Steve Bradshaw
Last year we followed Hungarian film director Árpád Bogdan as he tried to come to terms with his Gypsy past. Since then the plight of Hungary’s Roma has taken a sinister turn for the worse as Árpád now discovers for himself.

NARRATOR
Award winning Hungarian film director Árpád Bogdan knew his parents were Roma, or Gypsy.

Last year we filmed him we filmed him trying to find them. Árpád wasn’t raised as a Roma, he’d been brought up in state orphanages.

Árpád Bogdan
You come out of state care and even if you know you’re a Gypsy you can’t really relate to that, because you don’t understand the cultural heritage, you don’t speak the language and you don’t share the same values as the Roma.

NARRATOR
As we filmed, Árpád learned his mother had died. He did find his father.

Árpád Bogdan
Whether I’ll ever want to see my father again, well… maybe I will.

NARRATOR
But since then Árpád decided not to stay in touch. He’s spent the last few months learning English abroad.

This summer Árpád flew back home to Hungary to find the Roma had become headline news.

In a country hard hit by the global recession the extreme Right has gained ground partly by targeting the Roma. They call Gypsies welfare dependants and petty criminals. Many agree.

Then, in 2008, the start of a series of vicious attacks shocks Hungary. The only thing linking the victims is their race.

Fifteen Gypsy houses have been attacked, always at night, all at the edge of villages. Five people have been killed, including a woman and a four year-old child.

Árpád Bogdan
All this is happening in a terrible social climate. And it’s in society we have to look for the answers.

NARRATOR
In a Budapest pub, Árpád is trying to find some answers (to the murders) with his friends.

Norbi
Many things come to mind: a foreign secret service, the extreme Right, the political left; or it could just be a crazy individual with a grudge.

The prejudice people have that many Roma are criminals must have led some to the misguided conclusion that they can restore order this way.

Zsolt
It would be horrible enough if someone thought that he could identify Roma who are criminals and kill them, but there’s no logic in trying to restore order by killing a child. That doesn’t make any sense at all.

Robi
Gypsies are rats to them, just rats.

That’s why our women and children can be slaughtered, because we’re nobodies.

NARRATOR
A few days later in August, another attack

Árpád Bogdan
I heard that people who condemn these attacks are invited to the funeral, to express their sympathy to the family. I think I have to be there, too.

NARRATOR
The killers have become more confident.

This time, for the first time, they entered the Gypsy’s house. They shot a single mother and her 13 year-old daughter in their sleep. As her mother is buried the girl is fighting for her life in hospital. For her grandmother the pain is too much to take.

After the funeral, Árpád is invited to the wake – at the crime scene. Most relatives are afraid to be seen on camera but there’s one exception, the victim’s niece Virág.

Virág
She was a kind, cheerful person.

We spoke every day. She always asked how I was, though mostly she could tell just by looking at me, we were so close.

Árpád Bogdan
And the little girl, is she getting better?

Virág
She can still barely speak but she still keeps asking about her mother. Her mother meant everything to her, she was her best friend too. People are saying how ‘professional’ these killers are and that really upsets me, I don’t think we can call people ‘professional’ who attack two innocent, vulnerable women.

NARRATOR
After each attack Roma leaders visit the families. Aladar Horvath suggests a particularly sinister explanation for the attacks and murders.

**Aladar**
I think this is a provocation, probably to get the Roma to hit back at the Hungarians, to shoot back at them. And once that happens all further murders of the Roma will seem justified, and if it comes to any kind of a Gypsy revolt the state can use full force to crush it.

**NARRATOR**
Árpád decides to visit the family of the first victims, in Nagycsecs.

As in most attacks, molotov cocktails were thrown through the window. As they ran for safety, the gypsies inside were shot. The house chosen was always at the edge of the village – easy to attack and easy to get away.

**Árpád Bogdan**
You think they came from there?

**TIBOR**
Yes, where they came from and where they went.

**NARRATOR**
Tibor lost both his wife and his disabled brother in the attack. Donations enabled him to rebuild most of the house. But the fear would not go away.

**Girl**
I hear they kept on killing here and there and everywhere. I’m just glad they haven’t come back here.

**Tibor**
At night I hear the dog bark. I go out, look around, nothing.

Half an hour later the dog barks again. I check again, can’t see anyone out there. But I’m not afraid, they can come shoot me if they want. Isn’t it enough they killed my family? They might as well shoot me, too.

**Árpád Bogdan**
Having been to some of the crime scenes it strikes me that the killers seem to choose the poorest most vulnerable people, the ones least able to get their voices heard. But I know someone who has a slightly different perspective because she is also a kind of an expert. She is a sociologist and she lost her uncle in one of these attacks.

**Ágnes**
We have seen time and time again in Hungary that when a Roma person does something bad it is never just about him, it becomes a much bigger story. People generalise and the Roma get a kind of collective punishment. On the other hand solidarity doesn’t seem to work as effectively, not towards the Roma anyway, not even when children are killed, not even when people are being gunned down.
There should have been more of a public outcry?

Yes, I certainly haven’t seen the sort of national outrage I would have expected.

I–

Agi
I do have a personal link to this story, because er – sorry, I can’t bring myself to even say it.

Do you understand?

Árpád Bogdan
I understand.

NARRATOR
The next morning Agnes takes Árpád to the local Gypsy ghetto on the edge of town. Fifteen hundred people live here, almost all on benefits. Very few homes have running water.

Ágnes
There’s a strong expectation that the Roma should blend into society, but you have to take into account where we come from. And for many families the starting point is an environment like this. There can be no entrepreneurs, no intelligentsia coming from a place like this. It’s very tough.

NARRATOR
It seems everyone here has a problem.

LADY
Look here, look here! I got a letter about my house, but I can't read or write. Can you help me?

This is from a bank. Your house has been mortgaged.

Yes, but if I start losing my little pension, what will I eat? What will become of me?

This is my house, right here. You can come in if you want. Come in, come in!

Come this way.

NARRATOR
The murders are on everyone’s mind.

Lady
Gypsies are being slaughtered,

I can’t understand why. Why can’t people see that we’re just like them? We’re not animals. Why do they have to do this?

I’m so afraid.
GET OUT, GET OUT!

There are those who steal, that’s true. I understand if they’re punished – but only by the courts or the police. TAKE THAT CAT OUT OF HERE THIS INSTANT!

I remember when I was little they came and gathered the Jews; they were taken and burnt. That’s what some people want to do to the gypsies. I just wish they got it over with already.

What is our life worth anyway? They’ll come and kill us sooner or later!

NARRATOR
Agnes’s friend Janos is a Gypsy teacher.

Jani
Fixing the houses wouldn’t be enough, it’s about employment, education, and healthcare too. They would have to be moved away from here because physical integration is the only way to get them out of these circumstances. What’s missing is the money and the social will. If these 1,500 people were moved into the town there’d be a huge outcry.

And once there’s a ghetto it’s no surprise that people start behaving like people in ghettos do – and crime is a part of that, no doubt.

NARRATOR
To find out what the government is doing, Árpád visits the official in charge of Roma issues.

Teleki
There are 650 Gypsy ghettos in Hungary today with a 130,000 inhabitants, and for a long time nobody realised that it’s impossible to go to school or kindergarten from these places, it’s impossible to get work.

Árpád Bogdan
Since you’ve been in this job, what successes have you had?

Teleki
Looking at the situation today, I don’t think any politician can say that they achieved great things. This might sound harsh, but I think the Roma in this country still haven’t had kind of a new deal. It’s the responsibility of society, it’s not about politicians. Politics would change if society did.

It’s just that people would have to understand that the Roma are citizens just like anybody else.

NARRATOR
But society is not changing. At an anti-racist rally in Budapest turnout is disappointingly low.

American Activist
We must raise our voices in opposition against racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia - and romophobia.

**NARRATOR**
As tensions rise and accusations fly the Roma claim they’re not only being murdered, but they’re also being framed.

**Erno Setet**
Ladies and gentlemen, and now Erno Setet will perform a traditional gypsy dance!

**NARRATOR**
Árpád’s Gypsy musician friend, Erno Setet, was jailed for 17 months for a robbery even though he had solid alibis.

**Erno Setet**
I had 40 witnesses and a video recording proving that I was playing at a concert three hundred kilometres away from the crime scene, but neither the judge nor the police believed it.

The judge said, “In your community it is a given that you will find people to say anything you want them to.”

**NARRATOR**
Erno was eventually cleared on appeal. During his time in jail he lost his job and his wife left him, taking their two year-old daughter. Erno is convinced he was framed by the police simply for being Roma, and he is not the only one who feels that the Roma are blamed for crimes they didn’t commit.

**Árpád Bogdan**
There’s a case where the community of a small town accused three Roma boys with the rape and murder of a young girl.

Everyone felt so strongly, they even organised a demonstration that extreme right-wing groups also took part in. Five thousand people were there and the mayor made a speech to say: enough of Gypsy violence.

**Árpád Bogdan**
The boys were later cleared and the perpetrator proved to be a white Hungarian. I want to see how the three boys felt about all this.

**NARRATOR**
The boys volunteered for any testing necessary to clear their names. But many here in Kiskunlacháza still doubt their innocence – in the face of DNA evidence and a confession by a man now under arrest.

**Boy 1**
They treated us badly, not like a normal police interrogation, but like…

**Boy 2**
'You bloody Gypsy! What were you wearing when you killed her?'

Boy 3
We felt pretty bad to be accused of such a thing, when we barely even steal as it is.

Boy 1
The police only changed their tune when he saw the lie detector test results. We all passed.

NARRATOR
Around town Árpád finds that resentment against the Roma here is stronger than anything he’s ever experienced. Few people would speak on camera. But almost everyone tells a similar tale. The Roma, and the three boys in particular, simply don’t have a good reputation.

Boy
These boys are the black sheep of the community, it is safe to say.

Man
The Roma break into houses, they attack people on the street, they snatch handbags.

Árpád Bogdan
I heard something about another little girl… an incident last week.

Néni
Yes, that was my godson’s daughter. She was robbed while she was walking home from school by eight boys.

Árpád Bogdan
Who were these boys?

Néni
Gypsies, I’m afraid

Woman in Hat
There are a few Roma families here who do cheat, steal and rob – but hold on a second, there’s no reason to generalise.

The anti-Gypsy sentiment in this town is outrageous! Goodbye.

Árpád Bogdan
I came here because I thought I could prove how unfounded the anti-Gypsy prejudice in these small communities can be. But having spoken to lots of people,

Hungarians and gypsies, I had to realise that around here the prejudice is based on daily experience that is very real. And if that’s the case, it’s hard to expect people start being more positive, to change their attitude towards this ethnic group.

I don’t really know what could be done
I will have to ask someone who has been dealing with the subject for much longer.

**NARRATOR**
Andras Biro is a well-known human rights campaigner. Last year he warned the bad feeling against gypsies could lead to murders.

**András Biró**
These people have been on the margins of society for a very long time and that often brings an element of criminality, unfortunately. And there is an automatic reaction to that, not only by the population but also by members of the police. Polls show that 85% of Hungarian society feels negatively about the Roma. This is a frightening figure. But the incredible increase in recent times is based on a lot of people having personal experience of getting their crops, cell phones or Addidas shoes stolen by gypsies.

And they say, ‘Hold on a second, this isn’t right. This shouldn’t be allowed to happen.’ And eventually this builds up to a feeling that, ‘Something has to be done about this, something has to be done about these people.’

I read the interview in which you predicted months before the first attack that there will be killings. How did you know?

I’m not at all proud of my prediction. I wish I’d been wrong.

Some pathological individuals see this as a solution, just like the Ku Klux Klan used to.

**Árpád Bogdan**
Pathological?

**András Biró**
Yes, yes, I’m convinced of that. Someone who kills people because of the colour of their skin cannot be sane. But it was fairly clear to me that it could come to something like this. And I’m afraid to say it, but I think it could get worse.

**Árpád Bogdan**
Worse how?

**András Biró**
Pogroms.

**Árpád Bogdan**
What?

**András Biró**
Pogroms. More than one person will be killed at a time. And eventually the Roma will lose their cool, they will strike back and then this give and take will never end.

**Árpád Bogdan**
Is there a way out anywhere?
András Biró
Bridges have to built, quickly and locally. We shouldn’t look for politics with a capital ‘P’ in this, there should be small-scale, local projects to provide people with something to do, some source of income, employment.

NARRATOR
One such small local project is a co-op set up by a private charity in the village of Igrici. The Roma here were asked what they thought would help them make a living. They decided they wanted to live off the land and grow cucumbers.

Árpád Bogdan
What did people around here live on before?

Néni
Benefits dear, benefits. And loans. They went to local moneylenders, at huge interest rates. That’s how people got by, there was absolutely no opportunities for work around here.

Judit
Some of the people here have been out of employment for years, you can’t expect them to be able to handle this workload all of a sudden.

Woman in Red Shirt
There aren’t enough workers, that’s the problem.

Judit
Why? Aren’t there enough unemployed around here?

Woman
There might be, but many don’t come here to work.

Judit
Why not?

WOMAN
Because we have to work 14-16 hours a day.

Judit
And still Hungarian people say that the gypsies can’t work!

Woman
Of course we can work! It’s the Hungarians who come and say no thank you.

Néni
Not the Roma women, the Hungarians!

Árpád Bogdan
The people here are living proof that these stereotypes about the Roma not wanting to work and wanting to live on the dole are false. Here they are! And here is this project. And beyond giving the Roma employment it gives them self-respect and it gives their children a future. I think this is a really good thing. Great. Why isn’t this happening all over the country? HELLO? WHERE CAN I PUT ALL THE CUCUMBER?

NARRATOR
Then, breaking news. After a concerted effort by a hundred police investigators, four people have been charged with the whole series of racist attacks. The men work as bouncers in two bars in the town of Debrecen. One is a former soldier who used to serve with NATO troops in Kosovo. They are known to have racist views. One of them had even written on the internet about wanting to kill gypsies – men, women and children.

In a Budapest café Árpád catches up with Virag, the niece of the most recent victim. It’s been three weeks since they met at her aunt’s funeral. Virág has come to the capital looking for work. She tells Árpád the Roma back in her village are far from reassured by the arrests.

Virag
For a moment I did feel relieved, but deep down nothing really changed inside me. I think everyone else in the village felt the same. The situation is the same as before, the Roma men still patrol the streets at night, people are still afraid.

Árpád Bogdan
I expected something much more complex, as well.

A political conspiracy, maybe economic interests.

This seems too simple.

Virag
That’s it

Árpád Bogdan
But sometimes things are incredibly simple.

Virag
What would you do to reassure the Roma?

Árpád Bogdan
What would reassure me, and I think the Roma too, is if they started getting real opportunities in the society where they live. If they weren’t living at the edge of towns and villages anymore – or even further out than that – if I didn’t see young generations getting lost in an indifferent void.

As long as these basic social problems are not fixed we can’t rest assured.

Virag
Do you think that maybe it’s also your responsibility to help the Roma cause?
Árpád Bogdan
Well, put like that – no, I don’t think so. These issues, these problems appear in my work anyway. I don’t see myself as a civil rights activist or anything. I don’t think it’s something I have to bang about all the time.

But there is no doubt that when you look at what I stand for, when you look at what is represented in my work, the identification with the Roma is very clearly there.

NARRATOR
Losing his family made it easier for Árpád to make his own choices, but hundreds of thousands of Roma still remain trapped on the edge of Hungarian society. They are on the political agenda now, but politics still hasn’t found a way out.