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Research topic: *Media portrayal of the Romany musicians in communistic times– the use and misuse of certain stereotypes in the Eastern European public discourse*

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Being a musicologist by profession, I have been studying (already for a number of years) the figure of the Roma musician and the role Roma musicians played in the European history. Recently, my research topic focused on the post WWII period and the issues of the Roma musicians under communistic regimes.

My current project *Media portrayal of the Romany musicians in communistic times – the use and misuse of certain stereotypes in the Eastern European public discourse* is a part and parcel of the larger research dedicated to the figure of the Roma musician in eastern and south-eastern Europe. I predominantly address here the general problem of the use and misuse of documentary work in providing evidence while creating a certain image: the main question concerns strategies adopted to represent the Roma musicians in the communistic media. How were they officially portrayed? As unwelcomed in the public space? Or still presented as splendid musicians continuing the old, romantic tradition of ‘Gypsy music making’? At the original stage of my research it seemed to me that we could talk about a certain paradox – the juxtaposition of the positive image of the ‘romantic Gypsy musician’ as inherited from the 19th century and enjoyed in the early 20th century contrasted with the news of assumed Roma criminality and banditry. I was interested how, the disappearance of Roma musicians from the open urban spaces (at least partial) and pushing them towards less prestigious places, including dive bars, etc. was reported in the communistic bloc and how Romany musicians and their orchestras were classified as folklore attractions. In order to accomplish my task I was predominantly interested in such resources available at OSA as newspapers clippings, radio audience research reports, etc. but I also found a number of other materials very useful.

As I suspected, the most important collection at the OSA – the one that turned out to be the most often consulted and the most useful source of information for my research was that of the RFE/RL Research Institute. I followed the country-specific subject files: thematic collection of Radio Free Europe background materials. Specifically I was interested in Polish Unit,

Romanian Unit, Hungarian Unit, Bulgarian Unit and Czechoslovak Unit. Hence I mostly used archives from HU OSA 300 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, but also the ones stored as HU OSA 318 Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights. During my one and a half months stay at the OSA I also used already digitized RFE/RL Information Items, Background Reports and Situation Reports, which greatly advanced and fastened my work.

I have found large numbers of newspaper clippings and journal cuttings thematically organized in several boxes of Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute. For my research, the most interesting were the ones categorized as: minority issues, ethnic and national groups, ethnic discrimination, Roma issues, Gypsies. Among documents concerning the Roma I was able to identify materials concerning their culture and folklore, sometimes directly addressing musical issues. Indeed, among these clippings I found some really interesting articles and pictures.

Advancing in my query I soon realized that I need to expand my search and include such keywords as cultural life or folklore in general, in order to obtain more information on the question how the Roma musicians were represented in the media. I referred then to Press Surveys in English (e.g. Hungarian or Romanian Units), finding these summaries prepared by RFE researchers quite useful, although taking into account that the articles translated or discussed there were selected for RFE purposes.

I also found the Information Items very useful as they provided me with an insight information from informants either still living in the communist bloc, or those who escaped it (refugees and émigrés). Their observations concerning the role of Roma musicians served as the material for comparative study: on the one hand I could see the formal representation of the Roma musicians in the official press, while on the other hand I was able to compare this image with the eye-witnesses' reports. This comparison revealed the existence of the discrepancy not so much between how the Roma musicians were represented in the media vis a vis how they were perceived by their fellow-musicians, etc. but attested more to the fact that, in reality, the Roma musicians were very active and popular in the communistic bloc, while rather under-represented in the media.

However, at some point of my research – thanks to the discussion entailing my presentation at the OSA – I realized that despite many similarities between media portrayal of the Roma musicians in neighboring countries, there were also substantial differences, which

needed to be taken into consideration. My original assumption concerning the homogeneity of the media representation of the Roma musicians in the communistic bloc media was thus substantially undermined during my work at the OSA. Accordingly I decided to research separately such countries as Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, etc. before venturing comparisons and producing any generalizing statements.

While at the OSA I additionally checked the RFE Audience Research reports in order to elicit information on the preferred types of music listened to. Furthermore, I also referred to Biographical Files, being interested in information concerning Béla Bartók and Zoltan Kodály, and more specifically how the post WWII press presented their opinions on the Roma musicians. Both composers / ethnomusicologists were renowned for their work on the issue of so called “Gypsy music” in the early 20th century.

Despite my initial worry that the materials relevant for my project might be either scarce or hugely dispersed at the OSA, I was able to identify and review many documents which provided me with ample information concerning the issue of the Roma musicians in the eastern bloc and their representation in the media. My research at the OSA confirmed that in the Archives there are many materials on music and musical life in the communistic bloc. This also prompted me with some new ideas for further research (e.g. the role of institutionalization of cultural life on the situation of musicians, especially Romany ones).

The last stage of my research stay at the OSA involved watching films from the period – documentary, feature, cartoons – which featured the Romany musicians. I also decided to include films which were produced later, e.g. after 1989, but explicitly addressed the issue of the Roma musicians in the new reality while referring to their previous situation (see the list of films below). I believe these films significantly complemented my findings from the textual materials.

Overall I watched more than 10 films and inspected more than 30 boxes (see the list of boxed below), taking either images of relevant items, or detailed notes. Although I concentrated on textual materials, I was also interested in iconographic representations of the Roma musicians: several press articles were in fact accompanied with photographs, attesting to the popularity of picturing the Romany people as musicians and dancers.

Apart from the above mentioned files, I also consulted the multilingual collection of reference books kept at the OSA, which provided me with important details for the theoretical framework for my research. Also, while in Budapest I frequented other libraries, most importantly CEU library and Franz Liszt Music Academy library.

My research conducted at the OSA turned out very fruitful – I was able to collect a significant amount of materials, and already formulated preliminary theses for my future paper, which will be the result of this project. Both the support of the International Visegrad Fund and my research at the OSA will be duly acknowledged there.

Taking this opportunity, I would also like to thank the OSA staff for their support and help.

Anna G. Piotrowska

Appendix – consulted materials:

HU OSA 300 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute

Polish Unit:

HU OSA 300-50-1 # 472

HU OSA 300-50-1 # 478

HU OSA 300-50-1 # 1795

Romanian Unit:

HU OSA 300-60-1 # 153

HU OSA 300-60-1 # 122

HU OSA 300-60-1 # 123

HU OSA 300-60-1 # 124

HU OSA 300-60-1 # 126

HU OSA 300-60-6 # 1

HU OSA 300-60-6 # 2

HU OSA 300-60-6 # 3

Hungarian Unit:

HU OSA 300-40-11 # 1

HU OSA 300-40-11 # 3

HU OSA 300-40-11 # 9

HU OSA 300-40-11 # 12

HU OSA 300-40-1 # 170

HU OSA 300-40-1 # 171

HU OSA 300-40-1 # 172

HU OSA 300-40-1 # 173

HU OSA 300-40-1 # 174

HU OSA 300-40-4 # 25

HU OSA 300-40-5 #11

HU OSA 300-40-5 #97

Bulgarian Unit

HU OSA 300-20-1 # 40

HU OSA 300-20-1 # 41

HU OSA 300-20-6 # 1

HU OSA 300-20-6 # 2

HU OSA 300-20-6 # 3

Czechoslovak Unit:

HU OSA 300-30-7 # 270

Audience Research:

HU OSA 300-6-2 # 1

HU OSA 300-6-2 # 2

HU OSA 318 Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights

HU OSA 318-0-5 # 54

HU OSA 318-0-4 # 21

FILMS

1935 *The Last Camp* – aka *Gypsies*, dir. Evgenii Shneider

1954 *Tiefland*, dir. Leni Riefenstahl

1961 *Zanim opadną liście* aka *Gypsies*, dir. Władysław Ślesicki

1976 *Brunet wieczorową porą* (*Brunet Will Call*), dir. Stanisław Bareja

1978 *Gypsy Caravan*, episode of the Polish series for children "Lolek i Bolek", dir. Romuald Kłys, Władysław Nehrebecki

2000 *Disowned*, dir. Edit Kőszegi

2002 *Iag Bari: Brass on Fire*, dir. Ralf Marschalleck

2003 *Infidels*, dir. Kiarostami Bahman

2004 *Farewell to Musicians*, dir. Balázs Gát

2006 *Gipsy Side*, dir. Balázs Gát

2009 *Ghetto Street*, dir. Zoltán Csubrilo