Julianna Kohut-Ferki

The Interpretation of Strangeness and its Impact on the Local Society in Beregdéda, Transcarpathia

Abstract

My work focuses on the different patterns of experiencing strangeness. Based on my ethnographic fieldwork in Beregdéda, Transcarpathia, Ukraine, I try to reflect on why the articulation of strangeness becomes necessary, and how does the appearance of the stranger modify, erode, rebuild or create symbolic boundaries between the Hungarian-Ukrainian-Gypsy ethnic groups living together. At the time of the fieldwork, in spring 2015, the Ukrainian-Russian war conflict provided a breeding ground for stereotypical perceptions of ethnicity, while the appearance of the stranger tourist also led to the strengthening of the relationship between Ukrainians, Hungarians and Gypsies in the local society, and to the formation of a united front. The understanding of the stranger is constantly changing in line with the various regional and global cultural and economic processes and is formulated with individual interests in mind.

Keywords: sociocultural strangeness, boundary formation, ethnicity, Beregdéda

Introduction

One of the pressing theoretical challenges of contemporary cultural and social sciences is the extremely rapid transformation of socio-cultural relations and the need to adapt, the multiplication of the strangeness and the constant

change in its meaning.[1] It is no coincidence that the strangeness as a "sociocultural fact"[2] plays a prominent role in the subject of sociocultural anthropological research. The theoretical difficulties of the representation of the stranger[3] lie in the "multivocality"[4] of its interpretation. The interpretation of the stranger is relative, it can take place starting from the own,[5] in relation to the other, in a process of containment and exclusion. Paradoxically, knowing the stranger also overcomes the strangeness.[6]

There is more or less a consensus that strangeness is the result of a subjective construction, a representation of another culture. The stranger experiences the deviations from their familiar patterns in the host group. And the strangeness "occurs wherever certain orders collide with their boundaries"[7]. In fact, our knowledge of the stranger is a tool for a reflexive understanding of ourselves and our culture.[8]

How does the experience of the stranger happen in a multi-ethnic community? When and on what occasions does the stranger, who is different from the own, emerge? Where does the own and where does the stranger begin?[9]

Using the ever-changing socio-cultural meaning of strangeness, I will try to give answers to the above questions based on my field research in *Beregdéda,*

---

[1] This manuscript is an expanded and revised version of my presentation given at the 5th World Conference on Research in Social Sciences, 19. 02. 2023, *The changing patterns of the appearance of strangeness.* This work was supported by the Collegium Talentum 2022/23 programme of Hungary.

[2] The term is used by Gábor Biczó in the context of Schütz's interpretation of the stranger. Biczó 2010: 59–61.

[3] The German philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels draws attention to the "multivocality of representation", to the fact that the concept of representation in German can be used in at least four ways: imagery, visualization, representation, substitution. Waldenfels 2002: 151–182.

[4] Biczó 2010: 62.

[5] The father of phenomenology, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, describes the stranger as a "non-belonging". He interprets the stranger "from the standpoint of the own, from the starting point of normality", while the French philosopher Jacques Derrida questions this concept of the stranger. He addresses the question of strangeness in the context of hospitality. Nyírő 2005: 274.

[6] Waldenfels 2002: 151–182.

[7] Biczó 2010: 62.

[8] Strangeness can be historical-temporal, geographical, physical, social and ethno-cultural strangeness, gendered, linguistic and emotional intra- and intersubjective strangeness. Waldenfels 2002: 151–182.

[9] Biczó 2010: 57–66. Who is the "Other", where is the "Other", and when is the "Other"? Biczó 2018: 161.

started in 2015.[10] I am interested in why the articulation of the strangeness becomes necessary, and how does the appearance of the new stranger modify, erase, rebuild or create symbolic boundaries between the ethnicities living together. I see the stranger as "the surplus of a necessarily limited order", "which surplus prevents the order from coming to rest"[11]. The stranger can only be understood "in the division of the own and the stranger"[12]. The constructionist problem of the construction of strangeness cannot be ignored: "the other is not merely given, nor is it merely discovered or found, but it is created"[13]. Creating and experiencing the "other" involves creating ourselves.[14]

According to the contemporary critical interpretation, in addition to the stranger, the positioning of the role of the author researching the stranger, the presentation of "our own strangeness", is equally important and increasingly expected. This is necessary both for the sake of authenticity and for ethical reasons[15]. By including a critical perspective, I consider it important to reflect on the dilemma: to what extent is the researcher, who is a stranger in the local society, capable of showing patterns of experiencing strangeness?

Since the problem of the cultural stranger is almost contemporaneous with the emergence of anthropology, it cannot be ignored that the perspectives that help us understanding the stranger, the "Other", as a subject of knowledge have been constantly expanding since the 1860s.[16] The interpretation of the stranger is initially a concrete experience[17] of encountering the stranger in the

---

10 For details on fieldwork, please see the next chapter.

11 Cristoph 2004: 119.

12 Waldenfels 2004: 108.

13 Waldenfels 2004: 105.

14 Waldenfels 2002: 151–182. The experience of all kinds of otherness also has (or can have) an ethnic and political colour.

15 Lajos 2020: 108.

16 Lajos 2020: 105. "Biczó traces the beginning of the history of anthropology – following the practice of George W. Stocking (1963) – to the work of Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917). Tylor's delineation of the subject area of science and his definition of culture was one of the early attempts to define the subject of science in an exact way." Lajos 2020: 105.

17 This experience is also multi-layered, on the one hand, it is subordinated and superior, "foreign cultures demonstrated the superiority of European states", "illustrated the social condition that European societies could look upon as a distant past", on the other hand, the strangeness is associated with a paradisiacal, idyllic, pure, untouched image, created mainly through literary language, to such an extent that "the exotic 'Other' became a source of modern initiatives, visual art and literary movements in the first decades of the 20th century." N. Kovács 2007: 6.

context of travel, separated in space and time,[18] while later, as a result of an interpretive turn in the history of anthropology, we witness an expansion of the meaning of the object of knowledge. The interpretive turn is the reflexive change in the discipline, starting from the initially indigenous "wild", "exotic" image of the "Other"[19], to the "discovery of the image of the "Other" interpreting and textually formulating its own culture"[20], "the removal of the image of the socio-cultural 'Other' from the paradigm of the exotic stranger"[21]. The process of change was largely achieved through conceptual systems and descriptive models linked to culture[22].

My aim is to better understand the socio-cultural "strangeness" in the local society of *Beregdéda,* to investigate why, among the many "othernesses", ethnic strangeness becomes salient.[23] In the creation and production of the stranger, in line with the simplifying and group-forming critique of ethnicity (where ethnicity is a relational variable and cannot be extracted from the social context in which it is created)[24], I am interested in the socio-cultural processes that see and show the stranger in a dynamic way. And otherness is "far from being a

---

[18] One possible way of understanding the relationship between the own and the "other" (stranger) in critical anthropology is to clarify the concept and status of time. Biczó 2018: 254. Johannes Fabian in his work, *Time and the Other* writes about the time paradigm of contemporary anthropological theory, the complex interrelations of the time factor, and draws attention to the allochronic role of time in emphasizing "other-timeness" Johannes Fabian's critical observation is that Western European cultural studies have essentially been organised from its inception as an allochronic discourse, i.e. "science of other men in another time". Borbély 2017: 59. The consideration of the distance creating nature of the time dimension can be an important interpretative framework for the fieldwork, which I am not able to elaborate in this paper due to space limitations.

[19] In Europe, the wild man was not only the subject of scientific analysis, but primarily satisfied specific socio-ideological needs. Cocchiara 1965.

[20] Biczó 2018: 195.

[21] Lajos 2020: 106.

[22] The changing meaning of strangeness in the history of science is not addressed in this work. This has been addressed by several authors from different approaches, e.g. N. Kovács 2007; Biczó 2018.

[23] The 2016 sociological questionnaire survey on inter-ethnic relations between Ukrainians and Hungarians (TANDEM 2016) also looked at the experience of injustice among those living together. The results show that the same proportion of respondents in the Hungarian and Ukrainian samples experienced discrimination on grounds such as age (14%–13%), political views (14%–16%) and gender (5%–5%). The biggest difference between the Ukrainian and Hungarian samples is in the discrimination based on nationality. Rákóczi 2017: 74–77.

[24] Durst 2010: 174.

peculiarity of Other People, it is only a difference in possible comparison with their environment"[25].

The researcher's own position and role

The ethnographic fieldwork[26] on the present topic was carried out from 2015 to 2016, on average every two months, spending one to two weeks in the field.

I first learned about *Beregdéda*[27] (a village in Transcarpathia) when I was a schoolgirl during family visits, and All Saints' Day cemetery visits, and from what I heard from my family. The beginning of my scientific interest was the search for a topic for my BA thesis: the study of Slavic and Hungarian families moving to the settlement and living in the same house. Later on, to answer

---

[25] A. Gergely 1997: 4.

[26] It is a social science dilemma: "how can, and if at all, a life-world be understood, interpreted, reconstructed by the tools of scientific thinking?" The dilemma is not only the "strangeness" or "otherness" of the life-world to be understood, but also the question of the translatability of everyday knowledge in the scientific world. See Niedermüller 1994: 103. Because of the personal nature of cognition, understanding in the social sciences is in fact "making ourselves understood". Feischmidt 2006. Social science research is about understanding "something" on the one hand and making it understandable to others on the other. Niedermüller 1994: 103. Ethnographic fieldwork is intersubjective (Clifford 1999: 164), both scientific and subjective due to the situation of cognition and the personalities of the researcher and the participants in the research. The experiences gained in fieldwork, the stories learned and later told, are "a possible version of stories influenced by the field" (Bakó 2004: 391). They can be understood as "situated knowledge". Lajos 2015: 165. The field site is in fact nothing more than a "construction created by the specific means of the researcher and the experiences of the local lifeworld living in it and being investigated." Biczó 2017: 159.

[27] *Beregdéda* is located in the second smallest western county of Ukraine, in Transcarpathia. The official Ukrainian name of the county is *Закарпатська область, Закарпаття* "Transcarpathian region, Transcarpathia", reflecting the Russian-Ukrainian view of the area from the eastern side of the Carpathians. Sebestyén 2020: 5–6. *Beregdéda* is located in the *beregszászi (Berehove)* district, near the Ukrainian-Hungarian border, and has experienced several state changes. The organisation of Transcarpathia into a political region and the emergence of "Transcarpathianism" can be dated to the 20th century, during which time the area was transformed from a peripheral area of the Habsburg Monarchy into a collision zone of nation states. Fedinec–Vehes (eds.) 2010: 16. According to the 2001 census data, *Beregdéda* is a village of 2013 inhabitants, 79.8% Hungarian, 15% Ukrainian, 5% Gypsy ethnicity. The three ethnic groups (Hungarian, Ukrainian, Gypsy) living in the village have locally a total of nine denominations to choose from.

the numerous questions that were left open encouraged me to continue ethnographic fieldwork. In 2015–2016, I conducted informal interviews with the religiously and ethnically mixed population of the local society of *Beregdéda,* belonging to different social strata and age groups, and conducted 56 semi-structured interviews in total.

Listening to the stories of my interlocutors' everyday lives, I was confronted with the fact that they had various expectations of me, that they wanted me to play an advocate role. In exchange for their willingness to help me with my research and for telling me their stories, they hoped to gain external social capital, knowing of my studies in Hungary. Those to whom I had returned on several occasions sometimes reported anomalies in the funding system for various business incentives and grants from Hungary, and they saw me as a mediator and advocate to remedy. In some cases, at the end of the interview, they formulated what they thought was definitely worth mentioning in my future study. Or, conversely, what they considered to be "gibberish" about the work of researchers in other villages in Transcarpathia[28].

Despite the fact that they were aware of my origin in Transcarpathia, in *Beregszász (Berehove),* they addressed their message to Hungary. Their narrative about their own lives was formulated in relation to their image of Hungary. The leaders spoke in the voice of individuals living in a minority in the country, who felt threatened by their Hungarianness and feared the disappearance of the Hungarian minority, while addressing me as a person "belonging to a university" a state educational institution in Hungary. Some of them, through past experiences of a common phase of our lives, I can call dear acquaintances and they are still welcome me in their homes. At the end of the fieldwork, the arrival of my first daughter was already visible, which made the relationship more direct with those who had given me their trust when I approached them and who had given me their time for a longer conversation. My pregnancy also brought me closer to those who had already heard of me in the village. I received inquiring questions about my health and well-being, my position as a research student changed, and I was perceived as a mother in the local society. Moreover, it also gave rise to confusion: what could be the reason for the active presence of an already visibly pregnant woman far from home in *Beregdéda?*

---

[28] In this case, my interlocutor was talking about the existence of multiple identities and questioning it, perceiving it as a negative thing, as a loss. Multiple identity, in his interpretation, is an identity disorder which, according to the primordialist view, means the damage and loss of an innate identity derived from tradition. He considers the existence of multiple identities to be questionable in itself, or, if real, to be an intermediate state that implies danger or should be taboo (17 February 2015, Field diary).

The appearance of a "new stranger" – the tourist[29]

The stranger appearing in *Beregdéda* is shaped in the system of relations between the majority Hungarian, and the Ukrainian and Gypsy ethnic groups. These strangers are primarily related to tourism[30] and refer to tourists who are only staying in the village temporarily, motivated by the need to spend a holiday.

The Bereg region is rich in thermal and mineral water resources, of which two tourist facilities, the *Beregszász (Berehove)* swimming pool and the thermal baths in *Mezőkaszony (Koson'),* are currently in operation[31]. Both complexes are situated in the *Beregdéda* area. The "value" of the *Déda* village part is increased by the presence of a mine pit lake,[32] locally known as the "mine", which serves as a holiday resort called Boomerang. The resorts around the *Beregdéda* pit lake, such as "Boomerang", "Bora-Bora" and the "Horus Aquapark", which opened in 2018, are among the most popular resorts in the *Bereg* region[33].

The "separate village, town" built around the tourist-dominated lake, a separate "island" of holidaying strangers is less attractive to the residents of *Déda* due to the increased tourist population density. The tourism-based lake and the complex around it, in the local space alienate the lake from the locals, and

---

[29] Tim Edensor captures tourism using the metaphor of performance. According to his interpretation, performance refers to the multifaceted, constantly changing structure of the "tourist industry" and the dynamic activities of tourists (Edensor 2012: 241–269.) Bertalan Pusztai, ethnographer and historian, borrows the Australian anthropologist Malcolm Crick's ingenious formulation to capture the concept of tourism: "The tourism industry has a very good opinion of itself. So much so that their analyses are often indistinguishable from their own PR" Bódi–Pusztai 2012: 7. Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman illustrates postmodern society by perceiving the differences in the opportunities and motivations of tourists and vagrants. In the post-modern world, displacement does not necessarily imply physical movement, but he points to the fact that the motivation of tourists is voluntary and lead by free will, while that of vagrants is compulsive, which is a significant difference in their displacement. Freedom of choice is a sign of status in a hierarchical postmodern society. As the penniless is the antithesis of the rich, so the vagabond is the antithesis of the tourist. Zygmunt 1999: 2–6.

[30] German social scientist Konrad Köstlin stresses the role of tourism in keeping local culture alive, beyond its "destructive" effects. Köstlin 1995: 1–12. In late modern societies, leisure is increasingly becoming the sphere that defines, displays and represents social status. Schulze 1992: 15. The process of creating and interpreting the fictional worlds that characterise tourism is one of the fascinating topics that is beyond the scope of this paper.

[31] Tarpai 2010: 161.

[32] The *Déda* sand mine produced sand from 1963 until its closure in 1991. Popovics 2006.

[33] Sass 2019: 98.

those who do enjoy the bathing facilities as residents of *Déda* face the incomprehension of the local majority society.

One of my interlocutors – having a degree in higher education – open to excursions, travel and new knowledge, learned to swim as an adult with the help of an instructor in the lake of *Déda*. Since then, she has been swimming more or less regularly in the lake near her home. However, the quality of the lake's water makes it unpopular with locals. For example, some say[34] that the services offered by baths in Hungary near the border are of higher quality and are more affordable. The motivation for bathing shows two different approaches here, as physical proximity is an important factor for regular swimming, the commute across the border and sometimes several hours of waiting does not allow swimming multiple times a week. Thus, the bathing areas near the border in Hungary are possible destinations for the residents of *Beregdéda* for recreation and relaxation, while swimming and bathing locally is less common among them. The question immediately arises, which came up in a conversation with a middle-aged woman about the different choice of holiday destinations by tourists and locals:

> *"Why do tourists come here (to Beregdéda), when in Hungary, for example, they could swim much cheaper?"*
> *"They would go, but they can't because they don't have visas. A lot of people can't do it like we can, we are lucky in this one thing, this 50 km zone affects us, because those who come from the middle of Ukraine, they have a problem to get a Schengen visa. I would not have thought so, so that's it. By the way, I don't think they would spend their time here either, because it's not the rich class who come here on holiday, it's the middle class. And now they are raising prices so much here that they have said more than once that they simply can't afford it anymore. That's all."*[35]

The *Beregdéda* mine pit lake is a potential holiday destination for tourists coming mainly from Ukraine, from within the county or beyond, who organise their trips individually. It is a good option for those who do not wish to cross the Ukrainian-Hungarian border during their holiday or who cannot do so due to lack of passport or visa. The lake is cost-effective for bathers in terms of accommodation and is aimed at tourists who want to spend a minimum amount of money on their holiday.

The motivation of Hungarian visitors from Hungary, who arrive in a small number but organised through a tourist office, is not primarily bathing, but

---

[34] Field diary 27. 09. 2016.
[35] Middle-aged woman of Orthodox religion, excerpt from the interview. 27.09.2016. Beregdéda

visiting the historical sites of Hungarian significance in Transcarpathia, of which *Beregdéda* is only a temporary base. Criteria-based, guided accommodation of Hungarian guests through a tourist agency is provided only by persons involved in tourism, while Ukrainian guests mostly search for accommodation locally, spontaneously, based on the knowledge of locals and signs advertising accommodation according to the expectations of Ukrainian tourists. The quotation below also illustrates the different accommodation options of the guests differing mainly in their financial capabilities, as well as the discriminatory behaviour of the host, who positively discriminates the ethnicity considered to be his own.

"…if I want to tell you in one word, I give the first room to my guests coming from Hungary, and those coming from up there (laughs), I give the summer kitchen to them (whispers)."[36]

The Ukrainian and Hungarian tourists' motivations for holidays, travel options, the amount of money spent on excursions and recreation also differ, while the Ukrainian-Hungarian tourist is perceived in the local society in an ethnicised way. Language barriers often make it difficult to get to know the Ukrainian tourists. The lack of a common language may be a possible reason for the use of "uncultured" labels for the increased number of Ukrainian tourists. As the motivations for the appearance of the large number of Ukrainian tourists are not known locally, locals explain all acts of non-Hungarian speaking Ukrainian strangers by the specific features of Ukrainian culture or the lack of them. In this dichotomous worldview, the more affluent Hungarian tourist from Hungary gains cultural superiority. The knowledge of a common language, mostly Ukrainian, not only gives the chance to get to know the Ukrainian tourist better, but also enables the tourist to discover the characteristics of the Hungarian people. The encounter based on experiences in fact allows both sides to refute or nuance the often extreme negative stereotypical images of the other that are often spread in the media.

"We welcomed a few guests like that, and then the Ukrainians here in our house said that they didn't believe that the Hungarians were so friendly. They were always told that we are so nationalistic, that we don't like Ukrainians so much, it is like that they somehow incite the people against each other."[37]

---

[36] Middle-aged Roman catholic Hungarian man, excerpt from the interview. 23.02.2015. Beregdéda

[37] Middle-aged Greek Catholic Hungarian woman, excerpt from the interview. 20–21.02.2015. Beregdéda

Curiosity that is open to each other nuances and resolves stereotypes, while the difficulty of interpretation gives way to new stereotypes. Thus, for example, the difference in values is ethnicised, where the Ukrainian is interpreted as a traveller seeking experience, preferring excursions, while the local Hungarian is interpreted as an owner who spends a lifetime beautifying their house and refuses to leave their home for excursions.[38]

> *"[Ukrainians] have a very different perception of life than, er, Hungarian people, I would say. They do not strive to create a nice comfortable house for themselves. That's what I say. I don't know where they live or under what conditions, they like a good car and they don't regret anything. They like to live. Whenever they come here, they often drive up to the yard in jeeps so big that it's unbelievable how I think in what kind of a position, what kind of a businessman he must be, and then at the end it turns out he's amazed at how nice our house is. How I wonder, my God, if mine is nice for him, where can he live? And then he asks me how we got it all together, and then when I tell him how much we've worked for 20 years, he looks at me like an idiot. He said that life should be valued in experiences, not in work. So it's different, they have a completely different perception."*[39]

The difference in values also means that locals associate an imaginary world and prosperity with the unknown tourist when they see the tourist's car. In the local society, to the best of my knowledge, most people own their house or strive for buying property when starting a family. Renting a house or a property is an existing practice only for those who can neither afford to buy a house nor a car, which is "more expensive" in the eyes of the local society. From this point of view, the sight of an expensive car is associated, wittingly or unwittingly, with the image of a person who already owns a property. As there are examples to this in the municipality. In the meantime, Ukrainian tourists on excursions are perplexed by the futility of the locals' investment in real estate. The different priorities of owning an "expensive" car and owning a property can be seen as a collision of values, one of which is oriented towards staying in the area and the other is oriented towards mobility.

---

[38] The German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel tries to bring the concept of the stranger closer by juxtaposing the characteristics of the landlord with those of the merchant on the move. According to his interpretation of the stranger, "the stranger is not someone who comes today and leaves tomorrow, but someone who comes today and stays tomorrow". For him, the stranger is a unity of distance and proximity, which can be found in all kinds of relationships between people. Stichweh 1993: 12–30.

[39] Middle-aged woman of Greek Catholic faith, excerpt from the interview. 27.09.2016. Beregdéda

Maintaining the stranger – Gypsy

Töhötöm Á. Szabó presents the symbolic struggle of belonging to a group in the dynamics of social processes using the example of a socially highly fragmented Roma community. The local Roma community is not simply fighting for the "right to define its ethnic classification"[40], but also for "a general social recognition"[41] and social position, a process that is taking place simultaneously against the Roma and non-Roma people[42].

Distrust and fear of Gypsies start in childhood.

> *"(…) he never liked gypsies (laughs), because he was always scared that if you were bad, you'd go to the camp [i.e. the gypsy camp]. Because here, as I used to see, these dirty people go to the garbage dump and stuff, and then I told him, when he was little, that they'd take you to their sack."[43]*

In the quote, we read about a mother's child-rearing practices, which show that bullying and sanctioning of what is perceived as wrong are part of the socialization of children as well as the creation of a Gypsy enemy. The retaliator for the children's disobedient actions is the Gypsy, who takes the children in his sack to the uncontrolled, dangerous dwelling place, the Gypsy camp. The socialization without critical attitude includes the scaring with the Gypsy, the association of the dark, garbage-staring gypsy and fear. The Gypsy person is presented as a threat, a fear-monger, a punisher of perceived bad behaviour. Ultimately, the aim is to alienate the Gypsy-Hungarian relationship, to prevent relationship by marriage, and the descent by blood.

"And these nice kids, I think they're just like the others (laughs) So, you can make friends with them and I don't think anything, I wouldn't forbid my own child from them, but getting married is a different thing (laughs)."[44]

It is a common phenomenon that almost all ethnic groups living in the municipality discriminate between the local Gypsy and the Gypsy moving in, the local Ukrainian and the Ukrainian tourist, i.e. they discriminate positively those who are living in the local society. The stranger Gypsy or Ukrainian tourist is perceived more negatively than the local Gypsy.

---

[40] Szabó Á. 2020: 102.

[41] Szabó Á. 2020:102.

[42] Szabó Á. 2020: 101–118.

[43] Young Hungarian woman of Greek Catholic faith, excerpt from the interview. 27.06.2016. Beregdéda.

[44] Young Hungarian woman of Greek Catholic faith, excerpt from the interview. 27.06.2016. Beregdéda.

"I have to say that we do not have as many problems with the local gypsies as we do when they come [elsewhere from the Beregszász (Berehove) district-KFJ, the author] or from other villages, or when they settle here. There is not such a big problem with ours."[45]

All ethnic groups in the village, including the Gypsies, agree on the difference between the general and the local Gypsy image. Gypsies are also aware of the negative connotation of the Gypsy label and in many cases agree with the stereotypical perception. *"They can't stand being called gypsies. Neither they [pupils at the Déda school-KFJ], nor the parents."*[46]

The narrative about Gypsies is dominated by two conflicting views. On the one hand, there is the value judgement stemming from individual, less negative experiences with local Gypsies and the general stereotyped image of Gypsies, on the other.[47]

One possible way of expressing the positive qualities of a person of good character and exemplary behaviour, a commonly understood point of reference, is to mention the Gypsy. In fact, they express their humane attitude in contrast to the evocation of a negative, stereotyped image of the Gypsy. In this way, an inferior-superior relationship is created, which is a tell-tale sign that in the local society, in an imaginary linear and vertical field, everyone else is placed above the Gypsy. *"I even treat the gypsy nicely, even though he is a gypsy. I even say hello to the gypsy. (…)."*[48]

In order to maintain the moral high ground, the often unspoken image of the Gypsy is supported or refuted. Only the stranger Gypsy or the Ukrainian tourist is the one against whom local social relations are discursively reformulated.

The stranger as a factor for local cohesion

Antipathies towards tourists are found regardless of ethnicity. The Ukrainian villager, who lives in the local society and is mostly known in the neigh-

---

[45] Middle-aged Roman Catholic man, excerpt from the interview. 23.02.2015. Beregdéda.

[46] Middle-aged Hungarian woman of Greek Catholic faith, excerpt from the interview. 17.07.2015. Beregdéda

[47] The dichotomy between the positive image of the Gypsies in *Beregdéda* and the stereotyped image of the general Gypsy population is similar to the research experiences of Balázs Berkovits and Cecília Kovai in *"Gömbalja"* in Borsod County. Berkovits 2010: 67–70; Kovai 2017: 81.

[48] Elderly Rusyn woman of the Orthodox religion, excerpt from the interview. 29.06.2016. Beregdéda.

bourhood, is judged according to their personal characteristics, while all the negative characteristics of the Ukrainian tourist are embodied in the basic trait of Ukrainian ethnicity. This can be explained both by the Ukrainian tourists' lack of Hungarian language skills (as we saw above) and by the Ukrainian language difficulties of local Hungarians, as discussed earlier, language barriers make it difficult for them to understand each other.

Tourists wishing to swim were often baffled by the internal workings of the local community, partly because many people in the village do not speak Ukrainian. Although Ukrainian tourists in *Beregdéda* belong to the national majority, they are not only strangers in the local community, but are also a Ukrainian minority. The lack of this knowledge, the fact that the ethnic "order" that seemed familiar to them was "overturned" without crossing the Ukrainian border, has become a source of conflict in the relationship between locals and Ukrainian tourists. This may explain why, in the eyes of the local society, the Ukrainian was labelled as uncultured, in contrast to the Hungarian culture, which was elevated.[49] The uncultured attribute did not affect the local Ukrainian population[50], who, knowing the local order, were no different from their Hungarian ethnic counterparts, and were thus perceived as closer to them by all Hungarians.

The Ukrainian tourist in a conflict is the opposite, the dipole of the Ukrainian or Gypsy ethnicity in the local society. The objectivity of the conflict is treated as a fact, where the person proclaimed "guilty" becomes the embodiment of an ethnicity, in contrast to which the ethnicity identified in local society appears as a positive counter-example, not only in the eyes of the majority Hungarian, but of all other ethnicities.

In the summer of 2015, the war conflicts[51] provided an excellent breeding ground for stereotypical perceptions of strangers. During the conscription rounds, non-Hungarian-speaking tourists who appeared in the village were

---

[49] This can partly be explained by the growing prestige of the Hungarian language (Kovály–Erőss–Tátrai 2017: 3–22).

[50] In the study entitled *"Exclusion and inclusion techniques",* we can read about the practice of "incorporation" of the Hungarian-Romanian ethnicity, whereby the perceived negative characteristics of a Romanian stranger in a Hungarian community are separated from their personality and assigned to the negative characteristics of the foreign, Romanian ethnicity. The negative qualities of the stranger were not interpreted as part of the individual's personality, but as a function of their ethnicity. Biró–Bodó 1996: 15–43.

[51] My findings in this study are based on my field research, which was influenced by the events of the Ukrainian-Russian war that started in 2014, and the call-up of conscripted men aged 18-60 to the war.

perceived as "holiday refugees", making them enemies. The increasingly conspicuous appearance of Ukrainian strangers and their holidays created resentment because the locals feared being called up and thought that the military conscription of men from the local society should be replaced by sending Ukrainians on holiday, who were strangers to them, to the battlefield. At the same time, the conflict situation was interpreted by one of my interlocutors as the strengthening of the relationship between Ukrainians, Hungarians and Gypsies in the local society, as the macro-level events, the antipathy towards the war and the protest against the war brought the people in the local society together in a united front. The distribution of conscription documents was prevented by the locals through demonstrations and road blockades, blocking the arrival of the military trucks in the village. Not only Hungarians and Ukrainians, but also Roma women took part in the strike, despite the fact that the Roma men were not in danger of being sent to the battlefield because of their often unorganized nominal rolls or their omission from various censuses. The Gypsy woman's solidarity with the strikers was appreciated, but the Gypsy men's escape from the draft was met with resentment.[52]

With the roadblock, not only the call-up letters, but also all other strangers coming to *Déda*, tourists coming to bathe, were excluded. The blocking of the roads has also caused outrage among tourists who wanted to stay in Déda and who supplement the income of the locals, or even give their full income. *"There have been cases of Ukrainians instructing non-local (Ukrainian) tourists who were blocked." "Ukrainians also called on [other Ukrainians] to go back to where you came from. Fight for Ukraine who wants to."*[53] A Ukrainian woman from *Déda,* who spoke out against the war and the arrival of strangers, became an advocate for the village through her language skills, her anti-war commitment and her active participation in demonstrations. By rejecting the war and contradicting a Ukrainian-speaking stranger, she was practically showing solidarity with the local community. The slogans of the resistance were *"This is not our war!", "We*

---

[52] *"When I was the military registrar, we had to hand in the list of names and write down who was what, we wrote down Gypsies. We were not allowed to make the Gypsies an 'osobaya kartka', an identity card, because the gypsy cannot write. At the moment, the Gypsies count money better than the Hungarians, they are bigger businessmen than the Hungarians, they bring their goods from Nyíregyháza, they sell them, they pick the nuts, they sell them and now the Gypsy is here, they don't bother them, and they take ours. So where is the truth? I'm not saying that it will change anything for us, it won't. But we are not in the same league."* middle-aged Hungarian woman of the Reformed faith, excerpt from the interview, 15.07.2015. Beregdéda.

[53] Field diary, 05.05.2015.

are Hungarians, we will not let our husbands go!"[54]. The war was rejected by the locals in unity, regardless of socio-cultural differences, but it still had an ethnic flavour. The narrative of the minority in the country, who felt disenfranchised and strongly voiced their Hungarian identity, became an additional reason for staying away from the war. In the eyes of people living in the local society, Ukraine's territorial integrity is first and foremost the interest and responsibility of the majority, stranger Ukrainians in the country. In fact, the distancing from the stranger tourist and the war, which was believed to be inseparable from these strangers, was reflected in the non-ethnic unity of the local society.

> *"When was that first mobilisation, in the summer, I don't know when it started because it's actually been so long. The first phase, then the village united, then the women came together, that we are Hungarians, we won't let our husbands go. And there was a roadblock in every village, in every Hungarian village, and then we all went and the Ukrainians, I don't want to offend anyone, far be it from me, but there was an aggressive, not my husband, but Ukrainians in general are aggressive, very aggressive, and then because the road was blocked, a driver didn't respect it and got out and then he took out a big pipe and tried to attack everyone. And that was the reason for the argument between the women, how can you see? You don't know who you're taking in, what kind of vandals they are, what kind of Ukrainians they are, that you don't know what's in strangers, that there was a minor conflict between them, that you shouldn't take anyone in because they've ruined the village, they've overrun the village and then many people even attack Hungarians because we can't speak Ukrainian, and there were even examples of this in the summer."*[55]

The above opinion is from a Hungarian woman in an ethnically mixed marriage. In this case, the behaviour of the Ukrainian husband, known from the household and in a close relationship, was not sufficient to challenge the simplistic worldview or to refute generalisations about the Ukrainian ethnicity as a whole. The Ukrainian spouse is merely an exception to the stereotypical aggressive label of the Ukrainian ethnic group. The emergence of strangers and the unstable economic situation in the country have fuelled the often discriminatory attitudes towards the Hungarian minority on the basis of language skills. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian tourist arriving in the local society was a source of livelihood and financial income for the locals, so to abandon them on principle would have endangered the family's financial well-being. In the tourist season, which started in May 2015, there were already visible signs of

---

[54] Young, reformed Hungarian woman, excerpt from the interview, 21.02.2015. Beregdéda.
[55] Young Hungarian woman of Reformed religion, excerpt from the interview. 21.02.2015. Beregdéda

a willingness to welcome tourists. Everyone was preparing to receive Ukrainian tourists, who could. The possibility of renting vacant rooms and parts of houses was advertised with signs in Slavic, on boards aimed at Ukrainian speakers. Individual interests, the need for financial income from hosting tourists, overrode and greatly nuanced the various narratives, the fear of the stranger. The importance of this income is demonstrated by the changed use of space during the bathing season, by the fact that the family accommodated tourists in their otherwise used living space in order to maximise income.

> *"A lot of tourists come, I think there's still something we could do to attract them, because for people, a lot of people, especially here at the end of the village, it's a livelihood. During the summer, long ago 3 years ago, everybody pretended that I certainly don't welcome tourists, I don't myself. Now everybody is making at least one or two rooms that they can rent out."*[56]

Negative feelings of *"I don't welcome tourists"* have been overridden and transformed by the difficulties of making a living and the scarcity of opportunities to earn money locally. The arrival of tourists is a possible way of working locally, as they not only generate income from accommodation, but as a customer base they are also active in shaping local agricultural production.

"Returning guests from Lemberg [Lviv – KFJ] have become customers of tomato. So they plant more and sell them locally instead of selling them at the market."[57]

Summary

My ethnographic fieldwork in *Beregdéda,* Transcarpathia, Ukraine, suggests that the presence of the stranger creates new situations and challenges. The stranger is not only a passive recipient of the existing order, but also modifies it through its own influence, changing the symbolic boundaries and dynamics of socio-cultural society. As Bernard Waldenfels writes, the stranger prevents the order from coming to rest. The appearance of the stranger in the local society has given rise to the possibility of reconciling different cultural and economic interests, the possibility of mutual curiosity, the possibility of nuancing and overturning stereotypes, and the creation of new stereotypes when encounter-

---

[56] Middle-aged woman of Greek Catholic faith, excerpt from the interview. 27.09.2016. Beregdéda

[57] Middle-aged Hungarian woman of the Reformed faith excerpt from the interview. 15.07.2015. Beregdéda

ing difficulties in interpretation. Thus, for example, the difference in values is ethnicized in the local society, where the Ukrainian appears in the narratives as a traveller seeking experiences and preferring excursions, while the Hungarian appears as an owner who beautifies their house throughout their life and does not want to leave it for trips. All this can be understood as a clash of a "stationary" and a different, mobility-oriented value system.

At the time of the fieldwork, in the spring of 2015, the Ukrainian-Russian war conflict provided a breeding ground for stereotypical perceptions of ethnicities, but at the same time, the emergence of the stranger led to a strengthening of the relationship between Ukrainians, Hungarians and Gypsies in the local society, and to a unification of these groups into a united front. Otherness does not begin with the 2014 Ukrainian-Russian war and its local effects. Locals have their own strategies and practices to cope with the presence of strangers.

In Ukraine, the appearance and return of the stranger in the midst of a war that exacerbated the unstable economic situation is interpreted as a "threat", yet the Ukrainian tourist arriving in the local society was a source of livelihood and financial income for the locals, and thus individual interests overrode the various macro-level narratives and fear of the stranger.

Bibliography

A. GERGELY, András
    1997   Idegen az idegenben, idegen a hazában. In A. Gergely András (ed.): *Másság – Idegenség – Elmozdulás. Léthelyzetek az otthonosság és a sehollét között.* 4–5. Budapest: MTA Politikai Tudományok Intézete Etnoregionális Kutatóközpont

BAKÓ, Boglárka
    2004   A terepmunka értelm(ezés)e, avagy az etikusság határán. *Kisebbségkutatás.* 13. 2. 388–394.

BERKOVITS, Balázs
    2010   Cigányok közmunkán. Munkaképzetek egy magyar faluban. *Anblokk.* 4. 64–71.

BICZÓ, Gábor
    2010   Az „idegen" társadalomfilozófiai jelentőségének vázlata az antropológiában. In Feischmidt Margit (ed.): *Etnicitás. Különbségteremtő társadalom.* 57–66. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó–MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet
    2017a   Hol van a „Másik"? – a tereppparadigma kritikai antropológiai elemzése. *Ethno-Lore.* 34. 147–180.

2017b   Ki a „Másik"? A kritikai fordulat és az ismeretreprezentáció a kortárs antropológiában. *Magyar Filozófiai Szemle*. 1. 103–130.

2018   *A „Mi" és a Másik". Az idegen megértésének tudománytörténeti vázlata az antropológiában a 19. század második felétől napjainkig.* Budapest–Debrecen: DE Néprajzi Tanszék–L'Harmattan

BIRÓ, A. Zoltán – BODÓ, Julianna

1996   Kizárási és bekebelezési technikák interetnikus kapcsolatokban. In Gagyi József (ed.): *Egy más mellett élés. A magyar–román, magyar–cigány kapcsolatokról.* 15–43. Csíkszereda: KAM, Regionális és Antropológiai Kutatások Központja, Pro-Print Könyvkiadó

BÓDI, Jenő – PUSZTAI, Bertalan

2012   A turizmus kritikai és kultúratudományi perspektívái. In Bódi Jenő – Pusztai Bertalan (eds.): *Túl a turistatekinteten. A turizmus kritikai és kultúratudományi perspektívái.* 7–19. Budapest–Pécs–Szeged: Gondolat Kiadó–PTE BTK Kommunikáció- és Médiatudományi Tanszék–SZTE BTK Kommunikáció- és Médiatudományi Tanszék

BORBÉLY, Sándor

2017   Időtapasztalat a terepen. A történeti (historikus) megértés módszertani paradigmája a magyarországi néprajzi kutatásban. *Ethno-Lore*. 34. 31–83.

CLIFFORD, James

1999   Bevezetés: Részleges igazságok. *Helikon*. 4. 494–513.

COCCHIARA, Giuseppe

1965   *Az örök vadember. A primitív világ jelenléte és hatása a modern kultúrára.* Budapest: Gondolat

CRISTOPH, Jamme

2004   Létezik-e az idegenséget vizsgáló tudomány? A filozófia és az etnológia jelenleg folyó elméleti vitájáról. In Biczó Gábor (ed.): *Az idegen. Variációk Simmeltől Derridáig.* 117–137. Debrecen: Csokonai Kiadó

DURST, Judit

2010   „Gondolom, hogy cigányok… ennyi gyerekkel…" Etnicitás és reprodukció két észak-magyarországi romungro közösség példáján. In Feischmidt Margit (ed.): *Etnicitás. Különbségteremtő társadalom.* 173–194. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó–MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet

EDENSOR, Tim

2012   Performatív turizmus, színre vitt turizmus. A turisztikai tér és gyakorlat (újra) alkotása. In Bódi Jenő – Pusztai Bertalan (eds.): *Túl a turistatekinteten. A turizmus kritikai és kultúratudományi perspektívái.* 241–269. Budapest–Pécs–Szeged: Gondolat Kiadó–PTE BTK Kommunikáció- és Médiatudományi Tanszék–SZTE BTK Kommunikáció- és Médiatudományi Tanszék

FABIAN, Johannes
　　2002　　*Time and the Other. How Anthropology makes its object.* New York: Columbia University Press

FEDINEC, Csilla – VEHES, Mikola (eds.)
　　2010　　*Kárpátalja 1919 – 2009: történelem, politika, kultúra.* Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó–MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézete

FEISCHMIDT, Margit
　　2006　　Az antropológiai terepmunka módszerei. *Kvalitatív módszerek a társadalom és kultúratudományban.* Digitális tankönyv és szöveggyűjtemény. http://mmi.elte.hu/szabadbolcseszet/mmi.elte.hu/szabadbolcseszet/indexa3ef

KOVAI, Cecília
　　2017　　*A Cigány-magyar különbségtétel és a rokonság.* Budapest: L'Harmattan Kiadó

KOVÁLY, Katalin – ERŐSS, Ágnes – TÁTRAI, Patrik
　　2017　　„Hát megpróbálunk küzdeni": átalakuló boldogulási stratégiák Kárpátalján az Euromajdan után. *Tér és Társadalom.* 31. 2. 3–22. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17649/TET.31.2.2851

KÖSTLIN, Konrad
　　1995　　Wir sind alle Touristen – Gegenwelten als Alltag. In Christiane Cantauw (ed.): *Arbeit, Freizeit, Reisen. Die feinen Unterschiede im Alltag.* 1–12. New York: Waxmann–Münster

LAJOS, Veronika
　　2015　　Mozgásban a világ. A több színterű etnográfia (multisited ethnography) kérdése. In Jakab Albert Zsolt – Kinda István (eds.): *Aranykapu. Tanulmányok Pozsony Ferenc tiszteletére.* 163–172. Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság–Szabadtéri Néprajzi Múzeum–Székely Nemzeti Múzeum
　　2020　　Kulturális idegenség újratöltve. (Biczó Gábor: A „Mi" és a „Másik". Az idegen megértésének tudománytörténeti vázlata az antropológiában a 19. század második felétől napjainkig). *Alföld.* 71. 11. 103–108.

NIEDERMÜLLER, Péter
　　1994　　Paradigmák és esélyek avagy a kulturális antropológia lehetőségei Kelet-Európában. *Replika.* 13–14. 89–129.

N. KOVÁCS, Tímea
　　2007　　*Helyek, kultúrák, szövegek: a kulturális idegenség reprezentációjáról.* Debrecen: Csokonai Kiadó

NYÍRŐ, Miklós
　　2005　　Biczó Gábor (ed.): Az idegen – Variációk Simmeltől Derridáig. *BUKSZ.* 17. 3. 272–277.

POPOVICS, Zsuzsanna

    2006   Homokbánya vagy szemétlerakó? *Kárpátalja*. 286.
                https://karpataljalap.net/2006/07/07/homokbanya-vagy-szemetlerako
                – 31. 02. 2023.

RÁKÓCZI, Krisztián

    2017   Magyar-Ukrán kapcsolatok az egyén és a közösség szintjén, valamint a
                magyarországi támogatáspolitika megítélése. *Kisebbségi szemle*. 2. 2. 65–84.

STICHWEH, Rudolf

    1993   Az idegen. *Regio – Kisebbség, politika, társadalom*. 4. 4. 12–30.

SASS, Enikő

    2019   *A kárpátaljai Beregvidék falusi turizmusának helyzete és fejlődési lehetőségei*. PhD
                értekezés. Pécs: Természettudományi Kar, Földtudományok Doktori
                Iskola

SCHULZE, Gerhard

    1992   *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart*. Frankfurt–New York:
                Campus

SEBESTYÉN, Zsolt

    2020   *Kárpátalja Helységnevei*. Nyíregyháza: Pro Print Kft.

SZABÓ Á., Töhötöm

    2020   Menedzserek, munkások, napszámosok. Mobilitási minták, migráció és
                társadalmi pozíciók egy roma közösségben. In Jakab Albert Zsolt – Vajda
                András (eds.): *Ruralitás és gazdasági stratégiák a 21. században*. 101–118.
                Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság

TARPAI, József

    2010   A térségi összefogás példája a TDM rendszer kialakításán keresztül Kár-
                pátalján. In Hanusz Árpád (ed.): *A helyi és térségi TDM szervezetek helye és
                szerepe a vidék turizmusirányításában*. 157–168. Nyíregyháza: Nyíregyháza
                város és a Nyíregyházi Főiskola Természettudományi és Informatikai
                Kar, Turizmus- és Földrajztudományi Intézet

WALDENFELS, Bernhard

    2002   Paradoxien ethnographischer Fremddarstellung. In Iris Därmann –
                Christoph Jamme (eds.): *Fremderfahrung und Repräsentation*. 151–182. Wei-
                lerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft

WALDENFELS, Bernhard

    2004   Az idegenség etnográfiai ábrázolásának paradoxonjai. In Biczó Gábor
                (ed.): *Az idegen – Variációk Simmeltől Derridáig*. 91–116. Debrecen: Csoko-
                nai Kiadó

ZYGMUNT, Bauman

    1999   Turisták és csavargók – a posztmodern kor hősei és áldozatai. *Lettre*. 35.
                2–6.