

**Maria Bogdan**  
**The universal lyrics of the marginalized**  
**The New Roma**

The New Roma refers to an era in the United States when the African Americans first started to rise up against oppression. This was between 1915-1932, a time when “The New Negro” with self-confidence emerged and the Harlem Renaissance happened. Although this happened some few decades earlier than when hip-hop culture was formed but this period of time is considered as the beginning of a long era which resulted in the end of the official segregation and discrimination of blacks in the US through such main actions like the Civil Rights movement and later on the Affirmative Action. There cannot be a direct parallel made between Hungary and the United States since they don’t share the same history and because of this the two countries have always been in a different phase of democracy according to each other and practiced different attitudes to the politics of diversity. What they share is that they both have always been diverse countries with a particular minority issue – in the US mostly it has always been about the African Americans, in Hungary the Roma got most of the attentions in this aspect.

This is why I’m using the name “The New Roma” when talking about how the hip-hop appeared among the Roma in Hungary through the first Roma Rap band the Fekete Vonat. The use of this name refers to the attitude African Americans got in the early twentieth century and to the time, since that was the first time they tried to find and make their voice sound. Beside the fact that the first Roma hip-hop band has its roots in the US hip-hop era too both in the aspect of art and society, it is important to understand this earlier era since the later movements and cultural phenomena in the US history were built on this.

I assume the main points of the era where the New Negro appeared.

**The New Negro**

This name refers to a period of time in the US – during and a few years after the First World War – when the image of the African Americans went through a change. It also means an attitude that hasn’t existed before – Americans with African background became proud to be a “Negro”. Earlier the stereotypical attitude of the African Americans was characterized by humility and deference to white people and the acceptance of black inferiority. In this period starting with the beginning of the First World War, many African Americans migrated from the South to the North and Midwest within the US – settled in big cities where finding more job

opportunities they could make a living wage, could vote and got access to better education and living conditions than in the South, and even some of them went to fight in France in the First World War. According to these changes they became more conscious about themselves and fought back when attacked and proclaimed their pride in their race. It shows that in the Northern cities they found relative freedom according to the harder circumstances they left behind in the South. This was the time of the Jim Crow era which lasted in the first four decades of the twentieth century and meant that although African Americans were given certain rights, segregation, humiliation, antiblack riots, lynching still happened since they were still regarded as an alien race by many Americans. According to this great migration African Americans started to fight against racial oppression more effectively either by the means of culture and in the field of politics. They publicized their own ideas about the race, they were more powerful, and more militant, basically proud to be a “Negro”. Some of them even became black nationalists.<sup>1</sup>

The born of the New Negro resulted in a black cultural flowering decade in the 1920s called the Harlem Renaissance. It was based on the race pride of the New Negro era and manifested in different fields of the art having its center in New York, Harlem. In that time beside being a center of visual art, theater and music, New York was also the home of many wealthy patrons of the arts – so black artists could find support in this central Northern city. Supporters of the Harlem Renaissance hoped that all these political, social and cultural changes would make a turning point in the era of racial discrimination and violence and all this would end. In this aspect this what this cultural flowering resulted in was that African Americans gained a sense of themselves creating their own notions about themselves and like this it weakened the stereotypes against black people in the US.<sup>2</sup>

### **Deconstructing racial politics by the discourse of resistance - Era of Hip-Hop in the US**

Hip-hop emerged from the periphery of society and later became a popular genre in other countries too all over the world by having the same roots and goals – making the sound of the marginalized.

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<sup>1</sup> The New Negro 1915-1932. In: Irvin Painter, Nell, 2006 Creating Black Americans. African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present. Oxford University Press, New York, 173-174.

<sup>2</sup> The New Negro 1915-1932. In: Irvin Painter, Nell, 2006 Creating Black Americans. African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present. Oxford University Press, New York, 190, 195.

“We call ourselves underground street reporters. We just tell it how we see it, nothing more, nothing less. (Ice Cube)<sup>3</sup>

Hip-hop culture has five dimensions: graffiti, DJ-ing, rap music, break dancing and clothing. It symbolizes that generation of African-Americans who were born after 1965 (the end of the civil rights movement in the US) and live an urban life. This was the first African-American generation who grew up free of legalized segregation. This period of the American history is often called post-Civil Rights or post Black-Power, or post-black era and so this generation is called alike or even to post-Soul generation. While from the 1950s to the 1970s the mostly known African Americans could achieve success by defining themselves on racial terms while protesting against the white middle-class America, from the 1980s the most successful African Americans could be successful as individuals achieving success within the American society. In the meanwhile this era was also about finding out and preserving authentic blackness after recognizing that success often seemed to demand “turning white”. It resulted in seeking what is authentic and realizing, as an answer, the diversity within African Americans.<sup>4</sup>

The 1960s and 1970s were also the Black Power era which emancipated African Americans psychologically by creating a new image of black people saying that black people are prized and beautiful – saying the well known lines: Black is beautiful. This era focused on ordinary black people, living in poor inner cities and were trying to provide them a positive group identity. Black Power introduced the names African Americans, or Afro-Americans, or black instead of the names Negro, or American Negro. They emphasized the African heritage of black people in the US – calling this phenomenon as cultural nationalism. It started to be popular among black Americans after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., who was the symbol of nonviolence. That moment made African Americans think that racism in the US is still on a high level.<sup>5</sup>

Afterwards the post civil rights era brought fundamental changes like the Affirmative Action which aim was to increase the number of blacks, Latinos, Native Americans and white women

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<sup>3</sup> Authenticity and Diversity in the Era of Hip-Hop, 1980-2005. In: Irvin Painter, Nell, 2006 Creating Black Americans. African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present. Oxford University Press, New York, 335.

<sup>4</sup> Authenticity and Diversity in the Era of Hip-Hop, 1980-2005. In: Irvin Painter, Nell, 2006 Creating Black Americans. African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present. Oxford University Press, New York,

<sup>5</sup> Black Power 1966-1980. In: Irvin Painter, Nell, 2006 Creating Black Americans. African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present. Oxford University Press, New York, 291-319.

in college admissions and in hiring. Black people entered occupations where previously only white people were present.

They in general became highly visible in the American culture, in many fields of life like sports, entertainment, politics etc. Besides the more often breakthroughs in everyday life impoverished neighborhoods emerged within big cities where the life of the inhabitants were mostly characterized by unemployment, crime, drug abuse and police brutality. This is where hip-hop culture and within rap is originated from. The impoverished inner-city neighborhoods are often referred as the 'hood.

### **Rap music – the basics**

Rap music is originated from the Bronx of New York City in the 1970s. It was a purely local performance style when it was born. And later on, by the mid 1990s it became the most popular musical format of the United States having millions of non-African-American fans as well. Hip-hop culture has spread around the world so rap became the voice of the poor, the oppressed and even of the youth who are against official harassment.

Rap music has been characterized by various features like: it is critical with politics, social realistic, degrading for women, homophobic, moralizing, feminist, materialistic, black nationalist, or entertaining etc. Basically hip-hop and its representatives have been always trying to create a coherent image of black people as living in poor, urban neighborhoods. The main topic is injustice – they criticize the society in the name of the black people, and basically they have always been talking about authentic blackness which resulted in realizing how hard it is to characterize African Americans as a whole since they became a diverse group of people throughout the centuries.<sup>6</sup>

The first rhymes were born after such great poets like Gil-Scott Heron, one of the greatest spoken word performer. The Last Poets (who were coping with Gil-Scott Heron too) had an other great influence on hip-hop music and within on rap lyrics. The Last Poets were a group of poets and musicians who started to work together from the late 1960s. Their lyrics were of political content, often about social issues with the aim of raising African-American consciousness.

Spoken word – Gil Scott Heron: The revolution will not be televised

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<sup>6</sup> Authenticity and Diversity in the Era of Hip-Hop 1980-2005. In: Irvin Painter, Nell, 2006 Creating Black Americans. African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present. Oxford University Press, New York, 321-343.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnJFhuOWgXg>

The golden age of rap music lasted from 1988 till the mid 1990s. At this time political rap was the most popular topic of this genre and lyrics were mostly about police brutality. The golden age had two other important results – movies were made about the inner-city life in the ‘hood, and Los Angeles became the second major source of rap beside New York City – creating like this the notions of and the distinction between East Coast and West Coast rappers. The lyrics of West Coast rappers created the gangsta rap style – since their lyrics were mostly criminal-minded.<sup>7</sup>

This short summary of the formation of the hip-hop culture and rap music also shows that political and economical changes always make a society reconstruct itself. Reconstruction means basically an identification process which is necessary for being able to face the new circumstances. This happened in the US after the Civil Rights movement, and this has started in Hungary too at the beginning of the 1990-ies when after a communist-socialist regime the country and within all its members – different social groups – got the chance and the right to redefine themselves, and like this restructure the society itself.

### **Changes - Hungary**

Due to the political and economical changes the process of impoverishment became a visible phenomenon in the Hungarian society after the democratic changes happened. A research made between the 1980s till 2000, shows that this means that more and more people became poor among the Roma too, and in the meantime this meant a new kind of poverty – something which could be inherited from generations to generations, and is regarded as a permanent situation.<sup>8</sup> One of the main causes of this process was the deindustrialization that cut off jobs, leaving many people without regular income and job opportunities. This happened in the US too when the impoverished neighborhoods within big cities were formed. And this happened in Hungary too and this had a great influence on the living circumstances of the Roma. They made the poorest layer of the Hungarian society before the democratic changes and continued to be in this position after the changes but now experiencing a different/new kind of poverty.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Authenticity and Diversity in the Era of Hip-Hop 1980-2005. In: Irvin Painter, Nell, 2006 Creating Black Americans. African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present. Oxford University Press, New York, 338.

<sup>8</sup> A romák életkörülményeinek átalakulása 1988 és 2000 között. In: Ladányi János - Szelényi Iván 2004. A kirekesztés változó formái. Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 139-143.

<sup>9</sup> A kirekesztettség különböző formái az egyes országokban. In: Ladányi János - Szelényi Iván: A kirekesztettség változó formái. Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 151-157.

As a result social tensions came to the surface, and one of the main ones has been the emerging ethnical tensions. There are many explanations for this, in the background the main reason should be sought in the economical changes and challenges Hungary like the other East-European countries too had to face while turning into a democratic system, and been still facing since then.

As it could have been seen in the US any change, either a development (in the early twentieth century) or a decline in the economical background resulted in the emerging consciousness of the African Americans and the strengthening and developing of the cultural devices for expressing the opinions of the marginalized and for making them feel as a community they can lean on. This can be called as an identification process which has also started among the Roma in Hungary when they faced the effects of the economical and political changes.

What is important to see is that identification never happens by itself but it happens as an answer, it is rather a dialogue. There should always be something the self could react to for being able to make definitions about itself as a result. Cultural products give one of the great scenes of the identification process.

It is also important to talk about the general influence of the US on Hungary. The US is always stated as a political or social model for its democracy and society to the East European Countries. There has been many attempts to get models from the US in connection with creating an open society in Hungary. Sooner or later it always turns out that because being on different levels of the democracy some of the sociopolitical models doesn't work immediately here in Hungary.

### **The first Roma Hip Hop Band – The image of The New Roma**

Romák és gádzsók <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYYPIMX8pes>

In the second half of the nineties a Roma hip-hop band was formed in Hungary, the Fekete Vonat. Its members chose this cultural medium – hip-hop and the genre RAP to express their thoughts and feelings to the world.

They might have not been aware of the role they played but by choosing this name (referring to the Hungarian documentary film made by Schiffer Pal) and this style and forming a RAP band in Hungary which emphasizes its Roma ethnic background even at that time had a meaning which shows that a Roma RAP band due to the characteristics of the genre couldn't

and cannot be just a popular music band in Hungary. Their presence was unique not only because of the genre they chose to perform in, but because this was something that never happened before. There hasn't been a Roma Rap band before in Hungary – which means that they had to interpret the specific characteristics of the hip-hop and the RAP to this situation, and they had to find their own language/voice to be able to speak.<sup>10</sup>

It practically means that they started to create the world of the Roma hip-hop by defining what kind of images, words, expressions, tunes they use while rapping and singing, what could be the topics they talk about in their lyrics, what they want to talk about, who they want to talk to and how.

Following the characteristics of hip-hop the members of the band basically positioned themselves against racism by talking about the place they live (8<sup>th</sup> district Budapest), about how they live together with many kinds of people, and about the feelings and thoughts this living makes them to feel and think. Like this they constructed a new discourse of talking about the Roma in Hungary. This discourse was self-conscious and was an explicit way of talking about how it is to be a young Roma in Hungary. They described the conflicts and problems they had to face in a world where racism against the Roma is strong. They were talking about the Roma and the Gadzso, meaning that they always put emphasis on making a distinction between the two social groups – showing like this that there are conflicts which make it hard to live together but which should be solved.

By trying to find their own voice, they created a new the image of the (young) Roma –I call the image of **the New Roma**.

This image deconstructed the stereotypes of the Roma through the content of their lyrics which were thoughtful, deep lyrics. Breaking up with the traditional messages like the gypsies are always partying and singing and dancing just by fun these songs had deep meanings.

The Roma of their lyrics meant someone whose life can be described according to the general values of the society – who tries to live as all the other young in this country live – meaning and emphasizing that he/she shares the same desires, needs, feelings every other people have.

On the other hand they talk about the unspoken feelings of experiencing discrimination because of being the Roma in the society. They talk about their experiences of being judged by the appearance in situations like love, friendship, neighborhood, party). They ask back – why and for how long it would be like this. And at last they describe alternatives or imagined ways of living where either everything could happen in the other way around or where life is peaceful

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<sup>10</sup> Here referring to Spivak's work: Can the Subaltern Speak?

with people living together in peace and happiness. Following the well known style and discourse structure of the hip hop and rap mixing it with contents that describe their own life in this country, and using traditional Roma elements like the Roma language and tunes, they could successfully create the **Roma hip-hop context**.

The popularity of the Fekete Vonat was very big. Although they were a band of a specific genre and context somehow a wide range of people liked their music. First of all not only the Roma of the 8<sup>th</sup> district of Budapest liked them, and living and talking about urban life didn't narrow their popularity. They were popular among all the Roma in this country whether living in a city or in the countryside. Besides this they gained popularity among people of non Roma origin too. I think one of the explanations for this could be that although they talked about racism in Hungary in a so far unusually explicit way, they were not discriminating within their texts. On the contrary: People of non Roma origin could feel with them by listening to the lyrics about being marginalized or discriminated because they made it visible for the first time by this popular genre how it is to live like this. And also they could feel the same – in this sense ethnicity didn't matter but the feeling itself was important, so they could find something in these lyrics that they could identify themselves with. All this became a dialogue: The band shared its opinion about the world they lived in and was always ready to debate about it (and making this attitude symbolically the attitude of all the Roma in this country). The audience – the Roma and the non Roma - was interested in and accepted this emerging New Roma image because they felt that they were addressed and through this they got the chance to find their own voice for keeping this dialogue. This became the part of the identification process the Hungarian society has been going through in general. It would be interesting to examine how the image of the Hungarians started to be shaped by this time as a result of this influence generated by the Fekete Vonat which messages and the meaning of their existence as a Roma Rap Band became **universal** like this.

Bilakó <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CrHZIEG9ik>

Some say Fekete Vonat was popular only because they were the only Roma Rap Band at the time or the only alternative Roma sound according to the traditional Roma bands. And some say this big popularity was because after a while they started to use more elements from pop music than rap music in their sound.

By the time they appeared as a Rap Band in Hungary then hip-hop culture and rap music from the US as the main expressive device of resistance has been already spread and been popular in



Hungary. Breaking out the oppression by lyrics and sounds - at young age resistance is a common feeling as part of the intense identification process, just like in the case of a social group who is about to find its voice within the changed social circumstances. So this could be an other reason why the message of the band Fekete Vonat was successful in the society.

Anyhow it was they were a successful band in many aspects – regarding their music, or they effect on the identification process of the whole Hungarian society. Unfortunately they couldn't survive as a band together due to reasons which would make another conference paper. But what is important to mention from their end is that since then the just emerging New Roma image/and voice has stopped developing – the relationship between Hungary and the Roma went back to decades.

Fila rap jam <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mE6Lzewyng0>

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Balázs Antos  
Gypsy Side  
*The Film and beyond*

## **Introduction**

I studied cultural anthropology and with a friend of mine we already had made a documentary in Ózd<sup>11</sup>, before the one that we will (partly) see now. Our film about Ózd presents those Roma families who used to work as musicians but have been loosing their living. That has been a kind of sad aspect of our project. At the same time, this project gave the first inspiration for us for shooting 'Gypsy Side': that is when we heard that one of the musicians' grandsons were making rap songs in Budapest. And so we became interested in these authentic rap songs as well! And when we got the opportunity from the Open Society Institute to make a project about young and talented Roma anywhere in Hungary, we chose the young and talented Roma of the Eighth district to make the film. These Roma youngsters sing freestyle and rap. We did not know much about this culture at that time so we started investigating and it was fascinating...

### **1, Radio „C” Béla asks Joker for intro (8:15-9:32)**

I am glad that I present after Jenő Zsigó who introduced you to the context of this conference: to the Roma Parliament, as well as to the project of Béla Ponzok. Béla Ponzok, MC and manager, initiated and organised a Rap-contest series, called RAP-PORT in the once operating Radio C. It happened every two weeks. Actually, we shot our film in 2006 after a few months that the contest had finished about the teenagers who participated in this rap contest.

The boys got used to performing in front of a big audience, and it made them more mature somehow, and gave them self-confidence. They also practiced their improvising skills as „poets”. They were not like a band, but rather different teenagers of the area, 8 or 15 of them, performing together. As rappers, they also reflected on their identity, as most of the rap themes comes from a „who am I” point of view.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2004 with his friend and co-author, Balázs Gát, anthropologist they shot, edited and co-directed the documentary film "Zenészbúcsúztató" -"Farewell to the musician" about once professional gypsy musicians in rural Ózd, Hungary. The film involved five months of fieldwork and gave inspiration to the next project: gypsy music scene of the young urban Roma.

The short scene you see now, takes you to the studio of Béla, however, this scene was presented only for us and was not on the radio. Béla asked the guys to introduce themselves – through rap. The lyrics are proud and expressive.

The contest, besides being an entertaining opportunity for self-expression for talents, also proved to encourage community bounds. From the time of the contest and the parties, new friendships emerged, and the community of the area became more vivid. Unfortunately, the Rap-Port project has faded away since Béla stopped working for the Radio, which also closed a few years ago. Thus the „careers” of the guys have discontinued, sadly.

## **2, Biggy’s Shop (12:50-14:55)**

The scene in the shop presents the fact that hiphop is an international bussiness. The shop that you see in the film is near Széll Kálmán tér in Buda and ran by „Biggy”, a Nigerian emigrant. As he told us, he buys the American brand clothing in Hamburg and Amsterdam, the T-shirts are made in China but marketed in the USA, from where they are shipped to Europe.

As we learnt that too from Biggy, most of the clothes belong to gangster rappers. The Gangsta’ Rap T-shirt serves as a uniform with more goals. First of all, it helps members of the same subculture to recognise each other, including the identification of West Coast and East Coast.<sup>12</sup> In the shop, the boys also showed us how to put your cap for East side and West side, and they were showing examples for the different brands.

Secondly, the uniform (or the style) also serves as a symbol for a superpower’s protection.

The gangster idols on the T-shirt represent power of the big gangsters thus protect the boys in the Eighth distrist, or at least give a feeling of belonging to a Superpower, (almost in a religious sense). These boys are not gangsters, but they choose the message ’if society considers me as a criminal, they should at least fear me as a dangerous gangster’. Eventually, through the T-Shirt, the boys become members of a bigger community which makes them feel more secure. In the next scene you will see the boys singing about their wear and what they think about it.

## **3, Freestyle about streetwear in English (16:05-17:20)**

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<sup>12</sup> By the way, this does not mean too much. Rappers of the Eighth sometimes say West Side and East Side, which are the two sides of the river in New York, whereas the names of the Coasts stand for New York City and Los Angeles. Anyway, these phrases are interesting examples of how a local community takes over and „translates” (elements of) a broad subculture.

For this scene we gave the instruction to sing about any topic related to wear, in rhymes. And they sang. As you see, they are also able to rap in English – at least Zolika, who lived near London for two years. The others were also singing really freely, they did not have any time to prepare. They were just listening and replying to each other. You could see that freestyling needs talent and fresh mind.

The boys follow hip-hop culture fashion-consciously. Fashion is not only represented in colour or style but rather in brands that symbolize stars of the US. Rap stars also have streetwear brands, so a hiphop follower can read from the brands where one belongs to. Now let's see another scene of the boys' everyday life: the hairdresser shop.

#### **4, Hairdresser (24:45-28:25)**

The Nigerian hairdresser, Victor is an authentic cultural broker of hiphop in the eyes of the Eighth district boys. He is black just like the Afro-American hiphop stars. Being in this tiny shop in Baross street (on the Boulevard), which is just like an island in the city, is almost like being in Harlem. The local black minority hangs out in Victor's shop, and so inside the shop not much reminds the visitor of the Hungarian capital. Hairdressers talk in a Nigerian dialect – visitors have the impression that the shop could be almost anywhere in the world with an African minority. The Roma boys show undisputed respect to the natural born black community of the Eighth district, as they are a step closer by birth to the gangster idols. Thus they are proud of having black friends. In fact, the district is the more tolerant part of the city where 7-8 different minorities live together in harmony.

#### **5, Duel: Dangerous Elements versus Rap-Port boys (35:00-37:00)**

This scene is excellent to realize that you need to be talented and fast for freestyle. A rap-duel is a chance to compete but also to learn from each other. In the scene you could see two generations competing with each other: the older brothers and the younger brothers, who were doing really well. The topics emerged spontaneously. As you see, competition gives a lot of inspiration for the participants. In this way, the duel becomes a peacefully canalised way of harmful gang fight.

#### **6, Gypsy Freestyle on stage (41:40-44:22)**

This part of the film was shot at the festival 'Romajális' in Orczy-kert, a park in the Eighth district. In the scene you could see different performers doing freestyle, singing about what it means for them and how it feels to be Roma. The performers were using the word 'gipsy'

when expressing their identity. Proudness and dignity appeared - it was not a shame anymore to be a gipsy, on this stage.

No doubt that the Roma audience also supported this kind of free self-expression: the performers felt safe at the event.

### **Conclusion**

Now we can come to the conclusion that Rap-port, and freestyle rapping in general, was mostly a teenage fun. It helped to develop the boys' identity while singing about themselves. It also helped them 'to survive' with dignity, being member of a neglected minority. Even if musical carrier remained a dream, it has been important for the Roma boys to belong to somewhere: to the hip-hop (sub)culture. Eventually, they could be and they are proud to be 'on the Gypsy-side'.

**“The Negro outside, the real Gipsy”<sup>13</sup>**  
Ghetto-vision of the 8<sup>th</sup> district

Apropos of a documentary film, I would like to talk about the cultural representations about the 8<sup>th</sup> district. In other words, I would like to find out how this neighbourhood, - where we actually are -, is seen and interpreted in contemporary, mainly pop-cultural or sub-cultural discourses. What are the meanings of (Roma) “ghetto” in this context and is it a term imposed from the mainstream society or is it part of the local identity? Thinking about contemporary representations about the ghetto of the 8<sup>th</sup> district, I could or would have to, naturally, talk about the band ‘Fekete Vonat’, the animation ‘Nyócker’ (District) or choose some other cultural or artistic product related to the neighbourhood. However, since the lack of time and because some other lectures (by Veronka Vaspál and by Mária Bogdán) have come up during this conference with these topics, I only concentrate on one example and give a short analyze of *Gipsy Side*, a documentary film also presented yesterday by its author, Balázs Antos. And because Balázs has already talked about the context of the film and showed some pieces concerning the relationship between Blacks and Roma in the neighbourhood, I will rather concentrate on the importance of the place and try to approach the film from the aspect of the question of attachment to one’s residence and the ambiguous status of the so-called “ghetto” in the 8<sup>th</sup> district. With the inclusion and the account of the neighbourhood, the identity of the personae in the film steps into the field of the “Third Space” of the hybridity. Laurence Grossberg, - when explaining Homi K. Bhabha’s term -, describes hybrid identity as something that has been created in the existence of three “frontiers”. The subordinated or minor identity appears in this case between two, rival identities, located in an intermediate, third space. Here, hybridity is border-crossing, cannot create its own space or circumstances, but only uncertainty and mobility (Grossberg 1996, 88.) The rappers in the film *Gipsy Side* are moving in this hybrid, third space, which is the “ghetto” of the 8<sup>th</sup> district.

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<sup>13</sup> “...A néger kint, az igazi roma...” Quote from a hip-hop song in *Gipsy Side*, documentary film by Balázs Antos and Balázs Gát, 2007

Before starting the analyze of the film, I am first giving a very short historical sum-up to understand the process of downgrading and the presence of the term “ghetto” in the context of the 8<sup>th</sup> district. The 8<sup>th</sup> district had been settled during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in parallel with its neighbour districts in Budapest, the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup>. Nevertheless, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its development has slowed down and a clear division between the two parts (exterior or interior of the Grand Boulevard) of the district has become more and more visible. While the inner part was settled by aristocrats, governmental offices and privates palaces (named Palace Quarter, ‘Palotanegyed’), the outer neighbourhoods of the 8<sup>th</sup> kept their very rural appeal, with a built environment characterised by single level, often cob houses (Pilinyi 1997, 50.) As for the social structure of the two divisions, the Palace quarter was, needless to say, inhabited by the high bourgeoisie, while the external quarters were inhabited by various types of physical workers. Since the first settlements and more and more, the neighborhoods beyond the Boulevard have been considered as the “slum”, or the “ghetto”.

During the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the economical - social decline of the district has progressively intensified; after the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, some neighborhoods around the Eastern Railway station transformed into slums of prostitutes and criminals. The damages caused by the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and by the revolution of 1956 remained intact for decades: 90% of the built environment was lightly to seriously damaged and due to financial lack, only the most dilapidated buildings were impaired, the majority was left over in the same conditions, making home for migrating, poorer and poorer populations (Bakó – Bíró 1970). An interesting vague of temporary settlers or guest workers had been the Roma from North-East Hungary, commuting on weekly or monthly basis on the so-called “Black Train”, giving the name to one of the most famous hip-hop bands of the district, Fekete Vonat (Somogyi 2002, 27.) Concerning the built environment, as during the whole socialist era, there was practically no initiative to reconstruct or redevelop the district, the neighborhood became one of the most disadvantageous and run-down part of the entire capital. By the time of the democratic turn in 1989, the middle –or the worst - part of the 8<sup>th</sup> district became the symbol of the Roma ghetto.

Naturally, one has to use carefully the term *ghetto*. It has been mentioned about the 8<sup>th</sup> district by several Hungarian sociologists, among others by János Ladányi, who had diagnosed the threatening fact of the ghetto, even if neither the ratio of the segregation, nor the extension of the isolated territory can be compared to the North-American ghettos (Ladányi 2008, 64-65.) Nevertheless, the phenomena of the ghetto, in the course of time since 1989, got interwoven with the territory of the 8<sup>th</sup> district and, in spite of the social rehabilitation going on and its



physical consequences (for example the renovation and pedestrianization of this street), the area where we actually are is still stigmatized by the public opinion.

After this brief historical summary, I suggest a short analysis about the theory of post-socialist representations of the 8<sup>th</sup> district, hoping to get a clearer understanding of the hybrid contemporary identity of the ghetto-neighbourhood. In my opinion, this area, since the democratic turn, stands more and more like a tool for representation, raising and confronting the various discourses of exclusion, hybridity and mixed culture. When we talk about a city quarter as a tool of representation, it has to be clear what we exactly mean by representation and, more importantly, whose representation do we take as a basis. It seems like it is crucial to ask: who represents the 8<sup>th</sup> district? Its residents or those who only see it from outside? Can these two gazes mix or overlap with each other? What can be the relation between the image of the Roma population about its own residence and the opinion of the majority society, - living in other parts of the city -, about the “Roma ghetto”? In my judgement, we cannot and we must not, in every case, make the distinction between the inner and outer representations. Instead of a strict differentiation, it is worth observing the mixture of the two types.

To better understand this problem, I am citing Caroline Howarth who, from a predominantly social-psychological aspect, writes about the controversial judgement of the city of Brixton in England. According to Howarth, while the insider representations show Brixton as a vibrant, multicultural society, proud of its cultural richness, the wider society tends to marginalise it with representations of crime and blackness (Howarth 2002, 146.) Howarth, presenting this neat collision between the two images, emphasizes on the dialectics of how we see ourselves and how others see us. As she develops it, when one tries to map the identity of a community or of a particular neighbourhood, what we must ask is “Identity in whose eyes?” (Howarth 2002, 159.) Keeping in mind this question, I will present one example of the various representations of the 8<sup>th</sup> district, not ignoring the importance of the difference between the images coming from inside or outside, even if the distinction, once more, is not evident. Furthermore, we have to also understand that in the case of an excluded, multi-discriminated community, there may possibly be less opportunity and intention to create their own reflections. Yet, when it happens, their exceptional presence signal a sort of awakening of consciousness and emancipation within the Roma population of the district.

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Movies about Roma had been long time stuck in a romanticising and exoticising set of stereotypes: until the 1990s, the cinematographic representations practically only showed Roma

as free, passionate, primitive, outlaw people. According to Dina Iordanova, there is no other ethnic group who has been served so many times as a “metaphoric material” to films (Iordanova 2008, 307.) Nevertheless, in the 1990s, a new category of Roma film has been born, which aimed to show the social situation and the marginalization in a more complex way. In these representations, the romanticising allure had been demystified; the “esoteric admiration” was replaced in turn by a growing anxiety about racism and exclusion (Iordanova 2008, 307.) The movie, *Gipsy Side* has also broken with the above-mentioned, paternalistic tradition and thus became an exciting example of the mixture of inside and outside representations.

The film (for those who did not have the chance to listen to Balázs Antos’s presentation yesterday) was in competition for the 4<sup>th</sup> Verzio International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival, and winner of several independent film festivals-, shows teenager Roma rappers, trying to imitate the North-American hip-hop culture in the 8<sup>th</sup> district. Citing Kinga Kali: *“the first picture localizes: we are in Budapest, the panorama of the 8<sup>th</sup> district is recognisable even from distance. The sequence is attended by the confession of a boy (could be anyone from the movie): we feel at home in the 8<sup>th</sup>, no one wants to leave it, because this is the place where dreams come true.”* (Kali 2007a) Mario, Luigi and Joker are rehearsing together for years, at home, in the courtyard of their house, in the one-time program *Rapport* of the Rádió C (Gipsy radio) or even at the festivals organized in Orczy Park. The documentary chooses the anthropological method of participative observation and accompanies the boys through their way to the concerts, studios or even to the Black barber’s shop. During this time, *Gipsy Side* lets us discover a world telling about the perfect appropriation of a subculture, formed into its own.

Because Balázs Antos has already presented the complex and tricky way of appropriating afro-American hip-hop subculture, I am only referring to this topic very shortly. As Joker told to me in an interview made in January 2009, about the codes of Afro-American culture standing as patterns to them: *„... it is possible, that it was a protest for us. We did not grow up like a lot of children. We grew up in poverty and maybe we protested like this, we spoke out what we felt, in order to make it better or more beautiful. And we said it in a violent way.”* Luigi, in another interview from 2007 tells about the supposed virtual community with Black rappers: *„They started to rap also because they wanted to tell to the people how they suffer in their minority existence. They were a minority in the USA; we are a minority here in Hungary. So the rap had first a political side: it was a revolt when the Negroes went out to the street to rap. The same*

*thing happens with the Gipsies in Hungary. (...) So as Black people protested with rap, Roma do the same thing.” (Kali 2007b)*

In this few sentences, Joker and Luigi formulate the foundations of subcultures, among others of the hip-hop culture: the representatives of the subculture express such marginalized contents (for example class-consciousness or consciousness of difference), which are forbidden in the dominant culture. The subculture is, according to Dick Hebdige, a way of expression directed to the elementary tension between the people on power and the oppressed. This tension is getting expressed in the different sub cultural styles (Hebdige 2008, 140.) With the localization of the Afro-American subculture and the introduction of their music, the rappers of Gipsy Side live a phase of the sub cultural existence which, to a certain extent, gets accepted by the dominant society. This is proved also by the success of the film and its numerous projections in the course of film clubs or festivals<sup>14</sup>. Gát and Antos draw, in effect a positive, hopeful image about the Budapest ghetto-youth, where the protest against oppression is successfully turned into a process of creation.

However, the optimistic story has its (physical) limits. The people in Gipsy Side are only moving secure in the 8<sup>th</sup> district, inside a limited zone. Everything is close: their home, their friends, the building of Radio C, the Orczy Park, the barbershop of Nigerian emigrant Victor or the hip-hop clothing shop of the Black Biggy (Kali 2007a). The representation of this “ethnic ghetto” suits Yves Grafmeyer’s, a French urban sociologist concept about the „proximity spaces” (Grafmeyer 2006, 27.) According to Grafmeyer, the attachment to a neighbourhood depends largely on the social status of its residents; moreover, it stands in a disproportional relationship with their mobility. The more disadvantageous is someone’s social background, the more he or she is attached to his residence, whose neighbourhood network assures security. That is why; the rappers of Gipsy Side obviously keep on all their everyday practices in the area of the ghetto, in the 8th district. There is only one scene in the film when the boys move out from the “ghetto”: they go to Society Artisjus Hungarian Bureau for the Protection of Author’s Rights, to get the licenses of a few of their songs.

The sequence, where the boys cross the Danube and go to Buda side, representing themselves in an official institution, is impressive and suggestive. Although it is not explicit, the viewer can suspect that this excursion in the posh 1<sup>st</sup> district rests not only an exceptional occasion in

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Gipsy Side was projected severally during the three day-long ‘Magdi festival’ in 2009

the film, but basically in their whole life as well. The traditionally bourgeois neighbourhood, the downhill of Buda Castle are a more ambiguous, “dangerous” territory for them, than the 8<sup>th</sup> district, otherwise „dangerous place” for the outside world. Getting home from the Artisjus, one girl from the group even calls her parents to reassure them that she would be back in the 8th very soon, where she doesn’t have to worry about being injured because of her skin colour (Antos 2008, 44.) Again, we have to think about the inversion of spatial representations, how the “outer world” and the “residents of the ghetto” perceive two different realities. Whose representation is more real, what is the importance in reversing the “outside world” and the “ghetto”?

To sum up, the success and the hopes of the rappers in Gipsy Side are ambivalent: their appearance and shows are on the one hand, the authentic examples of the pride felt about the local Roma identity and the hybrid culture of the 8<sup>th</sup>, on the other hand, their inclusion in the majority society and in its mainstream culture is limited and uncertain. Citing again Dick Hebdige, we can define subcultural style as something that communicates at the same time one group’s difference and expresses its collective identity. However, Hebdige says that each subculture, in the course of time, gets to the phase of banalisation, that is to say they re-integrate from the resistance to the logic of the dominant culture. This kind of „domestication” of the „otherness” has not concerned yet the subculture of the rappers in Gipsy Side – their art and self-representation is still stuck among the walls of the ghetto.

Whose identity, after all, was shown in Gipsy Side? Without entering in the debate of the “anthropological gaze” and the all-time questionable authenticity in front of cameras, we can still presume that this sensitive and conscious way of filming has succeeded in giving a true imprint of this specific subculture. As the other representations are too, Gipsy Side is full of stereotypical uses of patterns of gangster-lifestyle and hip-hop subculture. The identity of the presented rappers is a hybrid mixture of the Afro-American hip-hop and the Hungarian Roma identity. And the combination of these two identities can only take place in the “third space” of the 8<sup>th</sup> district, where this kind of hybridization has its spatial and cultural terms. With the complex interference of the imitation of black subculture, the birth of an authentic Roma hip-hop culture and, as a third convener, the “eye” of the filmmakers, the stereotypical patterns achieves over and over new self-definitions and gets more and more significance. If we position Gipsy Side in a broader context, we can see that concerns about the 8<sup>th</sup> district since the democratic turn, its inclusion in high and mass-cultural discourses can make a way in a wider

sense: the interest and the learning about the representation of a stigmatized, mostly isolated space can bring closer its stigmatized and marginalized community as well.

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## **Subcultural capital and social marginalization – Roma hiphop as a subcultural economy**

Zoltán Sidó

Studying the literature on Roma hiphop in Hungary, I found, that although these studies touch upon relevant issues and interesting conclusions, they focus on one simple aspect of the topic. Most researches deal with the strategies of performers with which they localize the globalized means of hiphop and try to position themselves, the Roma people, the majoritarian society and their immediate environment (mostly the Józsefváros) in the symbolic space. Including the works of Somogyi (2001), Simeziane (2010) and partly Koppány (2006), these studies are based on a semantic approach, using text analysis as their main methodology.

However, this methodological restriction ignores several relevant dimensions of the phenomena. Therefore I try to leave this narrative behind and analyze Roma hiphop as a subcultural economy. This approach considers subcultures as a complex field of constructing and experiencing individual and collective identities, but in contrast with the semantic approach, this approach of subcultural economies considers both immaterial and material aspects of the identity construction. In the context of the production and consumption of subcultural goods it shows both the individual strategies of subcultural capital accumulation and the dominant economic and community logic of a subculture. The main questions are the following: what kind of processes and practices shape the scene?; how does subcultural production and consumption look like in the given field?; are there any subcultural entrepreneurs and what is their role in the scene?; how do subcultures use the new media infrastructure?

Although these questions are the basic ideas of cultural studies, there is an important additional aspect of this research: In this case we must constantly consider social marginalization of the Roma people that bring several new aspects on these questions and create new perspectives of analysis.

The purpose of this lecture is to present the main ideas and first results of a research which aims to find possible answers to the questions raised above. As the first stage of my research, I observed the network of young musicians from the Eighth and Ninth Districts, who are relatively well-known in the hiphop scene of the city. Some of them have been in the scene for years – as a member of the Rap-port collective for instance -, while others have started their musical careers only recently. Part of my methodology was participant

observation – both in online and offline spheres –, while simultaneously I was conducting interviews with musicians of the scene.

### **Theoretical background**

The homogenizing effect of global cultural trends has already been questioned in several case studies (Bennet 1999; Broder 2006; Koppány 2006). Hip-hop is an exceptionally good example of how global cultural forms can be filled up with local narratives. Take a look at the history of the Hungarian rap music for example. Both the gangster aesthetics of former rock musician Ganxsta Zolee, the popular but weightless gag-rap of the Rapülök or the radical nationalist Fankadeli can coexist under the same genre. The toolbar of the genre is suitable to present different positions, narratives and contexts, which leads us to the conclusion that hip-hop is not the voice of resistance *per se*, the connections between minorities and the genre is only contingent, which is important to be aware about in the study of Roma hip-hop.

If we followed the convictions of the classics of cultural studies, the Birmingham based Center of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) that youth subcultures are in all cases characterised as anti-status-quo, anti-capitalist spheres, then important aspects of the Roma hip-hop scene would remain hidden from our studies. It is supported by my findings that explicit political contents were considerably rare among the lyrics and statements of the performers. Furthermore, the general goal of the interviewees was more to integrate into the mainstream of existing pop music establishment.

These are the main reasons why I used the approach of subcultural economy – that is anyway a standard approach in recent cultural studies. It considers mainstream media and markets “not only as powers existing outside and against the subcultural scenes; but as integral parts of them” (Kacsuk 2005, 99.) The most quoted authors of this theoretical approach are Sarah Thornton, Paul Hodkinson and David Muggleton for instance, whose works were therefore important sources for my research. However, it is important to note, that in the case of Roma hip-hop this ethnographic, descriptive approach, that extended the scope of subcultural analyzes from symbolic resistance to other fields, still has to be completed with a broader social perspective, sensitive to class differences and ethnic conflicts. It is necessary to develop a theoretical and methodological toolbar that integrates the recent methodological innovations of cultural studies, and the socially sensitive, normative attitude of the Birmingham school.

In the following I will present the empirical results of my research.

### **The role of hip-hop in the analysed community**

In general, hiphop had a privileged but not exclusive role among my interviewees. Most musicians have a pragmatic attitude towards the genre: in case of songwriting hiphop becomes just a genre among others, and some elements of soul and r'n'b are frequently used in the songs. In this milieu the breaking with genre orthodoxy is not extraordinary at all, these performers are not marked as „too mainstream”. On the contrary, genre diversity features high standard and innovation. We can find some other examples of genre diversity in roma hiphop – the case of LL Junior and the Jamaican genre raggamuffin for instance.

However, hiphop remains a starting point and a common experience for urban Roma youth – every member of the researched community started his career as a rapper. There might be two reasons for this. The first is the symbolical identification with the situation of the Afro-American youth, which is well discussed in the documentary *Gipsy Side*. The second is a functional reason: hiphop is a genre that doesn't need much equipment or technology, just some talent in rapping. Beats can be produced easily by beatboxing, so one can become experienced enough without purchasing any instruments or special infrastructure. These characteristics can be alluring to children with disadvantaged background. This kind of puritan rapping is very popular among children – they use it as a kind of game or leisure activity<sup>15</sup>. It's easy to notice that contestants of talent shows in the 8th district – mainly in the Kesztyűgyár Community Center – are children of the age of 10 to 16.

We can also notice that there are no girl rappers on these programs. The answers of my interviewees suggest that this concludes from the fact that the activity of making music together is embedded in the context of male bonding. The guys making music together are also hanging around and going to party together, and girls are generally excluded from these activities. Although, there are some cases when girls play active role in the scene too, mostly through singing and dancing.

The playfulness and creative minimalism mentioned above, constitutes the basis of freestyle rap that has an exceptional reputation among the Roma youth. During freestyles the rappers must improvise instead of performing written songs, to show their talent in a real tense situation. This was the basic idea of the most popular and most acclaimed performance in the Roma hiphop scene in the 2000s, Rap-port, led and coordinated by the local radio DJ, Béla Ponczók.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbUZISmFdm4&feature=related> (accessed March 1, 2012)



Following the topic of freestyle we should discuss the process of songwriting in the roma hiphop community. One of the main strenghts of hiphop in the segregated quarters of New York in the late 1970s was its power to create the myth of origin and community. The beats of most songs were created from old funk, soul and disco tracks and these samples were reused and recontextualized in the hands of Afro-American youth. This reflective relation to their own cultural past played a huge role in the forming of the self-concept and self-consciousness of the black community. So the question is: is this phenomena noticeable in the case of roma hiphop as well?

Rappers interviewed for this paper stated that sampling is very rare in their music. During rehearsals and freestyles they might rap over beats found on the internet but in their own tracks sampling is especially rare. This might have many causes, but the most plausible of them is that Roma culture has no significant popcultural heritage.

The self-conscious political pieces of soul and funk or the aesthetic of blaxploitation provided enough content for the rappers in the 80s (Demers 2003), but there are no similar sources in the case of the Hungarian Roma. Although this does not mean, that there is no Roma popcultural canon. The band Fekete Vonat is still an important reference, and the group Weszélyes Elemek has a high reputation in the local scale – a teenager interviewed for this paper said that „everyone in the 7th and 8th district are familiar with them”. Besides, the rapper Kicsi Tyson was mentioned several times too.

So most Roma rappers in the 8th district are rapping to their own beats and this DIY principle is an important element of the artistic identity of some performers. DIY however does not mean an aesthetic concept: minimalism is not a merit in itself. The use of live instruments or trained singers in the songs are considered as a sign of professionalism. Responding to the question if there are any elements that make a song „more Roma” and that distinguish the Roma hiphop from the non-Roma hiphop I got unmatched answers. Most rappers stated firmly that there are definitely such elements of style, mainly the rhythm, the flow and the dynamics, and that Roma hiphop songs are „more living”. One of the interviewees told me that their former record label rejected an EP of theirs because it was „too Roma”. When I asked him what he thought about the reasons of this, he said that the record label wanted more simple melodies, but they have put „some flavour” in the songs and used live instruments such as the guitar, which is typical in the Roma pop music as well.

## **Networks and infrastructure**

Young rappers hardened in freestyles usually start to write their own tracks and lyrics after a while. It is not uncommon that experienced older performers patronize and sponsor young talents and their coming out is a contribution in one of the mentor's tracks. Informal social networks are especially important in the process of recording a song: on the one hand, the necessary technology is usually provided by friends or acquaintances so the performers do not have to rent a studio; and on the other hand, instrumental parts are recorded by familiar musicians. Relatives play important role in the instrumental parts, as most Roma hip-hop performers come from families of musicians.

After the track is recorded, comes the distribution, that is mostly limited to the online sphere. The two main forums for this are Youtube and Facebook. The songs therefore primarily reach friends, however this means a relatively large audience due to the social media. Although the tracks are physically not distributed in any other ways, their popularity may grow in offline spheres as well, through various practices and institutions.

I will illustrate the main stages of a relatively successful career in Roma hip-hop in the 2000s through the case of Lázók Roland, Luigi. Luigi and a couple of friends started to rap influenced by an older friend, Káló Bone, a former member of *Weszélyes Elemek*. Their freestyles stayed in the local playgrounds for a while. Their first show was at an outdoor social event, the Roma Majális in the Orczy Kert, which was followed by several similar occasions. Then the newly formed band contacted Béla Ponczók, a host of Radio C with the aim of some kind of co-operation, which led to the formation of the Rap-port collective and a radio program of the same name. Several shows and concerts followed, mainly in the Roma Parliament. This brief case study leads to the conclusion that Roma hip-hop draws heavily on Roma cultural institutions, using their infrastructure, building on their audience – but on the other hand Roma hip-hop itself is an effective way of community organizing through concerts and talent shows. Eventually, hip-hop contributes to maintain the Roma cultural infrastructure.

However, this co-operation has its own limits and therefore the main challenge for each performer is to break out from this closed scene and gain nationwide reputation. Even the most ambitious performers admit that the necessary resources and relationships are not available for them to break into the mainstream media, therefore they find television talent shows as *Megasztár* or *Csillag születik*, as main opportunities.

It is important to note, that almost every popular Roma pop performer turned up and gained popularity in talent shows: *Fekete Vonat* at the *FILA Rap Jam*, *Molnár Ferenc Caramel* in the *Megasztár*. Although the romantic idea of the direct relation between the mainstream media and amateur Roma musicians has its dark side as well: my interviewees

stated that these TV shows „do not recognize real talent”. However, the term „talent” is a highly ethnicised term in this context and therefore becomes the implicit critique of discriminatory practices of the Hungarian media. When my interviewees complained that the jury announced Vastagh Csaba as the winner of the X-Factor instead of the Slovakian Roma, Takács Nicholas; or that the band Compact Disco will represent Hungary on the Eurovision Song Contest instead of Molnár Ferenc Caramel, the talented/not talented dichotomy was strongly linked to the Roma/ non-Roma opposition and therefore to the shock of discrimination in general. They mostly blamed structural problems, such as it is easier to sell someone to the audience, who is not from a minority, and the jury and record labels hardly risk it.

One of my interviewees said that collective action and the strengthening of the community could be a possible solution for this problem. For this purpose, he organized a group with his rapper friends called the Ghetto Stars. They recorded their first track 'Together for our dream' which symbolizes that individual attempts on success do necessarily fail and therefore they need solidarity and cohesion.

The possible aim of my research could be the description of such attempts of collective action in Roma hip hop and pop music. An example might be the building of a parallel infrastructure to the mainstream institutions of pop music. The record company Skyforce is a good example – Skyforce is the only record company in Hungary that signs up only Roma performers.

However, these assumptions need further examination.

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## **Dangerous Elements? Inverting power structures by Roma Hiphop in Hungary**

### **1, Intro: my method and my choice**

This presentation is an attempt to analyze the video called 'Rascal Dogs' (Csibész Kuttyák) of Digital Street from a linguistic, sociolinguistic and literary perspective. My examination will also call upon sociology and anthropology, since considering the complexity of the topic 'roma hiphop' and the method 'critical cultural studies', interdisciplinary approach is inevitable and necessary. However, I still focus mainly on the text and the language of the chosen video, in other words, I take the lyrics as a phenomenon of a particular socio-cultural context upon which I shall reflect through the views and methods of literature and linguistics without having done anthropological fieldwork or qualitative sociological researches.

Before we start I would like to make some comments on my choice, that is the video called 'Rascal Dogs' of Digital Street. A few days after the detailed programme of this conference got published on the „romahiphoparchive.org”, I received some comments saying that the analyzed video was not a track of Dangerous Elements but that of Digital Street, that is L.C.N and Dangerous Elements featuring other MCs. I've appreciated the comments on the one hand because a (*the*) discussion between *us*<sup>16</sup> seems to have been started and on the other, because it made me realize (again) that in this genre the question whose (which MC's) text is more ingenious, spirited or snappy, is essential. The lyrics, being the only original element in Hungarian hiphop, (the basic for music, the wear, the dance and gestures are all 'imported' from America) is the sphere of constructing Roma hiphop identity. After all, I find it important to put it accurately and apologize for my mistake in time: I chose Digital Street's 'Rascal Dogs' video from youtube where at least three versions of the same track are available<sup>17</sup>.

The track was the first piece of Digital Street and very soon became extremely popular in the 8th district (but not in mainstream media). RadioC and GhettoRadio were regularly playing it,

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<sup>16</sup> Research of Bruck-Vági (2009) shows that „the fewer connection a non-Roma person has with the Roma in Hungary, the more biased they are towards the members of the Roma community” (Dósa, 2009, 48). The webarchive will hopefully be one of the ways to create connections between Roma and non-Roma. Also, as Anna Wessely pointed out in her recent presentation about 'mass culture', in today's 'hiper-segmented' society one can experience very different 'social milieus', while our common social knowledge does not exist anymore, the 'mass' as such, has disappeared. ('From art to mass culture' – a conference at ELTE, 16-17th February 2012, Budapest.)

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foH\\_aeHbwUY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foH_aeHbwUY) (Weszélyes Elemek);  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1rjcodTz3k> (L.C.N-Weszélyes Elemek);  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkt0nxd2c> (Digital Street)

children were singing it in the school, it appeared as ring tones of mobiles, etc. I admit it made a deep effect on me as well, and I believe if we talk about contemporary culture the process of reception is just as important as the text itself. Stanley Fish, American critic's theory about "reading communities" contends that all interpreters are extensions of communities. Since I have built on my own experience as a listener, my presentation will (could and must) merely provide one of the various possible interpretations. This approach, I believe, can maintain and sustain the pieces of roma hiphop as counterpoints of different interpretations whether political or not.

## **2, Projects in the eighth' aiming the Roma 'to have a voice'**

It is interesting that the majority of recent projects of the eighth district all have the common goal: they endeavor to make the eighth' Roma inhabitants speak, they want to give them a *voice*. Blogs of the eighth encourage inhabitants to express their own opinion, the Street Pop-Up art project (2008)<sup>18</sup> makes the inhabitants' messages visible, as well as the Photo*Voice* project (2010)<sup>19</sup>, focusing on mainly children. Projects of ZöFi (Green Youngs) in the district, for instance the newspaper 'Magdi' also serves as a media for the inhabitants of the eighth.<sup>20</sup> Until 2010 GhettoRadio gives roma hiphop programmes which is followed by regular self-organized parties called 'Voice of the Street'.<sup>21</sup> Last but not least, sociologists also find that important to give a voice to eighth' district Romas: in an entire book Zoltán Tábori profoundly reports on living circumstances and lifestyle of the Magdolna quarter's inhabitants speaking with them as much as possible (Tábori 2009). Mariann Dósa, in her MA thesis underlines that the Roma population involved in the process of the gentrification of the Corvin quarter 'had no voice' as a consequence of the state authority's ignorance and negligence, therefore she decided to conduct interviews with them to hear their *voice* (Dósa 2009, 59). Finally, I would like to mention a very fresh study of Vera Messing and Gábor Bernáth, sociologists, who examine how Roma have recently represented in the media. They consider the voice of Roma that is their own, individual and direct *voice* as an important indicator of their real situation and career chances (Messing –Bernáth 2012). (Regarding direct voice an important indicator of

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.teschkata.hu/2008/10/street-pop-up-2008-street-art-project.html> (accessed February 15, 2012)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.8kermegen.hu/> The blog and the project are called 'The eighth district and me'. An exhibition was organized in April 2011 of the children's works in Gödör Klub, Budapest.

<sup>20</sup> <http://zofi.hu/english/past> (accessed February 15, 2012)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.ghettoradio.hu/>; see the radio's report on 'Voice of the Street' parties: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1L9vyvajQAQ> (accessed February 15, 2012)

individualization, which is the first step to get rid of the process of homogenization.) After all, if one has a closer look at these projects it is hard not to believe that the act of speaking and consequently, language would not mean some kind of power (or empowerment), which the mentioned projects aim to give back to Roma. Fortunately the list of these sort of projects and studies could be continued<sup>22</sup> – my desire is to join them with my analysis.

### **3, Defining roma hiphop as a particular subculture**

To put it very simple, critical cultural studies focuses on the interconnections of culture and politics within the context of everyday-life (Vörös-Nagy 1995, 154.) Gergő Pulay, anthropologist, examining the Hungarian roma music scene, found that minorities often find a way to *re-position* themselves, and in certain cases they do it by the very same codes of modernity, through which they had earlier been defined as *different* (Pulay 2003, 352.) Thus the musical scene Pulay was observing can be considered as an alternative space where politics is being made. We should find his observation remarkable firstly because it gives special significance to the music scene (in terms of politics) and secondly because it implies that roma music scene, and as such roma hiphop, could be also (read or interpreted as) politically meaningful.

I argue that similarly to Hebdige's profound study on punk, Hungarian roma hiphop as a vigorous combination of dance, music, argot and wear (Hebdige 1981) should be considered as a separate and sovereign subculture in Hungary, yet hardly studied.<sup>23</sup> Unlike Hebdige I would like to demonstrate though the ways in which this subculture might be meaningful for the „outsiders”<sup>24</sup> particularly: what sort of literary meaning and political meaning does Rascal Dogs transmit towards us (outsiders), if any?

The context of hiphop is being constructed in a (symbolic) field of tension – a tension or opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Somogyi 2002, 22.) Hiphop as the expression/construction of identity of a particular group promulgates profound digression. This is the main message that may be followed by further messages. I see Digital Street's musical activity (in general, Roma

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<sup>22</sup> See Corvin-Szigony project for instance, which aim is to speak personally to the dwellers of Ferencváros, who are supposed to leave their home in order of the 'urban rehabilitation': <http://www.rev8.hu/egysajto.php?id=18> (accessed February 15, 2012)

<sup>23</sup> Since only a few publications have come out so far on roma hiphop of Hungary (Somogyi 2001; Koppány 2006; Simeziane 2010), I find it important to articulate and define this contemporary phenomenon here again as a separate, particular subculture.

<sup>24</sup> I agree with Hebdige that discussing a specific subculture it is important that we underline our role as outsiders. I will consequently use the term 'outsiders' for those who do not make part of this specific subculture in my study.

hiphop) as a construction of a special, let's say 'double identity': the band members in their lyrics primarily define themselves as hiphoppers ('here are the four crooks teaching you hiphop'), but also as Roma ('I was born as a Gipsy') – thus they become Roma and hiphoppers, Roma hiphoppers ('the four cools (*gizda*) and the gangster slang'). However, the mechanism of constructing identity and self-identity is certainly much more complicated than I just roughly scratched. The hiphop language's complexity along with the mechanism of constructing (self-)identity in strong relation with power will be explained in the following.

#### **4, Rascal Dogs: various revealing interconnections of language and power**

Below I argue that the cultural product 'Rascal Dogs' bears (hides) the features of power structures but also, as a consequence of the genre 'rap', these/certain power structures can be revealed within and throughout the track's language use. My aim is to recover and present the levels on which the mentioned structures of power appear, as well as analyze as extensively as possible the instruments by which the video questions and symbolically subverts the (ever-)actual power structures.

##### **4.1 *Linguistic seclusion* as instrument of repression and way of resistance**

My views are based on the Foucauldian power theory and Bourdieu's theory on language and symbolic power. I focus on the process of a certain group' or individuals' *linguistic seclusion* (and also, exclusion) because I see the examined phenomena (roma hiphop) as such. Moreover, in this study, I understand all kinds of exclusion, discrimination as processes that first and foremost manifest themselves through one's language use. (Besides your skin colour it is the way you speak that makes you different.) Hungarian sociolinguistic researches show that speakers of minorities very often perceive ethnic prejudices as a consequence of their use of language (Bartha, 2006, 418).<sup>25</sup> Namely, in terms of sociolinguistics, following the horizontal and vertical division of a language, in our case the language use of Roma in the 8th, and whether we regard it as a dialect (horizontal division) or a group language (vertical division), in any case – it has always been inferior to the vernacular in the everyday discourse.<sup>26</sup> Argot and slang for

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<sup>25</sup> Although the author refers primarily to Romani speakers, in this sense, it is irrelevant whether the speakers use a foreign language (not Hungarian), their own dialect, or a specific group language.

<sup>26</sup> The patterns of discourse of Roma and non-Roma children (in Hungary) are different in many aspects. The changing of speakers have different rules, the quantity of collateral, overlapping speech, or the rules and expectations of storytelling, for instance, are different within Roma speakers. In school all these particularities of speech use are often considered - not differentiating between speakers - as lack of certain abilities and not as differences in language use (what they are, in fact), thus stigmatizing the different cultural, social (also, regional, economic, etc.) language uses (Bartha 2006, 412.)



instance, and basically all non-official, non-written language variants have been subservient to the vernacular, whether we admit this or not. Additionally, in the case of Roma whom the linguistic discourse also defines as Hungary's biggest and most underprivileged minority<sup>27</sup>, language rights (that are human rights as well), as Miklós Kontra points out, are shockingly damaged by the actual education policy partly as a consequence of the lack (!) of any Hungarian language policy or strategy (Kontra 2007, 147). Minority groups, especially Roma have constantly been affected by linguicism in Hungary (a group's discrimination based on their language use; Skutnabb-Kangas), meanwhile the official, state-controlled public discourse has underlined in relation to the languages spoken by Roma: the lack of vernacular (!), the too many different dialects (!), and that it is basically only an oral culture anyway (!) – as explanations or rather excuses for ignoring Roma's own languages in official life and education (Kontra 2003, 330). I would like to suggest that Roma hiphop as a subculture appears to be a firm opposition, in terms of language, against the above-delineated discriminative language policy since the official language policy's language and Roma hiphop's language style are not accessible/understandable for one another, mutually exclude one another. This is how linguistic seclusion (exclusion) works as a self-inducing mechanism within a society.

Additionally, in terms of literary scholarship the genre 'rap' might be considered as unambiguous *linguistic seclusion*, since the artists create their own *bricolage*-style, a particular and meaningful mixture of different language variants, that is a whole new world of language which is mostly inaccessible for outsiders. Below it will turn out how much an outsider is able to decode from that sovereign world of language.

#### **4.2 Rascal Dogs: the genre (rap) and the speech situation**

Rap, before became a musical **genre**, used to be a linguistic style and it has never lost this meaning (Schusterman 2000) Hiphop is a combination of two different slang terms: *hip*, used in the African American Vernacular English (as early as 1898!) meaning *current* or *in the know*, and *hop* for the hopping movement. Thus hiphop refers to a *special knowledge* and a dance. The term hiphop came to alive when a guy was *teasing* a friend who just joined the US army, singing the words hiphop in a way that was mimicking the rhythmic cadence of marching soldiers. Rapping or emceeing refers to spoken or chanted rhyming lyrics with a strong

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<sup>27</sup> Illiteracy is the highest, the number of educated people is the lowest, unemployment is the highest among Roma. The so-called 'gipsy-question' in Hungary used to be considered as primarily a social problem, cultural and linguistic aspects of the question were ignored (Kiss 2002, 191.)

rhythmic accompaniment.<sup>28</sup> MCs parade with their improvisation ability and compete with each other. Hence rap might be related to other traditional oral genres, such as the Portuguese 'fado', which has a particular type when two singers respond to each other improvising highly effective but always with a respect to the partner.

It is important that we reflect on the form of the performance: the performance *gives voice* to each MCs, it is structured in a way that the performers have equal opportunity to present and speak for themselves. Thus the structure of the performance suggests the idea of everyone's right and opportunity for speaking. It is the microphone (in the third and forth MCs' text) that will appear as an instrument that 'gives the power' to the actual speaker. See MC nr.4 as the microphone empowers him: „I grab the microphone...microphone in the hand, I grab it, I push it, here is a big smack in your face!” (i.e. smack appears as a consequence of grabbing the microphone) In this way the performers construct their alternative way of power-geometries. The way of performing – one by one, but also all MCs together, offers the opportunity for the expression of individual and group identity at the same time.

As the text begins it immediately creates a **firm speech situation**: the narrator speaks from a fictive radio giving the news 'from here, from misery' (as he says) and 'the text is for you', which is, the outside world. This basic context will be affirmed by each MCs throughout the track, and this process will function as enhancement: the listener will feel the heaviness of the narrators' 'misery' more and more as the track goes on. The whole text builds on the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', similarly what László Somogyi observes in his study on Black Train's texts. The speech context is extremely meaningful as it summons an entire world of hierarchy structures and fundamentally questions the operation of our modern media as fair or something else. What does news mean anyway for one and what it means to another? Which news are newsworthy and for whom? Who is supposed to give news to whom?... The text constantly addresses the listener, using the personal pronouns ('this is what *you* need', 'it was *you* who made the row') or using the vocative (believe me, remember this bro'). Moreover, the text poses questions to the listener ('why should I show you more...?', 'tell me what you wanted from us?') and even, threatens him/her. ('you like it or not I shoot you', 'I will make you all smart') However, the listener is not able to respond, first as he/she does not possess the necessary *linguistic capital* (simply, does not speak the same language variant) and secondly because

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<sup>28</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip\\_hop](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip_hop) (accessed February 15, 2012)

listening to a video or a track is a linguistic process that does not give the opportunity for the listener to react. I am trying to demonstrate the fact that 'Rascal Dogs' speaks a language (roma hiphop) that does not correspond with the recipients, with non-Roma. Hereby the listener feels frustrated and miserable because he/she is incapable to answer, in other words the performance makes the recipient *powerless*.

The depicted controversy between narrator and listener plays a pivotal role in the process of reception and is a key point to see the narrator's – the MC's – superiority in hiphop that rises from ruling the language. „I eject you with my rhymes and I shoot you” – as an other track, entitled 'Fight' puts it.<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu, building on and complementing Austin's speech-act theory, points out that as a consequence of the normalization of the language (that is the evolution of the vernacular around the 'long 19th century'), those who speak must ensure that they are entitled to speak in the (right) circumstances, and those who listen must reckon that those who speak are worthy of attention (Bourdieu 1991). The text of 'Rascal Dogs' breaks with this basic rule of linguistic interaction, which rule is strongly attached to the central uniformization of the language. Therefore we can interpretate the performance that does not comply with more than hundred-year-old unwritten laws. As the performers put it in the text: 'noone can say stop' for them – eventually, they can express themselves freely without having any linguistic difficulties that normally they do have as a consequence of the requirements of the possessives of power and knowledge.

**The Chorus** briefly summerizes how the performers want the listener to see them. The key words here are respect, name, money, gangster style, and Joe City (in English!) virtue, which let us conclude to the narrators' moral universe. The key words delineate a world in which one's name and respect for the others are essential, money or the fight for the money also counts a lot, and it is a world which has its own style (gangster style) and inner name (Joe City). (Inner name is an important indicator of collective group-identity.) The Chorus also highlights that the persons are tough guys with whom it is better not to pick a fight, moreover they can turn provocative. ('what do you want, they (i.e.we) catch you') By the third person plural grammatical form ('these are all rascal dogs') the chorus depicts the performers from an external point of view (which is, how they want us to see them) as a unified whole group of

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<sup>29</sup>Kálo-Young G – Márió: Harc [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI34\\_3rK\\_L8&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rI34_3rK_L8&feature=related) (accessed February 15, 2012)

persons who have certain similar characteristics and who – as an entire group – appears even more stronger and unquestionable.

#### 4.3 Rascal Dogs: toposes (ghetto, fight) and lexicon

I would like to refer again to the beginning of the text which defines the position of the narrator: 'here we are again giving news from misery' – it says. Misery – as the following lyrics make that explicit – proves to be a metaphor for **ghetto**, the most important topos throughout the history of hiphop as well as a key theme of the analyzed performance. According to the text, ghetto is being depicted as a unique world, which laws have remained unknown for outsiders so far, however, through (or for the moment of) this performance the narrators as experts of the ghetto-world (ex. 'I always say the truth', 'what we have told you is the truth') reveal the secrets of this world for outsiders and offer an entry-point for insiders.

Interestingly enough, the text points it out as a fact that the addressed listeners *already possess a knowledge* about their ghetto-world: '*you know* where you have homeless on the streets and bitches on the square' or 'I know that's not good, still *you see it*' – for instance. Building on the listeners' knowledge on ghetto by such phrases, the text interacts with the everyday and social science discourse on ghetto that has recently been discussed by János Ladányi (Ladányi 2008), Mariann Dósa (Dósa 2009) and many others. I mentioned interaction, as the text does not only summons these discourses but also firmly reacts/responds on them claiming that outsiders in spite of their knowledge, still do not know the truth about the real ghetto-world. The truth about the ghetto of Budapest, in the interpretation of Rascal Dogs, is so incredible that is rather similar to a television show. Thus the linguistic representation of 'Rascal Dogs' writes up the phenomenon of 'ghettoization' that strengthens both the contrast and the distance between Roma and non-Roma, including their knowledge on each other. This consequence of ghettoization is expressed in such oppositions as 'what is *fear for you* is just *party for us*'. Furthermore, it can be observed as quintessential in the line: '*I live here where you have never been to*' – in that line the contrast between me and you is the most explicit, therefore in my interpretation it turns a key line for the whole text. As Mariann Dósa points out, „physical segregation furthers existing prejudices against Roma people, since it reduces the association between the Roma and the non-Roma which hinders the latter from forming a less biased, firsthand view about Roma people” (Dósa 2009, 67.)

In relation with the topos 'ghetto', 'fight' also plays an important role in the performance: 'I will never give up the fight'. Fight for breaking out of the misery and fight for the truth, saying

the truth always at all circumstances – 'I'll say the truth all the time – at the worst, I'll die' – will be presented as an essential value, and as such, important part of the MCs' identity.

As I have presented so far, the different language capital, the different language variants that the narrators and the recipients speak is a key element in the reception of hiphop. What makes the reception, the understanding even more difficult is the speed of speech and the **lexicon** the performers use. I will refer to only a few peculiarity of the lexicon of 'Rascal Dogs' to present the difficulties of unstriching the meaning of the text. Namely, I highlight the slang-words that do not have a denotation in the vernacular or if they do, that is a very different one: *csibész, kanyhaló, verebek vagytok, gizda, rák a beled, csináljatok meg, szoszi, bevarrni*. In English: rascal, crook, you are sparrows (i.e. too weak, awkward), weak or scraggy, your intestine is crab (similar to 'you are sparrows'), do away with me (probably on the analogy with the American phrase), bye, to catch sy or smash sy. We see that the text uses elements of slang most of the time to describe the narrators' or the listeners' characteristics. In terms of language, the narrators' relation with prisoners is remarkable: the words highlighted with colour are part of the Hungarian prison-slang. The narrators speak the language of prisoners –the totalitarian institution of the majority that aims to repress, discipline 'the criminals' and make them invisible (Foucault 1977). Also, the narrators', the Roma knowledge and experience as prisoners distinguish them from the majority and highlights the racism of jurisdiction. Prisoner-slang recalls power structures (again), and inverts them as the listeners (the majority) does not understand these words. Thus most of the presented elements stand in the text as 'secrets' (elements not accessible) for the speakers of the vernacular, and to make it even more complicated, the words with bold on the list are used in the opposite sense of their (slang)dictionary denotation. Interestingly enough, two of these, *gizda* and *kanyhaló* are words of roma origin. *Gizda* derives from 'gizdavo' that means proud in romani but in Hungarian it appears with arrogant as the first denotation and weak, skinny as the second denotation. *Kanyhaló* – a word in the text that me as a Hungarian native-speaker and speaker of vernacular did not understand! – derives from the romani 'kanjhi' and refers to the guy who steals chickens (as a profession; 'csirkefogó'). According to the slang and prison slang dictionary it means liar, untrustworthy, and in rustic speech it means rogue, rascal. Finally, *csibész*, which by the way later migrated to the Czech argot (*cibész*), has originally also a pejorative meaning, just like *gizda* and *kanyhaló*, as it denotates firstly goon, bandit, and also naughty boy. In the case of *csibész*, prison slang definitely helps us to understand its use: *csibész* in the prison is a prisoner who exceeds the others in material, physical, mental or other sense. All in all, *csibész* is a cool

person (at least in the prison). In addition, the title (and the chorus) *rascal dogs* strengthens the set of pejorative connotations by using another firm pejorative element, *dog*. However, we see that the performers use *csibész*, *gizda*, *kanyhaló* (and *kutya*) inverting the pejorative denotation that of the dictionary to a positive meaning, thus presenting their world and themselves as subversive, anarchic. MCs believe that they have extraordinary linguistic ability and are connoisseurs of word formation, thus creating their own power through language use. “Hip-hop artists constantly change word classes and meanings”, resisting rigid categories by mixing different sociolects, “resulting in a sense of chaos, movement, and urgency”.<sup>30</sup>

Many things in a language are predictable if you know the language. One has achieved the highest level of knowledge when one can **play with language** and manipulate it.<sup>31</sup> This is exactly what the MCs are able to do in *Rascal Dogs*. Let’s see two more examples how the text plays with the listeners’ prediction – just like many contemporary poetic texts do. Lines that seem to make no sense, they merely stand as a set of rhymes of random words are typical of the genre rap. The MCs simply play with the words as they improvise: „magamat tartom katona másik *parton*, az I-re a *kardom*, nincsen *pardon*, egy kalandra *vágyó fantom*”. Another instrument of rap, **transparency** forces the listener to pay attention to context as it uses words and sounds that are similar. “Négy *csibész* hallható, ezt hallhatta a hallgató” (“It’s the four rascals that the listeners have been listening to”) (This line is hardly understandable, even by the second or third listening of the track – it is another example of the MCs ruling the language and manipulating the listeners.)

As Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates in his book *Language and Symbolic Power*, differences in terms of accent, grammar, and vocabulary are indices of the social positions of speakers and reflections of the quantities of linguistic capital which they possess. Linguistic capital is a practical competence of speakers, which is not equally distributed in a society. In other words, it is the capacity to produce expressions for a particular market. I believe that my linguistic analysis on *Rascal Dogs* so far has presented how (from the point of view of the majority) ‘the group with less *linguistic capital*’ is able to subvert power structures by creating its own space of politics in which the circumstances and rules of getting and possessing *linguistic capital* are defined by the members of the subculture. Roma hip-hop studies could be the continuation of Bourdieu’s examination who was focusing on the most deprived groups’ language use.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.hiphoparchive.org/hiphop-lx/vocab-fundamentals> (accessed February 15, 2012)

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.hiphoparchive.org/hiphop-lx/vocab-fundamentals> (accessed February 15, 2012)

Bourdieu calls euphemization the process that 'if one wishes to produce discourse successfully within a particular field, one must observe the forms and formalities of that field' (Bourdieu 1991, 20.) Creating their own discourse, Rascal Dogs definitely criticises euphemization that otherwise rules any field of modern society.

#### **4.4 Provoking Roma stereotypes and the functions of verbal aggression**

At two points the text brings up the issue of being stigmatized by the majority in an extremely open, provocative way 'I was born as a mad Gipsy' and 'Gipsies are mad', which radiates the whole text. Therefore I shall reflect upon that. If we have a look at the broad collection of Hungarian phrases and proverbs on Roma, we will see the majority society's stereotypical approach towards them: they exaggerate certain characters (of Roma), ironize and joke on them. (And thus language works for maintaining power structures...) According to proverbs, in the eyes of the Hungarians Roma appear as cunning, losers and clumsy, bad (in terms of Christian morals), dishonest, brash, avaricious, ridiculous, black, poor, hungry, (which one can conclude on how they treat their horses). According to these proverbs, they do not want to work or they do not like working as such. And I found only one proverb presenting a positive stereotype: they are very good musicians. (But even this one is doubtful: is someone a good musician because of his/her roma origin or because of his/her talent?...). Also, the relation which can be observed in the linguistic form of the proverbs is rather disdainful, humiliating, gloating upon them. Although these proverbs are fading away nowadays, the stereotypes they summon have much longer lives, and they continue ruling the everyday discourse of today.

I have cited all those proverbs to picture that the line 'I was born as a mad Gipsy', or even the word itself Gipsy inevitably summons a whole world of connotations and stereotypes in the mind of the listener. The text starts playing with the evoked connotations. The title 'csibész kutyák' recalls the phrase 'veszett kutya', on which the line 'veszett cigány' will play. Thus all the possible denotations and connotations of these phrases (rascal, dogs, mad and gipsy) will circulate between each other, strengthening each other's effect (for example between kutya and cigány a new relation will appear). The depicted sets of lexicon will eventually lead to identifying rascal dogs with mad Gipsies. (!) Other phrases that recalls the mentioned stereotypes on Roma, such phrases as 'I follow my blood', 'I'll be ready and awake all the time, Gipsies are mad...', 'I took them for a mug and so I got your money' – these phrases will relate to the very same circle of meaning of rascal dogs, mad gipsy, etc. The fact that in certain speech situations, especially in the case of self-definition Roma use external names and internalize external stereotypes (that of the majority) is very much similar what Andrea Szalai, linguistic,

observed in a bilingual Roma community. She found that the community's language use, regarding Roma – non Roma opposition ('we' and 'they') as well as naming certain Roma groups are all very much appropriate to the majority's definitions (Szalai 1997, 105.) Rascal Dogs also internalize the majority's external connotations and stereotypes on Roma, moreover it does that openly and provocatively, scandalizing that in a way that shocks the listeners: making them realize how shocking it can actually be to born 'as a mad Gipsy'.

The performance is certainly shocking also because of the **verbal aggression** it uses. At some points the text even threatens the addressed listeners. Regarding Rascal Dogs I would rather agree with those who questions the established opinion of hip-hop being a non-violent, non-aggressive way of protest. However, through the results of multidisciplinary aggression-questing, we understand the function of verbal aggression in hiphop in relation to power. Verbal aggression is the most typical form and way of expression of practicing power over others. At the same time, verbal aggression can indicate the lack of power, furthermore, it is often the fight for power that causes verbal aggression. And last but not least, practicing verbal aggression constantly – just like 'Rascal Dogs' does - might be a way of keeping the power (Kegyessné 2008, 62.) In relation to the mentioned stereotypes on Roma that the text writes up, verbal aggression expresses outrage, inertness, powerlessness on the level of language. Last, but not least it is rather telling that swearing, cursing and insulting words and abuse were punished in the 17th century: these acts break taboos of the community thus causing instability in the 'normal', established life of the village. As Foucault depicts in the History of Sexuality, the vernacular cleaned itself through the centuries from taboos including swearing words and established a disciplined middle class vernacular as normal (Foucault 1990). The analyzed track challenges this process and questions the set rules on 'clean, correct language use'. Hereby 'Rascal Dogs' invert what Bourdieu and Foucault claim on the nature of symbolic power and symbolic violence. According to Bourdieu, symbolic power is an invisible power which is misrecognized as such and thereby recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu 1991). In the case of Rascal Dogs that is to say that symbolic power is a *visible* power, which is *recognized* (easily) as such and thereby recognized as *illegitimate* subverting existing and never-questioned power structures. We know from Bourdieu and Foucault that in modern societies symbolic violence has been built into the institution themselves and that the whole mechanism needs active complicity on the part of those subjected to it. (!) Rascal Dogs makes these kind of mechanisms shockingly explicit.

## 5, Conclusions



I hope that my analyze has been able to demonstrate that roma hiphop should be considered as a particular and sovereign subculture, which is capable for constructing a firm group identity of the 8<sup>th</sup> district of Budapest, but also for expressing individual self-identity. If we examine the lyrics profoundly, we will have no doubt that in the sphere of roma hiphop subculture alternative politics appear. That is, the symbolic but firm questioning of the operation of the media, the refuse of the ethnic prejudices based on a group's language use, and the general criticism of the normalization and uniformization of the vernacular (which is equal with exclusion of sociolects, dialects, obscene lexicon, slang, etc.). Since Roma of the 8<sup>th</sup> is not able to make part of the discourse of power and knowledge, they create their own, different language with their own secrets and rules. In terms of literature, this 'new language' or 'different language' challenges those profound aesthetics conventions that are fundamental of our modernity (Schusterman 2000), but also questions the legitimacy of high culture and the segregation of high culture from low culture.

Furthermore, the track demonstrates very well the mechanism of stereotypes on Roma, reflects (builds) on the 'we-you' opposition of society, demonstrating the stereotypes' effect on constructing their own Roma identity. The track reinscribes a political-economical-sociological phenomena, ghettoization and unfortunately, seems to prove Foucault's theory on 'the biopolitics of the population' (Foucault 1977), in which race appears as the central object of the modern political state. Criminality, madness, and anomalies are conceptualized in racial terms in today's society. Adding to all this, taking Bourdieu's theory into consideration, that says that language use is determined by the state of the body (see for ex. one's accent that is inscribed upon one's body), one can understand why the line 'I was born as a mad Gipsy' sounds so piercingly as it does, emerging from the entire text as such.

And so, if in the beginning I said that the lyrics bears or hides certain power structures, hereby I claim that the text harshly unstriches and destroys those power structures, yet appearantly only symbolically and only for as long as we hear the track.

\*

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## **Bojána Papp: *Rap as a language and new hope of Prisons***

### **Introduction**

First of all, let me tell you how I became involved in the culture of prison and hiphop.

In 2010 there was a big competition organized for Hungarian Roma music for prisoners, that was called authentic Roma music festival, so it was not especially organized for hiphop only, but for authentic Roma music. I wanted to make a film on that festival and so I was working on that. At the time I was also a journalist for the Prison Paper, monthly paper for the imprisoned. When I had to make a pre-shoot in the prison, I was told by the prison staff that a small rap competition was going to happen in Tököl, the Juvenile Prison and if I am interested, I could do the pre-shoot there.

I immediately decided to go for the rap competition and with my colleagues we got involved very soon: we had to go for the semi-final, which was the preselection for the final. The competition amazed me from the very first moment. I had not known hiphop culture before, but it was clear, that this competition was the most authentic hiphop I have ever seen in my life! Not only because some of the participants were really talented and made really good productions but because the whole culture, including the lyrics, was made by them, the prisoners. And this 'new culture' was definitely telling a lot about their life of the „outside world”. I thought that this was something others had to see as well, and that I would make a documentary about it. Otherwise nobody would see this event ever! So we started to work on the issue and for shooting we went back to Tököl several times.

I must tell you that at that time I did not really have the time to research for the documentary – which is in fact not good, if you want to make a good documentary. However, I think that during the work and the shootings I got to know quite well the educators, the prison system of Tököl and the characters, the competition participants as well.

### **About the rap competition of Tököl**

The idea of the competition came from an educator of Tököl. I do not know if you know the system in prison: there are the educators and the guards – two different jobs. The guards care about the strict system of the prison and the educators care about the education, all the cultural

programs of the prisoners, and all the other issues about spending time. This is, in fact, maybe the most important issue in prison: to spend your time practically and positively. So the educator, who created the idea of the competition, was Klára Nagy. I tried to invite her for this conference but unfortunately she could not come. As I see, she is one of the most creative workers in Tököl, and having creative workers is very important for the juveniles in the prison, I believe.

Tököl is a prison for juveniles and adults as well. There is the country's prison hospital, a school, a paper factory and other special places for prisoners, so you can imagine a whole complex there. The prisoners have a very strict daily routine: they have to get up at 5 in the morning and do work or go to school, etc. The juveniles actually have to do much less things than the adults who live there because of their job: they work in the paper factory in Tököl where they produce various paper products, for example toilet paper. The juveniles have much more time to spend. Therefore Klára made a call for proposal for them in October 2010. Around 50 people applied to perform something, which is a huge number out of 300! It unambiguously shows that hiphop is a vivid cultural issue in Tököl, just like in other Hungarian and international prisons.

Some of the participants performed hiphop, some of them performed beatbox, others did hiphop dance or wrote up popular tracks of English, American and Hungarian rap, for example from the band 'Weszélyes Elemek'. And many of them used the musical basis of international hiphop stars.

### **About the participants**

As they received their own disc with the musical basis, the educators told them to start to work on their own lyrics, which was the point of the whole competition.

The fact that the participants came from various parts of the country with different social background was extremely interesting and telling. You could find participants not only from the poorer areas but also from the rich families. It was nice to see that the competition was not about the social backgrounds or certain territories of the country, but it was really about the participants' (talent) as they found their way to express themselves. Some of them were doing art for the very first time in their life. Others were kind of professional in hiphop culture before: coming from the street, they had gang bands in their teenagehood. Eventually, the

project gave a clear image of the world of the prison as well. As I saw, the prison is a very open space and society – if you go there as an outsider, obviously.

For lot of the prisoners, prison actually means home. Those performers, who I consider 'professional hiphoppers', got into different state institutions very early, at the age of 12-15. They were taken away from their families, which was in fact better for them than staying with a very bad family situation. For them being in the prison, the work of the educators and this competition gave a new hope, even if this new hope was meant to be only inside the prison.

I chose five characters, as you will see from the trailer, who were very talented and made good lyrics, based on their lifestories: the crimes they had committed and the inside life of the prison. This was interesting for me as well: as an outsider you cannot really see the real prison culture, the inlife. However, through rap they will tell you about this too! I would never get these stories through interviews. These are in the lyrics, in kind of gang situations during the rehearsals for example, which was very important for me to see, as a director. In my opinion, that's the hardest but also the most exciting job for a documantary maker to catch those moments of inside life of a culture.

## **The final competition and the creation of the culture of a prison: hiphop**

### **1, The final competition**

The final of the competition was at Christmas, the 20th of December 2010, and the educators invited famous Hungarian bands for jury, like Animal Canibals and Sub Bass Monster.

Organizing the jury was an important and smart decision of the educators because big heros of hiphop came to the prison to see the competition. The participants probably would never ever had the possibility to perform for stars in other way. The 'stars' of hiphop proved to be very open-minded and nice during the competition, they became a really good team as a jury. They were not very nice with bad performances, they did not always say that everything was great, and so they were quite good educators. For example, they said, okay this lyrics is fine but the performance is so boring that you never ever will go with this. It was a talented way to improve the juveniles.

I believe the whole competition was a really good way to help them go on with music. And I really hope that in the future those guys will manage who proved to be really talented with music.

...As you saw it in the trailer, the lyrics referred to their gang life. And it is also important that all over the world in prisons hiphop is the culture, especially in the US. So in reality, hiphop and prisons criss-cross each other and some of the singers you might have seen in the two days conference. For instance, there was a boy in a video that we saw<sup>32</sup> who was in the prison when we shot the film, and had a very good production for the competition. However, as he was released before the final, you did not see him in the film.

You should know that before the competition, this kind of gang life started to get a form, to be organized inside the prison. Therefore, organizing the competition was a brilliant idea of the educators to prevent serious and aggressive actions in the prison. Hiphop gave the prisoners a good way to express this kind of gang life in a peaceful way.

## **2, The creation of the culture of a prison: hiphop**

So this kind of culture is really alive there. And with this competition, with creating their own style and own lyrics, the educators gave the opportunity for the prisoners to live or experience this culture, which was a brilliant idea, in my opinion. And really worked well! Gangs, and relatives and friends (and friends, considering themselves relatives), and other groups started to work together in art and express themselves through this music.

In this (or any) prison the competition was like a possibility of surviving their penalty, in fact. When the competition was just in the final, you could just feel the tension growing. It got serious. They started to brought tough lyrics to each other. There was a building, B12 (you see in the lyrics), for example, the adults building with talented musical groups. So the youngsters started to write lyrics like 'You, bastards' and things like that for them. And when the adults heard this, of course they started to make texts like that too.

So in the final it was like a real tension, everyone was interested in who is going to win the competition and what it is going to mean in this place to win this competition. And me, personally, I was very curious too!

Finally, since it was not a 'real competition' nobody won but all of them won: there were eight first prizes, and everyone got at least the second place. It made all of them really disappointed, on the other hand the decision of the organizers was completely understandable.

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<sup>32</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1R2rVhik\\_gE&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1R2rVhik_gE&feature=player_embedded)

Anyway, hiphop culture in the prison is definitely living through the tattoos, the music, some words or some mottos. It is everywhere.

Finally, I will tell you some stories of the participants if you would like to, because that's very interesting, I think.

## **Two rappers of the prison**

Gergő was sent to foster home at the age of 12, and he chose the one he was sent to because he was told it was going to be a nice place for him, as he told me. However, very soon the mafia from outside – which is a system that works today as well – collected some kids from the foster home, gave them drugs and got them used to drugs, than made them do robberies and go to the second district of Budapest to rob money, mobile phones and stuff like that. So he got in the prison when he was 14, and year by year he got stronger and stronger and started to sing, to paint, to write novels, to find his expressive way in the prison. He has recently been released. He would never ever had the possibility to get into the real music life out of the prison.

In general, I think when these guys are inside, hiphop is a new hope for them, but when they are outside – I do not know, it is still an open question for me, what happens to them when they are outside...

The other guy, who you will see in the next trailer too, comes from a rich family and is the youngest child of the family, 'the black sheep', as he calls himself. He got into drugs when he was 17 and started to steal money from his parents. It is a completely different story from that of Gergő. He started to express himself through rap for the very first time at the competition, he is talented and it is interesting to see that he can really go with music, also after he's released. So for him, hiphop is a real 'new hope'.

So let me show you the other trailer – this one without music.

## **Conclusion**

...My experience is that - the most talented ones, that you saw now, and there were other really talented – these guys are talented in general, and hiphop is a good way to express themselves. So for me the event was (and the film will be) about the talent, and how to



support this talent and go with it. Most of the lifestories of these guys are the same: all of them are talented but they do not live in a supportive family, they do not find a supportive teacher or anyone who could help them to find a way for their talent, and that's how they got in the prison. And the other thing important is that I never asked who is Roma or who is not, partly because of the recent political situation, partly because it was important not to mention Roma in any sense. Regarding my research, it was not an important question.

Thank you for your attention.