

# **Kazakhs, Tuvans and Gypsies: "Disappearing" Socialisms Visualized**

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For many years, ethnographic and documentary films have been an accepted part of classroom curricula in North America. Yet due to the noticeable absence of Eastern Europe and peoples of the former Soviet Union from such endeavors, materials available to scholars have for the most part been limited to feature films, low-quality documentaries transferred to videotape in the East, or western documentaries whose focus and purpose lie elsewhere.<sup>/1/</sup>

Films such as Peter Gothar's *Time Stands Still* (Hungary, 1983), Vasili Pichul's *Little Vera* (Russia, 1988), Tengiz Abuladze's *Repentance* (Georgia, 1986), and Emir Kusturica's *Time of the Gypsies* (Yugoslavia 1987), however, reveal the changing cultural and political tapestry of the former Soviet Bloc and the internal variants of existing socialism.<sup>/2/</sup> But Western scholars cannot avail themselves of the variety of non-fiction feature representations of these cultures, so rarely do minority documentaries and experimental films reach non-native audiences. This situation is no doubt attributable to causes both financial and political: former communist regimes exercised caution--if not aggression--toward foreigners attempting to document local-level cultures, perhaps assuming that, while archival research and field interviews could not be prevented, the actual documentation and preservation of these cultures on film and video would remain beyond the pale of accepted practice.

Anthropologists, folklorists, ethnomusicologists and others who have used a camera (still, film or video) are in a position to affirm the anxiety and sensitivity with which these instruments of "reality" were viewed by officials, foregrounding Lenin's dictum that cinema--or, in its postmodern formulation, visual representations indeed the most important art. This credo seems, for that matter, to have guided bureaucrats, apparatchiks, and local officials: for, in their reasoning, if the camera were capable of recording images, to it belonged as well the potential to reveal all--including what they wished to conceal. Then as now, dramatic disparities prevailed between the canon of official ideology and the "vecu" of people within cultures, hence the widespread suppression and persecution of feature filmmakers and documentarists from Warsaw to Zagreb, from Bucharest to Tashkent.

As we enter a new historical age in which communist states play a minor role--a transitional climate of democratic multiparty politics--it becomes all the more important to recognize the means by which socialism manifested itself visually in particular cultural forms, the better to trace the trajectory of its national variants./3/ Political scientists and international relations specialists, among others, have, to be sure, conceptualized the events of 1989--their cultural differences and common political and economic denominators--/4/; they have noted, too, the role of minority issues in the context of inequalities in the "state socialist" system. But the fragile status of national minorities and the ethnic subcultures through which they resisted--and continue to oppose--state power remains to be reassessed. Still to be interrogated, then, is the part played by representations of such explosive ethnic and nationalist issues in hastening the decline or prolonging the longevity of marxist-leninist states./5/

To that end, I intend to suggest a modest reframing of the roles of several minority groups and their portrayal by western film and videomakers (all of whom are anthropologists). I want to focus especially on three films from the "Disappearing World" series produced by Granada Television, Great Britain: *The Kazakhs of China*, *The Herders of Mongun-Taiga*, and *Across the Tracks: Vlach Gypsies in Hungary*, released in 1990 and 1991./6/ Apart from a restricted list of commercially and educationally distributed titles, relatively few documentaries are available to enable viewers to educate themselves about the validity of many ethnic minorities' claims to human rights violations, infringement of legal status, and cultural annihilation. Among the more useful of these is the Glasnost Film festival, a series of short films produced by Russian studios and including topics such as youthful rebellion, the Stalinist show trials, and the Chernobyl disaster./7/ The differences between the Glasnost documentaries and the "disappearing World" series are not difficult to discern: whereas the former contains only films produced, shot and edited by Russian artists, the latter is the product of British Granada Television, and thereby adheres to the stated objective of the series to provide an ethnographic portrayal of societies under duress, facing changes and challenges./8/

Aside from its stated purpose, "Disappearing World" aims to present a faithful filmic representation of the past, in ways perhaps not unlike early attempts to capture "reality" when the cinematic apparatus was first invented and deployed, for example, by the Lumiere Brothers. In that sense, the series seeks to call attention to the ways in which marginalized, silenced, and excluded subjects experience state-imposed difficulties. Despite surface differences in style and

content, these three documentaries on the lives of Kazakhs, Tuvans, and Gypsies nonetheless focus on three interlocking issues: the efforts of minority groups to maintain autonomy within majority group or state pressures; the persistence of local identities and boundary maintenance; and internal hierarchical and gender complexities that persisted in spite--or even on account--of state socialism.

These films offer fascinating insights into the lesser-known cultures they purport to represent: their usefulness and impact, however, are to some extent compromised in certain cases: excessive footage is accorded, for example, to work-related activities thought to be characteristic of the peoples they portray; hand-held cameras tend to remain static rather than flexible or experimental; shots are ordered according to internal principles that at times seem at odds with the action (perhaps because of the immediacy of events recorded in the field, as well as pre-arranged interviews); and spontaneous occurrences are interspersed with "talking-heads"-style interview segments. What's more, narrative voice-overs impart authority to the visual texts, imposing an "authorial" anthropologist's interpretation upon indigenous perspectives with which the spectator may only have a passing familiarity.<sup>/9/</sup> This is not to say, however, that these visual testimonies of the final decade of socialism lack interest or excitement: on the contrary, for they constitute a valuable resource as classroom or ethnographic film festival contributions in their precise exploration of cultures and lifestyles rarely encountered by outsiders, especially undergraduate students. These remarks are meant as an intervention in the discourse of a dynamic discipline, to be considered in dialectical relation to written texts, both historical and ethnographic.

The announcement for *The Kazakhs of China*, a film directed and produced by Andre Singer with the anthropologist Shirin Akiner, is contextualized in a matter-of-fact tone that has come to be a hallmark of Granada Television: "The nomadic, fiercely independent Kazakhs live in the mountains between Tibet and Mongolia, away from the Chinese authorities. They have adapted to communism and now enjoy what they believe to be considerable advantages over their more conventional neighbors."

The Kazakhs as thus represented are, to a greater or lesser degree, compatible with the foregoing claims, give or take an occasionally disputable aspect.<sup>/10/</sup> Of China's more than 1.4 billion people, over 30 million are said to belong to some 54 minority groups.<sup>/11/</sup> The Hui (Muslims) are an important division to which Kazakhs, numbering about one million, belong.

Inside the Peoples' Republic of China (the only such state formation remaining), they continue to cling to their life ways against all odds. During the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Kazakhs were forced to give up their herds and land and join state collectives, abandon their family based hierarchy, and succumb to the leadership of the communist party.<sup>12/</sup> Since 1977, however, most Kazakhs have enjoyed the benefits of the relaxed attitudes of the leadership in return for the quantities of wool they produce as transhumant, livestock herders; even the practice of their Islamic religion and Turkic language is now encouraged, if not supported.

During the filmic expedition in 1983, the spectator is invited to enjoy the hospitality of Abduqaye, a respected elder and leader of his extended family commune, living in the foothills of the Tien Shan mountain range near Uruschi, the capital of Xinjiang province. As a patriarch he commands great power and, not surprisingly, as a member of the communist party's local cell, he is given the blessing of the state as well.

In the course of Abdugaye's family's transitions from summer to winter pastures, we are given more than a mere glimpse of working activities: the shearing of sheep (an activity reserved to women); the disassembling and rebuilding of yurts (circular tents); the milking of mares (for kumiss, the national drink of fermented mare's milk); a council of men considering support for collective brigades in their efforts to relocate herds; preparations for a wedding to take place that will unite two clans; and the weaving of beautiful colored textiles and cloths. The contrasts in colors are in fact quite stunning (a credit to the expertise of the director, Andrei Singer), made all the more dramatic by the fact visual evidence of Kazakh women, primarily the unmarried, in traditional red, green and black costumes, plumed headdress, and black boots. Their attire distinguishes them from non-Kazakhs, especially Chinese, while most younger men wear clothes that westerners can readily identify as standard Chinese dress (the Maoist uniform).

Filming among the Kazakhs, as we are assured in the opening sequences of the film, took place without incident. The Chinese authorities allowed the Granada crew to engage fully in documenting their subjects, with the possible exception of those along the borders of the former Soviet Union. It would indeed appear that the crew enjoyed the hospitality of Abdugaye and the community, as evidenced by the fluidity of movement within and beyond camera range, and the free discussion of daily problems, a commendable achievement by the filmmakers despite the presence of two government officials accompanying the foreign team. Although the film was

originally shot in 1983, it is remarkably contemporary and even timeless in feeling: the Kazakh-Chinese relationship does not appear to be strained (although it must be borne in mind that the film was shot in pre-Tiananmen Square China), Western consumer goods are not evident (or perhaps the filmmakers took care to avoid them), and the population is quite substantial, which might well indicate that their Islamic beliefs have withstood stringent Chinese birth-control policies. This is not to suggest, of course, that the Kazakhs live in something other than contemporary consciousness, for present-day signifiers are plentiful: a sewing machine: moving vans: and a town palpably nearby (with its electricity, schools, cash economy, etc.). One segment portrays a local medical worker, with only a few weeks of training, practicing modern medicine together with acupuncture. Above all, the presence of Chinese communist work brigades, executive councils, and use of the term "comrade" reveal that earlier forms of collective decision-making and elders' power have been abandoned.

What is remarkable in this visual document is its representation of the Kazakhs as able and successful herders, horsemen, and traders. It is noted that Kazakh life is not wholly independent of the Chinese state, the community's existence depending upon the sale of tons of wool to the authorities. With sheep-raising its greatest resource, the Kazakh culture is revealed to be both formidable and heterogeneous: famed horsemen (several scenes attest to the prowess of women riders, including a match between men and women during which women are allowed symbolically to whip their male companions), Kazakhs rely on a wide range of domesticated animals: sheep for wool and meat, cows for milk, yaks as beasts of burden, goats for milk and food, dogs, and even camels, although their function remains obscure in the film. The supreme importance of horses is intimated by a proverb claiming that, in order of importance, a Kazakh's four most prized objects are his horse, gun, birthplace, and wife.

Unfortunately, such patriarchal perspectives in Kazakh society may well have influenced the filmmaker and anthropologist who pay little attention to gender relations: one is left to one's own devices, for example, to decipher the relationships of the protagonists to one another. Abdugaye's family is quite large, with several adult women and many small children, and the lack of clarity as to their identity impedes a fuller understanding of the dynamism of extended family networks, obviously an important factor. It is nonetheless quite evident that the head of the family makes all decisions and that women have little say in important matters: yet this contradicts statements by the film's few female protagonists with regard to the transformations

brought about by communism--that is to say, a more balanced relationship between the sexes. Today, we are told, women may sit on local councils, although very few in fact do so.

Women also participate in small rituals previously reserved to men: in one scene, for instance, an old woman recites an incantation asking the "Powerful Father" of the mountain to bless the freshly made kumiss, in a verse ending with the Muslim phrase "God is great" which invokes the animistic, Islamic aspects of their beliefs. Under communism, moreover, young men and women are allowed to select marriage partners freely, as Abdugey's eldest daughter has done.

It is not only women who believe that communism brought progressive change to their lives: for both men and women, young and old, are viewed as having a vested interest in maintaining the party's status quo, as they explain (to the film crew) their support of Chinese communism.<sup>/13/</sup> One young man denounces the elders for their old habits; another young teacher reads (excessively) lengthy passages from a textbook about Marx and Engels -- all in Kazakh, and provided by the Chinese state. During a gathering to celebrate Abdugey's daughter's future marriage, the women's song becomes a hymn to communism:

We are singing about how happy we are,  
This is Sardaban, my beautiful country.  
Like two brown horses beautifully plumed.  
We are singing about Sardaban, my beautiful country,  
Where communism has spurted, that's what we sing. <sup>/14/</sup>

The lyrics recall the wave of successful Maoist (in the former Soviet bloc, Stalinist) indoctrination, yet the viewer soon discovers that not everyone is so well "adapted."<sup>/15/</sup> An older Muslim religious leader (mullah) and an eagle-hunter confirm that, in Kazakh society, marginalization is a relative concept. The eagle-hunter -- a profession similar to medieval falconry in Europe -- claims that his profession serves him and his family well and that they prefer to maintain the tradition of dependence on wild animals hunted by eagles. Such narratives serve to sustain the viewer's interest: I would in fact have welcomed more such illustrations of the sense of interconnected lives in the Tien Shan area that movingly describe the ways in which some Kazakhs succeed in maintaining a respectful--and manageable--distance from Chinese

communism. The visual construction of these lives, so far removed from "disappearing," instead prompts the spectator to recall earlier arguments about the viability and longevity of cultures through flexible and adaptable modalities that enhance their chances of survival. During one interview, the main protagonist describes his fundamental belief in Chinese communism, his support of the local school, and the teacher's (his daughter) efforts to educate children in marxist-leninist terms:

I have worked for others since I was 9. I used to have no shoes, so stones cut my feet like this. They were hard times. Since Liberation [1949, the founding of the People's Republic of China, LK], my six children have all had an education. Because it was Party policy, I became a Party member. And my children now work for the Government. Only one child is now at home. The rest work for the people. Things have changed...

It remains, of course, to be seen whether the newly emergent independent state of Kazakhstan, with its recent east-west joint industrial ventures, will have a lasting impact on Kazakhs elsewhere.<sup>/16/</sup> If the late 1980s and early 1990s are any indication, Islamic fundamentalism and nationalistic fervor might stir nation-building desires across the borders for groups such as the Kazakhs as well.

The particular dialectic between minority and state hegemonic cultures which have characterized the Kazakhs has also acted within those smaller tribal societies whose existence has been monitored by dominant state-supported institutions. Such is the case of the Tuvanians in *The Herders of Mongun-Taiga*, directed and produced by John Sheppard with the anthropologist Caroline Humphrey, filmed in 1989. Contrary to the Kazakhs in China, the Tuvan people, a group of herders numbering around 200,000 in southern Siberia near the Mongolian border, are more fully integrated into the surrounding larger societies--Russians, Altay, Kazakhs, and Buriats. The Tuvan Autonomous Oblast is situated in the foothills of the Sayan Mountains, and the Tuvinians (of whom there are many subdivisions along linguistic, regional and cultural markers such as Soyot, Kets, and Beltir), live around the upper Yenisey river and its tributaries.<sup>/17/</sup> Unfortunately, the filmmakers did not find it necessary to clarify to which Tuvan group we are being introduced in *The Herders of Mongun-Taiga*, for there are subtle but

important differences in climate, herding, and agriculture among the northern, eastern and southwestern regions. This is especially true for some Tuvans who have been known as reindeer herders in the past, whereas those depicted in *The Herders of Mongun-Taiga* today rely on sheep herding, cattle raising and horses. /18/

The one thousand Tuvanians in this reportage live in Khyzyl Khaya, a settlement in the south-western corner of Tuvania, bordering Mongolia on the south and the Altay Oblast the east. They are herders and, like the Kazakhs, live from their livestock of cattle, sheep, goat, yak and horses. The film's initially choppy editing style prevents in-depth treatment of any aspect of Tuvan life; instead we are offered short, montage-style flashes of landscape, animal tending, school day scenes, horseback riding, and epic-length singing. While these non-intrusive scenes fill the screen, haunting melodies stage the scene for the Tuvinians' great musical culture and a celebrated form of "throat-singing," a popular but very demanding style known among several unrelated cultures of south Siberia and Mongolia. /19/ Despite the fact that this area became a part of the Soviet Union in 1921, the collective farm is largely a network of interrelated extended families with both private and communal herds. Like other livestock herders, the Tuvans follow seasonal cycles as they move their herds to better pastures, a communal activity assisted by the state which provides lorries for the journey. This type of "half-and-half" economy, a form of reliance on both forms of ownership, seems to provide Tuvinians with an productive base, allowing them a sense of freedom from state pressures.

The division of labor is predicated throughout this visual odyssey upon an equilibrium between men and women, with the occasional clarification that men do perform of the herding activities while women tend the yurts and children, take care of domestic chores, and sewing. While the image-track unfolds sequences of these diverse gender-based activities, the narrative at times tends to overburden the viewer with unnecessary--and, for that matter, inadvertently patronizing-- remarks: "It's getting cold outside, but the stove warms the yurts; the water's on the boil; and Terish [wife of the host] pounds the tea for supper. She's been doing so for 32 years." 14 Similar outdated ethnographic film making techniques characterize some of the interview segments which seem to crop up from time to time without identifying the interviewer, although her questions are audible--at times awkward and even embarrassing, interrogating young men and women about how they met and what they planned to do, techniques (and their shortcomings) all too well known to anyone who has ever conducted an interview. Yet in this



film, unlike in the Kazakhs of China, they are at times intrusive as the accumulation of ethnographic material progresses. In one scene, as the interviewer presses the eldest son for answers, the father responds in his stead as the shy youngster remains elusive. In another, the camera crew invades the host's family as they celebrate their daughter's return; the surprised mother, unprepared, comments "I'm all undressed...This'll kill me, I want my scarf," and later, "Oh goodness me, I'll die. They're filming and my hair's a mess." The mother's attempts to avoid the camera testify rather more to the power of the visual apparatus and the tendency of ethnographers at times to fail sufficiently to respect their informants' privacy than to cultural specificity and ethnographic analysis. /20/

An interesting departure in this installment of the "Disappearing World" however, no doubt as a result of the influence of the project's consultant, the British anthropologist Caroline Humphrey, is the close attention paid to the religious beliefs and conservatism of the Tuvans. /21/ In one unusual scene, the young host's son kills a sheep by reaching into its chest and rupturing the main artery. Apparently, such scenes (all too common in films about tribal societies that foster a sense of the exotic and non-western) require great skill, and the subsequent butchering must take place east of the entrance to the yurt. (As the host reveals: "Killing a sheep is a very honored and respected thing to do," no doubt explaining at the same time why only men are allowed to perform it"). In Shangri-La, fashion Tuvan religious values exist not in monasteries but in yurts and in the springs and valleys which are endowed with magical qualities. As we witness recitations of scapulamancy and myths, the filmmakers construct the text to enhance the pervasive folk animism and shamanism which exerted a strong cohesive force for Tuvinians, in particular in opposition to the religious fundamentalism of neighboring peoples and the atheism of the former Soviet State.

It becomes clear that local leaders have gone to great lengths to deny the existence of religious values, a combination of Lamaism and shamanism, frowning upon the practices near ova (sacred sites): these efforts were so successful that the film crew was stymied in its search for answers to various beliefs and behaviors. At one ova site, for instance, discarded bottles attest to the fact that a recent gathering took place; in another, filmmakers come to realize that small children are cross-dressed, as if in a transsexual gender practice. In the end, Tuvinians refuse to be forthcoming with explanations, even though one mother evokes a generic indigenous world-view: "This is how my grandmother used to dress her children."

Despite official protest, shamanism prevails among Tuvans. A fascinating sequence features a reconstructed shamanistic performance of drums and song by a woman descended from a Shamanistic family. /22/ The popular prestige of powerful female shamans has a long tradition among Tuvans and other Siberian tribes. One of the film's highlights takes place when the filmmakers solicit individual stories about shamans, their beliefs and practices. The official party secretary's admission that "...in general we regard it (shamanism) as their own private affair" comes as something of a revelation. doubtless in the wake of the Gorbachevian turn in politics. /23/

Herders of Mongun-Taiga, provides rare insights into a culture under the spell of glasnost and perestroika; in a yurt scene, for example, a father remarks to his daughter returning from town that "perestroika is going all right." /24/ In Khyzyl Khaya, Lenin statues and quotations from Gorbachev attest to the fact that the Soviet state attempted to regain its 1919 revolutionary momentum by galvanizing the populations of the Soviet Union during the late 1980s. Even though bureaucrats interviewed declare the Party's leading role in society in bringing about changes, both perestroika and glasnost are now part of history and the Gorbachev era is relegated to the annals of history. For the herders of this remote Siberian countryside, however, changes brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union will have serious consequences: they are too few in number in proportion to their more numerous Buriat and Kazakh neighbors, and their religion is neither orthodox Lamaist nor Muslim. Such groups, like many of the Far North, /25/ certainly will experience deeply the lack of state support in goods, social services, pensions and other heretofore assumed rights and privileges; moreover, they will suffer as rising ethno-nationalism in the region surfaces and alliances and borders are realigned accordingly. /26/ But based on this cinematic example, they are not ready to be classified as a part of the "disappearing world" despite such postmodern gestures as youthful preference for motorcycles instead of horseback riding.

The consequences of surrendering a prior means of survival while maintaining cultural integrity occupy the focus of *Across the Tracks: Vlach Gypsies in Hungary*, directed by John Blake with the supervision of the English anthropologist, Michael Stewart, who has spent a great deal of time among the Gypsies of Gyongyos, a city in northern Hungary. /27/ Not unlike the Kazakhs in China and the Tuvan in southern Siberia, the culture of Vlach Gypsies in Hungary is not, they suggest, in the process of being extinguished: on the contrary, while horse breeding

remains a Rom (the self-designated term used by Gypsies) way of life, it does not exclude agriculture, trade or industrial wage-labor. Gypsies under state socialism had been referred to not as a nationality - categories reserved for Slovak, Romanians, Serbian, Croatian, and German groups living in Hungary -- but as a minority with specific cultural traits. /28/ The film is largely devoted to the ways in which Mokus (Squirrel) and his family succeed in managing a fluid socio-economic milieu without undue struggle.

The life of the Vlach Gypsies in Gyongyos is represented as partaking of many of the features of ordinary Hungarian rural culture in that region: long takes of skillful horse-trading with the aid of a go-between; manifest resentment of the peasants' way of life (even though Gypsies must engage in at least rudimentary horticulture and factory work); visits to related families on festive occasions; revelry, singing, and dancing at the slightest provocation. Despite the jacket-note's claim that Gypsies "live in semi-slums, and they are forced by law to work, often for very low wages," there is virtually no hint of the profound and wide-ranging social issues of Gypsy life: an emerging Gypsy consciousness and systematized formal history; an alarming dropout rate in public schools; intensified Hungarian ethnocentrism and racism toward Gypsies, with its concomitant social marginalization ; alcoholism, police brutality; unemployment; crime; and prostitution in Gypsy communities. /29/ The film would have benefited from reference to preceding treatments of the subject such as Pal Schiffer's 1966 documentary, *Black Train* (Fekete Vonat), a searching exploration of commuting Gypsy workers; as such, *Across the Tracks* reinvents an image of Gypsies in "communist Hungary" disconnected from such earlier visual testimonies, thus leaving the viewer with a highly selective--and perhaps excessively optimistic --view. Yet a careful reading leaves little doubt that, at several points, Gypsies, too, reveal themselves to be somewhat ethnocentric through the awkwardness which they handle daily encounters with gadnos (non-Gypsies). It is not only the railway tracks which separate Hungarians and Gypsies; on the contrary, Gypsies depicted here want to maintain their separateness and distance from society at large; and, as the narrative claims, from the pre-1989 communist state as well. How can they do that? There are many ways: a strong distancing mechanism through language, dress-code, behavior coupled with a good dose of ethnocentrism. At Mokus's foaling, the mare has difficulties with the afterbirth, an activity needing serious medical attention by a Hungarian veterinarian. In a context which reveals the enormous cultural separation and ethnocentrism of toward Hungarians (Magyars), Gypsies

discuss freely the veterinarian's lack of morals fearing that he will overcharge them. After the veterinarian finishes to tend the mare, one woman even flatly states in Romany: "Don't let the vet ask for too much money . . . Give him nothing."

This rejection of cooperative spirit between two peoples is also played out when, for example, the Hungarian priest refuses to baptize a Gypsy child. In another scene, a mother dressing her two daughters (in a fashion which signals Gypsiness easily with the flowery skirts and large headscarves covering their long, dark flowing hair), for example, warns them: "A Gypsy girl never wanders around at night. She mustn't talk with boys. She must wear clothes like this. You must wear a scarf because Gypsies don't like a girl who goes without a scarf. They say you're trying to look more beautiful."

Despite their pride in their culture and distinctness Gypsies nevertheless must face both outsiders and the state. They, unlike the Kazakhs depicted in *The Kazakhs of China*, did not become ardent supporters of socialism. Under state socialism (though the filmmakers constantly use the "communist state") Gypsies, like anyone else, were under the same law which made wage-labor compulsory. The state took particular care to reinforce this law and Gypsies have many horror stories to tell about police harassment concerning "unlawful joblessness" or "job avoidance causing public danger" (*kozveszelyes munkakerules*). Yet, despite these efforts Gypsies have been able to engage in various forms of informal economies ranging from music playing, horse-trading, scavenging for food to feed animals, begging, and seasonal labor, forms of economic activities which have been going on for decades unchecked by the authorities. During one interview Mokus and his wife are appalled at the prospect of joining the local state collective farm. Answers range from illness to hard work and to making more money outside of traditional agriculture. Presenting considerable countervailing power, these activities have provided the Gypsies of Gyongyos with an economic base sufficient for their survival as Gypsies. Although the socialist state prided itself by claiming successful assimilation of Hungary's ethnic groups, of whom Gypsies are the most numerous minority), Gypsies never assimilated; moreover they did not become ardent followers of the dogma of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. It is an almost expected practice from filmmakers that, following the successes of *Angelo My Love* (directed by Robert Duvall, 1977, USA) and *Time of the Gypsies* -though from quite a different cultural perspectives -- that films about Gypsies be in Romany. The Blake-Stewart film is no exception. Throughout the film the spectator is provided with

Romany speakers, and may understand a little about the language (with the many Hungarian loan-words) as an ethnic maintenance mechanism both against outsiders and officials. At times, Gypsies, who among themselves always speak their own language, shift to Hungarian with co-workers, officials, police, and school teachers. Gypsy language publication was virtually unknown before 1989, and it is the sign of changing times that at present, with the emerging Gypsy consciousness and political parties, there are several newspapers, magazines, television, and radio programs in Romany.

As we follow Gypsy men making deals of horse-buying at a market, we are provided with fascinating glimpses into the intricacies of their lives. The obvious merits of this film is that it reveals that with or without the state's blessings Gypsy life goes on and it is filled with emotions and sarcasm which have been the hallmarks of visual representations about Gypsies. This is true with regard not only to Vlach Gypsies of Gyongyos but those portrayed in Angelo My Love and Emir Kusturica's successful feature adaptation *Time of the Gypsies*. In the latter the final scene closes with the protagonist's son stealing the coin of the dead father's eyes at a funeral wake showing the inevitable continuation of life from death. Similarly, Mokus admits at the horse-market -- itself an action-filled scene with a musical number of Hungary's famous Kayi Jag Gypsy performing ensemble from Budapest which, unfortunately, is not credited by the filmmakers -- that the horse he just helped to sell had beautiful fur and was strong, and adds with a smile that it had bad teeth. Outside of the Gypsy sphere of existence, on the contrary, such irony and cultural sarcasm is of no avail. In a quite intense scene, Mokus and his friends visit a Hungarian farmer to buy a horse but no deal can be struck: there are no go-betweens and flexibilities in their bargaining, nuances of languages obscure understanding between the Gypsies and the gadjo. Gypsies who came with a large sum are envied by the peasants who frown upon the cash in the Gypsies' pockets and who do not appreciate their willingness to bargain interpreting it as "a dirty job."

In this example, a telling moment of reverse ethnocentrism is evident when Gypsies boast of having enough ready cash to buy the horse, whereas the peasant family can only dream of such a luxury. On the contrary, another brief segment in the video text, untranslated by the videographer, when the wife of the farmer makes a racist comment about impolite and irrational Gypsy business tactics. It is not only the question of a few thousand forints which prevents the deal from materializing, but the cultural distance between the two groups which prevents flexible

intermingling and rapprochement. The camera positions and point of view clearly take the side of the gypsy horse-traders, and the British anthropologist allows us little insight into the perspective of the peasant family. The filmmaker/author's perspective has, of course, been interrogated from the work of Jean Rouch to that of Trin Minh-ha, and it would seem that we have yet to forge a viable positioning as filmmakers and students of culture that enhances the porous-ness and flexibility of the "ethnoscapes" in the words of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai./30/

One cannot help but wonder why, despite such obvious conflicts, the Stewart-Blake film misses the opportunity to make a larger statement in this rather idealized presentation of the late 1980s when state socialism was losing its grip not only on Gypsies but on the population as a whole. For by the beginning of the 1990s, when rampant nationalism and xenophobia had broken out in several parts of the former East Bloc, particularly Romania and Yugoslavia, Gypsies faced new and exacerbated challenges. With the opening of borders, increasing numbers of Gypsies began to make their way toward the West in search of security, peace, and employment opportunities. The Time of the Gypsies is inescapably now being played out in western European cities and refugee camps as Gypsy children beg in the streets, men engage in black marketing and women are forced into theft and prostitution.

In conclusion, these visual examples offer highly individualistic perspectives on the manifestations of socialism in China, the former Soviet Union, and Hungary. The filmmakers' projects are contained within the agenda of the series, yet somewhat paradoxically, the worlds reflected through detailed examples and beautifully executed shots are far from disappearing: on the contrary, the viewer is left with an impression of their vitality and dynamism both in the wake of changes in the larger societies in which they exist and the global transformations that inevitably impinge upon their future survival. Within the coming decade, new projects, visually challenging and politically informed, will very likely reinvestigate the same and other subjects, perhaps resembling not only what they are constructed to envision but also those visual texts that preceded them. If indeed the goal is to seek detailed ethnographic data, their impact would be enhanced by supplying the viewer with accompanying contextualized documentation. /31/ All in all, these filmic ethnographies reveal a fascinating world for the spectators, whether specialists or students. At times with humor and colorful details, they are essential visual texts which, when combined with written ethnographies, document a decay of a state formation and

celebrate the energy and vitality of groups who do not wish to be considered just another minority facing extinction.

## Notes

1. To contrast the films discussed here with some of US documentaries with East European themes see, Gaylen Poss' *After Solidarity: Three Polish Families in America* (1987, New York) and the KCET production *Hungary - Pushing the Limits* (1986, Los Angeles).

2. Scholarly studies on East European and former Soviet cinemas are gradually increasing, in part as a result of relaxed governmental intervention in research agendas and visits by western scholars, and because of the number of filmmakers visiting the west from those countries. For recent works on the changing visual cultures of the former East Bloc see, Nicholas Galichenko, *Glasnost: Soviet Cinema Responds* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991); Graham Petrie and Ruth Dwyer eds., *Before the Wall Came Down: Soviet and East European Filmmakers Working in the West* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990); Daniel Goulding, *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); David Paul ed., *Politics, Art and Commitment in East European Cinema* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); Paul Coates, *The Story of the Lost Reflection: Alienation of the Image in Western and Polish Cinema* (London: Verso, 1985); and Catherine Portuges, *Screen Memories: The Hungarian Cinema of Marta Meszaros* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

3. The anthropologist Katherine Verdery refers to this as "theorizing socialism," see "Theorizing Socialism: A Prologue to the 'Transition,'" *American Ethnologist* 18, no.3 (1991):419-439.

4. See, for example, J. F. Brown, *Surge to Freedom: The End of Communist Rule in Eastern Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Stan Berglund and Jan Dellenbrant, *The New Democracies in Eastern Europe: Party System and Political Cleavages* (Aldershot, G. B: Edward Elgar, 1991); Charles Gati, *The Bloc that Failed: Soviet East European Relations in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); and Daniel Chirot ed., *The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

5. These attempts of the 1980s are described in the Gail Lapidus, "Gorbachev's Nationalities Problem," *Foreign Affairs* Fall (1989):92-108; J. Birch, "Border Disputes and Disputed Borders in the Soviet Federal System," *Nationalities Papers* (1984):43-70; and Martha Olcott, "Gorbachev's National Dilemma," *Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 2 (1989):399-422.

6. *The Kazakhs of China* (Directed and produced by Andre Singer, anthropologist Shirin Akiner, released 1990, filmed in 1983, 53 min); *Across the Tracks: Vlach Gypsies in Hungary* (Directed and produced by John Blake, anthropologist Michael Stewart, released 1991, filmed in 1988, 52 min.; and *The Herders of Mongun-Taiga* (Directed and produced by John Sheppard, anthropologist Caroline Humphrey, filmed 1989, released 1991, 52 min.). All three are British Academy Award Winner. For another Granada film of the same series see Antonia Young, "Film

review: Albania as a Part of Disappearing World." *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 11/1-2 (1993):129-130.

7. The Glasnost Film Festival is a 12-part video collection of 22 documentary films produced between 1986-1988 by the Citizens Exchange Council and the American-Soviet Film Initiative; available from The Video Project, Oakland, California.

8. The logo of Disappearing World is stated on every videotape: Disappearing World provides a precious record of the social structures and beliefs of societies confronting change and, in some cases, facing extinction by the pressures of our expanding technocratic civilization. Traveling to remote corners of five continents, film crews worked with anthropologists who have done extensive fieldwork with the societies concerned. The result is a series of accurate portraits in which the people are allowed to speak for themselves.

9. For criticism of traditional ethnographic film making see Jack Rollwagen ed., *Anthropological Film making* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1988); Akos Ostor, "Whither ethnographic film?" *American Anthropologist* 92 (1990):715-722; and Terence Turner, "Visual Media, Cultural Politics and Anthropological Practice," *The Independent* January/February (1991):34-40.

10. I should add that the Kazakhs of China are far less well-known than their counterparts in Kazakhstan or northern Afghanistan; see Martha Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1989); and V. Kozlov, *The Peoples of the Soviet Union* (London: Hutchinson, 1988).

11. June Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

12. See Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), especially Chaps. 20-21.

13. In another segment, a woman attests in her narrative to the power of decades of successful state indoctrination:

In the past we lived with pots and pans, were whipped and couldn't speak like this. Today, following the leadership of the Party, we women have more equality. When I was 12 years old, I was sold to an old man of 54. He died when he was 74. Nowadays the young can fall in love and everyone is much happier.

The literature on women's status in the former Soviet Union is substantial and increasing; for a recent example, see Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola eds., *Russian Peasant Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

14. On non-socialist Kazakh music see Viktor Beliaev, *Central Asian Music: Essays in the History of the Music of the Peoples of the USSR* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975); and Mark Slobin, *Music in the Culture of Northern Afghanistan* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1976).



15. Frank Miller, *Folklore for Stalin: Russian Folklore and Pseudo-folklore of the Stalin Era* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1990).
16. Steven Greenhouse, "Chevron to Spend \$10 Billion to Seek Oil in Kazakhstan," *The New York Times*, 19 May 1992, A1, A9.
17. L. P. Potapov, "The Tuvans," in M. G. Levin and L. P. Potapov eds., *The Peoples of Siberia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 380-422; and Ronald Wixman, *The Peoples of the USSR: An Ethnographic Handbook* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1988), 201.
18. See Potapov, *The Tuvans*, 390-400.
19. S. I. Vainshtein, "Fenomen muzykalnogo isskustva, rozhdennyi v stepiakh," *Sovietskaia ethnografiia* 1(1980):68-81.
20. In a final segment of the film, a young woman willingly explains her wish to leave the pastures and move to the town of Khyzyl Khaya. The whole interview is conducted in Russian, while the rest of the film is conducted in the Tuvinian language. If indeed this linguistic shift is indicative of Russian influence on Tuvan culture, then the future of that society, with its magic springs and epic tales, is compromised: the extent to which this reflects the filmmakers' perspective is ambiguous.
21. Caroline Humphrey, *Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
22. On Siberian and Tuvan shamanism in English see Marjorie Balzer ed., *Shamanism: Soviet Studies of Traditional Religion in Siberia and Central Asia* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1990); Vilmos Dioszegi ed., *Popular Beliefs and Folklore Tradition in Siberia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968); and Vilmos Dioszegi and Mihaly Hoppal eds., *Shamanism in Siberia* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1978).
23. Yet it is clear that ethnocentric hostility toward Russians among indigenous tribes in the area has been rampant; Rasma Karlins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR: The Perspective from Below* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 56-59.
24. This cultural climate emanating from Moscow might well have influenced the ethnographer Valerii Tishkov's rather idealistic assessment of the situation of minorities: "A high standard of living, harmonious social relations and genuine democracy will lay a reliable and long-lasting foundation on which to preserve and promote the cultural diversity of the Soviet peoples"; see "Glasnost and the nationalities within the Soviet Union," *Third World Quarterly* 11, no 4 (1989):207). (emphasis added).
25. Debra Schindler, "Theory Policy, and the Narodna Severa," *Anthropological Quarterly* 64, no. 2 (1991):68-79.

26. Some of these problems are already documented in the special issue of "After the Breakup: Roots of Soviet Dis-Union," *Cultural Survival* 16, no. 1 (1992).
27. Michael Stewart, "True Speech": Song and the Moral Order of a Hungarian Vlach Gypsy Community," *Man* 24 (1989):79-102; and "Gypsies, Work and Civil Society, In C.M. Hann ed., *Market Economy and Civil Society in Hungary* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), 140-162. 28. In the Hungarian ethnographic lexicon, for example, it is stated: "Gypsies in Hungary today do not possess the required cultural, linguistic or social structural elements of nationality or a national minority. Today they are experiencing a fundamental change in their life-style," see *Magyar Neprajzi Lexikon A-E* 1 (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado 1977), 426.
29. Specific aspects of these may be found in David Crowe and John Kolsti eds., *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (Armonk:M.E. Sharpe, 1991); Laszlo Pomogyi, "Szociologiai jellemzok a polgari sorsnak magyarorszagi ciganyसारol" [Sociological characteristic of Gypsy life in pre-war Hungary], *Phralipe* 3, no. 1 (1992):3-10; "Ahogy Tetszik: A Magyar Hirlap Kulturális Melleklete" [Special Gypsy Cultural Issue] *Magyar Hirlap* 28 July (1990):1-8; and "Az Emberi Dimenzio: Roma-eselyek es kilatasok az uj Europaban" [Human Dimensions: Chances and Perspectives of Rom in the New Europe], *Phralipe* 12 (1991) :3-11.
30. Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," In R. Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology: Working the Present* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991), 192.
31. For a recent collection of articles dealing with anthropological video and film making see Jack Rollwagen ed.,
- 32 *Anthropological Film and Video in the 1990s* (Brockport: The Institute Press, 1993).