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Adventures in Early Socialist Television Edutainment

By Anikó Imre

Abstract: This article examines a quintessential genre of early socialist television entertainment: the historical adventure series. It draws on two popular series, the Polish *Janosik* (1974) and the Hungarian *Captain of the Tenkes* (1964) to foreground two formative tensions within early socialist television: that between the state's paternalistic, top-down imperative to educate a supposedly docile and homogeneous national audience and television's position as a home-based medium of family entertainment on the one hand, and between the national and cross-national dimensions in the development, distribution, and reception of these programs on the other. The author argues that the shows conjure up a historical regional culture arching over the singular national histories. This cross-border relevance, evident in the programs' striking aesthetic similarities, their international distribution, and their international cast of actors, points to television as a crucial research area for revising scholarship on East European nationalisms and national identities.

Keywords: Janosik, national identity, regionalism, television entertainment, television history, *Tenkes*

Socialist Television and Patriotic Entertainment

I Love Lucy (CBS, 1951–57), *Bewitched* (ABC, 1964–72), and *The Brady Bunch* (ABC, 1969–74) are more than classic shows in the television archives, easily accessible and lovingly revisited by fans. They have provided generations who grew up well after these programs' original runs with references to their parents' and grandparents' era, a family history that also interpellates younger Americans to be the subjects of national history. The jokes, fashions, consumer products, and historical events referenced in shows of the 1950s and 1960s weave a rich fabric of national intimacy. This fabric is a permanent part of domestic homes, thanks to commercial television's economic imperative to recycle, which has been greatly facilitated by online access and distribution. This is why it is not only middle-aged viewers but also college students who find the current hit *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007–) enjoyable, for instance. The show's shameless nostalgia for the 1960s, from the antique Cheerios boxes to the antiquated gender roles and the permanently fashionable dress and hair styles, renders a series set in the 1960s as familiar to young Americans as does the postmodern criticism of the same phenomena in which AMC brands packages and sells its televisual quality (Dawidziak; Lavery).

By contrast, in postsocialist Eastern Europe, domestic television dramas of the 1960s and 1970s hardly evoke familiarity with an era of national history among the younger generations. One reason for this is that, following the collapse of the Soviet empire, the explosion of new, commercial, multiplatform broadcast, cable, and satellite channels radically transformed television and rendered much of early socialist television absurdly unfamiliar. This amplified sense of absurdity was also no doubt due to the fact that socialist entertainment had been so heavily filtered through Marxist-Leninist ideology that there was always a distance between viewers' lived lives and the ideologically airbrushed, party-approved scenarios reflected on TV, whether in scripted or nonscripted programming. This is not to say that postsocialist cultures are free of either central state interference

A Tenkes kapitánya (*Captain of the Tenkes,* 1964). The Captain (Ferenc Zenthe) and his wholesome peasant girl, Veronika (Marta Vajda).

or television-mediated nostalgia. However, the nostalgia shared by viewers across generations is not for an era lost to and buried under radical historical change, since early socialist television was not in the business of depicting the contemporaneous reality of the 1960s and 1970s to begin with. Instead, there is a great deal of nostalgia among those who lived through the first decades of mass socialist television broadcasting for the experience of participating in a particular kind of limited and controlled television entertainment that assumed and addressed a unified national audience. Much of the postsocialist nostalgia for socialist television is at least partly a desire to cut through the layers of unfamiliarity brought about by rapid social change and to anchor identities that have weathered radical historical adjustments in the shared memories of programs that actively mobilized national belonging around entertainment programs. The most prevalent among these early entertainment programs are historical adventure series. A genre that revolved around mythical outlaws or freedom fighters turned national heroes, it constituted some of the first domestically produced drama series in the region in the 1960s and 1970s.

Socialism[1] and entertainment rightly strike one as antithetical terms. At the very minimum, entertainment implies having some freedom to choose among options. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, however, when television became a national medium in the Soviet-controlled region, viewers' freedom came down to a choice between turning their black-and-white television sets on or off, if they could even afford a set. Moreover, under totalitarian state control, program imports, production, and schedules were centrally monitored to conform to ideological directives that prescribed how socialist citizens should spend their centrally allotted leisure time in the ultimate service of the collective good. *Edutainment* is a better term to characterize socialist regimes' approach to television from the late 1960s on. By virtue of being a home-based medium whose appeal is affective and intimate, television's emergence into a mass medium presented state party authorities with both a challenge and an opportunity. It posed a danger as an instrument of quiet subversion in the domestic sphere, which slipped past the surveillance exercised within other public institutions. At the same time, its attraction as a mass medium of entertainment could be harnessed to forge a unity within the larger national family around shared identifications and pleasures, which could in turn fortify the frayed bond between state authorities and the broader population.

Most state socialist regimes recognized early on that to benefit from the propaganda potential of television, they had to do more than prohibit and censor foreign program flows. To retain some control over the medium that John Ellis called "the private life of the nation state" (5), they had to get in on the game and provide their populations with indigenous, party-approved entertainment. Nationalism became the cornerstone and mediating terrain of socialist governments' media policies across the region, and television was the key instrument of nationalistic edutainment. By the 1960s, Stalinist principles of forced Marxist-Leninist internationalism had lost their credibility along with the communist utopia of a classless, egalitarian, international brotherhood. This created an opening for national regimes to adjust the central Soviet rhetoric in the service of consolidating their own domestic powers. The dispersion of television broadcasting allowed for the subtle and measured deployment of affective identification with the nation-state in the domestic sphere of leisure. This would alleviate widespread disappointment with really existing socialism and strengthen patriotic identification. Patriotic television edutainment helped to create a common ground between citizens and state governments in an unstated opposition to the Soviet occupier.

During the cold war, dissident writers, filmmakers, and other intellectuals were regarded as flagship figures of anticommunist resistance. Literature and film were charged with sending political messages in allegorical double language to "the people," who retreated into their homes away from politics, drawing up a clear contrast between the public and

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private spheres. However, it has become increasingly clear in the past decades that the sharp division between oppressor and oppressed, along with the opposition between the public sphere of resistance and the domestic sphere of escapism, conceals a much more dispersed field of negotiations over power and identification, characterized by compromise and cooptation rather than conflict and opposition. The evidence is not simply in the secret police files that have revealed since 1989 that some of the most respected intellectuals themselves were spies. Rather, a closer look at television edutainment shows a vast field of power legitimation practices at the party's disposal, along with potential minefields that threatened to expose these practices, which existed below the international radar of high cultural products.

Research in the messy field of the affective politics of socialist television is in its infancy. My current contribution to such research discusses what we may consider the quintessential genre of popular fictional television edutainment in its first two formative decades: the historical adventure series. Sitcoms, soap operas, and dramatic series produced in the United States and, to some extent, in Western Europe in the postwar years became synonymous with commercial scripted television entertainment worldwide. In comparison, when television became a household fixture in socialist countries in the 1960s, national broadcasters modeled their first domestically produced series after a narrow selection of foreign entertainment fictions fixated on the past and turned sharply away from the present.

This generic preference had several advantages. Importing historical drama series reduced the likelihood that Western products and lifestyles and, with them, the contagious ideology of consumer capitalism would seep in. Furthermore, from the late 1960s through the 1970s, during their heyday, domestically produced historical adventure series allowed socialist regimes to teach selective history lessons and foster national identifications that also appeared to conform to ideological prescriptions demanded by the Soviet occupiers. These series contained ostentatious demonstrations of adherence to Soviet dogma, such as the glorification of folk culture or plotlines that rewarded peasant characters at the expense of the wealthy and powerful classes. Although such elements appear comically tendentious today, they were subtle enough not to undermine the shows' power of identification with the nationalistic spectacle. In the most liberal socialist countries, the programs' propagandistic excess was released in another register of entertainment, political cabaret, inspiring hilarious ironic send-offs.[2] The real lessons of the programs were borne out of the powerful convergence between folk mythology and high cultural legitimation. Historical adventure series glorified masculine national heroism in the face of a general notion of oppression, a traveling metaphor that could be applied to any threat to national sovereignty, with little regard to the historical accuracy of such depictions. Although the shows situated these heroic struggles in the national past and made allusions to the international communist class struggle against capitalism, such allusions were overridden by the undertones of national resistance against Soviet domination.

The offerings of socialist television broadened considerably in the 1980s with the introduction of color sets and the addition of second and, in some cases, third state broadcast channels, followed by the arrival of cable and satellite programming. However, the emotional impact of the early series, grounded as they were in the well-timed confluence of nationalistic identification and entertainment affect, has left a profound nostalgic residue that has endured into postsocialist times. As I discuss at the end of this article, viewer nostalgia has also turned these series into platforms for political legitimation and touristic self-branding.

I elicit my argument about fostering state-directed nationalism through television edutainment from a closer look at two popular series: *The Captain of the Tenkes* (*A Tenkes kapitánya*, Hungarian Television, 1964) and *Janosik* (Polish Television, 1974). These two programs are exemplary of broader aesthetic, social, and media policy trends of the 1960s and 1970s. Their success with audiences and the effectiveness of the political messages they communicated are rooted in three interrelated factors, all of which identify television entertainment as a crucial terrain for the constitution of Eastern European nationalisms and for revealing the contradictions at the core of these nationalisms. The first aspect is the socialist historical adventure series' loose treatment of historical facts, places, and people. Paradoxically, this proves essential to consolidating a spatiotemporally bound, linear, national history around prominent historical actors. Both shows feature semifictional

A Tenkes kapitánya (*Captain of the Tenkes,* 1964). Ferenc Zenthe, playing the protagonist, Máté Eke, dressed in the enemy's uniform to deceive the imperial forces.

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characters against a vague historical backdrop. As I show through my analysis of the genealogy of the Janosik legend that informed the TV series, the national heroes on whom the protagonists are based actually operated across multilingual and multicultural territories well before the nineteenth-century struggles for national sovereignty began and before twentieth-century national borders were drawn.

Second, the nationalistic projects at the heart of these adventure series are supported by a contradictory double cultural legitimation. They borrow from the alleged authenticity of folk culture, also fulfilling Marxist-Leninist expectations. However, this folk authenticity is invariably established through the mediation of national poets and writers, who have assumed ideological leadership roles in the cause of national independence since the late eighteenth century. Third, the historical figures after whom the protagonists are modeled were far from heroic. They were social bandits, local Robin Hoods, who embody a wish-fulfilling, contradictory collective belonging to a European cultural sphere and a voluntary submission to exoticizing Western European images of the periphery. The prevalence of such outlaw heroes conveys a regional specificity to the development of nationalisms and nation-states in Eastern and Southern Europe.

Television Broadcasting and the Socialist Adventure Series

Television was first introduced in some countries of the region in the prewar period, in step with the United States and Western Europe. Small-scale state television broadcasting began as early as 1936 in Hungary and 1937 in Poland. World War II and its aftermath, involving the political and economic restructuring of the Soviet sphere of influence, interrupted the development of television infrastructures. State broadcasting did not start up again until the late 1950s. It began, for the most part, with sporadic broadcasts received by a few thousand subscribers in each country. Regional cooperation began almost immediately. The first program exchange, a 1957 Hungarian initiative, was titled Intervision, and included Czechoslovakia, Poland, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and Hungary ("A magyar televízió").

It was not until the 1960s, however, that the proliferation of television sets in the homes and the quality and quantity of programming transformed television into a truly national form of entertainment. In Hungary, where regular communist broadcasting began in 1957, the number of programming hours a week jumped from twenty-two to forty between 1960 and 1965 ("A magyar televízió"). The Slovene broadcaster, Television Ljubljana, started transmitting its own television programming in 1958, with seven hundred to eight hundred television sets in Slovenia and about 4,000 in all of Yugoslavia, compared to the 90 percent in all homes in the United States at the same time (Pusnik and Starc 779). In Czechoslovakia, where the war interrupted prewar experimental broadcasts, trial public broadcasts began in 1953. The rapid increase in television access in the 1960s played a central role in the liberalization of the country's political climate. This liberalization was frozen following the Prague Spring of 1968, which was brutally crushed by the Soviet Union, temporarily turning television back into the mouthpiece of the communist puppet regime (Newcomb 640). Television Romania was established in 1956 and added a second channel in 1968. This was then suspended in 1985 because of dictator Ceausescu's energy-saving program until after 1989 (Mustata, this issue). In most countries, however, the mid-1960s saw the launch of a second channel and the extension of broadcast time to five, then six, and eventually seven days a week. Color television was only introduced in the late 1970s.

By the mid-1960s, all Soviet satellite governments faced a pressure to revise their ideological positions and programming policies to adjust to the opportunities and challenges presented by the new home-based mass medium. The launch of communication satellites, beginning with Sputnik-1 in 1957, the first Earth-orbiting artificial satellite and a crucial part of the Soviet space and communication strategy, increased government fears of access to Western programming even in countries that did not share broadcast signals with the West. This challenge could only be minimized by rechanneling desires for capitalist lifestyles toward fostering national cohesion on the party leadership's terms. Communist governments therefore embarked on a careful import policy and a strategic domestic production of scripted programming in the 1960s. The first postwar broadcasts produced in communist Eastern Europe were of live theatrical and sports events as well as news programming, feature films, and a range of educational cultural programming. Television's shift to the center of public culture in the 1960s allowed communist governments to expand and solidify their educational propaganda mandate through entertainment.

The rapid increase in television access in the 1960s played a central role in the liberalization of [Czechoslovakia]'s political climate.

The greatest political risk involved in the expansion of television broadcasting in Eastern Europe was that, unlike feature films or print publications, broadcast signals could not simply be confined to state borders. Inhabitants of large regions in Yugoslavia, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Albania received either Austrian, Italian, or West German programming. As Dana Mustata explains in her contribution to this issue, even Romanian viewers suffering from the information lockdown and scarcity of programming imposed by the Ceausescu's dictatorship were able to access relatively more liberal Hungarian, Serbian, Bulgarian, and Russian television. The risk of unpredictable social and cultural influences that state authorities were willing to take varied within the region. At the most liberal extreme, Slovenian TV Ljubljana and Croatian TV Zagreb established an official cooperation with the Italian broadcaster RAI (Radiotelevisione Italiana) in the early 1960s. This happened despite protests from communist party authorities, who were anxious about the influx of Western news programs and the consumerist values transmitted by fictional programming (Pusnik and Starc 782–83). Significantly, such unprecedented openness toward Western entertainment was finally approved because it strengthened the national leadership's own strategy of championing Slovenian values and the cause of national independence in opposition to the top-down encroachment of Yugoslavian federalism, which was pushed by the government authorities who controlled the Yugoslav state broadcaster RTV (Pusnik and Starc 786).

However, especially in countries where access to capitalist broadcasting offered constant comparison with socialist programming, the ideological directives behind the new programming policy had to be subtly disguised lest they prevent citizens from identifying with the intended ideological content. Media and communication reforms in the 1960s focused on television as the main institution for implanting patriotic, socialist democratic values within entertainment. Television had to provide carefully selected information. It also had to shape the tastes of citizens to understand and appreciate Eurocentric art and culture and resist what were widely perceived as the detrimental effects of television: reducing faculties of appreciation for cultural quality as well as general mental and physical laziness.[3]

Socialist entertainment, thus, occupied a precarious place, carefully navigated by party authorities: It had to be democratic, addressing all citizens of the state, but it also had to adhere to high standards of Eurocentric taste and education. In both imported and domestically produced programs, it had to avoid genres that would create too much excitement about the West or were perceived as being in low taste. Nationalistic historical adventure series were an ideal genre to cater to these contradictory demands. They seamlessly transferred to the new medium the project of an already established nationalistic literary culture focused on battles between good and evil, in which the good side was embodied by masculine allegorical figures who defended the nation and resisted the evil intruder or oppressor. Such depictions stretched from nineteenth-century epic poetry inspired by earlier nationalistic movements and antiestablishment rebellions to the tales of partisan resistance and World War II heroism particularly favored by Moscow.

Janosik (1974). Marek Pepereczko, the hunk, as Janosik, the outlaw.

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The allegorical structures and gender schemes of the narratives were also easily mapped onto a number of existing literary and film genres: popular boys' adventure stories by valued national and regional authors (e.g. Ferenc Molnár's *Pál Street Boys*, first published in 1907, an international favorite among boy-

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bonding stories); adolescent adventure tales about young men conquering nature; overtly propagandistic novels and films about heroic boy groups, often in wartime contexts (e.g. Arkady Gaidar's *Timur i evo komanda/Timur and his Platoon*, 1940); an abundance of war films and partisan films (e.g., the Yugoslav epic *Walter Defends Sarajevo,* dir. Hajrudin Krvavac, 1972); male-bonding TV series set in wartime (e.g., the Polish favorite, *Czterej Pancerni I Pies*/*The Tank Crew of Four and a Dog*, 1966); and historical novels and film epics that evoked selected and glorified events from the national and European past to rally popular identification with the socialist state's top-down nationalism. Feature films such as the Polish *Colonel Wolodyjowski* (dir. Jerzy Hoffman, 1969), the Bulgarian *Measure For Measure* (dir. Georgi Dyulgerov, 1981), the Romanian *Mihai Viteazul* (dir. Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1970), the Albanian *The Great Warrior Sandberg* (dir. Sergei Yutkevich, 1953), the Yugoslav *Battle of Kosovo* (dir. Zdravko Sotra, 1989), and the Hungarian *The Stars of Eger* (dir. Zoltán Várkonyi, 1968, based on Géza Gárdonyi's classic novel of 1899), for instance, were all set during the region's Ottoman occupation and provided memorable lessons in patriotic male heroism. American Western films were also seamlessly incorporated into this loose genre of historical family edutainment.

An entire subset of literary works, films, and television programs about larger-than-life men fighting enemies of the nation revolve around outlaws. The television series of the 1960s and 1970s that focused on outlaw heroes often drew on national writers' reworking of the unruly, often scant historical sources, which were at times embellished by folk songs and stories, at other times almost entirely reinvented in literary treatments. The seven-part Hungarian series *Sándor Rózsa* (1971) about the eponymous nineteenth-century outlaw was adapted from early-twentieth-century writer Zsigmond Móricz's novels. The Lithuanian *Tadas Blinda* series (1972), featuring popular actor Vytautas Tomkus, was named after another outlaw hero whose story had been central to the national literature. In Bulgaria, the TV series *Kapetan Petko Voyvoda* (1974) celebrated nineteenth-century insurgent Petko Kiryakov Kaloyanov, who had joined forces with Garibaldi around 1866 to fight Ottoman Turks in Crete. The Romanian state commissioned a number of adventure films and television series, including the feature film *Haiducii/The Outlaws* (1966), followed by six other films about outlaws including *Iancu Jianu, the Tax Collector* (1980) and *Iancu Jianu, the Haiduc* (1981). They were directed by Diny Cocea and scripted by party-favored writer Eugen Barbuthe (Neubauer, Cornis-Pope, Markovic, and Klaic).

The early eighteenth century yielded an especially rich and ideologically profitable historical background against which to develop domestic historical adventures series about mythical outlaws turned national heroes. In East Central Europe, roughly the territory of the Habsburg Empire stretching across present-day Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, the Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia ,and Slovenia, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century was a time of peasant uprisings against the Habsburgs. The most memorable and successful of these was led by Hungarian magnate Ferencz Rákóczi II, Prince of Transylvania, the richest landlord in the kingdom of Hungary. His military operations were mostly conducted in the borderland area between the Habsburg and the Ottoman Empires. Rákóczi, also funded by the French crown looking to overthrow Habsburg domination in Europe, recruited the emancipated peasant soldiers of Northeastern Hungary called *hajdus* or *haiducs* to join him. With their help, he seized control of much of Hungary by 1703. After several battles and much negotiation, the uprising failed, and the prince was forced into exile first in Poland and then, for the last eighteen years of his life, in Turkey. The subsequent return of Habsburg domination turned him and his fighters almost instantly into folk heroes. Some of his men went into hiding in inscrutable border areas and sustained themselves by highway robbery. Although these outlaws were not discriminating as to whom they robbed—or murdered, in many cases—folk stories, songs, and later nationalist writers elevated them to the status of justice warriors who carried on the legacy of the uprising by protecting the poor against the rich, many of whom were German-speaking foreigners.

Rákóczi and his outlaw followers were further revived and embraced in the region during the national revolutions of the 1840s. They were also appropriated by party authorities by the 1960s, when nationalism made its way back into the official rhetoric. For the socialist regimes of the 1960s, the Rákóczi uprising and the outlaw resistance and its aftermath was appropriately heroic, safely removed from the present in history, and not associated with bloody revolts, unlike nineteenth-century national revolutions, which were feared to carry the risk of igniting street demonstrations. The uprising's benefits also included a tale of unity and cooperation between peasants and the highest nobility. It was ideal for fortifying national consciousness, unimaginable under the earlier, forced internationalism of Stalinist crackdowns in the 1950s. At the same time, it provided a contained affective outlet through television entertainment, restricted to a kind of national fandom and intimacy that fused the national and the nuclear family.[4]

Not the least important, unlike feature films or literature, the historical adventure series often slipped under the radar

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of censorship because it qualified as family or youth entertainment, aligning such series with a flourishing animation and children's film production. By contrast, art films of the time that took up the resistant hero/outlaw theme fell into two different categories, both under heavy censorship: Some were produced as propaganda material by official party culture, such as *Mihai Viteazul* (*Michael the Brave*, dir. Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1971), the spectacular national epic production ordered and controlled by Ceausescu to boost national pride. Others expressed subtle allegorical opposition to the regime. Miklós Jancsó's stark black-and-white feature *Szegénylegények* (*Round-Up*, 1966) depicts the Austro-Hungarian monarchy's revenge on outlaws who had gone into hiding in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, a story that directly reflected on 1950s ideological purges conducted by communist governments.

What the edutainment series have in common is that they were instrumental and effective at fostering national unity through entertainment television not despite but because of the fact that they were mostly made up. In other words, their edutainment power and longevity within national memory derives precisely from their loose interlacing of historical fact, folk culture, and high literary treatments that are not only transregional but often trans-European in their construction. The kind of nationalism they weave around improper, outlaw heroes implies an unacknowledged embrace of colonial, Western European construction of the Eastern peripheries as rebellious and wild, a kind of permanent Wild East in which the laws of civil nation-states are subordinated to popular justice.

Nationalism and Entertainment: *Tenkes* and *Janosik*

A Tenkes kapitánya (*Captain of the Tenkes*, 1964) was the very first drama series produced by the Hungarian state broadcaster Magyar Televízió, running in thirteen twenty-five-minute parts in 1964. It was also one of the most memorable series of all time. The show is set in the early 1800s, during the Rákóczi uprising. Peasant *kuruc*[5] leader Máté Eke, in charge of a handful of freedom fighters, hides out in wine cellars in the hills of Western Hungary to protect the poor against the occupying Habsburg army, who conduct their operations from the castle of Siklós. In each episode, they circumvent or overcome the well-armed Habsburg soldiers with cunning, an intimate knowledge of the local environment, and the help and collaboration of local villagers.

The series began broadcasting on a Saturday in January 1964. The episodes were repeated during the course of the next day. The entire series was broadcast again in the second half of 1964, followed by over ten subsequent reruns. The episodes were molded together into a feature film almost immediately, released in 1965 (Deák-Sárosi). Writer Ferenc Örsi turned his script into a juvenile adventure novel in 1967, to be reprinted six more times just during the Kádár period (1956–88). Thanks to a large extent to regular reruns, the theme song is recognized by everyone in Hungary and beyond its borders to this day. The show even inspired a popular song, which topped the Hungarian charts shortly after the series was launched. Even a stage musical adaptation has been produced recently, performed annually against the backdrop of Siklós Castle, the location for both the series and the actual historical events on which it is based.

The Polish *Janosik* (1974), directed by Jerzy Passendorfer, has also enjoyed uninterrupted, cult popularity since its release. It is about a Slovak outlaw with a Hungarian name, who operated across several fluid borders during his short life in the eighteenth century. Poems and novels written of his life are required reading in Slovak and Polish schools. His story inspired ten films and TV series altogether in the Czech, Slovak, and Polish territories between 1929 and 2009. Similar to *Tenkes*, it has been released on DVD recently.

Janosik and *Tenkes* are remarkably similar in their aesthetic and narrative dimensions, their educational mission to reinforce a Marxist-socialist version of national histories, and their postsocialist cult endurance. Their construction is virtually identical: a memorable title sequence shows the heroes, in folk period costumes, riding on horseback in a wide

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shot that evokes Westerns, to the tune of inspiring music. In both cases, the theme music took on a life of its own by mobilizing affective associations with freedom and social justice. The music itself generated a kind of socialist television fandom at the interface of folk motifs and state-sanctioned high culture. In *Janosik*'s case, it was written by Jerzy Matuszkiewicz, a widely celebrated jazz musician and composer, who had also established himself as a composer for Polish films, something that lent instant prestige to the production. At the same time, the theme evokes Polish highland folk songs, with flutes, trumpet, and guitar sounds, infusing the folk tunes with the sense of adventure and romance. *Tenkes*'s theme was composed by venerable composer Tihamér Vujicsics. The instrumental melody resonates with the *Rákóczi March,* which is considered an unofficial Hungarian anthem. It is likely that the march itself was actually written in the aftermath of the uprising, in the 1730s, and existed in several versions. But the popular tune had also been lifted into classical music by Hector Berlioz in his *La Damnation De Faust* (1846) and by Franz Liszt, who drew on the theme when writing his *Hungarian Rhapsody no. 15*. The music, thus, instantly carried a subtle set of connotations in which folk culture, national history, and national high art were validated by the music's previous career in European art.

Both series adopt a mixed procedural-serial format. Most episodes are self-contained adventures with predictable outcomes, with plots that have the heroes get out of a hopelessly tight spot, set against the larger collective story arc of historical events. The adventures take place in a dialectically conceived nationalistic universe where the honest underdog fights the good fight against the evil but not-too-smart oppressor. The episodes often introduce a humorous tone, mostly due to the failed intrigues of the ridiculous Count Horvath in *Janosik* and the bumbling Baron Eberstein in *Tenkes*, as well as comical sidekick characters such as the scheming innkeeper Dudva in *Tenkes*. Both shows obey the rules of tame socialist representational decorum and stay away from depictions of sex and gore—often cited by fans as the main positive distinction of this native entertainment format over most of American film and television. Sword fights, chases, and modest battle sequences provide low-budget but effective spectacle. The shows' binary gender regimes are fundamental to the central socialist regulation of nationalistic pleasures. The inevitable romantic element is concentrated on broadly drawn female characters whose main contribution is to pine after the heroes. The latter then appropriately resist these temptations and demonstrate loyalty to a single, special, clean and handsome peasant girl (Maryna and Veronika, respectively). The heteronormative romance is already established at the beginning of *Tenkes* and develops only slightly across the episodes, mostly because of outside intrigue, whose resistance reinforces socialist family values.

Janosik (1974). Marek Pepereczko as the protagonist of the Polish *Janosik* series. (Color figure available online.)

Although the series is unwatchable by today's standards of nimble cinematography, special effects, fast-paced, clever dialogue, and naturalistic acting, they delighted socialist audiences at the time. The historical adventure genre had been well-established for Polish and Hungarian audiences, who were familiar with Zorro movies, Douglas Fairbanks films, and other Western costume adventure dramas such as the French-Italian production *Fanfan la tulip* (dir. Christian-Jacque, 1952). The nationalistic fandom that such series ignited was also anchored in the actors who played the leads. Pepereczko was widely considered a "hunk" and delivered many viewers in Poland as well as the GDR to the series. His role was similar to those of other television and movie actors who established a limited transnational fandom within the socialist bloc. The best known of these is probably Gojko Mitic, the Serbian-born movie and television star, who played the lead Indian characters in the famed GDR Westerns. Gyula Szabó, who played Eke Máté, the captain of the Tenkes, was less young, less tall, and less dashing but well liked and credible as the heroic paternal protector and freedom fighter. Both series enlisted the best and most popular acting talent of the time.

The oddest aspect of these series to the contemporary viewer is the ethnographic sequences that interrupt the narrative's unfolding to feature folk dance and music. These apparently unmotivated inserts were paradoxically meant to authenticate the historical events and characters on which the programs are loosely based, as organic elements of national culture. Such a requirement contrasts sharply with the other educational purpose of the series, which required teaching and modeling European erudition. The two purposes cross most jarringly in the series' use of language: whereas the Eurocentric education of the masses necessitates using the most normative and literary register of language, the desire to create folk authenticity produces an inevitably forced provincial dialect. The dialect used in *Tenkes* is a geographically unspecific mix of rural accents as it is imagined

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Both series solicited nationalistic identification right from the credit sequence by the joint effects of music, heroic action, and spectacular landscape.

by actors trained in prestigious drama schools. Janosik and his band use the Polish Gorale highlander dialect. What is missing from both series is precisely the daily language that most viewers would speak. This schizophrenic situation, in which catering to the regular viewer was undermined by contradictory efforts to educate the ideal viewer, characterized the entire period of socialist media cultures.

Tenkes's scriptwriter Ferenc Örsi said in his memoir that he had written the series at his children's request, who were disappointed when imported shows such as *Robin Hood* and *Zorro* ended in the early 1960s (in Deák-Sárosi). This is a charming anecdote that at once covers up what was, no doubt, a range of political considerations behind launching the first dramatic series. It also inadvertently reveals the place and intention for such a series: to address what was perceived as a childlike populace's legitimate yearning for innocent entertainment that is in step with European trends but also reinforces nationalism as a glue between party-led government and anticommunist viewers in their homes, while flashing its Soviet-approved educational intention. The series was recognizable to viewers for its folktale resonances familiar from youth and children's fiction, most notably "Ludas Matyi," ("Matt the Goose Boy"), an epic poem written by Mihály Fazekas in 1804, first published in 1817. This story has its origins in folktales that reach back to the sixteenth century, about a poor boy who takes cunning revenge on a greedy feudal overlord for stealing his goose. The story, embraced by the socialist regimes as a parable about peasant intelligence versus capitalist greed, inspired a number of filmic adaptations, most famously Attila Dargay's 1977 animated tale of the same title. *Ludas Matyi* was also the name of the Hungarian socialist government's own satirical newspaper (1945–92), which published officially approved humor that also allowed some pokes at socialism.

Apart from the evidence of lower production values, there is nothing particularly televisual about either series. The historical adventure cycle encompassed and easily crossed over between film and television in this experimental time, when socialist regimes were trying to figure out what to do with an emerging entertainment mass medium, and when, in the absence of private television and advertising, film and television were under the same state control and budget. This is why both series were easily condensed into features films, which elevated the prestige of the series as an essential part of national treasure.

From Cross-Border Social Bandit to Socialist National Hero

Both series solicited nationalistic identification right from the credit sequence by the joint effects of music, heroic action, and spectacular landscape. The introductory themes evoked and encapsulated the oppressed poor's rightful fight against trich, and, in case of *Tenkes*, foreign overlords. The backdrops are different: in case of *Tenkes*, it is the rolling hills of Western Hungary near Siklós Castle; in the case of *Janosik*, it is the high mountains of the Tatras. However, both are open outdoor landscapes that provide the perfect hiding and battle places for manly men, much like in Westerns. Neither was the historically accurate site of the Rákóczi uprising and its aftermath. Siklós Castle simply provided an appropriately scenic location, irrespective of the fact that most of the actual military operations and brigand activities of the uprising took place in northeastern (rather than southwestern) Hungary and present-day Ukraine and Slovakia. Such inaccuracy was minimized by referencing some of the historical figures and events of the uprising in selected episodes, including Rákóczi himself.

In a similar vein, the Polish series moves the historical Janosik from his actual place of birth and life in the Slovak-Hungarian lower Tatras to the Polish highlands. This area had been previously embraced by Polish intellectuals of the 1830s and then again after the crushing of the anti-Russian Polish uprising in 1864 as the birthplace of ancestral Polish culture. Nationalist writers were fascinated by the ethnic group called Gorale who lived in this border area, a shepherd community that spoke its own Polish-Slovak dialect and originally migrated there from the Romanian region of the Carpathians. The Gorale were "discovered" and romanticized in nationalistic accounts as a group unspoiled by civilization and foreign influence. Literary accounts of outlaw heroes, including Janosik, were associated with the Gorale long before the TV series, which gives its protagonist a highland accent that instantly evokes a long history of popular nationalism located in the Gorale highlands (Rassloff).

The same vague historiography applies to the main characters in both series. Although the protagonist of *Tenkes*, Máté Eke, is not based on a single historical persona, the character and the plots are familiar from the large folk and literary web gradually woven around the Rákóczi uprising, particularly in the nineteenth century. The actual life of the outlaw Juraj Janosik is dwarfed by the richness and complexity of the mythic afterlife in which he became a cross-cultural legend in Slovak, Polish, and Czech national cultures. Even his name has multiplied in the course of its various appearances, oscillating among Johannes, Georg, Janko, Janik, Janicek, Jasiek, Janosz, Janos, Juro, and Durko (Rassloff). *Janosik* is a derivation of the Hungarian "János" with the Czech/Slovak -ik suffix attached (Vortruba). A Slovak-Hungarian borderland figure,

Janosik's story was shaped by market songs, fairy tales, brigand stories, shepherd myth, nativity plays, the literatures of national revival, and across various media in socialism and thereafter.

his legend only entered Czech culture in the late nineteenth century, after being established as a Slovak folk hero. Eric Hobsbawm, in his work on social bandits, saw him as a noble robber, while Milichericik considered him a rebel against feudal exploitation (Rassloff). A marker of historical transformation in the ethnically and religiously complex Carpathian region, Janosik's story was shaped by market songs, fairy tales, brigand stories, shepherd myth, nativity plays, the literatures of national revival, and across various media in socialism and thereafter (Rassloff).

It is significant that, similar to other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century outlaws, Janosik became nationalized during the nineteenth-century national revivals only once Western European literary romantics became interested in the lawless and exotic peripheries. His legend fit the European outlaw model that was greatly influenced by Friedrich Schiller's *The Robbers*. Schiller was a professor of history at the University of Jena in Saxony, where many Slovak intellectuals took his courses and witnessed a fervent German ethnic activism. These models were first channeled back to Central and Eastern Europe through German high cultural mediation. Janosik's nationalistic-romantic appropriation was further facilitated by authors such as Lord Byron and Alexander Pushkin. Byron became available in Polish in 1830s and in Hungarian in the 1840s (Vortruba). Romantic literary influences thus rendered outlaws such as Janosik palatable for Western European tastes. From Schiller to Dumas, from Scott to Mérimée, from Pushkin to Verga, European-wide high romanticism rendered the old outlaw-bandit figure honorable and misanthropic in stories set in the European peripheries, which were associated with passion, desire, pride, revenge, and lack of concern with the rule of law and convention. At the same time, this Western European projection created a wider exposure for Eastern European literatures and cultures. Eastern European folk poetry collected by writers was translated into French and German and then plagiarized and pastiched, embellished by colorful inventions of haiducs and vampires (Neubauer, Cornis-Pope, Markovic, and Klaic).[6] Such high cultural creations of Janosik depart from folk songs, which rarely celebrate the brigand, and which do not paint the image of an ethnic rebel against Hungarian oppression. Jan Botto's poem *The Death of Janosik* is one of the most memorable records of the legend's nationalization, which is included in the Czech and Slovak national educational curriculum at all levels (Vortruba).

Under twentieth-century authoritarian regimes, two kinds of Janosik myths were taken up: in the pro-Nazi Slovak Republic and postwar Czechoslovakia, Janosik was deployed variously as both representative and subversive of the ruling regime. During the war years, communist artists evoked Janosik subversively. In 1941, the illegal Slovak Communist Party initiated "Janosik Combat Units" to carry out antigovernmental agitation. Underground agitprop literature of the time reactivated Janosik's rebellious Hungarian kuruc imagery. After the communist takeover of 1948, the new rulers decided to convert the subversive Carpathian highwayman into a patriotic icon of the socialist state. The national opera embarked on a giant production of Jan Botto's *Death of Janosik*, and the state sponsored several patriotic films about him. The most successful of these was the two-part *Janosik* (1962–63), directed by Pal'o Bielik, featuring battle scenes with thousands of extras in brilliant color. The film fuses the myth of noble robber with a socialist-realist interpretation of class struggle. It is comparable in its parameters and effort to build a shared socialist national ground to Passendorfer's 1974 film version of *Janosik*, which followed the 1973 TV series. The film and the series established Janosik as a Polish national hero, subtly repositioning him in Polish history through the location, costumes and set design, which suggested the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as much as the early eighteenth century. The new ethnic contours of the noble robber in the Polish versions are evident in the choice of his antagonist Bartos, a sneaky killer who is identified as a Slovak-Hungarian (Rassloff).

Socialist governments eagerly capitalized on the accumulated cultural appeal of outlaw historical figures to use television as a nationalistic edutainment platform on which to consolidate their power. Early historical adventure series were successful at solidifying popular nationalism not simply because audiences naively gobbled up the nationalism presented in depoliticized entertain-

Socialist governments eagerly capitalized on the accumulated cultural appeal of outlaw historical figures to use television as a nationalistic edutainment platform on which to consolidate their power.

ment formats. In fact, the underlying political edutainment intent of these shows was not lost on viewers. However, the shared recognition of such intent did not necessarily undermine the affective bonding within national fandom. Rather, it created yet another layer of identification, which only rendered more complex the experience of budding national television spectatorship. The added aspect of ironic awareness was articulated in cautious jokes and political parodies of the time. For instance, while the Janosik myth was embraced by the Czechoslovak state, it was also often parodied or rendered fantastic, as in *Zbojnik Jurko* (*Robber Jurko*) 1976), Viktor Kubal's famous animated feature. From the 1970s on, political cabaret provided an outlet for a growing number of satires. The film *Paco, The Brigand of Hybe* (dir. Martin Tapak, 1975; based on a novel by Peter Jaros) is a parody of Bielik's sweeping nationalistic movie *Janosik*. Stanislav Stepka's Radosina Naïve Theater performed the 1970s parodic play *Jaááánosíík* in student bars and other places of alternative culture, connecting political cabaret with the avant-garde as well as jazz, rock, beat, and amateur theater. Such performances demystified not only the Janosik tradition but also the institution of academic theater, along with official socialist state culture and its fabricated national identity, conveyed through the standardized language of socialist newsspeak (Rassloff). Political cabaret thrived in Hungary as well. The fandom around *Tenkes* and the historical outlaw adventure genre was no doubt boosted by comedian Géza Hofi's legendary parody of the tendentious acting and contrived speech in the series *Sándor Rózsa*. Such parodies only fermented a kind of oppositional nationalist unity over the shared skill to engage in double talk and laughter.

Conclusions

The contradictory nature of national intimacy that the historical adventure genre built around the outlaw figure has become even more evident in postsocialism. On the one hand, right-wing nationalist factions have drawn on the early eighteenth century for validation, as is indicated in the very name of the largest Hungarian ultranationalist Web site, *kurucinfo.hu*. On the other hand, the popular nationalism associated with the early adventure series has been deployed by various corporate and state players as a consumer enticement and branding strategy. In 2008, on the fifteenth anniversary of Slovakia's founding, Prime Minister Robert Fico called Janosik "the greatest role model for my government" (Rassloff). *Tenkes* has been embraced for place branding purposes by the city of Siklós, where the series was shot. The local government, eagerly supported by citizens nostalgic for the memories of the early 1960s when TV cameras and stars swirled around, built a wax museum that features the main characters. In addition, since 2009, the Year of Cultural Tourism in Europe, Siklós has been home to a festival that evokes a vague historical tableau based on the TV show, complete with women in folk costumes baking bread, an equestrian show, wine tasting, crafts, and a musical based on the TV show set against Siklós Castle.

The transition from national mobilization to touristic city-branding has been rendered fairly seamless by the blatant inauthenticity and constructedness of the TV-generated national myth. As I have argued, through providing carefully measured nationalistic fictional programming, socialist regimes were able to co-opt and redirect against a "federal," Moscow-based, distant communist oppression the oppositional potential of nationalism's affective charge. They surreptitiously consolidated anti-Soviet resistance on an emotional ground that disguised propaganda as innocent entertainment. This was so not despite but because of the fictionalization at the heart of these series, which opened up history to various nationalistic deployments: the bandits in the cen-

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An iconic image of the rebel group from *Tenkes* is used to promote red wine from the Siklos area, where the series was filmed. (Color figure available online.)

ter were lifted from historical periods of prenational state formations and operated across shifting borders and linguistically hybrid territories. For the most part, they were robbers and murderers, who had to be retroactively nationalized and elevated as heroes in tendentious encounters between folk and high culture.

Besides calling attention to the importance of television in studies of socialist national cultures, these shows, considered together, also produce unintended accounts of a historical regional culture arching over the singular national histories. This cross-border relevance, due primarily to television's international distribution during socialism, itself building on the common trajectories of nationalism emerging from common imperial cultures, outlines a regional experience, way of expression, and identification. This regional vision contests the national fragmentation to which academic research in the social sciences and Slavic studies often subject these cultures and to which they subject themselves for economic or political reasons. This has, thus, been the beginning of a larger argument for considering popular socialist television an indispensable resource with which to complement and connect social scientific accounts of East European nationalisms and cultural approaches so far narrowly focused on East European literature and cinema.

NOTES

1. I privilege the term *socialism* over *communism* here because it is the way most of the Soviet satellite regimes themselves increasingly preferred to designate themselves following the Stalinist 1950s.

2. For example, see Géza Hofi's memorable parody of the series *Rózsa Sándor* (1971, dir. Miklós Szinetár), inspired by the mythical adventures of the eponymous nineteenth-century Hungarian outlaw.

3. For instance, to conform to these directives, in 1968 Hungarian Television (MTV) divided its programming among different departments this way: art films and programs that promoted cultural appreciation made up 30 percent of all programs; 9 percent of broadcast time went to literary and dramatic programming; news programs, responsible for political agitation, consisted of 29 percent; youth and children's programming made up 11.5 percent; and informational programming such as nature documentaries took up 2.5 percent. In addition, a daily morning program called *School Television,* in which experts gave lectures on a broad range of academic subjects to viewers invested in supplementary education, made up 11 percent (Horváth). With the addition of Friday, a sixth day of weekly programming, that year (Monday remained a nonbroadcast day devoted to work), programs were reorganized so that each weekday had a distinct educational profile. Entertainment programs were concentrated on the weekend.

4. Rákóczi's portrait is currently on the 500-forint banknote in Hungary; his statues pepper the landscape; and there is no town that does not have streets and schools named after him.

5. A term used to denote armed anti-Habsburg rebels in the kingdom of Hungary between 1671–1711.

6. "It may be said then that the theme of the haiduc-outlaw was a powerful influence over the emergence of the vernacular literatures of South-Eastern (and Eastern) Europe, involving an intense back-and-forth of literary activities and influences—from country to country, from East to West and vice versa, and from metropolitan, printed 'high' literature to performative balladry" (Neubauer, Cornis-Pope, Markovic, Klaic 6).

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