, so

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evocatively achieved. Popular opinion, reinforced by media representations and state policies, universally wraps the Roma in the imagery of Orientalism, judging them inferior, barbaric, tribal, nomadic and childish – in other words, incapable by nature of rising to the level of civilised, rational, modern nationalism. Like children, the Roma are only good at playing in this scheme – celebrating, dancing and, above all, playing music. Roma musical play, however, appears to be serious and ideologically saturated when seen through Gatlif’s eyes. The play of difference in identity, of diversity within imposed unity, of collectivity within individualism, which Roma identities embody in the film, thus appears implicitly threatening to those invested in primordial nationalism.

Rather than written history instrumentalised through state education, media and other hegemonic public discourses, it is precisely music that gives the Roma a home in this film. In the process, however, the very definition of home becomes something irreducible to national or other borders. Instead, it is inscribed into bodily practices and sonic spaces. Mieke Bal coined the term ‘migratory aesthetics’ to describe an aesthetic encounter that ‘takes place in the space of, on the basis of, and on the interface with, the mobility of people as a given, as central, and as at the heart of what matters in the contemporary, that is, “globalized” world’. In this sense, the term ‘migratory’ refers to the understanding that migrants and migration are a fact of any society today. Almost fifteen years after making Latcho Drom, Gatlif’s thematising of westward and northbound Roma migration can be read as emblematic of the New Europe itself, a place increasingly transformed by mass migrations and new diasporic formations. It is hardly a coincidence that the European Parliament has recently called for the re-categorisation of the Roma, a diverse group dispersed across European nation-states, as a ‘European minority’.

The film’s migratory aesthetics would place Latcho Drom within an expanding body of films that foreground the issues of migration, diaspora and ‘cultural homelessness’ through a Brechtian, non-linear aesthetic. This genre of films, produced by interstitial, transnational and diasporic filmmakers, has been discussed variously as ‘accented’, ‘intercultural’, ‘multicultural’ or simply ‘transnational’. The Roma’s transnational history and musical identity-in-play thus lend themselves to theorisations of an emerging audiovisual aesthetic which reverses traditional negative evaluations of migration and mobility. One needs to be alert, however, to the dangers of theorising or aestheticising away migration, disconnecting it from the actual experiences of the Roma and other economic and political migrants.

The tension between ‘migratory’, with its implication of violence, deprivation and pain, and the refined air of ‘aesthetics’ in Mieke Bal’s otherwise useful combination, should keep us aware of the limits of such encounters. Bal frankly admits that her collaborative work on an art video served as a ‘laboratory’ for understanding what happens in encounters with migratory aesthetics and argues that the experience of migratory aesthetics compels an ‘ethical imperative to provide a congenial, friendly soundscape in which mobility – the migratory – is not the despised exception but the valued norm’. Latcho Drom is a visually and acoustically beautiful film. However, its ethical and political

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5 See Huub van Baar’s article in this issue.

imperative is not likely to reach beyond the odd cineaste who enjoys films without dialogue and characters, or the connoisseur of ethnic musics. If one is unfamiliar with the ways of life of Eastern European Roma, who have been settled for centuries as (second-class) citizens of particular nation-states, *Latcho Drom* may tempt one to think of the Roma as an aesthetic category, as an idealised, homogenous group that embodies migration as a liberatory metaphor in the face of violent territorial nationalisms. *Latcho Drom*’s migratory aesthetic, refreshing as it is in the face of a multitude of stereotyping representations, may inadvertently reinforce the romantic image of the wandering nomad. It is thus not likely to reduce either the intensity of anti-Roma racism or of mainstream fears about mass-scale post-Cold War migration within Europe.

How can the migratory aesthetics of Roma music influence or translate into effective migratory politics? Are there aesthetic experiences and expressions in which the extraordinarily rich cultural hybridity and inherent transnationality of what is artificially united under the phrase ‘Gypsy music’ turns into a progressive and effective political attitude towards forced migration and discrimination? While the continuity is evident, what is the difference between the traditional Roma folk music that has become an integral part of national musical traditions and the youthful urban sounds of Roma rappers and other pop musicians, whose ethnic identity politics is often more directly articulated and whose sounds and images borrow from and open towards a world music market while continuing to address a national audience?

There is no doubt that hip-hop lends a great deal of commercial and political clout to a new generation of Roma musicians precisely because it re-colours their ethno-racial difference in the cool shades of world music. Compared with *Latcho Drom* or traditional Roma folk musics, ‘Roma rap’ introduces new categories of assessment, ones not so easily controlled by nationalistic discourses, the nation-state or European high culture. But I will also caution against instant optimism about Roma agency: the assimilationist logic of the transnational entertainment market, despite its immediacy of production, distribution and access, puts severe limitations on the resistant politics associated with hip-hop. Furthermore, even with the transnationality of the music and images that Roma rappers cultivate, the nation-state and national languages continue to assert boundaries and hierarchies.

In order to assess such recent developments, it is important first to take a closer look at the traditional status of Roma music and the image of the Gypsy musician as they are imbricated with nationalism and the state.

**FROM ANTI-SOVIET ROCK TO ROMA RAP**

Musicology – along with a range of social sciences – has been informed from its inception by a combination of nineteenth-century positivism, realism and romanticism in Eastern Europe. This ideological cluster has helped support the seemingly opposing ideals of the spontaneous, uncontrollable genius in the arts and an unmediated empirical access to inferior subjects in the sciences. Taken together, these two notions
produce their ideal subject – or abject – in the ‘musical Gypsy’, the quintessential natural artist who is, at the same time, a natural barbarian in need of ‘salvage ethnography’. Approaches that openly acknowledge the performative, allegorical aspect of anthropology, the fact that such research inevitably soothes its own anxieties about modernity and relentless progress by projecting them onto the ‘primitive’, premodern beast are relatively recent and still few and far between. Mattijs van de Port, for instance, presents his ethnography of Serbian Roma not only as a personal journey (rather than a static body of unmediated knowledge) but also as a dialogic, relational narrative constructed out of different voices in constant translation. More importantly, he identifies the image of the romantically talented primitive beast as the projection of a national mirror-image onto the figure of the ‘Gypsy’, itself a redemptive and self-purifying effort to externalise a Western European projection onto Eastern Europe.

In a similar vein, until recently, Gypsy music has typically been addressed in terms of ethnomusicology, purged of politics. Even if one has not met ‘real Gypsies’, in a number of ethnographic media representations of East European Roma life the non-Roma viewer is struck first by the poverty in which extended families strive for mere survival and then the fact that, sooner or later, singing and dancing starts up, whether the place is a clay hut, a makeshift house or a hole in the ground. Whilst this kind of nationalistic stereotyping reinforces charges of laziness, the Roma themselves tend to see musical play as a survival strategy against recurring adversity that would otherwise be unbearable.

The discursive ghetto of inferiority that the inherent musicality of the Roma drew around the Romany minority has been essential to downplaying the hybridity and cultural mixing that Roma music evidences. This ambivalent strategy was spatially mirrored in the housing policies of the Socialist states. One of the most forceful ways in which East European states created Roma ghettos was, paradoxically, the result of forced assimilation: by assigning Roma families inferior housing in government complexes. I grew up in one of those soul-killing blocks of flats that have become sad emblems of the Communist regime, lasting testaments to its absurdity long after the fall of the Wall. In our long ten-storey tenement building, divided into twenty-four conjoined blocks, each of which comprised about forty identical apartments, number ten was known as ‘the Gypsy block’. It was widely known that Gypsy families had been transplanted into the heart of the apartment complex from nearby shacks, the original Gypsy settlement, on which the state’s aggressive urbanising ambition had encroached by the mid-1970s. With the Roma families wedged in amidst white Hungarians, there was no way to avoid each other. Still, segregation found a way to evolve: non-Roma families avoided number ten like the plague, speeding up as they passed it on their way home from the bus stop and exchanging gossip about the unspeakable ways in which Roma primitives regularly violated the rules of civilised urban living. Children also played separately, having perfectly internalised the hierarchy on both sides by the time they reached ‘playing-in-the-street’ age.

On summer nights, however, we were all listening to the sounds of Roma celebrations coming from the shacks. The Gadje apartment dwellers’ reaction was one of great irritation, and somewhat hypocritical,
considering the ongoing non-Roma drunken traffic in the local streets and bars. Decades later, I can finally explain this excessive annoyance as a manifestation of ‘ludophilia’, that is, one’s own inhibited pleasure that manifests itself as the jealousy of or even attacks on the pleasures of others. Renata Salecl employs the notion of ludophilia persuasively to explain the post-socialist outburst of East European nationalisms. She argues that these nationalisms did not appear out of the blue; rather, they had always thrived hidden under otherwise manifest ideological utterances of the socialist state. While on the level of ideological meaning nationalism and communism were opposed, the former being anti-communist and the latter declaring itself to be internationalist in orientation, on the level of fantasy, they shared a solid ground in homophobia, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and sexism. After 1989, the takeover of governments that represented the right-leaning East European moral majority reduced the distance between manifest ideological meaning and underlying racist and sexist fantasies.10

The sound and politics of the new post-socialist ethnic and immigrant ghetto, abandoned by the state, are quite different from those of the pop music that sustained the generations growing up in the 1960s and 1970s. As the suggestively titled collection Rocking the State11 documents, rock music took on a thoroughly political role in uniting a youthful national opposition to state socialism. The ‘rock revolutions’ in Poland, Hungary, the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia helped to vent frustration and catalyse resistance during the 1970s and 1980s. These rock revolutions went through distinct phases that were similar throughout the region: the initial imitation of Anglo-American stars and bands was followed by attempts to adapt these models to native languages and political goals. All Socialist governments recognised the fomenting power of locally adapted rock and responded with prohibition, monitoring and censorship. In some countries, such as Yugoslavia and Hungary, state authorities eventually concluded that a legitimate opposition would only fuel rock’s political energies and had successfully co-opted the rock scene by the 1980s.12 This led to the merging of the rock sound and nationalist fervour, as in the production of the mammoth Hungarian patriotic rock opera, István a Király (Stephen the King). Nevertheless, while it is extreme to claim that rock music brought the system down, it undoubtedly contributed to the loosening of the state’s grip on identities in every country.

The decline of Socialism and the arrival of global television, particularly MTV, in Eastern Europe also accelerated a generational shift in musical sensibilities.13 Rock continued to be harnessed in the service of nationalist sentiment. The best illustration of this convergence is the Serb Turbo/Folk/Rock scene that had led up to and thrived during the Yugoslav wars of succession.14 But, to many in the younger generation, the violent purity and whiteness of such music pales in comparison with the cool and erotic energies of the African-American and Afro-Caribbean ghetto.

Eastern European Roma, who have been pigeonholed as ‘entertainers’ for centuries in order to keep them out of the proper diligent professions that defined legitimate citizenship, have recently come centre stage as the local embodiments of ghetto music. While Roma musicians have always maintained extended international networks regardless of the musical genre they pursued, during Socialism their activities were monitored and

13 The expansion of European Music Television into Eastern Europe was greeted with excitement, particularly in war-torn Sarajevo. See Lida Hujic, “I Hope You’re Enjoying Your Party!” MTV in Wartorn Bosnia’, Screen, 3:37, 1996, pp 268–78.
regulated by nation-states. States provided contracts and visas for foreign venues and took credit for the achievements of their ‘good’ Roma.\textsuperscript{15} While the flexibility and variety of ‘Gypsy’ music was acknowledged, the national framework always prevailed even in allegedly depoliticised musicological accounts. According to Hungarian ethnomusicologist Bálint Sárosi, who wrote an extended study of Roma music, music provides a level playing field where selected, disciplined and musically educated Gypsies can become true Hungarians, which, Sárosi seems to believe, is their sole desire.\textsuperscript{16} It is important to emphasise the nation-states’ continued ambivalence here: the same Roma who are condemned for ‘shaming’ their countries in front of Europe and the EU when they seek asylum in Western Europe are proudly embraced as the nation’s representatives when it comes to claiming cultural credits abroad.

Since the fall of the Wall, the European popular music market has turned towards Eastern Europe and the Balkans in search of novelty and originality: consider the success of the Russian Tatu duo or the Romanian Cheeky Girls. There is no shortage of neologisms that describe the varieties of world music transplanted into and growing out of East European soil. Along with Gypsy techno and Roma rap, one hears of speed-folk, Transylvania-pop, Balkanrock, etc. Some music producers even draw an analogy between the exoticism that East European literature and film had to offer to the West under Socialism and what popular music has to offer now. Many Romany musicians have taken advantage of Western interest, easier travel and international family networks to build transnational careers.

Globalising Roma pop music is still politics-saturated just as anti-Communist rock was, but this politics posits different tensions, complicated by their muteness under nationalised Communism. It maps a playing field in which race, class, gender and other identities are explicit factors, rather than suppressed registers effaced by the dialectic between the nation and its others. Whilst post-Communist states continue to fabricate a populist image of eternal national glory steeped in and guaranteed by the classics of Eurocentric high culture, recent products of glocal entertainment media introduce the voice of a growing sensibility that is rather sceptical about the merits of nationalism in a world where MTV educates more powerfully than national poetry.

\section*{WORLD MUSIC AS VIRTUAL HEIMAT?}

The time when Eastern European Roma are entering the world music market has been characterised as a distinct ‘third’ phase in the genealogy of world music. According to Stephen Feld, the term ‘world music’ emerged in the 1960s to communicate a Western desire to learn about non-Western ‘ethnic’ musics and the minorities who play them around the world. This academic and commercial desire reproduced imperialistic hierarchies under the scientific guise of ethnomusicology and returned to ideas of the ‘authentic’ and the ‘primitive’, homogenising previous intercultural influences. The second phase of ‘world music’ replaced the search for the authentic with the celebration of the hybrid. It fused first-world mass-media professionalism with Third World sounds, spearheaded by ‘pop star curation’ such as Paul Simon’s work on \textit{Graceland}}
The current third stage is equally informed by the industry’s promotion of a diluted diversity and an ambivalent academic reaction, which alternately celebrates the indigenisation of global pop (often romantically saluting hybridity as inherently resistant) and anxiously accuses the big players of world music of commodifying ethnicity and committing ‘channelised violence’.17

Can we transpose migratory aesthetics into an expanded, global and largely virtual space where the boundaries of high and popular culture, art cinema and do-it-yourself media become fuzzy, if not altogether invisible? On YouTube.com, scenes from *Latcho Drom* coexist with the performances of hundreds of Roma rappers and other popular Roma musicians. The hits multiply if one searches in specific languages or by the names of particular performers. Seduced by the deceptively smooth digital cohabitation of prestigious art film and popular Roma music, I try to imagine a new ending to *Latcho Drom*: Gatlif’s film ends in Spain, the westernmost station of the Roma’s European migration. In the last scene, a Romany flamenco singer’s powerful voice cries out from the hilltop to the city below the accumulated historical rage of the Roma, the oppressed of Europe, accompanied by a chorus of female voices and traditional *palmas*, or rhythmic hand-clapping. In my imaginary version, the film would then cut to Roma hip-hop musicians in baggy pants and oversized jewellery in the streets of Barcelona, talking in rapid-fire musical language about racism and daily discrimination. It is hard to see such a scene in the film as anything but jarring. This suggests to me that, despite *Latcho Drom*’s positive reassessment of Roma hybridity and mobility, some unspoken claim to musical and ethnic authenticity lingers, inseparable from the film’s high modernist aesthetic. This claim undercuts the possibility of a more direct kind of intervention in identity politics, which has fuelled rap’s worldwide journey from Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American ghettos to a variety of other ghettos around the world.

Hip-hop has actually fertilised the flamenco scene in Andalusia much as it has most other forms of popular music played by young Roma musicians today. The new genre is variously called flamenco-rap, hip hop Andaluz, street rumba, or, by the Spanish music industry’s labels, ‘sonido ciudadísmo’ or ‘urban sound’. In an article devoted to this new musical mix, Susanne Stemmler argues that the inherent hybridity, openness, performative irony and play of the two styles amplifies in this combination and creates a new space for social and political critique. The band Ojos de Brujo exaggerate and thus ironically perform to the majority culture the exoticising stereotypes of the ‘Gypsy dancer’ and the Egyptian belly-dancer, who are equipped here with sneakers and other accessories of global rap. The group Daara J rap in Caló, the language of the Andalusian Romany, integrating Yoruba rituals with narratives about drug dealers and skaters. Rap, in this account, is not only a highly politicised news channel connecting transnational communities of the ‘Black Atlantic’ but is also a musical form that functions as an open source. Hip-hop, then, provides a virtual home of shared experiences, a space of connectedness and belonging to a transnational community often called ‘hip-hop nation’. ‘Home seems to be a habitual practice of mobility, itself a symbolic habitat, a way of life’.18 Rap and flamenco are both sound cultures that act against the territorialisng impulses of the nation-state.

This is a compelling account, whose optimism is contagious. It seems quite likely that rap has introduced into national cultures Roma voices that had not been heard before. The image and sound flows of rap help Roma rappers transform their own ethnicities by re-appropriating the image of the Gypsy musician formerly tamed by the state in the service of a transnational identity politics. One sees examples of such success stories in Eastern Europe, too. The band Gipsy.cz, from the Czech Republic, has recently made it onto the World Music Charts’ European Top Ten. Led by rapper ‘Gipsy’ (Radoslav Banga), the band of Roma musicians perform in Romany, English and Czech and mix Romany sounds and music with various pop styles. Gipsy.cz’s first CD, Romano Hip Hop, released in 2006, has been distributed Europe-wide by Indies Scope Records. The title song was voted ‘Song of the Year’ by the readers of the popular Czech music magazine Filter.19

At the same time, when one takes a closer look at the ways in which most Roma rappers try to carve out new spaces of identity in Eastern Europe, their efforts seem to leave them suspended between the global media and the nation-state more often than allowing them to critique both. Browsing the YouTube selection in Hungarian, one finds many hits for LL Junior, one of the most popular Roma rappers whose song lyrics open this article. His offerings, for the most part, are romantic songs, which infuse traditional Roma tunes with Afro-Caribbean influences. LL Junior was a founding member of Fekete Vonat (Black Train), one of the first and most successful Roma rap bands in the post-socialist era. Like Gipsy.cz’s, Black Train’s music is founded in Roma traditions but also incorporates American rap, jazz and pop. Unlike traditional Roma folk music and mainstream pop music played by Roma musicians, Black Train’s lyrics openly confronted racism and discrimination. Following their success with both Roma and non-Roma audiences at home and abroad, the band signed a three-album contract with the Hungarian EMI in 1997. When making the third of these albums, however, a changed Hungarian EMI leadership refused to allow the band to record songs in Romany. A statement from the parent company, EMI London, assessed the situation succinctly: ‘It’s not good business to be racist.’20

As Black Train’s and LL Junior’s mixed success stories show, the new opportunities for travel, marketing and distribution outside the channels controlled by the state constitute a transnational opening for Roma musicians. But Roma musicians invariably need to make allowances in order to be heard in their own countries. The local versions of the popular musical talent show American Idol have provided rich case studies of the ambivalent relationship between Roma musicians and their nation-states. As I have argued elsewhere, they provide the best illustration of the minefields that Roma entertainers have to negotiate, easily exploited, as they are by both commercial media and state politicians for the economic and political capital they represent.21 Romany singer Vlastimil Horváth won the 2005 season of SuperStar in the Czech Republic at the same time as Caramel, aka Ferenc Molnár, won Megasztár in Hungary. While these national winners’ ethnicity was at the centre of public debates over whether the rise of Roma stars will elevate the status of the entire minority, the singers themselves have been eager to shed the burden of representation.

19 See http://www.gipsy.cz
20 http://groups.yahoo.com/group/balkanhr/message/2029
Embracing selected Roma musicians has long been a strategy employed by the state and the moral majority with which to handpick and isolate from their communities ‘model’ representatives of the minority, most of whom remain all the more excluded from the national community. György Kerényi, long-time manager of the minority station Rádió C in Hungary, reminds us that urban Gypsy musicians have always been a part of the Budapest bohemian intellectual world. It is easy to see how such tactics continue in the management of Roma pop stars by the state and by national media.

Ibolya Oláh, who finished a close second in the 2004 season of Megasztár, was officially chosen to represent Hungarian culture in the European Parliament in Brussels, where she performed a patriotic song in the spring of 2005. The final of the 2005 season was attended by numerous prominent political officials and cultural elites. Unlike Gipsy or even LL Junior, whose hybridised Roma images are carefully calculated and cultivated, the YouTube presences of Oláh and Caramel reveal nothing about their ethnic origins. In the eyes of the global media world, these national media stars are represented as simply ‘Hungarian’.

Ibolya Oláh, an orphan with a spine-chilling, powerful voice, marched forward in the 2004 Megasztár competition performing two kinds of music: one of her sources was popular songs from the Hungarian classical pop repertoire of the explicitly patriotic variety, such as Péter Máté’s ‘Hazám’ (‘My Country’). The lyrics speak the sentimental language of patriotism from the explicit position of the white male intellectual. The song opens with the metaphor of paternal lineage to confirm the genetic bond between family and country, patria and patriarch: ‘I can hear my father’s voice. You may not like this, but this is my country.’ In Hungarian, the word used in the song for ‘country’, ‘haza’, unites ‘home’ and ‘country’. The Roma woman, by definition excluded from both categories, is symbolically included on stage while performing the role of the model exception that confirms the rule about the bad minority. Oláh’s other choices consisted of international hits, mostly by black singers, such as Queen Latifah’s song from the musical Chicago, ‘When You’re Good to Mama’. Oláh’s ethnic difference became acceptable and even seductive on the national talent show when removed by a degree of separation in the direction of the nurturing ‘mythical black mother’. Oláh, the embodiment of the doubly excluded, has been fixed in subsequent appearances to exemplify the state’s programmatic multicultural outreach and Europe’s generosity towards minorities. Her performance of the song ‘Magyarország’ (‘Hungary’) was employed to enhance the televisual spectacle of patriotic fireworks twice in 2005: on New Year’s Eve and on the state holiday of 20 August, the birthday of King Stephen, legendary founder of the Kingdom of Hungary.

Caramel’s image and music have been similarly whitewashed and nationalised, with the singer’s voluntary participation. His hit song and video clip, ‘Párórára’ (‘For a Few Hours’), features the singer sitting on the grass in a baseball hat, baggy pants and a long shirt, absorbed in the timeless existentialist art of observation among people rushing by. Caramel moved audiences during the 2005 season of Megasztár with his performance of ‘Egy Elfelejtett szó’, (‘A Forgotten Word’), rendered a classic by the Hungarian 1980s rock band LGT. The song became a cult item of the rock revolution and a nostalgic brick in the construction of

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post-communist national unity. The irony that the Roma were generally assumed to be the recipients of state favours and therefore allies of the Party leadership is erased in this performance along with Caramel’s ethnic minority position. The singer’s rap song ‘Mennem Kell’ (‘I Gotta Go’), from the album launched by his success on Megasztár, features the voice of a confident and well-to-do star on the rise. The clip shows Caramel, who is hardly an athletic type, emerging from an elegantly dishevelled bed shared by a sleeping blonde bombshell. The song announces that the world is waiting for him and therefore he cannot be tied down by a woman. We see him enjoy the blowing wind and his new mobility while driving a Mercedes.

The most extreme example of the dangers of double cooptation, by both state discourses and commercial media, is Roma singer Gyözö Gáspár, leader of the band Romantic. Gáspár wants his band to be the nation’s favourite, simply embraced by Hungarians and the Roma alike. Perhaps it is no wonder that the first prime-time television show starring a Roma in Hungary revolves around the non-offensive Gáspár: The Gyözike Show, in its third season on the commercial channel RTL Klub, is reality TV, which records the daily life of Gáspár and his family. While the fact that a Romany man and his family occupy precious prime-time television space, attracting a large non-Roma audience, is a significant development, the family’s life in the expensive villa they inhabit more closely resembles the Beverly Hillbillies. The decor is in bad taste, family members constantly shout at one another in the stereotypical Roma dialect familiar from cabaret scenes, and most of Gáspár’s efforts to assert himself backfire in some ridiculous way or another. The show seems to confirm nothing but Gypsies’ inability to function as hard-working citizens. It displays the results of putting childish Roma entertainers in the china shop of an expensive house, comically performing a lifestyle which they will never be sophisticated enough to appreciate. The ‘real Roma’ that this reality show delivers appear to be hopelessly hovering among various stereotypes. On the show, in live concerts and in his web presence, Gyözike seems eager to please by offering himself up for easy consumption and by dedicating his own life and music to consumption. Perhaps the most explicit of these consumptive performances is the song ‘Fogyni volna jó’ or ‘It Would be Great to Lose Weight’. In a concert video on YouTube, Gyözike performs the song with two other Roma dancers, to the lukewarm applause of a predominantly Gadje audience. The song’s message amounts to this: ‘It would be nice to lose weight but I like bacon and sausage too much.’ Gyözike’s chunky appearance certainly underscores the urgency of his message and provides for a depoliticised common ground with many out-of-shape Hungarians. On YouTube, the spectatorial comments, invariably in Hungarian, converge in national shame about being represented in terms of such a common ground on an ‘international’ forum.

Some of the most revealing episodes of his reality show revolve around travel. Gyözike and his family are often sent to exotic locations where their national TV star status is both proven and compromised. Removed from the home country and seen through the eyes of a range of foreigners with whom he interacts, Gyözike becomes indistinguishable from travelling Hungarians. This offers Hungarian audiences a palatable but also ambivalent platform for identification. In Miami, for instance,
Gyözike plays out the typical ‘East European abroad’ scenario: for lack of foreign-language skills, he yells in Hungarian on the top of his lungs at the truck driver whose vehicle he has bumped and who shouts back obscenities in English. While, for the truck driver, the entire conversation is lost in translation, the Hungarian television audience is ‘in’ on the flow of creative swearing that Gyözike produces. The fact that he is willing to play the Gypsy buffoon of racist cabarets, exaggerating his nasal accent and Roma slang, also provides room for just enough distance from the embarrassment of the experience for Gadje viewers. His Roma identity is both disavowed and functions as the key that fully activates the joke.

Clearly, while musicians such as Gyözike, Caramel and LL Junior get to travel to places, their mobility is in proportion to the consumability of their images and music by national audiences. At this transitional time in post-Cold War Europe, one can conclude that world music, particularly hip-hop, serves as a vehicle for some Roma to come into a different kind of representation by turning the traditionally degrading association with musical play into a licence for youthful coolness, global flexibility and, not least, profitability. The political value of this new-found mobility for Roma empowerment is highly ambiguous, however. On the one hand, the commercial success and increasing media prominence of Roma rappers demystifies hypocritical claims that the only road to proper national and European citizenship is through Eurocentric national education and high cultural sophistication. The Gyözike Show, unlike Latcho Drom, is regularly watched by two million Hungarians who find evident ground for identification with the Roma star who dares to perform the majority’s Gypsy stereotypes to perfection and gets rich from it. His mobility is real and desirable, even if it is very different in quality from that produced by Latcho Drom’s respectful and loving migratory aesthetic. At the same time, the degree of these musicians’ control over their own representations remains questionable. The price to pay for stardom invariably appears to be a willingness to sell back to the national majority the exoticising, touristic vision they produced in the first place.

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