

Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities

Theses of a doctoral dissertation

Kristóf Bánszki

„The tv series Linda and the social representation of the Kádár-era”

DOI: 10.15476/ELTE.2023.060

Doctoral School of Philosophical Sciences,

Dr. Tamás Ullmann DSc, professor, Head of the Doctoral School

Doctoral Program in Film, Media and Contemporary Culture,

Dr. Gábor Gelencsér PhD, habil. associate professor, Head of the Doctoral Program

Members of the committee:

Dr. Péter György DSc, professor, president of the committee

Dr. Gábor Gelencsér PhD, habil. associate professor, opponent

Dr. András Murai PhD, college associate professor, opponent

Dr. Veronika Hermann PhD, assistant professor, secretary of the committee

Dr. Zsófia Orosz-Réti, assistant professor, member of the committee

Dr. Beáta Margitházi PhD, assistant professor, assistant member of the committee

Dr. Zsolt K. Horváth PhD, assistant professor, assistant member of the committee

Supervisor:

Dr. Balázs Varga PhD, habil. associate professor

Budapest, 2023.

1. The objectives of the dissertation and the definition of the topic

In my dissertation I am going to explore Hungarian tv shows, specifically focusing on the series *Linda*. I would like to investigate whether the narrative of *Linda* transcends the socialist era it was made in, or rather just portrays it from a different perspective. Focusing on *Linda* and other shows of the era helps us understand the potentials and self-concept of socialist television programming. In my opinion, *Linda* - having been made in the very last decade of Socialist Hungary - refrains from bringing in narrative innovations alongside the political relaxation of the second half of the 1980s. On the contrary, the series, in most cases, precedes certain progressive and “Western” trends in television, such as portraying social class movements, and specific business and societal phenomena that eventually led the socialist “shortage economy” towards capitalism and therefore democracy. The showrunners clearly intended to introduce various reforms to television productions via their unique perspective, technical proficiency and extensive networking. Director György Gát and his crew deliberately used various narrative devices taken from Western motion pictures that appealed to the gradually changing societal demands - the series, therefore, repeatedly created precedent and initiated change within Hungarian Television.

I would suggest the show has a special place within the late Kádár-era Hungary’s pop culture, and is tied to the decade’s societal, cultural and political relations with intriguing ambivalence. The series often stays neutral towards official ideologies, and does not by any means dare conflict or go against them. In certain aspects, it is in sync with the increasing reformism of the 1980s. It tracks the societal and political changes of the country, yet in some aspects it even portrays proto-capitalist views and values in retrospect. In my analysis I argue that *Linda* - especially at the start of season one - can be seen as a show that not only foreshadowed but also came to shape certain societal changes. The series’ importance and influence comes from its contemporary and continuing popularity that made it achieve cult status over the years.

The show’s influence and the strongly divided opinions that still surround it indicate a capitalist pop-cultural environment. This is mostly due to the series deviating from the norms previously seen in other Hungarian television productions and series in every sense, e.g. having an active female protagonist or portraying various business models. With its proto-capitalist views, the series is very much aware of its own potential for survival and deliberately creates certain

conditions not only to increase viewing figures but to actually build a community - which is unprecedented in Hungarian Television.

2. The structure of the dissertation and the outline of the applied method

My dissertation focuses on the representation of crime, the societal ground for the narrative and the depiction of taking initiative and action through the portrayal of the police-woman main character (who is considered an original protagonist in every respect) and the side characters and antagonists who surround her. Furthermore, the way the police are depicted, crime is portrayed and certain visuals are used clearly pinpoints why *Linda* is considered an innovative series that no doubt has shaped public opinion. There have been no detailed Hungarian analyses on socialist television practices for the longest time post-1989, as academic interest initially turned towards researching Western television culture. This has started to change around 2014.

Following the introduction and outlining the thesis, in the first chapter I am going to go through three highly important works that are indispensable in examining socialist television programming, then moving on to Hungarian-written essays on the same topic. Interestingly enough, these works all specifically focus on tv series out of all television programme types. Next, I am going to sum up the history and defining trends of Hungarian television, explicitly focusing on murder mysteries within the crime genre. As both the audiences' perceptions and showrunners' works had been heavily influenced by foreign examples, here I am going to summarize what murder mystery series from the West were aired by Hungarian Television at the time.

In the second chapter, I am going to get on the main subject and start analyzing *Linda*. As a first step I am going to outline the circumstances of the show coming to life and argue for its originality and innovative nature. I am going to examine the various gender roles depicted in the series, with special focus on the female protagonist and the ways her character is considered unconventional compared to previous Hungarian trends. I will also discuss the topic of individualism and collectivism. I am going to claim that *Linda* is the first feminist female protagonist in Hungarian television history.

Then, I will examine how the series portrays the relationship between police and bureaucracy and how this differs from previous Hungarian motion picture trends and Western norms. I am

going to claim that the show is innovative in its depiction of both protagonists and antagonists. I will demonstrate how the visuals of *Linda* are considered pioneering, given the directorial intent to fill each frame to the brim with action. To support this, I will analyze the unique methods of filming and some specific imagery, then identify the series' proto-capitalist features. I will examine certain visual spectacles, such as the title sequence, the recurring locations and the portrayal of extreme sports.

In the third chapter, I am going to summarize György Gát's filmography which simply cannot be separated from the analyzed series, then I will attempt to reconstruct the creation and development of *Linda* based on archived sources. I will separately analyze the circumstances surrounding the making of each season, detailing such features as a brand new financing method developed by György Gát or various production innovations. I believe season one is a narrative and stylistic test run to see whether Hungarian audiences of the time were open to a series with an unprecedented and unconventional protagonist, plot and style. Season two, however, becomes an experiment in reevaluating and recalibrating its financial and productional resources. One such example includes introducing the concept of a *writer's room* to revolutionize script-writing.

In the fourth chapter, I will reconstruct the scandals surrounding *Linda* and György Gát's persona, then I move on to examine merchandising, remediation and the way the actors' careers have been built in relation to the show. I am going to claim that as a live action, fictional Hungarian tv series, *Linda* is not only innovative in its narrative and production techniques, but also in its proto-capitalist view of very consciously constructing the afterlife of the series.

To conclude, I will present how viewing figures were measured and utilized at the time, how they were evaluated within the industry, then I will demonstrate how each season was received both in Hungary and abroad.

During my research, I have used both quantitative and qualitative methods, conducted personal interviews and archival research. The most important aspect for me has been to approach all research from a social-historical and culture-theoretical lens. Anikó Imre's book *TV Socialism* points out that the relationship between socialism and television should be treated as interconnected windows. Following this notion, I found it very important to examine the television and the government's conception of self and their own ideas on what their roles in

society consisted of at the time, as the significance of certain works can only truly be acknowledged in the light of these circumstances.

3. The result of the dissertation

As part of working on the essay, I have systematized the extensive corpus on the topic, then expanded it with quantitative and qualitative analyses, personal interviews and archival research. Working from a substantial source material, my research goes beyond a simple analysis of a television series. Taking *Linda* as an example, I have explored how Hungarian Television was run, including the specific characteristics of filming tv series in the examined time period, while placing the series in an international context both in the narrative and production sense. Furthermore, I have extensively analyzed the different methods and trends of both socialist and capitalist television productions, including merchandising, remediation and star persona building. My dissertation can be seen as a unique approach to television history where I use the tv series *Linda* to interpret and reflect on certain production-historical, reception-theoretical, stylistic and narrative elements.