



Breaking down European Attitudes towards Migrant/Minority Stereotypes

Migrant/minority stereotypes in popular culture production in Hungary

PART 1. General introduction

We believe relevant observations of the Hungarian situation can be achieved through the detailed examination of two distinct focus, with eight previously structured interviews.

First focus (F1): World of the celebrity migrants

Based on the definition of popular culture, we decided to examine media products from the perspective of producers and consumers alike, which are nationally available and aim at a wide audience. Also, they present news and opinions which frequently become a part of the popular culture, their choice of news and values directly influence young people. They significantly form how the online media depicts migrants thus reinforcing and spreading the stereotypes already existing within the community.

We pay special attention to tabloid printed entertainment and TV shows reaching a wide audience. As well as expert opinions regarding their reach and influence on community diversity and migrant depiction in general. We also examine well known and accepted celebrity immigrants considered as the „good immigrants”. Thus in our first focus are two TV celebrities, well known in Hungary: Joshi Bharat (from India) and Fekete Pákó (from Nigeria).

They both frequently appear in the media, and while their built up persona, appearance, and status are completely different, they clearly influence Hungarian opinions and stereotypes regarding their ethnicity.

In the interviews with content producers, editors and editors in chief, we seek to find out what causes the different media appearance of the two characters. We want to find out what forms their media presence and how their migrant background influences it. We also want to find out how they create, form, represent or even become a role model for the migrant community in Hungary.

Second focus (F2): Balassagyarmat open community shelter

Our second focus is on special media phenomena, which appeared as an opposition to anti-immigrant online communication on Facebook and in the blogosphere.

The media hype around the Balassagyarmat open community shelter gave rise to a Facebook group called "[Civil alliance against the Balassagyarmat open community shelter](#)" and a blog called "[A city stabbed in the heart](#)". They both operate with extreme passion and stereotypical reasoning. We interviewed the group's leader to find out what goals they have achieved, how they organize their group, whether they plan to take action outside of the virtual world, what brings them together, what influences their reasoning and how they build their image.

We examine if their reasoning show signs of the stereotypical clichés present in the news and how their prejudices are influenced by the migrant's characteristics presented by the media.

The existence of this group is not a novelty in Hungarian online space, the extremist [kuruc.info](#) and its [Facebook page](#) (which were banished from Facebook months ago, due to continuous reports of abuse, but managed to reorganize its content) has been operating for years now, using far right



and anti immigrant rhetoric.

What we found interesting and made us decide to investigate it further is the "[Civil alliance against the Balassagyarmat Bear](#)" Facebook group, which was organized as a satiric opponent of the aforementioned extremist group.

Poking fun of demagogic reasoning, fears and stereotypes, they reacted to the extremist group with humor. They substituted the immigrants with the image of a bear, which was previously reported to roam about, thus poking fun of the sense of danger that the Reception Centre represented for the locals. We were curious about their choice of methods, motivations and achieved goals. We wanted to find out if - given a similar scenario-, humor and popular memes can act as an effective tool. Maybe their popularity and trendiness amongst young people can influence different age of groups and perhaps the local populace as well.

General experiences during preparations

The organization of the Balassagyarmat interviews went smooth regarding their timing, theme, length and depth. The organization of the media focused interviews ran into unexpected complications, multiple times. Generally, upon first contact, the interview subjects denied their competence in the matter and were unwilling to make comments. As for the content producers, only one case went without complication¹, all the others insisted on anonymity and took a long procedure of approval for a personal meeting. They denied written invitations, someone² could only be reached through mutual contacts and other brought company along for the meetings, yet another³ broke up the interview after 25 minutes instead of the previously agreed one hour. During the interviews their desire for approval was evidently present, when the question of stereotypes came up, they avoided the topic, and it took us some cross questioning to get useful information. Another general phenomenon was that everything needed approval from a higher authority, regardless of the position of the interview subject.

Later we will elaborate on our reasons of choices, what makes the chosen editors' opinions relevant, the implications and how their personal attitude affects their created content.

¹ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

² Editor of TV2 – July 2013.

³ Editor of Hajdú talk show - June 2013.



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PART 2. Perceptions and main stereotypes

On the first focus (F1): the migrant celebrities and their public persona

Hungarian mainstream media rarely represent migrants. The National Media and Info Communications Authority measure the representation of different minorities on a semi annual basis, in both commercial and national television news. The aim of their research is to poll how much media consumers are aware of the diversity of the society and how sensitive are they towards the problems of certain groups.

According to their last [report](#) on the diversity of society (January of 2013), in the second half of 2012, stories about migrants only appeared 36 times in all the news.

This small number does not show significant difference from previous years. News shows are in a privileged position considering they are in prime time and they represent migrants as an "undifferentiated, homogeneity mass"⁴, we believe it is best to examine the Hungarian "migrant image" by disregarding news and focusing on two regularly appearing, emblematic characters of the mainstream media.

1. Joshi Bharat, the Indian guru

Joshi Bharat was born in India and came to Hungary in the 1980's to study. Originally studied acting, also worked as a puppeteer, got his degree in Hungary and started to work at the National Puppet Theater. Meanwhile in the late 1980's, started to study esoteric and after being discovered because of it, got regular invitations from different TV channels as guest. He appeared later on commercial TV stations, first on weekly then on daily basis, giving life coaching advice. In 2008 he finally got his own show on a commercial TV station, (TV2) with the clear goal to break the dominance of concurrent channel's (RTL club) similar show (Mónika Show). It was an afternoon talk show, with guests bringing their conflicts in the spotlight, as the show was aiming for peace making and finding resolutions. The intense rivalry of the channels caused the show to change, and start to feature more and more verbal and even physical assault. The authority kept fining the channels for complaints and finally both shows were cancelled. (*"Authority fines work. The TV stations played the fines all right, but being unable to do whatever they want, the viewership declined."*⁵)

After the cancellation of the program, Joshi Bharat ended up at the network's other channel, this time further refining his persona, played an advisory role. Along with the host who had a psychology degree, they analyzed and solved individual life problems. From here on "understanding", "peace making", "resolution" became dominant in his public character, with much less direct conflict and without any verbal assaulting.

His public persona became much milder, and returning to the main channels morning talk show, he kept up his somewhat low profile media image flawlessly. *"Regarding Joshi and his show, it's interesting to note, that even though everyone turned away from the show, they did not feel the same revulsion towards Joshi, as he was different."*⁶

Let us see then the properties of his public persona how did the editors, and editors in chief see him?⁷ "Sober-minded helper, open and emphatic, able to receive problems and to resolve them, sensitive."⁸, "friendly, open, able to give, helpful, everything regarding sympathy."⁹ What property

⁴ Member of NMIA (National Media and Infocommunications Authority) – August 2013.

⁵ Member of NMIA (National Media and Infocommunications Authority) – August 2013.

⁶ Editor of TV2 – July 2013.

⁷ Question: Please tell us some markers for Joshi Bharat. What comes in mind about him?

⁸ Editor of TV2 – July 2013.

⁹ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.



does he link with his character? „Good hearted, well meaning, thinker, gives good advice.”¹⁰, "Calm, understanding, takes interest in other's fates, genuine, likeable.”¹¹

The presented image seems coherent; later in interviews with the focus groups, "wisdom, attention, and understanding" were the properties most often associated with his character.

The samples we have showed to the groups, present Joshi in two different roles. On one hand, in the promo-spot¹² of his own talk show he promises to talk "differently, honestly" to open up the well known celebrities, to the viewers. On the other hand, as a guest of the highest ranking evening talk show (Hajdú Show)¹³ he takes the role of the immigrant, has to prove his allegiance through tongue twisters and puzzles. We can safely say, both samples generally represent a positive picture of the "Indian people".

2. *Fekete Pákó, the clown*

Lapite Oludayo (alias: Fekete Pákó) was born in Nigeria, came to Hungary in 1994 as a law student. In Nigeria, he was a singer and conga player in many professional music bands. In Hungary he played traditional African music first, and then got his own album published, singing popular Hungarian rollicking songs. Video clips were made for the Hungarian songs, which brought him nation wide fame. He appeared in many shows, his main media value was being laughable. Even though he is not fluent in Hungarian, his media presence is continuous since the early 2000's. He was a frequent guest in radio and TV shows, and popular with the tabloid press. His TV appearances were mostly reality shows, where he presented his media persona. Scandals in his private life (divorce, custody issues), and media career (racist remarks in an extremist right wing radio about Jewish and Roma people) caused the commercial TV networks to turn him down, thus his public profile is getting lower.

The tabloid press still writes about him sometimes, but in the popular culture¹⁴ he is considered more to be "lame" than "cool". "The hit song Gimme dem boobies with his interesting pronunciation, made him a likeable figure, nobody said anything bad about him. At the clash of cultures (the extremist radio interview) created quite a rift. He ended up making those whose skin is darker than the Hungarian average look very bad, because of an ill meaning provocation.”¹⁵

Let us see then the properties of his public persona, how did the editors, see Fekete Pákó?¹⁶ "A clown, easy to fool, a well meaning simpleton.”¹⁷ "A Hungarian entertainment brand, meaning speakers, DJ decks. Funny.”¹⁸, "His exotic, strange way of being Hungarian brought him in the spotlight, this made him a funny character for the audience.”¹⁹

During the focus group interviews we have presented samples from the before mentioned Hajdú

¹⁰ Joshi Bharat – June 2013.

¹¹ Editor of Hajdú talk show – July 2013.

¹² [Another Way – Talks with Joshi Bharat](#)

¹³ It has been removed from youtube.

¹⁴ [Celebrity index](#)

¹⁵ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

¹⁶ Unfortunately, however Pákó first accepted our interview request, we could not reach him at the agreed time, and later he won't answered to our phone calls.

¹⁷ Editor in TV2 – July 2013.

¹⁸ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

¹⁹ Editor of Hajdú talk show



show, in which Pákó milked a goat and drank the milk.

We have not found any of his appearances differ or at least detail his media persona.

In accordance with this, in our focus group interviews the words "silly", "stupid", "vulgar" and "lame" were used to describe his character. To sum it up, Pákó turns up in a rather negative light in the media, rather than his previous funny, naive appearance.

We see that a lot depends on how detailed the public personas are, how much the celebrities are able to adapt to new roles and not get stuck in unfavorable positions and how much attention they can get from editors only by causing entertaining scandals. The difference between the two media personas were summed up rather wittingly by an editor: "Pákó is a creature of instinct, while Joshi is absolutely level headed."²⁰ We can see clearly, how every step of their media career was influenced by this.

3. „Not every Indian is Joshi and Pákó is not a typical African”²¹ – *Social embeddings, examination of the media influence*

According to Joshi Barat, the acceptance of his character and public persona was based on conscious effort of integration: "When I came to Hungary I decided not to vanish in the Indian community. There were about 20 Indian people here and if I were to hang out with them, I would have vanished. I said, I must be here, I need to soak up, and if I lose my Indian identity, I didn't have it in the first place. I can't lose my true identity anyway. The immigrant, who only hangs out with his African friends, or his Cuban friends, will insulate himself. He will project his alien nature and attract the same. As for me, I project that I am one of you. "²²

This open adaptive capacity seems to be the main reason why most people in the media do not consider Joshi a "typical" migrant: "When I picture Joshi Barat I don't think of an Indian, but a Hungarian just like myself." At the same time, editors and producers consider his public persona to be genuine and generally positive; this is the reason why they still consider him a successful, interesting, "A list celebrity"²³ after so many years spent in the media. "Joshi's image is very close to what people think of Indians because he also introduces a cultural additive during his appearances and PR activities. What people think of him, and India, is mainly the same."²⁴ "He managed to be a good TV personality, because he possesses the intelligence to recognize how to survive in a different cultural environment. He made a lot of effort to fade the cultural differences caused by his country of origin. He thinks in many dimensions, this is why he is still in the media."²⁵

Opinions differ on how much his image influences the acceptance of the Indian community living in Hungary. "Maybe there is a prejudice towards Indians or generally towards people with a darker skin, but the viewer will say Joshi is different, he has a job, he is alright."²⁶ "Obviously anyone who represents a certain community or group helps to build up a certain stereotype in the receiving

²⁰ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

²¹ Second focus group

²² Joshi Bharat July 2013.

²³ Editor of Hajdú talk show (Frizbi) – June 2013.

²⁴ Editor of TV2 – July 2013.

²⁵ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

²⁶ Editor of TV2 – July 2013.



society. But I wouldn't call him any kind of a hero."²⁷

The editor of the most viewed evening talk show thinks outright that "If someone likes him (Joshi), then that's it, we aren't really able to do anything about that, not even if we make the show with the most views. If someone thinks that Indians are good, it's not the Frizbi show that will validate their opinion or convince them otherwise."²⁸

Opinions also differ on how Pákó's image influences the way people think about African Hungarians. According to the producers and editors the society differentiates between celebrities and "black people" in general. "I believe what they think of Pákó and about Africa are not the same. Pákó is not equal to every black person, obviously his persona consists of black identity, might even strengthen the stereotypes somewhat, but people can tell the difference."²⁹ "A guy from the block, a bit of a negro for sure, but I doubt that anyone has a problem with that. I can't remember him being a victim of any open or concealed threat because of that."³⁰

We asked a media researcher about this, who studied the media representation of the Roma people in a previous project. She has a completely different opinion on the effects. She believes that because of the small number of migrant representations, the two celebrities get more spotlight, their behavior, appearance, represented values, will -even if involuntarily- affect the image of their ethnic group. "The problem is that he is the black person for Hungarians and this is how he makes invaluable harm when he projects this personality on TV, which the editors only enhance. This would be okay, but the problem is, there is nobody else besides him, even though we know there are black people in hospitals, but they never make it to the media."³¹

The editor's and the media consumer's opinion clearly diverge here as the producers of the content credit much less influence to the appearance and behavior of the two characters, than the media researcher who reached his conclusion by examining the consumer side.

Worth to notice, that the celebrities themselves experience the different sentiment of the populace towards Indians and Africans.

Stereotypes are much more generous towards Indians³², Joshi believes³³ the reason is Hungarians meet very few black people. Most of their experiences are still from movies and media, which draw from the "Maugli" image, and news mostly cover the wars of the continent. He never experienced any atrocities because of his darker skin, but he believes his integration was easier due to his exotic appearance did not hold as many negative elements as Pákó's and the African's.

²⁷ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

²⁸ Editor of Hajdú talk show (Frizbi) – June 2013.

²⁹ Editor of TV2 – July 2013.

³⁰ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

³¹ Vera Messing, researcher – August 2013.

³² In the focus groups people used more positive markers for Indians (exotic, music, dance, colorful), as for the Africans (instinct, primitive, tribal)

³³ Joshi Bharat – July 2013.



On the second focus (F2): The Facebook groups of Balassagyarmat

- "Civil alliance against the Balassagyarmat Refugee Centre"

In the beginning the group was organized of local residents. They wrote longer articles on blogs regarding immigration issues; they copied other contents, mainly reports on different Hungarian immigrant centers. Lately the situation at Vámosszabadi is what keeps the editors interested, they published open letters, poking fun of the authorities and human rights activists. Their Facebook page differs significantly. It's primarily for quick reactions, the local populace shares scary stories and also gives each other advice how to "defend". Often driving each others temper, overbidding each other with stories without any possibility of a reality check.

The editor of the group said they do not filter the content other than "removing off topic comments. We basically gather all the information on the Reception Centre. We try to get the information first hand, we look up those who suffered atrocities, but if he is trustworthy, because we know him, that's enough I guess."

General dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, with the opening of the Reception Centre, with the lack of information from local authorities, and the conflicts between the locals and the immigrants are what keeps the group together.

The headcount changes over time, the community reacts actively to larger demonstrations, and signature campaigns, but members do not meet regularly, only a small core (10-20 people) know each other personally too.

They try to get media coverage, they frequently send articles to editors, but only two national TV channels (Hírtévé, TV2) covered them so far, and even though interviews were made with the group members, none of them made it to the edited reports.

The group is also politically active, they asked for support from the representatives of the Hungarian extreme right wing party (Jobbik). Representative Gyula György Zagyva made several appearances on the location³⁴, gave speeches, and frequently writes about local conflicts of Balassagyarmat on his blog³⁵. He also made a speech in the Parliament regarding the issues of the Reception Centre, and called to account the Minister of interior affairs.³⁶

- "Civil alliance against the Balassagyarmat Bear"

Interesting to notice, that the group's founder was originally a member of the xenophobe group. When the Refugee Centre opened, he heard many conflicts between the locals and the migrants, felt the people's mood shifting. As more extremist content found its way to the page, he gradually turned away from the group, though he still follows their posts, he does not share their ideological base anymore.

He did not agree with the opening of the Centre, he found the general lack of information problematic, and that the populace was under informed. "There was no problem before the Centre. I am not even against it, i just want order." This attitude is common amongst the populace on the Facebook page. The founder of the group is a 25 years old man from Balassagyarmat, quite

³⁴ <http://zagyvagyula.hu/hir/tuntettunk-balassagyarmaton-menekultszallo-bezarasaert>

³⁵ <http://zagyvagyula.hu/hir/bevanderlok-tortek-be-fenyos-nappal-balassagyarmaton>

³⁶ http://www.old.szentkoronaradio.com/belfold/2013_02_20_a-balassagyarmati-idegenszallo-ugye-ujra-a-parlamentben



reserved when it comes to politics, that's why he wanted to poke fun of the extremist views. The idea was given by a real bear roaming the countryside for a couple of days, frightening the locals. "Because if I meet a bear, I am really unable to do anything. What to say to him? He is bigger and stronger, he may come at me. Then I thought maybe extreme right sentiments and fears can be projected onto the bear. It could be a source of humor."

News of the group only spread amongst the friends at first, those who joined all understood the bear metaphoric and the goals of the community. "Many said it's a cool hobby to behave like a racist Nazi without actually hurting anyone. It's not against a group of people, but the sentiment is clearly there."

The editors are operating with the same contents and rhetoric as the other group, except instead of immigrants the targets are always the bears. "Unclear personal identity, unknown place of origin, criminal background, tropical disease to spread around, or whether he wants to assault our children and other absurd fears against aliens, but depicted as bears."

The reality of the news is unimportant, only the context matters, how absurdly it presents bears instead of migrants. Group members are mostly young students (17-26 years old). It's not provoking or looking to clash with the original group on a purpose. They have no clear political affiliation yet, though the group is oriented towards the Hungarian Two Tailed Dog Party³⁷, a comedy party regularly extremely over bidding other parties campaign promises. No media influence can be shown by the group; they mostly work as a local patriotic group and fairly regular online gag.

PART 3. Main findings

On the first focus (F1): the migrant celebrities and their characters

Superficial knowledge

During the interviews, beyond the pre-specified topics, we tried to get information on the interviewees' general knowledge and source of information on immigrants. We asked every subject how they got in contact with immigrants, where they get their information from, how they consume media products, how much are they aware of global and local immigrant issues.

We found that even though editors and producers gather their information from multiple media sources, this knowledge is very superficial and their general sentiment is formed by everyday experiences, especially on culture and gastronomy. Besides this, the superficial knowledge based on the daily news is also worth to mention. The Facebook group editors on the other hand clearly had their preferred media outlets and did not even bother to get a more detailed picture.

Understated responsibility

Maybe it is the effect of the aforementioned findings, that the editors understate their own responsibility in forming the migrant image in the media. Producers, editors even at nation wide media outlets do not seem to think that their content would have a long lasting and serious influence on the general populace. Every interviewee feels the positive influence stronger than the negative ones, because "even though in a negative context the migrant can strengthen stereotypes, but the viewer can tell the difference between the personality and the stereotype. They

³⁷ <http://www.mkkp.hu/>



differentiate on a personal level and treat negativities as generalizations."³⁸ Despite this, even though they admit that a paragon like role could strengthen acceptance, commercial media's other considerations take priority and they are unwilling to take risks. "There was a good initiative which enforced a positive image of immigrants and how much they could give us. Joshi became the face of this, because this is a good cause, an image building one, but we deliberated until the last moment whether or not we are ruining his public persona by putting him in a situation which is about breaking down negative stereotypes. This is basically impossible to conceive with an even riskier case, like the refugee center in Vámoszabadi or something of that sort."³⁹

Lack of regulations

Here we arrive beyond debating the personal responsibility of the editor, to the general guidelines and regulations, because it is difficult expect a highly competitive for-profit organization to have its own moral and ethical guidelines which may contradict profitability. In Hungary, the Media law of 2010 is the general guideline in every aspect. Since 2012 the National Media and Info communications Authority acts as the highest media regulating authority. Within it, as the successor of ORTT and an independent organization, the Media council acts as the main sanctioning and guiding agent since 2010.

They constantly examine societal variety, but due to the low number of cases they do not monitor migration on its own. They only sanction violations of the media law, clear cases of exclusions and hate speech. Regarding minorities, the authority mostly deals with issues regarding Roma people.

They receive complaints in this regard, and protection of minors was also a priority for them so far.

The Media Authority's studies on migrant's media representation are only suitable to make general inferences, as it does not examine the use of words or context. They explain this with a lack of capacity, and the lacking priority of the subject, as no request have been made so far for a well aimed study. As for sanctioning, they have chosen not to get involved so far, and according to previous practice they take the protection of minors as a priority and monitor reality and talk shows.

In this regard sanctioning have a direct, easy to see effect, malicious content can be filtered and editorial offices can be persuaded to comply with certain ethical standards even if it means loss in viewership. The majority of editorial offices have signed the Codex of Public Service and declared it as binding, which, much like the BBC guidelines expects the parties to voluntarily obey the rules, without any monitoring or sanctioning.

"Neither the viewers, nor the editors' basic attitude and prejudice would change due to sanctions, but the state could declare a certain limit. You can hate anyone, but you can't do the gipsy, Jew, migrant spluttering in public. Sadly the Media Authority does not take this step. It fails at its most important task towards society, it does not sanction properly."⁴⁰

Good news is not news.

Without universal guidelines editorial offices have their own ethical code in dealing with issues of

³⁸ Editor of TV2 – July 2013.

³⁹ Editor of TV2 – July 2013.

⁴⁰ Vera Messing researcher – August 2013.



society. An outstanding example is Hungary's biggest tabloid newspaper's policy towards the extreme right: "We do not write about Jobbik, except in a negative context, not even if we happen to end up on the same platform in some issues. We do not accept their presence in society, and we do not think that we should give them any publicity in Hungary's biggest daily newspaper."⁴¹

The rest of the media outlets do not have such strident attitude, most cases the editor in chief decides ad-hoc what issues to cover and how.

Everyone is careful not to make content violating the media law, which is not easy due to the ambiguous definition of hate speech. Content filtering, removing comments and deleting users is frequent in the online media. According to the current ruling, the provider of the surface is responsible for prohibited content, and can be fined if fails to remove the incriminated content after someone filed a complaint.

Migrants usually appear tailored to target audiences in most media outlets. There are two major trends: One is the tabloid style, emphasizing on celebrities, stories, cultural differences and exotic details. They lack true depth, as they only talk about the celebrities' everyday life as a migrant. The other trend talks about crime on a wide range, from illegal border crossings to crimes involving immigrants. These stories usually appear shortly in evening news, or in other news based genres.

According to the study of the NMIA, migrants are heavily over represented in stories of crime, they appear as out- and negative reference groups, a burden to the social and health care system. "Negativity and social norm breaking are unavoidably newsworthy themes. This is where the Public Service media should come in, as being non profit. We know what we should do, how we should do it, and we know why it does not work."⁴²

Hungarian double standard

Migrants do not appear only as a novelty in news shows. The general populace heavily differentiates between the migrant images seen in the news, and between the already "integrated" better known migrants. "We use a double standard in everything, there are the dark migrants, who lay on their beds wearing dirty clothes, and then there are those who we accept since they have already proven themselves."⁴³ The same double standard was clear when we asked about ethnic groups easily differentiated by the shade of their skin. According to multiple editors, acceptance is based on familiarity. "An African person has to struggle to overcome even the basics. Sadly, human brain is like that. White is better than black."⁴⁴ We aren't doing any better when it comes to stereotypes either, claims the media researcher. "Stereotypes can not be changed, they are very stable, very hard to modify at all, especially by objective information. What happens is that the TV or a show creates certain sub stereotypes. The successful gypsy, the successful immigrant or the media immigrants are being created."⁴⁵

Media influence

Opinions differ on how media appearance of migrants influences the Hungarians general revulsion against immigrants. An earlier NMIA study, examined how the representation of Roma people in

⁴¹ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

⁴² Member of NMIA (National Media and Infocommunications Authority) – August 2013.

⁴³ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

⁴⁴ Joshi Bharat – July 2013.

⁴⁵ Vera Messing researcher – August 2013.



certain talk shows influence general sentiments towards Roma people, as these shows presented Roma people mainly as a source of conflict. The result was, that these shows only reinforce negative stereotypes, "gave an extra punch to their reasoning, when it came to try convince others against Roma people"⁴⁶ Producers' opinions differ much more on how effective positive examples can be.

The majority believes in the power of personal experience when it comes to breaking down stereotypes and that the media's positive influence only shows up over a much longer period of time. The media researcher stresses a very important point, which can strongly influence the media's portrayal of immigrants. "What has changed drastically is the political discourse. The media, only by communicating the politician's opinions and statements, can heavily reinforce stereotypes. Without any explanation, it can reinforce an already existing stereotype in the general populace, make it accepted as self evident, even though it is not."

Something to look out for, especially during the 2014 campaign season.

On the second focus (F2): the Facebook groups of Balassagyarmat

Dangers of Facebook communication

The appearance of extremist, hateful opinions on online spaces are especially dangerous, as it gets to a high number of people without analyzing the issue or highlight its details. Compared to this, Facebook is even better at reaching out for people with a common interest. It spreads fear and hysteria among the local populace and motivates for action in many comments. It qualifies local problems as general ones, often labels, and looks for examples to support general anti-immigrant stereotypes. It appears as authentic, while not trying to uncover the background of the news. It reacts quickly, and able to lift the local issue to a political level.

What can be seen as a positive aspect, is that the media so far has not been willing to open up for the members of the group and grant them coverage, thus keeping them off from mainstream media.

The influence of the parody group

It is hard to form an objective picture of the parody group's goals and intentions based on the interviews. The group looks much more like a funny initiative, without any well thought out goals or intentions, than a well thought out and designed answer to prejudice. Their choice of means proved to be successful, the funny pictures and memes get a lot of Shares, but the intentions of the individual users and content producers are hard to tell. As of now, those who wish to covertly express their extreme, hateful racist opinions can freely do so, since the target is not a real community, "only a bear". Since the page is not moderated, and there are no structured opinions to counter stereotypes, the whole thing resembles much more to a virtual Hyde Park Corner. It's hard to tell whether or not it's forming the group members thinking on migrant issues, or just presenting the same extremist content in a concealed form. Sadly there are no plans for the future amongst the content producers to continue their work in a more structured, well thought out way. Even though their choice of means could be an example to follow.

⁴⁶ Member of NMIA (National Media and Infocommunications Authority) – August 2013.



PART 4. Follow up and recommendations

Based on the shortcomings revealed by the interviews, we make the following recommendations:

- The mainstream media would need more migrant voices, in a representative way, with varying nationalities, status, degrees, and occupations in many different roles. We agree that representing migrants more alone will not change the general populace's opinion but we do stress that it does form the sentiment if they see people with migrant background more often in diverse situations and roles. Personal life and stories can emerge and the homogeny mass can turn into details of the countless reasons and difficulties of immigrant life. Having this in mind, we would urge the Public Service media to make a more determined statement in the matter and show an exemplary presence.
- We consider a quota on migrant presence in the media to be an idea worthy of discussion and further contemplation.
- We support the idea of grassroots initiatives which aim to support migrant communities. One such tool could be immigration themed blogging, journalist training, and the support of self organizing civil media presence. This can become a reference later on for the mainstream media.
- We stress the need of a basic awareness raising training for media workers such as journalists, editors, bloggers. This would help them, to understand their own responsibility in the representation of migrant issues and people in the media.
- Media appearances would need to be more detailed, focusing more on personal stories, and the connections between issues. As for news shows, the editors should put more effort to show the background of immigration as a contrast to the negative aspects.
- More emphasis on the state's authority in a gate keeping role, to keep out malicious contents from news. If such content does turn up, we urge not to wait for complaints, but to keep up a constant monitoring activity and sanctioning.
- In accordance with this, in the year 2014 we would like to propose the handling of political speeches with priority and filtering hate speech.
- We believe community platforms are a good way to reach out to young people, we also support the use of humor. This is a good tool, but considering its short and long term effects on the community, we recommend a more deliberate use. We also propose a professional support for a broader perspective beyond the timely events.

"These aggressive voices exist exactly to test us, our strength, and the health of our souls, and how we are able to handle such problems. We are unable to handle them yet. We really must start some kind of thinking together."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Editor in chief of Blikk – June 2013.

