

# Inside Victims, Outside Offenders: A Case Study on Crime Reporting

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*In political and media rhetoric throughout Europe, migrants and refugees are often linked to crime; especially to gender-based crimes. This paper, focusing on Hungary, examines whether media discourses perpetuate this image and to what extent do other attributes of offenders (such as ethnicity and class) influence the way the media represent those involved in rape cases. The 720 articles sampled for this study were analysed using qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis, with Lindgren and Lundström's model on inside victims/offenders and outside victims/offenders and Nils Christie's theory on ideal victims being applied to the findings. Results show that the media in Hungary is more likely to grant victim status to those who are insiders (Hungarian, white, middle class) when their offenders are outsiders (migrant, Roma, lower class), while socially marginalised offenders are automatically externalised. The paper also shows that marginalised people are externalised collectively, while insiders are externalised individually. The application of Christie's theory further strengthens the relational hypothesis that the ideal (or outsider) offender makes the ideal victim.*

**Keywords:** *crime reporting, media, discourse, victim, offender*

## Introduction

Migrants and refugees in political and media rhetoric are often linked to crimes, and especially to rape, sexual harassment and violence against women. This rhetoric was particularly marked in Hungary after 2015. The national narrative, presuming a connection between migration and sexual violence, occurred in a particularly divisive political space, where events in Hungary further exacerbated this narrative. In 2016 a referendum was held in Hungary which asked: “Do you want the European Union to be able to mandate the obligatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without the approval of the National Assembly?”<sup>2</sup> Campaign posters and adverts across the country displayed the following slogan: “Did you know that since the beginning of the migration crisis, harassment against women in Europe increased dramatically?”<sup>3</sup> Hungarian government politicians regularly

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<sup>2</sup> The Orange Files 2016.

<sup>3</sup> BALOGH 2016.

connected migration to crime and danger.<sup>4</sup> Hungarian-language media framed mass migration as a threat to Hungary and Europe.<sup>5</sup> However, there is a clear disconnect between the political and media narrative and the experienced reality in Hungary. According to official Hungarian statistics, in 2016 249 rape cases were reported, of which 13 listed the offender as foreign.<sup>6</sup> Four of 244 total reported rapes were committed by foreign perpetrators in 2015 and 10 of 163 in 2014.<sup>7</sup> In Hungary, as is the case globally, rape cases are vastly underreported, only 0.6% of the victims report sexual assault and these cases are usually committed by someone the victim knows, not strangers.<sup>8</sup> When sampling cases for this research in 2017, only two cases were reported in Hungary where the perpetrators were migrants. Also both cases took place in the beginning of 2017, meaning that the 2016 campaign was based on the fear of potential cases, rather than actual negative experiences with refugees/migrants in Hungary. It is this paradox that inspired me to research this field further and to gain a deeper understanding of the mediated representation of rape cases with offenders with different ethnic or national background than the majority (foreigner, Roma). Accordingly, this paper seeks to answer the research question: How do ethnicity and nationality impact on the media characterisation of victims and offenders in recent Hungarian rape cases?

### ***Theoretical perspectives***

When analysing the representation of crime, victims and offenders, Niels Christie's (1986) canonical work on *ideal victims*<sup>9</sup> serves as a useful starting point. He identifies six attributes to describe the circumstances of a crime where a legitimate victim status is likely to be granted:

1. the victim is weak
2. the victim carries out a respectable activity when they are attacked, e.g. visiting friends or family members, caring for the elderly, instead of doing something deviant, like drinking, taking drugs, etc.
3. the victim is not to be blamed for what has happened
4. the offender is big and bad
5. the offender and the victim do not have a personal relationship
6. the victim has power and sympathy to claim victim status

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<sup>4</sup> KÖVES 2015: 73–82.

<sup>5</sup> BERNÁTH-MESSING 2017: 33–53.

<sup>6</sup> The precise definition of 'foreign' is not set out in the Hungarian statistics, rather the designation of a 'foreign' offender may include tourists, expats, migrants and refugees, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Index, 1 April 2017.

<sup>8</sup> VAN DIJK et al. 2007.

<sup>9</sup> CHRISTIE 1986: 17–30.

Such idealisation of victims and demonisation of offenders are problematic victimologically and criminologically.<sup>10</sup> Christie's theory also implies that attributes of the offender contribute or withhold in granting a person victim status.

Lindgren and Lundström<sup>11</sup> in their outstanding paper published in *Social Semiotics* in 2010 set up four theoretical categories: 1. inside victims; 2. outside victims; 3. inside offender; and 4. outside offender. This model is particularly applicable to use when characterising the victims and offenders in rape cases when represented in the media. Insiders in Lindgren and Lundström's model are those who are typically 'Swedish' or 'normal' in the sense that they are born Swedes, white, middle class; opposed to outsiders who are migrants, low-class, leading deviant lifestyles. In rape cases, the media often portrays both the victim and the offender in very detailed terms and examining these characterisations, in light of Lindgren and Lundström's model, can help find discursive patterns in media representation. By analysing the patterns, it will reveal whether ethnicity and nationality make any difference when characterising and granting a victim status to someone who had a crime committed against them?

## Methods

Qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis offer especially fruitful ways to examine media articles and to address the research question: how do ethnicity and nationality impact on the media characterisation of victims and offenders in recent Hungarian rape cases? When conducting this analysis of representation in Hungarian media, I examined how individual victims and offenders are portrayed in a select number of chosen cases. I searched for words and phrases intended to describe the characteristics of victims and perpetrators, e.g. adjectives which work as modifiers or attributes, synonyms, and any other language use or phrase which are intended to portray the victim and the perpetrator. All the words intended to characterise the victim or the offender were collected, categorised and analysed.

## Case selection

Although the data collection for this article took place in 2017, this is the first publication of the research which is part of a larger project. When selecting the cases, I focused on incidences over the last fifteen years: 2005–2017. Although from a criminological point of view, very few rape cases occur by a foreign perpetrator in a public place, in the case of migrant offenders, however, often this is the case.

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<sup>10</sup> CHRISTIE 1986: 17–30.

<sup>11</sup> LINDGREN–LUNDSTRÖM 2010: 309–324.

Therefore, I examine cases where the offender barely knew the victim for the sake of comparability. I discuss cases involving sexual intercourse carried out against a person without that person's consent. To further refine the sample, I selected the most discussed cases, using the archives of the official Hungarian News Agency (MTI). Considering the news values<sup>12</sup> in different stories, news editors use tags to be able to search and identify the topic easily. Tagged stories are the most-publicised cases, therefore, I have chosen cases with their own tags. I used three expressions which denote rape/sexualised violence/to rape ("szexuális erőszak", "nemi erőszak", "megerőszakolt") and found nine<sup>13</sup> tagged rape cases. Five were excluded either because of the lack of Hungarian dimension (i.e. they did not take place in Hungary), or the time frame (i.e. they occurred before 2005, the start point for this research), or because the case was about domestic violence. This approach leaves us with a selection of four primary cases which together enable us to address the question: how do ethnicity and nationality impact on the media characterisation of victims and offender in Hungarian rape cases? In three cases the perpetrators are white, Hungarian citizens, in one the offender had a Roma background. To be able to answer the research question fully, I will also analyse cases about offenders with migrant background. When doing so, I will construct a synthetised "case" which is made of articles from the selected media outlets on rape cases with migrant offenders.

## **Sampling**

I examined three different media outlets. All three represent a distinct genre. The first MTI is the official news agency in Hungary. MTI has a vast influence on Hungarian media products both in terms of agenda and content since most of the news sites use it as a source and they often publish the articles without any changes. Second, Index.hu was a market leading political online news portal at the time of the data collection (before its reorganisation in the summer of 2020) with significant resources to cover stories in more depth than the more minimal information provided by the news agency (MTI). The third is Blikk Online, one of the most read tabloids in Hungary, also has significant human resources and an extensive reporter network to gather information on crimes. When sampling articles for each case, different search words were needed at different media outlets, since all have their own archiving system.

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<sup>12</sup> News values are "those criteria that influence, often implicitly, the selection, production and prioritization of events as news. Key news values include drama and action, immediacy, violence, celebrities, and sex" (GREER 2007: 26).

<sup>13</sup> The 2010 Roland Damu rape case, where a well-known Hungarian actor was found guilty of rape in Budapest, also occurred during this period. However, it was not included in the sample as articles on the case were not tagged by editors.

- Case 1. When searching articles for the Nóra Horák case, I used the phrase “murder in Kiskunlacháza” (“kiskunlacházi gyilkosság”<sup>14</sup>) in every sampled media outlet.
- Case 2. To find articles covering the case of Kata Bándy, I used “Bándy Kata” in the MTI and Index.hu archive and “Bándy” in Blikk.hu.
- Case 3. For the freshmen camp rapist case I used “freshmen camp” (“gólyatábori”) in MTI, “freshmen camp rape” (“gólyatábori erőszak”) in Index.hu and “freshmen camp” (“gólyatábor”) in Blikk.hu.
- Case 4. When sampling coverage of the Zsanett case, I used “Museum Boulevard” and “police” (“Múzeum körút; rendőr”<sup>15</sup>) in MTI, “Zsanett case” (“Zsanett ügy”) in Index, and “police” and “Zsanett” (“rendőr; Zsanett”) in Blikk. In the latter, I also applied the snowball method – sampling the articles found linked in the articles I found.
- Case 5. Finally, for the synthesised migrant case, I used “raped” (“megegyeztet”), “rape” (“nemi erőszak”) and “sexualised violence” (“szexuális erőszak”) as searching words in MTI and collected from the findings all articles with “illegal migration” tag which is used by the editors for all articles concerning migration. In Index.hu I used “migrant” and “sexualised violence” (“migráns; szexuális erőszak”) “Syrian” and “sexualised violence” (“szír; szexuális erőszak”) and “Afghan” and “sexualised violence” (“afgán; szexuális erőszak”). In Blikk.hu I used the same searching word combinations as in Index.hu supplemented with “migrant, rape” (“migráns, nemi erőszak”).

For all five cases, the period being sampled was reports from 4 May 2007 – 17 March 2017; altogether I extracted 720 articles to examine (see Table 1 below).

*Table 1: Numbers and distribution of articles sampled for each case analysed*

Case No.	Case title	MTI	Index.hu	Blikk Online	Total
1	Nóra Horák case	46	19	30	95
2	Kata Bándy case	57	60	59	176
3	Freshmen camp rapist case	25	47	42	114
4	Zsanett case	73	86	48	207
5	Offenders with migrant background	38	32	58	128

*Source: Compiled by the author.*

<sup>14</sup> Kiskunlacháza was the Hungarian village where the murder of Nóra Horák took place.

<sup>15</sup> The rape of Zsanett occurred on the Museum Boulevard and was committed by members of the Hungarian police.

## Analysis

### *Nóra Horák case*

The Nóra Horák case was a sexually motivated pedicide. The corpse of Nóra Horák, a 14-year-old female was found on 23 November 2008 in the woods near the local community centre in Kiskunlacháza, a village near Budapest. She was raped and then strangled. Seven months later, on 26 June 2009, the suspect whose ethnic background was white Hungarian was taken into custody and he confessed the murder. He was later sentenced to life imprisonment. During the seven months of the investigation, it was rumoured that three juveniles – all three from the Roma ethnic community of Hungary – had committed the crime. While the police denied that the three Roma juveniles were involved in Nóra’s murder, the rumour could not be stopped and the case had a significant role in the spread of the “Gypsy criminality” as a phrase in the public discourse.

#### *The victim*

Nóra Horák was represented by the media in contradictory terms; on the one hand she was portrayed as an innocent child, a little girl, on the other hand, a tempting young woman. While she was often referred as the *14-year-old*, the *schoolgirl*, the *teenager*, the *girl*, the *little girl* and the *poor little girl*, she was also represented as someone *who attracts men*.<sup>16</sup> It was claimed that she looked *much older than her age*;<sup>17</sup> the perpetrator “was shocked when he figured out that she was only 14”.<sup>18</sup> Also, the tabloid attached pictures to the articles where she was posing and was deemed to look sexy. Index.hu wrote that she was an *excellent hip-hop dancer* and “impressed men”<sup>19</sup> (not schoolboys) as she was *strikingly pretty, attractive, beautiful, friendly and popular*. It revealed that despite her young age she had an ex-boyfriend for ten months and had recently been in love with another. *More boys played around her, wanted to escort her home and someone kissed her at the party*. She went out with her friends regularly and smoked, but apparently, she had respected her parents who told reporters that they had a *harmonic, honest relationship*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> MTI, 6 March 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Index, 6 March 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Blikk, 4 August 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Index, 6 March 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Blikk, 22 April 2010.

### *The offender*

The perpetrator in the Nóra Horák case was described as *scruffy* and *smelly*, he had a *difficult childhood* and a *tragic life*, he had lost his family. According to the tabloid, Blikk Online, this was the reason why *he was on the wrong track*.<sup>21</sup> His life was *lonely* – he only had one short-term girlfriend in his entire life and never let anyone in his home which was in a *dilapidated* condition, *dirty* and *full with trash*. He had *low self-esteem*, he was also *anxious* and was *afraid that he was found to be stupid, ugly or crazy*. He was represented as an *alcoholic* who was always in a pub where he was seen as a *quiet, calm, decent, aloof and tongue-tied young man*. The media also quoted a psychologist who claimed that he had personality disorders and an *unstable personality*, but was totally *compos mentis*. He was said to live a *double life*: he was *calm* and *quiet* in his daily life but in his own fantasy world he was *violent*. In addition, he had *inferiority complex* coupled with a *desire for power*. According to a criminal expert, he may have had some *sexual aberration* as he had a collection of women's panties. Negative attributes, such as *cruel, brutal, tragic, outrageous* and *bestial* (used 26 times in total), were most often used to describe the murder but not the murderer himself. He himself was called *cruel* and *satyr*<sup>22</sup> only once. The media – led by the tabloid, Blikk Online – described him as miserable rather than dangerous. However, the media was not entirely consistent with this characterisation as some phrases used did make him look dangerous; one expert quoted in the reports stated that he had *pleasure when murdering*, he was *hunting* and he was *prone to aggression*. He was also called *unashamed* and a *brigand* once. He had a *strong physique*, being 180 centimetres tall and weighing 100 kilograms and this represented a *significant dominance* in comparison to the victim. Nonetheless, he was afraid of *tough guys* in prison.

### ***Kata Bándy case***

25-year-old police psychologist, Kata Bándy was on her way home from a nightclub when she disappeared in the city of Pécs, in southern Hungary. Her body was found after a countrywide search lasting 3 days. Based on DNA samples found on the body the police identified a potential offender. Four days later, the suspect was captured while trying to escape the country; shortly after his capture, both his identity and his ethnic background (Roma) became publicly known. The suspect, László Péntek, was taken into custody where he confessed the murder. According to his confession he was drunk and under the effects of synthetic drugs when he committed the murder. He confessed that he wanted to have sex with the victim, but she refused and resisted. The attacker started strangling her and she rolled into a ditch during

<sup>21</sup> Blikk, 19 April 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Satyr is metaphorically used for men whose sexual desire is stronger than their sense of decency.

the scuffle. He stated in his confession that when he left the scene, he did not realise that the victim was dead. In the court of first instance, Péntek was sentenced to life imprisonment. He later appealed and was sentenced to forty years imprisonment.

### *The victim*

Kata Bándy possessed everything to qualify as an ideal victim; she was pictured in the media as *very pretty, charming, good-looking, strikingly beautiful, likable, kind, smiling, happy, vivacious, young girl*. Her personality was described as *shy, solid, quiet but direct and definite*. The Minister of Human Capacities, Zoltán Balog claimed that she was *gentle, loved people, and God created her to help*.<sup>23</sup> She had a secure family background with a select few people who she was really close to, *she lived her life conservative, in her intimate relationships she was faithful, she did not live a wild life and was not a party animal*.<sup>24</sup> She was also represented as very intelligent and this was described in several ways: *she was the reason and prudence herself*,<sup>25</sup> *she was fighting for her life by her intelligent, not by force*,<sup>26</sup> *she was exceptionally clever*,<sup>27</sup> *aimed to gain doctorate*,<sup>28</sup> *she was the smartest among everyone and solved all situations*.<sup>29</sup> Immediately after her disappearance, thousands of people all over the country tried to help to find her<sup>30</sup> and when they found her body the nation began to mourn. In media she was explicitly called “one of us”.<sup>31</sup>

### *The offender*

The adjectives and synonyms used to describe the perpetrator, László Péntek, remained the same before and after his identity was revealed: *cruel, cold blooded, aberrant, sex offender, satyr, “pleasure murderer” (kéjgyilkos)*. Yet later the intensity and specificity augmented – he was also called *prisoner, rapist, ‘Roma criminal’, womaniser and criminal*. Beyond these attributes and synonyms which referred to the crime he committed, his character was described in very detailed terms. It was mentioned that *he lived through traumas in his childhood, he was also said to be affectionless (but not neurotic)*, all these, however, seemingly did not serve as an excuse to be on the wrong track, in contrast to the perpetrator in the Nóra Horák case. In fact, he was said to be

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<sup>23</sup> Index, 23 July 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Blikk, 10 July 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Blikk, 10 July 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Blikk, 30 December 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Blikk, 19 February 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Blikk, 19 February 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Index, 10 July 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Index, 10 July 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Index, 19 July 2012b.



“like this” (*bad, evil*) from his childhood,<sup>32</sup> someone else claimed that it began in fourth or fifth grade.<sup>33</sup> He lived in poor conditions (*as a squatter; the house was in terrible state*) and this was represented as his fault. The media represented him as unemployed, he only had *occasional works as an unskilled worker on constructions, lumberman, tattoo maker and he “collected metals” (vasazott)*.<sup>34</sup> He also had stolen and robbed from people, “he had stolen from his own girlfriend”.<sup>35</sup> He had “alarmingly empty everyday life”.<sup>36</sup> He was represented as a drug user who also drank a lot. He was represented as *a totally useless member of the society; the judge in his trial overtly said this and called him an unscrupulous criminal; he was said to be someone who is incapable of normal, civilised coexistence*.<sup>37</sup> He was also said to be a womaniser, he had many partners and was proud of his sex life. He was represented as someone *who cannot stop his instincts* (cf. the migrant offenders), *has no moral brakes, and has outbursts*. He was portrayed as if he were born to be a criminal: “eleven times convicted man” phrase was used as an epithet and the media concluded that he “had the opportunity to get to know law enforcement and justice system”<sup>38</sup> since he spent years in prison earlier. Some of the synonyms used for him were the *man previously convicted, experienced criminal, prisoner* and he was said to be *the cool kid in jail*. He was represented as someone bound to be in prison: “While he was outside, he was in bad shape, was scruffy with musty smell but he bloomed in custody, he arrives to his trials relaxed, muscular, freshly shaved, with styled hair, wore pretty watch and branded shoes.”<sup>39</sup>

Not only was he represented as *aggressive* and *dangerous* but his family were also; his mother was seen to trivialise domestic violence when she said a couple of slaps are normal in every family when talking about him beating his ex-girlfriend. In addition, according to the media, his cousin was also investigated and he was similarly represented as a violent person who threatened, beat and choked his ex-girlfriend. Representing the offender’s family as a violent one could have been interpreted as a part of his own trauma, but media representations did not explain his experiences of family violence through this lens at all, rather the portrayal suggested that violence is normal within Roma families. Indeed from the very outset, as his ethnic background was revealed at the time of his capture, the media represented him using negative ethnic tropes: he was called a “Gypsy criminal” by a (far-right) politician, and Péntek himself stated that the police told him: “You stinky Gypsy, Kata would have never talked to you.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Index, 19 July 2012a.

<sup>33</sup> Index, 19 July 2012a.

<sup>34</sup> Metal collecting is a typical economic activity among very poor people and in Hungary mostly done by Roma people, where they collect iron and bring it to waste recovery centres for payment.

<sup>35</sup> Index, 19 July 2012a.

<sup>36</sup> Index, 19 February 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Index, 5 April 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Index, 18 February 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Blikk, 28 August 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Index, 18 February 2013.

## ***Freshmen camp rapist case***

In August 2014, a female first year university student (a freshman) was raped at a freshmen camp in Hungary. According to the victim she was looking for a friend when she ran into the camp photographer, then she had a blackout. Later when she regained consciousness, she had anoxia as a result of strangling and her eyes and jaw were badly bruised. She reported the attack and the 40-year-old photographer was taken in custody. It was subsequently revealed that he took pictures of the attack with the intention to blackmail the victim. According to the prosecution he attacked, choked, punched, threatened and raped the student. Two additional offenses were made against the attacker as the photos of her were made without her permission and with the intention of blackmailing her. He was sentenced to nine years in prison. After this case became public, two other cases were revealed from other freshmen camps in Hungary.

### *The victim*

In the freshmen camp rapist case, the audience received surprisingly little information on the victim, she was not blamed nor questioned. Nonetheless, in the media coverage of the case the blame was put on the freshmen camps, and the organisers, but the freshman victim herself was not blamed for being there explicitly.

### *The offender*

The freshmen camp rapist's character was discussed in more detail than the victim's, but not as much as the offenders in the other cases examined here. He was referred as *the freshmen camp's satyr, rapist, suspected photographer, perverted photographer, recidivist sex offender, a real sex predator*. On the one hand, he was represented as an *aberrant, sick person who has a dark past*; he was punished two times previously for rape and sexual assault, had spent five years in prison where he behaved *exemplarily*. According to Blikk.hu, he seemed to get back on the right track and started a new life but now he *let space to his perverted desires again*.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, he was represented as a *popular, party face who was a good lover and had a very nice, cool and joyful personality*. He was said to be a *good actor, a manipulator who easily gained people's trust and mesmerised those in his environment*.

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<sup>41</sup> Blikk, 2 September 2014.

## Zsanett case

Zsanett E. was a 21-year-old female who reported that she was raped by two police officers on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 2007. She claimed that she was stopped by five officers for a roadside check in Budapest. The officers took her in a dark alley and two of them raped her while the other three watched. After the rape, she was escorted home and twenty thousand forints (about 50 Euro) was taken from her. She filed a complaint against the unknown police perpetrators. It soon turned out who was on duty in the particular area at that time and Zsanett E. was able to identify the five police officers involved. After the identification, the offending officers were suspended, yet in January 2008 they were all reinstated. Ultimately, the prosecution dismissed the case before going to trial due to a lack of evidence that a crime had been committed. Zsanett brought the case to court anyway as a private prosecution. After multiple trials, the Court acquitted the five officers from the accusations of sexual crime, violations of personal freedom, extortion and bribery. According to the Budapest Capital Regional Court of Appeal, there was a lack of evidence to prove the claims of Zsanett E. or the claim of the police officers. Meanwhile, criminal proceedings were brought against Zsanett E. for false accusations. Her case was later suspended and eventually dropped.

### *The victim*

Despite the vast coverage of the case, readers were given very little information on Zsanett and her private and professional life was entirely unrevealed. It is also surprising that the media did not use direct adjectives to characterise the victim but rather to describe her character. However, despite the fact she was the victim, she was often referred as the *accused* or the *suspect*. The news outlets found out that she had “embezzled”<sup>42</sup> from her former working place and this story featured many times. Similarly, the story of her allegedly threatening a witness kept repeating in media coverage. In connection to the case, she was repeatedly accused in the press of making false accusation. In contrast, the accused police officers were referred to as *innocent* ten times. During the months of the investigation, the media systematically dismantled Zsanett’s credibility. Headlines and sub-headings questioning her credibility dominated the coverage: “She likes to be in focus”,<sup>43</sup> “Not even her ex-boyfriend believes in Zsanett’s story”,<sup>44</sup> “Fantasy on the rape”,<sup>45</sup> “Controversial story of Zsanett”.<sup>46</sup> Also, authorities gave statements to corroborate that she was lying:

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<sup>42</sup> Blikk, 8 October 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009a.

<sup>44</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009b.

<sup>45</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009c.

<sup>46</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009c.

“That could not happen, none of the police would do such thing”<sup>47</sup> (a police officer); “I wish we had so many patrols that five of them could sit in one car”<sup>48</sup> (police chief); “I heard that she is the girlfriend of the pop-band called Hooligans, which is considered to be against the police. This is nonsense, she must hate the police for some reason”<sup>49</sup> (an accused police officer). Not only was her credibility questioned but also the reporting of rape more widely was undermined: “The alleged violence begins with consent”<sup>50</sup> (the lawyer of an officer); “If this goes on, not one boss, teacher or grumpy grandfather will be safe, because crowds of women will begin to accuse rape.”<sup>51</sup> (Havas Henrik, a celebrated media person); “I would look behind to check who is fucking me from behind”<sup>52</sup> (András Bánó, reporter). Moreover, Zsanett’s personal morality was attacked again and again by characterising her as promiscuous. From the very beginning, her own sexual attitude was at stake: the lawyer of one officer said that “the lady [Zsanett] is not famous for what the English ladies are”.<sup>53</sup> The night she was raped, she was with a member of a band called Hooligans. She was interpreted as a groupie who had *some sex, flirt* and a *short romance* with a celebrity.<sup>54</sup> Finally, in her case the details of the rape were made public. “I was raped from behind while forced to engage in oral sex with the other officer”<sup>55</sup> (Zsanett). These technical details both alienate the victim from the “normal” but also objectify the victim discursively. This objectification evolves distance between the readers and the victim<sup>56</sup> by the gaze.<sup>57</sup>

### *The offenders*

The portrayal of the police officers changed during the process; at the beginning they were represented as *brutal* officers, but when they and their fiancées started to talk to the press (mostly the tabloid news outlet – Blikk Online) they suddenly became ordinary people who had been *slandered*. They were represented as *model officers*,<sup>58</sup> *exemplary fathers*<sup>59</sup> and *fiancés*<sup>60</sup> who lived an ordinary life; one officer, a father, *used to watch football games with his son*,<sup>61</sup> three of them *were planning their weddings*, they

<sup>47</sup> Index, 5 June 2007.

<sup>48</sup> Index, 31 May 2007.

<sup>49</sup> Index, 17 November 2008.

<sup>50</sup> Index, 1 June 2007.

<sup>51</sup> Index, 25 June 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Index, 25 June 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Index, 20 September 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009b.

<sup>55</sup> Index, 17 May 2007.

<sup>56</sup> LINDGREN–LUNDSTRÖM 2010: 309–324.

<sup>57</sup> SARTRE 1966.

<sup>58</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009e.

<sup>59</sup> Index, 19 May 2007.

<sup>60</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009e.

<sup>61</sup> Index, 19 May 2007.

went to church for preparation.<sup>62</sup> They testified and claimed in the press that they were *innocent*. The five officers were taken to pre-trial detention and were suspended. As a result their *normal, harmonic family life* was overturned, they became unemployed and thus had to endure a *lower standard of living, spend the money they saved for the wedding*,<sup>63</sup> *take the help of their families*,<sup>64</sup> etc. On reflection, it seems there was a discernible turning point in the public and media discourse. Meanwhile Zsanett was represented as guilty, incredible, promiscuous and deviant, the *brutal* police officers were repainted as likable, common people who *spent the holidays by the sea*,<sup>65</sup> *liked to eat homemade stuffed chicken*,<sup>66</sup> just like ‘us’.

### **Cases of migrants**

This last case is a little different than the previous ones since this *case* was compiled from many cases where the media identified or labelled the offender as being a migrant.<sup>67</sup> This was necessary as only two cases happened in Hungary during the time period being analysed and both cases only resulted in two short articles, not sufficient for an in-depth analysis. Therefore, I decided to collect other cases which have connections to Hungary (e.g. a Hungarian victim) or were just interesting for the Hungarian media for some reason. As expected, none of the characters of either the offenders or victims were discussed in detail; in fact, usually only the age and the nationality of both were revealed. This lack of detail is not surprising since when a criminal case becomes a newsworthy topic, reporters try to uncover new details as the story goes on. However, in this instance, it is not a concrete case we are dealing with, rather an issue or a phenomenon – the assumption of a connection between migration and sexual violence – that was in focus and as such the newsrooms were reporting on multiple cases concurrently. It was not the details of those involved in the cases per se, but the issues invoked by the cases that was deemed newsworthy. Consequently, most articles classified in the *news* genre which aim to answer the five basic questions: what, who, when, where and why in a shortest possible way.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, I used the same methodology in this case as well and collected adjectives, synonyms and phrases concerning the perpetrators, the victims and the crimes.

In Hungary, there were only two reported rape cases during the sampling period (4 May 2007 – 17 March 2017) where the perpetrator was a migrant. Nonetheless,

<sup>62</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009e.

<sup>63</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009d.

<sup>64</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009e.

<sup>65</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009e.

<sup>66</sup> Blikk, 21 January 2009e.

<sup>67</sup> I followed the media definition of migrant for this, in that I did not set out with a pre-set definition of migrant, rather I included cases where media reporting labelled the offender as being a migrant.

<sup>68</sup> HORSTI 2007: 145–161.

stories about rape cases with migrant offenders are common in Hungarian news as the media often reports about international cases, mostly focusing on German rape and sexual assault cases. The Hungarian media, however, barely pays attention to international cases concerning violence against women in general, only if the perpetrator has migrant background.

### *The victims*

The victims in the sampled articles were usually young (students, teenagers or sometimes even underage), very old or in vulnerable position (e.g. a victim used a wheelchair). The fact that the victims' ages vary greatly, and no other information is available reinforces the feeling that any one of "us" can be a victim of migrants.<sup>69</sup> Their innocence was emphasised as well as their defenceless. Some attributes referred to the victim status, for example *brutally beaten, bloody, left in her panty and a towel, having physical and mental injury, shocked, depressed, broken, intimidated, crying*. Their background was discussed in quite general terms: one child victim lived in poor conditions and used to be in state care, one woman worked as a cleaner, one young girl was a volunteer working with refugees, lived in a Christian dormitory and her father was a lawyer at the European Commission, another victim was a worker of the Red Cross, one mother of three was victimised too, one Hungarian victim worked in Malta, another victim was on her way home from work. Again, this suggests that every one of "us" could be victimised.

### *The offender*

In the case of perpetrators, the most common attributes that were reported were their age and nationality. Nevertheless, it seemed to be irrelevant where they were actually from, more important is that they were foreign, aliens, outsiders; they were often described as *Muslim-looking* or *North African-looking*, or just "hell knows where they came from".<sup>70</sup> Migrants and refugees were portrayed as unemployed idlers who are "sitting around bored and tamping their phones".<sup>71</sup> There were a surprisingly high number of juvenile offenders, but none were represented as being underage or described as being a teenager or a child. In fact, most adjectives and attributes referred to danger caused by them: they were said to be *rough, violent, disrespectful with police, they look angry* and *dangerous*, they form *furious, unrestrained, aggressive crowds*<sup>72</sup> and

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<sup>69</sup> LINDGREN–LUNDSTRÖM 2010: 309–324.

<sup>70</sup> Blikk, 13 February 2017.

<sup>71</sup> MTI, 23 September 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Blikk, 7 January 2016.

*violent, unbridled hordes*,<sup>73</sup> once even *policemen were forced to flee*.<sup>74</sup> Also, the places they were staying at were considered to be *suspicious neighbourhoods*.<sup>75</sup> Offenders with migrant background were often portrayed as drunk whose *sexual instincts is out of control*.<sup>76</sup> Synonyms used are *foreign, alien, offender* and *monsters*.

When discussing the cases, the media stated that they are *shocking, astonishing, severe, disgusting, reprehensible, brutal, shameful, chaotic, particularly cruel, scandalous, horrid, disgraceful, terrible, horrible, indescribable* and *indignation generating*. Blikk.hu further dramatised the incidents; they wrote about *migrant trouble*,<sup>77</sup> *suspended civilisation*,<sup>78</sup> *Austrian panic*,<sup>79</sup> statistics which were *so formidable as if it were in a war zone*.<sup>80</sup> According to Blikk.hu the *fear in Malta was justifiable* after the rape of a Hungarian woman which is a worrying sign: *from now on Maltese must calculate with such cases and prepare the changes in the holiday paradise*,<sup>81</sup> *they can now see the dark side of migration*.<sup>82</sup>

## Discussion

A substantial number of articles were analysed for this study, as discussed in the *Methods* section; however, this selection only covers three media outlets in Hungary. The outlets were chosen carefully to represent a range of genres, but they are far from the whole media representation of these cases. Furthermore, the media is just one of the actors shaping and influencing discourses on these matters. Another limitation of this research is that there are other determinants affecting the representation of these cases. For example, the cases happened in different years and public sentiment changes over time. To mitigate this effect, I chose the cases within a 10-year time frame. While determinants other than ethnicity, nationality, class could be analysed, these were chosen because there is both theory and empirical research about the effect of these determinants. Indeed, as discussed below, the findings of this research are consistent with both theoretical and empirical findings about how ethnicity, nationality and class shape media representation of rape cases.

As the analysed cases show, the characterisation of victims and offenders has many different angles. While these characterisations may differ from article to article, from case to case and across media outlets, one can still find discursive patterns when reading the articles together and carefully. Greer claims that the media have learned

<sup>73</sup> Blikk, 7 January 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Blikk, 26 January 2016.

<sup>75</sup> MTI, 2 September 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Blikk, 4 September 2016.

<sup>77</sup> MTI, 27 January 2016.

<sup>78</sup> Blikk, 7 January 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Blikk, 5 May 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Blikk, 5 February 2016.

<sup>81</sup> Blikk, 9 February 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Blikk, 9 February 2016.

to “do race” but not yet *class*.<sup>83</sup> In the media representation of the examined cases, journalists never connect offenders’ ethnic background to the crime, only when citing some politicians or other actors. Such statements about class work in more complex ways, as will be discussed shortly. Individual journalists may or may not consciously intend to construct such narratives, indeed in some articles they are even self-reflective on these representations. Nevertheless, applying critical discursive analysis can show how hegemonic patterns are protected in media discourse. With Thompson’s terms, media works ideologically when supporting solidified patterns of power and certain hegemonic interests.<sup>84</sup> Media and journalists have their own agendas determined by newsworthiness,<sup>85</sup> commercial and other market interests so to some extent they must meet mainstream social expectations, for these reasons journalists cannot greatly differ from mainstream discourse.<sup>86</sup> Giving an example from the above cases, none of the media outlets tried to portray Kata Bándy’s killer differently. It would be unacceptable to even suggest that he is not born evil – this became and was the mainstream narrative and thus all had to adhere to it.

As mentioned earlier, Lindgren and Lundström set up four categories (inside victim, inside offender, outside victim, outside offender) to show how discourses maintain hegemonic patterns. In the authors’ terms, outsiders (both outside victims and outside offenders) are those people who can be collectively distanced from average Swedes, from what “normal Swedish” is, insiders (inside victims and inside offenders), however, are people who are normatively part of the Swedish society.<sup>87</sup> When applied to the Hungarian context, insiders are those who are of white Hungarian ethnicity, middle class, leading a “normal” (non-deviant) life, while outsiders are migrants, Roma, lower class, deviants. Offenders are typically represented in externalised tropes, while “victim images are constructed in terms of inclusion”.<sup>88</sup> Accordingly, the media has no problems when it comes to cases with inside victims and outside offenders – they fit the expected pattern. Inside offenders and outside victims, however, challenge hegemonic patterns and the socio-economic interests associated and embedded in this hegemony; media outlets themselves are beholden to the socio-economic interests that pay, fund or own them directly or indirectly, etc. Since inside offenders cannot be put in a role where they can collectively be judged to be outsiders, media discourses alienate these offenders individually by representing them as people who live double-life, “normal” on the surface but actually rather deviants.

The Hungarian case studies above support Lindgren and Lundström’s theory perfectly. In the five cases there are two outside offenders; the migrant offenders and László Péntek, the rapist and killer in the Kata Bándy case. In the synthesised

<sup>83</sup> GREER 2007: 20–49.

<sup>84</sup> THOMPSON 1990.

<sup>85</sup> DAVIES 2011: 36–62.

<sup>86</sup> THOMPSON 1990.

<sup>87</sup> LINDGREN–LUNDSTRÖM 2010: 309–324.

<sup>88</sup> LINDGREN–LUNDSTRÖM 2010: 309–324.



migrant case, the nationality of the offenders was stated in every article if it was known. If it was not, they were referred as ‘Muslim-looking’ or ‘North African-looking’. They were represented as dangerous aliens as a group who are unable to control their sexual instincts, thus being a general threat to European women. So migrant offenders were collectively distanced. The same distancing happened in the Kata Bándy case where the offender had a Roma background. While his victim, Kata Bándy, became the most idealised victims of all the cases, he was represented as the incarnate evil. The contrast between victim and offender was so sharp that is, the media narrative made it impossible not to sympathise with the victim and to hate the offender. It is more striking when comparing the case to the Nóra Horák case. Both storylines are very similar; a female disappeared, within few days their bodies were found, both cases ended up with murders followed by nationwide chase for the offenders. However, there was a significant difference – the victim in the Nóra Horák case was underage. Theoretically, this would raise her to the top of the *hierarchy of innocence*<sup>89</sup> and as such to the top of the *hierarchy of victims*.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, her story received much less attention than Kata Bándy’s. As the analysis above shows, the contrast between Nóra Horák and her offender was not as distinct as in the Kata Bándy case. Since, the offender was an average Hungarian man, the media had harder time to alienate him. When doing so, the offender’s personal circumstances were highlighted rather than his origin (ethnicity, nationality, culture). Nóra Horák was 14 years old but she was rather represented as an attractive woman than a child or a teenager, the offender, on the other hand, was represented more often as being miserable than evil. Thus, the polarisation of the two characters was not so contrasting as in the Kata Bándy case.

In the freshmen camp case, the method of distancing the offender was very similar to the Nóra Horák case. The freshmen camp rapist was an educated, middle class, white man. While, distancing migrants and the Roma offender was more straightforward, alienating Nóra Horák’s offender was harder since he was a white, Hungarian man; however, he was uneducated and low class thus the media constructed the liminal image of him as miserable, defective rather than evil. For the media to externalise the freshmen camp rapist was rather more challenging. He was represented as a pervert, not evil like László Péntek in the Kata Bándy case, nor miserable like Nóra Horák’s killer. In the freshman rapist case, the responsibility was shifted slightly to the organisers of the camp, and generally the sexualised and sexist vibe of these camps. Indeed, none of the other offenders in the other cases were able to talk in the media and give their own point of view, other than the freshman rapist and the police officers. Thus, it seems that the media, editors and journalists overtly sympathise and identify with middle class people regardless how they act while excluding lower class people by not giving them the chance to represent themselves or their side of

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<sup>89</sup> MOELLER 2002: 36–56.

<sup>90</sup> GREER 2007: 20–49.

the story. As such, the media reproduces marginalisation, instead of fulfilling its normative role and representing the various social, economic and cultural levels of society, bearing in mind different interests and points of view.<sup>91</sup> When Greer claims that media have learned to “do race”, he also argues that “not yet *class*”.<sup>92</sup> This is also shown in this analysis; the more socio-economically marginalised an offender is, the worse they are portrayed in the media and vice versa. The Zsanett case is extreme even within this framework of interpretation. The offenders were five police officers who had the backing of various tiers of authority and possessed the access and the power to present themselves as innocent. The media did not even try to distance the officers, yet they did repeatedly with the victim by characterising her as unreliable, promiscuous, guilty and by silencing her story from the narrative. While the officers were talking to the press about their daily routines, eating habits, wedding, marriage and average lives, Zsanett was silenced and her credibility was questioned again and again. While representing the officers as “one of us”, the media depicted the victim as promiscuous, incredulous and guilty, someone who is capable of being a false witness. The officers were recast from dangerous predators to exemplary citizens step by step, meanwhile the victim was totally alienated from what is thought to be the “normal” Hungarian female. She went through a similar externalisation<sup>93</sup> as the inside offenders did in the other cases. Therefore, this case is extreme in that sense that externalisation happened to the victim not the offenders and the process of democratisation<sup>94</sup> happened to the offenders not the victim.

When considering the attributes connected to victim status<sup>95</sup> that Christie discusses, the results are similar to those shown in Lindgren and Lundström’s model: the more externalised the offenders are, the more idealised the victims become. When Christie describes the ideal victim, he mentions the offender in half of the attributes. The offenders need to have some (negative) attributes themselves for the audience to be able to sympathise with the victims. In other words, the ideal offender makes the ideal victim and vice versa. The media representation and construction of victims is relational to that of their offender.

<sup>91</sup> THORBJØRNSRUD–FIGENSCHOU 2016: 337–355.

<sup>92</sup> GREER 2007: 20–49.

<sup>93</sup> With Thompson’s terms, externalisation is done to groups or individuals that can threaten dominant groups.

<sup>94</sup> Democratisation is the opposite of externalisation in this manner. Lindgren and Lundström define it as “tendencies to discursively move identities or subject positions that are initially permeated by otherness closer to the collective subject position of the hegemonic ‘us’” (LINDGREN–LUNDSTRÖM 2010: 322).

<sup>95</sup> 1. the victim is weak; 2. the victim is engaged in a respectable activity at the time; 3. the victim is not to be blamed for what has happened; 4. the offender is big and bad; 5. the offender and the victim do not have a personal relationship; and 6. the victim has power and sympathy to claim victim status.

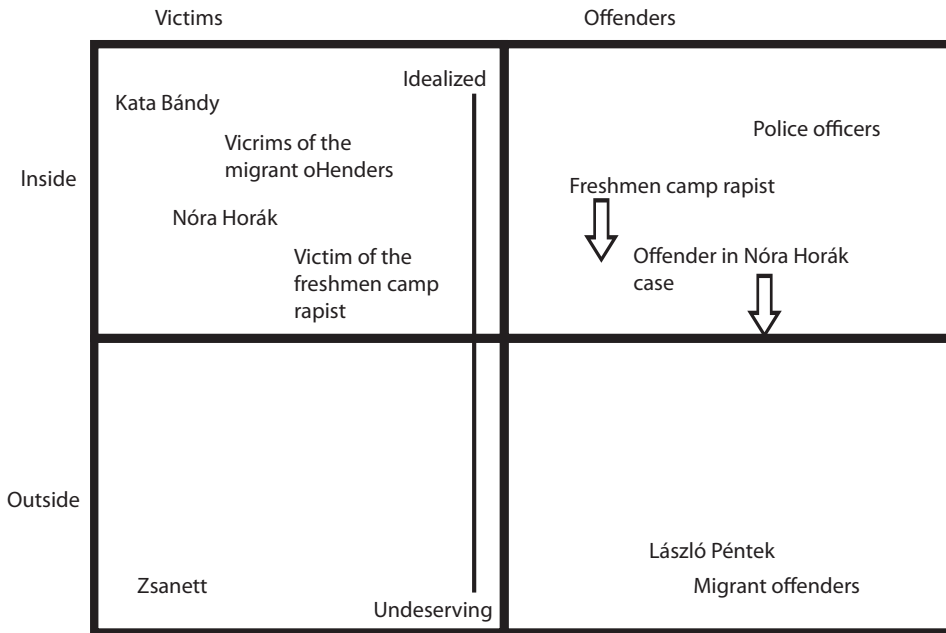


Figure 1: Diagram showing the Placing of Hungarian Rape Cases within the Inside/Outside – Victim/Offender Matrix

Source: Compiled by the author.

The most idealised victim in the examined cases is Kata Bándy, she had everything from the attributes herself and her attacker was a “perfect match” in that manner. He was an easy target to portray as big and bad and evil not only because of his act but also because of his ethnic background and low class status. Similarly, considering their cultural background, the offenders with migrant background were easily portrayed bad and dangerous despite most of them being juveniles. Yet because they are distanced from what “normal” Hungarian or “normal” European is and they represent a foreign culture, their very presence is formidable and risky. Nóra Horák had all the attributes to qualify an ideal victim and she was even underage. Yet, she was not idealised as much as Kata Bándy since her attacker was not represented as a really bad person, rather a miserable character and victim of his circumstances. The victim of the freshmen camp rapist was not so idealised yet her character was not really questioned either so she still qualified a victim. This was in contrast to Zsanett who not only failed to qualify as an idealised victim, but she even failed to be a considered a victim per se. In this case, the narrative of victim/offender was inverted – Zsanett was represented as guilty and her attackers as victims. To sum up, the more successfully media can construct the offender’s narrative, the more idealised the victim will be. In other words, being an ideal victim requires to be attacked by an “ideal offender”. “Ideal offender” in this manner is someone who is an

easy target to be played off (e.g. foreign, migrant status, ethnic background, low class status, etc.). The more distanced the offender is from what is normatively considered to be “normal”, the easier they become the “ideal offender”. In other words, idealised victimhood moves together with inside victimhood which is strongly connected to the offenders’ outsider status (see Figure 1).

## Conclusion

The representation of crime in the media is influenced by politics not only in terms of its agenda but also by solidified patterns of power and hegemonic interests as discussed above. This paper has shown that the media is more likely to grant victim status to those who are insiders when their offenders are outsiders. Moreover, marginalised offenders are automatically and collectively externalised by the media, while *insiders* are externalised individually by represented as deviant persons. In doing so, the media reproduces marginalisation. While these findings might paint a negative picture of the media, nonetheless, the intention of this article is not to demonise media but raise awareness of hidden discrimination in discourses. To put it in another way, I do not argue that the media intentionally or voluntarily further marginalises the marginalised, rather that media discourses are intimately connected to hegemonic power structures. In Hungary, determinants such as ethnicity, nationality and class matter for how one relates to the hegemonic binaries of victim/offender, guilt/innocence, insider/outsider, etc. and ultimately who is marginalised and how this occurs. However, why marginalisation occurs and precisely how this occurs, i.e. how exclusionary discourses work in practice, lie beyond the scope of this paper and there is certainly need for further research into this in the Hungarian context.

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