Recent Eastern European Crime Films
Q and A Dialogue of the Members of the Contact Zones Research Group[1]

Edited by Balázs Varga
balazs.varga@btk.elte.hu

Q:

Crime fiction has always been an important site for the discussion of values, conflicts, fears and moral norms of societies. After the political changes in Eastern Europe, crime fiction could become more important than ever before in the articulation of social imagination, facing post-socialist transformation, inequality, social tensions and frustration, and also in coming to terms with the region's socialist past. Yet, until recently, crime films were mostly missing from Hungarian and Romanian film culture. However, some current and successful films (Nimród Antal's *The Whiskey Bandit [A viszkis]*, 2017, Bogdan Mirică's *Dogs [Câini],* 2016) and television series (the Hungarian *Golden Life* [*Aranyélet*], 2015, the Romanian *Shadows* [*Umbre,*], 2014, and *Silent Valley* [*Valea Mută*], 2016) seem to have made a turn.

How these films and series describe and interpret the post-socialist transformation of Eastern European societies? What do we think about their heroes? What moral standards and norms do they represent? To what extent do they follow the global genre patterns and what are their local specificities?

A:

Anna Bátori

Local Forms, Global Patterns

While crime fiction is not alien to Hungarian and Romanian cinema – let us recall Lajos Fazekas's *Flat Tire* (*Defekt*, 1977), György Dobray's *The Victim* (*Az áldozat*, 1980), Ferenc András's *The Vulture* (*Dögkeselyű*, 1982), Pál Erdőss's *Last Seen Wearing a Blue Skirt* (*Gyilkos kedv*, 1996), the recent proliferation of crime on screen indicates a turn in Eastern European genre film. European cinema's never-ending competition with Hollywood in an attempt to

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invite their audience to watch local productions, together with the birth of a whole new generation of directors and production framework, were the factors that triggered this post-2010 genre-shift. Still, I think that in Eastern Europe this change can be located within a much wider post-socialist Zeitgeist that encouraged filmmakers to look into the socialist past and present that is still laden with remnants of the previous political period. Interestingly, Romanian and Hungarian crime films operate along a well-defined national formula that points toward corrupt post-socialist authoritarian forces in leading legislative positions. The humiliating actions of the Romanian *Securitate* or the Hungarian Secret Services are recurrent motifs that signal another, more popular form of collective remembrance in cinema. Given the fact that crime and socialism were opposite terms in the socialist dictionary of Eastern Europe, it is no wonder that the narrative focus of some contemporary crime films from Romania and Hungary lies on the sinister actions of ex-*Securitate* agents and spies. For instance, Tudor Giurgiu's crime-thriller film, *Why Me?* (*De ce eu,* 2015) depicts the deeply corrupt justice system of Romania where a young prosecutor reveals the interconnected network of post-*Securitate* agents and the cat-and-mouse games that Romanian politics play with innocent people. Being spied on, eavesdropped and constantly harassed, the prosecutor eventually commits suicide, thus signaling the impossibility of breaking the (post-)socialist wall of Romanian (in)justice. The dusty-smoky interiors, the big city-streets, the intellectual-moral approach of the prosecutor to the crime, his rise and fall and threatened position during the investigation, are all elements of a complex political thriller that, brimmed with crime-characteristics, create a thrilling film. Still, like other Romanian films that dig into the socialist past – from Stere Gulea's *State of Things* (*Stare de fapt*, 1996) to Andrei Gruzsnicki's *Quod Erat Demonstrandum* (2013) – *Why Me* has a very elemental dramatic characteristic that pushes the narrative towards a drama. In this regard, Giurgiu's film remains in the very box of European art cinema for it mainly concentrates on the psychological struggles of the main prosecutor whose personal life collapses within a couple of days. The same dramatic concept can be revealed in Nimród Antal's *The Whiskey Bandit* (*A viszkis*, 2017), an almost-heist-film that, instead of exploiting the immense potential the crime-story of the Hungarian Robin Hood has to offer, remains on the very psychological level of the whole post-socialist phenomenon of capitalist transformation. In this way, the elements of heist

are pushed into the background, with the psychological vicissitudes of the folk hero remaining dominant.

Thus, what Romanian and Hungarian crime cinema offers, is a local form of the global crime pattern that – explicitly or implicitly – recalls the misuses of the socialist period. The corrupt authoritarian figures in the centre of their narratives – in Viktor Nagy's *Father's Acre* (*Apaföld,* 2009), in Corneliu Porumboiu's *Police, adjective* (*Poliţist, Adjectiv*, 2009) or in Bogdan Mirică's *Dogs* (*Câini*, 2016) – all draw on the failing system of totalitarian power. The main protagonist in contemporary Romanian and Hungarian crime film – be that a police-man, a detective or the person who committed the crime – is an innocent, sympathetic figure with whom we can easily identify. These everyday-characters who signify one's hopeless position within the corrupt framework of legislation, stand in contrast with dynamic police-forces and/or politicians that play a witted game with people wanting to reveal the truth. Even Árpád Sopsits's *Strangled* (*A martfűi rém*, 2016) – a film inspired by the true story of a serial killer in socialist Hungary – is embedded into a very strong political subtext. Similar to *Why Me*, the young prosecutor of the crime must sacrifice his life on the altar of the truth, while the malfunction of police and their interconnectedness with the socialist leadership gets swept under the carpet.

The question of the future is whether Romanian and Hungarian crime fiction remains a tool of collective remembrance or, after a couple of years, it leaves behind its socialist-laden thematic of the totalitarian framework and starts to delve into crimes that are not politically-driven. Whatever will be the case, the fact that we witness a great turn in Hungarian and Romanian film and television is a reassuring sign that Eastern European cinema did not give up upon crime cinema.

Hajnal Király:
Masculinity – imported (Antal Nimród: The Whiskey Bandit, 2017)

When approaching a cultural phenomenon in a certain film, namely the representation of masculinity, a series of questions arise: why exactly this topic? Why now? Why here, in Hungary and why in this particular way? (meaning the choice of genre, other narrative and formal characteristics). A film on the Whiskey robber could have been made long time ago,

immediately after or during his long detention or shortly after his release. Besides evident moral considerations (to not make a hero out of a convict, of which Hungarian media has been also accused with), there are a few underlying socio-political, cultural discourses that may have affected this timing. I contend that the new film of Nimród Antal, just like his previous *Kontroll*, can be conceived as a kind of social allegory thematising a specific image of the "own" migrant (coming from a remote region of the former, historical Hungary), the relationship of the individual with a collapsing capitalism (the topic of bank robbery under the circumstances of economic crisis animates latent social tensions, revengeful desires) and a post-communist crisis of masculine roles so prominent in contemporary Hungarian films.

The *Whiskey Bandit* doesn't side overtly with any of these discourses, managing to rely on facts and pieces of information already available about the case, most of them "doubled" in media news commenting on the actual stage of the police investigation displayed in the film. The film's strongest statement is undoubtedly the image of this new type of gangster, a Robin Hood, a Zorro becoming a national hero, a living legend, a possible model (!) for the forthcoming generations. His figure actually owes more to the genre of the western than to the gangster movies: a lonely wolf coming from a remote place, the Secler wilderness, who under the pressure of the chaotic and inhuman rules of a wild capitalism becomes an outlaw. One could say that he just follows the rules set by the system. His natural calmness, expressionlessness and lack of gestures emanate an elementary masculinity in striking contrast with that of the institutional representatives of a declining patriarchy (high officials, bank managers, policemen, whose strength is mainly restricted to a rough vocabulary). This contrast is most prominent when facing – as if in a mirror – in the interrogation scene the detective who has dedicated long years to the case. This sweating, emotionally unstable, divorced man (who cannot even take care of a plant, slowly dying in his office), far from a classic image of a "cool" detective, and a prototype of many helpless "mean" man characters (small officials) from the last decade of Hungarian cinema, in fact seems to be chasing his lost masculinity, the fierce man of action. As concerning the main protagonist, he is more a cowboy than a gangster: while this latter thrives in community, the former acts alone. Moreover, he succeeds as long as he is alone, and is caught after he has paired up with other men and a (fatal) woman. This image of raw, more archaic masculinity complies with both nationalist and liberal views on the acute

crisis of migration: both see this masculinity as a possible revigorating force of a decadent masculine order, coming either from a "pure" source of the Hungarian culture (Transylvania or Vojvodina, also thematised in Márk Bodzsár's comedy *Heavenly Shift*, 2013) or a more multicultural environment (as seen in Mundruczó's *Jupiter's Moon*, 2017). From the perspective of discourses associated to migration, it is not without signification that in all these films this "alien" force appears as elementary and enigmatic: it can be studied, contemplated or temporarily used and detained, but not fully controlled.

Bence Kránicz
Hungarian Bandit(s)

Nimród Antal's *The Whiskey Bandit* and the HBO series *Golden Life* are arguably the most successful pieces of recent crime fiction on the Hungarian movie and television screens, respectively. *The Whiskey Bandit*, with around 280.000 movie theatre admissions, has been the most popular crime/gangster movie in Hungarian cinemas since 1990, while *Golden Life* enjoys more or less unequivocal enthusiasm from film critics.

However, few reviews and analyses deal with the moral position of these films, and even fewer texts question how the Hungarian society perceives the morality of these stories. The way I see it, the authors of the two films – for the sake of simplicity I will treat the two released seasons of *Golden Life* as one film story – all argue rather openly that the post-socialist Hungarian society and institutional system favoured corruption over honour, lies over truth, 'back doors' over 'front gates.' As Attila Miklósi, the protagonist of *Golden Life* discovers at his new job as a security guard, corruption, even downright theft is a common practice in legal businesses just as in the underworld from which he desperately but unsuccessfully tries to break free.

On the other hand, Attila Ambrus, the titular character of *The Whiskey Bandit*, chooses to rob a bank because he needs the money fast, money to bribe a politician with. His real decision, however, is to keep the 'job' of bank robber after his successful first attempt. Ambrus is presented as a smart and even talented person who learns quickly. Still, his best career option is that of the bank robber. To risk some critical comments, I'd take it as a flaw in Nimród

Antal's script that the protagonist makes this decision far too quickly and without much moral struggling.

As the success of the two movies and the lack of treating these topics in reviews show, contemporary Hungarian society takes it as an unproblematic or even unquestionable truth that the position of the criminal is equivalent or seemingly better than the position of the respectable man in post-socialist Hungary. In fact, Attila Ambrus was treated as a Robin Hood-type hero in the media, and, according to *The Whiskey Bandit*, is still perceived as such in the social imagination. If cinema is a mirror of society, then Hungarian audiences might see nothing but a criminal when they look into that mirror.

Zsolt Győri
Gangster Zone

Nimród Antal's *A viszkis* (*The Whiskey Bandit* 2017) has a unique place in postcommunist Hungarian crime cinema dominated by gangster comedies and crime thrillers. In comparison with the few Hungarian crime films based on actual events – György Szomjas' *Gengszterfilm* (*Gangster Film*, 1999), Deák Krisztina's *A miskolci boniésklájd* (*Who the Hell's Bonnie and Clyde*?, 2004) and Anna Faur's *Lányok* (*Girls*, 2007) – the story of Ambrus Attila is a real heavyweight. As the title of the film already suggests, the Whiskey Bandit has become a household name, a quasi-mythical folk hero who, unlike the main characters of the films mentioned, gained a celebrity status unmarred by violence. Amongst the 1990s perpetrators whose stories inspired cinema, Ambrus is the one without blood on his hands and the most outstanding 'track record'. He is the quintessential bandit remembered less for unlawful and inhuman behaviour than his anti-Establishment attitudes and inventive ways to fool the police.

Antal's film emphasises these qualities while telling the story of Ambrus (played by Bence Szalay) as that of a socially underprivileged person. Unlike some filmmakers of the past two decades, the director of *The Whiskey Bandit* does not pretend to be familiar with the underworld. The criminal milieu is secondary to the person story, well reflected in Antal's choice to choose the genre of the biopic instead of the gangster film. Whereas cinematic gangster memoires usually talk about moral corruption, here the social commentary is more relevant. Coming from a broken family in rural Transylvania and with a history of cleptomaniac

attitudes that put him into borstal, the young Ambrus is portrayed more like the orphan of society, an underprivileged person drafted into the Romanian People's Army straight after leaving the orphanage, who later flees to Hungary by crossing the border illegally. The immigration motif is justly underplayed however, as an ethnic Hungarian from Romania would not be considered an immigrant in the public mind. In fact, the image of the resilient Transylvanian person is regarded as a Hungarian national type, as one of us. Or even more virile, vigorous and creative than us: this is underlined by the superior masculine and athletic qualities of Ambrus compared to the always sweating and chubby chief interrogator (Zoltán Schneider).

Antal emphasizes Ambrus' Transylvanian origins consciously in the film and portrays him as not just an orphan of society but of the cultural nation. After all, the film talks lengthily about how this young refugee fails to take roots in his chosen land and finds it hard to be naturalised. The film identifies a hypocritical Hungarian society as one of the main reasons behind Ambrus' inability to get settled in his chosen country and transformation into the self-made man of the Whiskey Robber. The 1990s Budapest is depicted as a corrupt and corrupting social environment, exemplified by the dishonest civil servant (Imre Csuja) whose greediness is depicted as the root cause of Ambrus' criminal transformation. The same is true for Kata (Piroska Móga), the girlfriend, whose superior social status and elitist parents put the boy under the pressure to prove that he is not a loser. The postsocialist value system is portrayed as corrupt, because it values material wealth (and the materialisation of wealth) over other types of human values. Ambrus falls victim of the failing moral standards of the newly emerging entrepreneurial class, the archetype of which were taxi drivers who appeared in popular imagination as an opportunistic tribe, operating on the threshold of legal and illegal enterprises, involved in various types of wheeling and dealing activities. Hungarian cinema seem to have acknowledge this popular perception as Ferenc Grunwalsky's *Egy teljes nap* (*A Complete Day*, 1988) and Faur's already mentioned *Girls* testifies. The fact that the real Attila Ambus appears in the minor role of a taxi driver in the *The Whiskey Bandit* might be more than a meta-cinematic gesture and be understood as a general commentary on the identity strategies called forth by the liberalising market economy of the 1990s. In my view the mentality of the bank robber takes

root in the same socio-economic setting that serves as a background for the (stereoypical) image of the taxi driver in that decade.

It should also be mentioned that the television series *Aranyélet* (Easy Living, 2015-) also locates the criminal origins of it protagonist, Attila (Szabolcs Thuróczy), in the early 1990s when he worked as a taxi driver. In one of the episodes, after realizing that in Hungary it is counterproductive to play along the rules, he bursts out against the Establishment: "I made up my mind, it's over. We won't pay our debt or taxes. They asked for it. Fuck them. You'll never see me buy a tram ticket again." Attila articulates the desperation of a generation for whom the postsocialist transformation came with the detoxicating experience that the moral standards and value systems of their parents' generation is outdated, and that society is hypocritical. Paradoxically, illegal activities and criminal dealings were a form of rebellion against the system; however, they also led to heroes being increasingly entangled in paternalistic criminal networks. Anti-Establishment sentiments become hypocritical when crime and corruption itself becomes a part, if not the most lucrative segment, of the Establishment. This is the case in *Easy Living* where white collar crime and nepotism – including corruption, overbilling, crimes related to public procurement – no longer offers thrill because it no longer carries the air of non-conformism, but is disguised as beneficial to the community. The personal conflict in the case of Attila does not only follow from the sudden return of his moral conscience but because he no longer feels the liberating excitement of trespassing the law. At the same time he is also aware of the double moral standard according to which ordinary criminals are punished to the full extent of the law while the criminal elite usually gets away with almost any degree of misconduct.

The two films I addressed here briefly cannot draw up universal patterns of how postsocialist societies perceive of crime, yet it should be noted that they follow global patterns of the genre and carry a strong compensatory function. Crime films, and more recently the gangster comedies of Guy Richie, idolise ordinary criminals and demonise white collar criminals. Cinema here starts to function as a cultural mechanism of compensation for the corruption attributed to law enforcement and the administering of justice. In other words, it hopes to counterbalance actual situations in which social hierarchy comes with a certain inequality before the law. Subscribing to a sense of justice in a world of injustice is the

compensatory gesture of popular cinema. This is valid for the *The Whiskey Bandit*: the 350,000 tickets sold proves the continued public fascination with Ambrus Attila but it also renders legible the disillusionment of people with the Hungarian legal system.

Beja Margitházi
Dogs and Underdogs at the End of the World (Bogdan Mirică: *Dogs*, 2016)

Although Bogdan Mirică's *Dogs* is set totally outside of everything (out of the city, out of time, out of law), where all the roads end, only a few people live and the surface appears to be untroubled, he seems to explore a different way of reflecting on recent social and institutional changes in Romania, catching some familiar characteristics of post-communist condition. Mirică's movie switches the well-known urban setting of so many contemporary Romanian films to a rural, peripheral environment, located at the 'easternmost' border region of the country, but speaks about the same, old mechanisms and power relations which determine the actual status quo. Thriller and western genre conventions offer useful narrative tools and atmospheric concepts for Mirică to tell the story in a special way, and at the same time to explore some new aspects of the topic.

At the beginning *Dogs* launches two different acts of exploration, and both of them prove to be eloquently failed. In an impersonal, short and supposedly authorial introduction, a slow, smooth camera movement scans carefully the surface of a marshy ground; the close study of the surface finally leads to the sudden appearance of a mutilated and rotting piece of human leg. Whose leg is this? Was he killed? Where is the body? – these are the questions which will never be clearly answered, but this travelling piece of leg proves to be a perfect McGuffin in leading us to other questions and characters of the story. Thus, the explorative attitude of this emblematic opening shot followed by the next scenes' turn slowly prepares the viewer to pitch upon some signs of dirty, hidden secrets without getting answers and without finding every piece of a big, troubling puzzle.

Roman, the guy from the city, arriving from Bucharest to overtake his rightful heritage of this waste, huge Dobrudgean land, confronts this exactly same topology of disturbing surface and silent depth. He is the one who initiates the other exploration, in order to find out the reason behind some disquieting nocturnal actions around (t)his land, and later, to understand the laws

which rule this strange provincial universe, where 'calling the Police' in the best case ends in the arrival of an old, aggressive dog. Armoured with his jeep, mobile phone, modern rationality and urban survival strategies, the young city guy has to face the shadows of an unknown, hardly discoverable past and the undemolishable power relations of the local mafia.

While this seemingly no-man's land slowly gets threatening and foreshadowed by crime, Roman has to understand that this hidden, strong hierarchy is part of his heritage. Past here does not express itself in material traces of some crumbly, old buildings or decayed roads, but a secret relationship between some still faceless, criminal forces. Mirică here sets a clear and pessimistic generational division: the inherited land comes with bargains and deals set by the previous generation, and cannot be reset by the newcomers. Young people, like Roman (see also the naïve officer working near Hogas at the police station) do not own the right tools and means to change old systems and structures.

Compared to other recent Romanian films, Mirică takes an alternative path by mixing authorial tone with western and thriller genre conventions. The slow cinematic mood and rhythm of *Dogs'* first part with long takes, no actions and minimal dialogues seems to intensify Roman's attitude of exploration, lack of information, finally arriving to the decision of selling this heavy, dubious heritage, and leaving behind the ambition to unmask the background machinations. What seems to be lost in this slower first part of the movie, is gained back by a strong, powerful atmosphere. The enigmatic characters, laconic dialogues and lack of plot twists outline an almost tactile tension that is imploded in a cathartic, although calculable final scene.

Mirică's contemporary story is a pessimistic one, not because of the final victory of the Bad or because of the defeated Young. The indifference, emotionlessness, even calmness of the mafia leader is more than a genre panel, and it is more disturbing than his triumph, because it tells about the success of resistance to change. *Dogs* is not about the heavy heritage of communism, it is about crime that survived communism and survives democracy, too – a powerful continuity, independent of changing political systems.

Elżbieta Durys
Polish Crime Fiction After 1989

As it was in other countries of the Soviet Block, before 1989 the crime cinema had an extremely difficult, if not impossible, way to the screens in Poland. The state, which controlled this area of creative activity, did not support these kinds of projects primarily due to the ideological reasons. As a country representing the Soviet Block, Poland was obliged to set an example. According to this reasoning, in a Communist society there were no pathologies and aberrations, and thus no violence and crime which would inform crime fictions. Usually, in good crime stories, one can meet a law enforcement figure who is ethically ambiguous. The most interesting are those detectives who provoke ambivalent feeling among the viewers (like Popeye Doyle, one of the main protagonists of William Friedkin's *The French Connection* [1971]). If they do not balance on the edge of law or sell themselves cooperating with criminals, they get broken by an evil that they should fight with. The censorship, however, did not give consent to such an image of a police officer.

Notwithstanding, in the 1960s a cycle of so-called milicja movies emerged. These include *Touch of the Night* (*Dotknęcie nocy*, 1961, dir. Stanisław Bareja), *The Criminal and the Maiden* (*Zbrodniarz i panna*, 1963, dir. Janusz Nasfeter) and *The Criminal Who Stole a Crime* (*Zbrodniarz, który ukradł zbrodnię*, 1969, dir. Janusz Majewski). Guided mainly by propaganda goals, milicja movies were to improve the image of the police in Polish society, increase confidence in officers as well as promote their infallibility. Milicja movies were very popular, however, due to different reasons. They were made by very good professionals, and famous actors (Zbigniew Cybulski, Tadeusz Janczar, Zygmunt Hübner among others) were cast as main protagonists. During the next decades one could spot several interesting productions that used the crime formulas, i.e. *Excuse Me, Is It Here They Beat up People?* (*Przepraszam, czy tu biją*, 1976, dir. Marek Piwowski), *"Ann" and Vampire* (*Anna i wampir*, 1981, dir. Janusz Kidawa) or *Kill Me, Cop* (*Zabij mnie, glino*, 1987, dir. Jacek Bromski). However, they did not form a separate strand within Polish cinema of that period.

Despite the abolition of censorship in 1990, the situation in Polish cinema has not changed much in this respect after 1989. Every now and then crime movies were produced but they did not form a separate strand within Polish cinema. Released in 1992, *Pigs* (*Psy*) by Władysław Pasikowski, despite the fact that it combined elements of genre formulas (both cop and gangster cinema) with social issues (fears and anxieties of Polish society caused by political

and economic transformation), it remains an exception. Despite two movies from the beginning of his career – after *Pigs* the director made *Pigs 2: The Last Blood* (*Psy 2: Ostatnia krew*, 1994) – Pasikowski abandoned cop and gangster cinema conventions for more than twenty years. In 2018 his new cop movie *PitBull: The Last Pig* (*PitBull: Ostatni pies*) is to be released.

It should be noted, however, that in the meantime Władysław Pasikowski was director of one of the most critically acclaimed cop TV series. *Cop* (2003–2008) consisted only of two seasons but combined in a skilful manner elements typical for Polish culture, i.e. a disillusioned protagonist, a lone wolf eager to fight for law and order in a society plunged into chaos. Chronologically earlier, because screened between 1995 and 1999, equally important was *Extradition* [*Ekstradycja*] directed by Wojciech Wójcik. This TV series, extremely popular among Polish viewers, also presented a figure of a lone wolf fighting with organised crime that permeated all the layers of Polish society.

In 2005 the new act on cinema was introduced followed by the establishment of the Polish Film Institute. Since then on Polish cinema was dominated by historical movies and romantic comedies. Directors like the Czech David Ondrícek in his movie *In the Shadow* (*Ve stínu*, 2012) or the Slovak Michal Kollar in his *Red Captain* (*Rudý kapitan/Červený kapitán*, 2016) openly referred to *film noir* conventions to present historical events, Polish movie makers, however, preferred more traditional approach. Films like *Red Spider* (*Czerwony pająk*, 2015, Marcin Koszałka) or *I'm a Killer* (*Jestem mordercą*, 2016, Maciej Pieprzyca) should be treated as exceptions in this respect. The latter uses genre conventions openly to comment on the Communist system. Only after 2010 and the *Nordic Noir* craze that went through the entire Europe, Polish directors became more eager to use crime genres conventions. In this context *Jeziorak* (2014, Michał Otłowski), *A Grain of Truth* (*Ziarno prawdy*, 2015, Borys Lankosz) or *Servant of God* (*Sługi Boże*, 2016, Mariusz Gawryś) are worth mentioning.

While discussing contemporary Polish crime cinema, the extreme popularity of Patryk Vega's movies should be noted. Born in 1977, the self-taught film director, writer and producer hit the Polish screens with his *PitBull* in 2005. The movie can be perceived within the context of a formula developed by Pasikowski at the beginning of the 1990s. Vega uses the conventions of cop cinema, gangster movies as well as thrillers in his productions. At the same time he declares in the interviews that he fills the conventions with the material he collects from reality.

Despite the fact that his movies and TV series, shot in a dizzying pace, remain underdeveloped in terms of both narrative and style, and critics seem offended by the profanity and stereotypes, Vega's movies are box office hits, attracting up to 700,000 at the opening weekend.

One more interesting phenomenon can be noticed in the context of Polish crime cinema after 2010. Often labelled as thrillers, conspiracy paranoid movies also had marked their presence. From the critical perspective it is important to mention *Entanglement* (*Uwikłanie*, 2011, Jacek Bromski), *Traffic Department* (*Drogówka*, 2013, Wojciech Smarzowski), *Closed Circuit* (*Układ zamknięty*, 2013, Ryszard Bugajski), and *Secret Wars* (*Służby specjalne*, 2014, Patryk Vega). They refer to the American cycle of conspiracy paranoid films of the 1970s. Contemporary political events serve as a background of a story of an individual who gets involved in corruption and crime. These movies can be read as a form of commentary or safety valve for social dissatisfaction. It is worth noting, in this context, one of the most famous, but also the least successful Polish conspiracy paranoid movies up to this day: *Smoleńsk* (2016) by Antoni Krauze. The plane crash of April 2010, during which representatives of Polish government were killed on their way to Katyń where they were to commemorate Polish officers murdered by NKVD in 1941, becomes a pretext to present right wing conspiracy theories on the enslavement of the Polish nation and state.

It seems that Polish cinema after 1989 did not make the most of the potential of film genres, especially of crime cinema. Few exceptions, like Władysław Pasikowski's *Pigs*, have not managed to convince Polish film directors to take advantage of forms and formulas elaborated on the American ground.

Balázs Varga
Eastern Crime Wave and Its Social and Cultural Intersections

In an important scene of *The Whiskey Bandit* (Antal Nimród, 2017) the title character states: "In different countries, they use different words to "make money." Americans, for example, make money, the French win it – and we, Hungarians, are looking for money." This quotation (in addition to being a well-known Hungarian saying) links some of the film's key topics. First of all, the global-local dynamics as crime (i.e. theft, robbery, etc.) is universal, yet it has its

local character. Secondly, there is a strong but problematic relationship between social elevation, enrichment and crime. And finally, the issue of individualism.

The current wave of Eastern European crime films clearly reflects and presents the questions of here-and-now: local aspects of global trends and problems. Crime stories are usually the stories of upward social mobility and enrichment. The relationship between moral/social norms and crime, individuality, private property ("money making") and upward social mobility is quite definite. It is clear that these topics are particularly important in such transitional times as post-socialist transformation. Crime films address topics and values (individuality, private property, self-made success) that were de-emphasised or stigmatised as "capitalist" during socialism. It is not by chance that so many recent Eastern European crime film discuss the 1990s (i.e. post-socialist transformation period) and/or are based on true stories or actual events (the Slovak-Czech-Polish *Red Captain* [*Červený kapitán,* Michal Kollár, 2016], the Czech *Kidnapping* [*Únos*, Mariana Čengelová-Solčanská, 2017] and *Kajínek* [Petr Jakl, 2010] or the aforementioned Hungarian *The Whiskey Bandit*). The first decade of post-socialism, the decade of "original capital accumulation" obviously offers for discussion the problems of continuation and renewal, system change and social mobility.

Another important context of this trend is the turn towards more mainstream narratives and genre patterns in contemporary Eastern European film cultures. Many of the directors of these genre experiments, crime films and TV series have previously been known for remarkable dramas and arthouse films. Such as Kornél Mundruczó with *White God* (*Fehér isten*, 2014) and *Jupiter's Moon* (*Jupiter holdja,* 2017), or Marian Crișan with *Orizont* (2015) and the television series *Silent Valley*. Or we could mention the Czech filmmaker, Alice Nellis who is the co-director of the striking Czech HBO-produced TV series, *Wasteland* (*Pustina*, 2016). But of course we could not forget about those young filmmakers who begun their career in the attraction of American films like Attila Gigor or Áron Mátyássy from Hungary or the Romanian Bogdan Mirică who is behind the HBO-produced television series *Shadows* and is the director of the compelling rural noir, *Dogs*.

It would be too early or an overstatement to say that this recent crime wave is a turning point in the transformation and history of Eastern European cinemas. However, it is certainly a

sign that popular culture has begun to systematically elaborate, understand and re-tell the founding myths of post-socialism.