Ethnicity, Performance and World Music. Cultural politics and musical practices of Roma performers in Hungary

by
Gergő Pulay

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Supervisors:
Professor Ayse Caglar
Professor Michael Stewart

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Abstract

During the last two decades Roma musical styles has gone through numerous changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The effects of these can't be assessed merely through altering musical performances and products in themselves, but also through the ways of shaping the relationships of the Roma with their broader social surroundings. The aim of this paper is to understand the 'micro-politics' of Roma music making in Hungary by placing such performances at the intersections of identity politics and the recent development of the world music field. In practical terms, it means to contextualize the music played by Roma as a form of expressive culture with respect to the networks of musical performance, production and reception. The category of world music is widely understood as an all-encompassing notion of 'musical otherness'; and also as a recent market-force towards creating 'mixed' or 'hybridized' forms of music. My basic assumption is that musical practices can and should be interpreted as contributions to more explicit discourses on the 'dispersal', 'recognition', 'modernization', or 'labeling' of the Roma in our region.

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Introduction

On the 25th of November 2006 I was invited to a party organized by 'Radio C' (the first and only official radio station of the Hungarian Roma minority[1]) in a suburban area of Budapest. Most of the guests were representatives of a developing Roma elite; including young Roma journalists working as experts of minority issues in the media; activists from NGOs with initiatives against discrimination; dancers and musicians from more or less acknowledged Roma bands; star speakers of the 'Radio C'; and some of those few young men who are considered to be the 'vanguard' of a presumed Roma business class in Hungary – since they're working as stockbrokers or managers of multinational companies. This crowd could be seen as a mixed and diverse configuration of people – unless we take into consideration the common notion of being 'Roma representatives' of all these different professions.

Although the organizers were attentive for the well-being of the guests, most people were passive, unsatisfied with the place itself and the band that played. The location of the party – the canteen of a public school – resembled the usual site of a rural wedding than a place of an urban 'elite celebration'. While the menu contained several 'traditionally Roma' items, most of the guests – at least the men – were drinking English whiskey. Later I joined a smaller group of people to continue the evening somewhere else. A Roma woman from our company, who otherwise works as a fortune teller, suggested going to her flat. I knew that such after-parties are usually not only better and more intimate but they're also among those nowadays rare events when my Roma acquaintances sing a whole set of songs which are otherwise

totally excluded from the stage performances. These are the 'songs for listening' (*"hallgató"*) or in other words the 'true speech' (*"chachi vorba"*) of the Roma. Such slow songs are based on narrative forms, strongly connected to the personality and the life story of the performer. As Michael Stewart notes, "In the act of singing, Rom men create an ideal communal world in contrast to their daily fractiousness. The context and content of Rom collective singing, as well as the nature of the song, mean that in the performance of song Rom men experience themselves becoming fully Rom." (Stewart, 1989: 79.)

In the flat one of the men at the table took upon the role of the initiator and started to sing a *'hallgató'* in a rather special way. In his version the traditional songs became jazzy vocal improvisations. The others joined his ironic performance and accompanied the singer as a swing-choir while one of the main voices of 'Radio C' added a spontaneous oral imitation of Afro-American hip-hop bass-lines to this hybrid cultural display. The performance was a meaningful example of the changing conceptions and practices of being and "becoming fully Rom". Although the situation was rather amusing it was obvious that the border is quite thin between the loose act of being both 'traditional' and 'modern' and the turmoil because of the shame of not being able to sing the songs as it *should be* done traditionally. The conflict between these two different views was explicated by one of the musicians who stood up at a moment and said: "After destroying so many songs let's try to sing at least one properly!" The others started to debate his statement immediately by saying that "there's no such task" and "what we are doing is the 2006-way of singing". There were no explicit discussions on 'Roma identity' and its maintenance in a changing world; however the crucial issues of the debate were clear for all the participants. It

[1] By following both the academic discourses and the definitions in the field I use both the 'Roma' and

was not only about the relation of innovation and ethnic traditions, but also about the condition of being 'fully Rom', the self-ironic display of its features, and the shame felt after such 'dangerous games'. According to Victor Turner, in a performance like this controversial cultural explanations can co-exist at the same time (Turner, 1988.).

Most of the ethnographies on the singing and especially the 'true speech' of the Roma in Hungary describes these practices as culturally sacred moments of activating traditional patterns and notions of togetherness beyond the time and space of everyday life (Kovalcsik, 1999.; Stewart, 1989.). In my case a similar social practice was filled by something else than the mere activation of traditional patterns. The experience of being and "becoming fully Rom" was supposed to be constructed by the successful mix of something 'old' and something 'new', or in other words by showing the potential for cultural translations instead of reproducing local and traditional patterns. If such an action is powerful and persuasive enough for the audience, the performer will be recognized as somebody who is able to hold on to both the 'traditional' and the 'modern', his ancestors and his contemporaries as well. If the interpretation of such performances as accentuated moments of identity-construction is correct then we have to suppose that such changing performances are still significant mediums for the altering modes of ethnic identification.

The above described case could be taken as a meaningful example of the main issues raised up in this research. During the last two decades Roma musical styles has gone through numerous changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The effects of these can't be assessed merely through altering musical performances and products in themselves, but also through the ways of shaping the relationships of the Roma with their broader social surroundings. Beyond the musicological categorization of styles

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the "Gypsy' category throughout this paper. However, in most cases 'Roma' appears as an external

based upon only their inherent features and the discourses that are limited to the problems of minority representations in the media, this paper is concentrated on the place of Roma musicians and their performances in a context formed by the various networks of musical production, reception and consumption. The main questions of this paper are the following: What are the performers' strategies for identification? What kinds of musical patterns are used in these altering contexts? What the musical scene does for the wider contestations related to the recognition or integration of Roma?

"If history is written by the victors then the Roma only ever win at music." – writes Garth Carthwright, the author of the book *Princes Amongst Men: Journeys with Gypsy Musicians*; a popular travelogue in the circles of English-speaking enthusiasts of Balkan Roma performers promoted by the world music market (Carthwright, 2005.: 12). Although scholars from the disciplines under the umbrella-category of Romany Studies often deprecate the romanticizing tendencies of popular literature on the Gypsies, there are some recurrent ideas that come into view in both of these genres. One among them is that Roma music cannot be understood merely in terms of performative arts or aesthetics: it is a socially-embedded expressive form which has its own 'micro-politics' through the agency of performers and the various forms of cultural exchange in Roma and non-Roma relations. As Carol Silverman notes, these practices are based on "the paradox, that Roma are powerless politically and powerful musically" (Silverman, 1996: 231.). In these terms the music of the Roma could be conceived according to Lawrence Grossberg's suggestions about popular culture in general; as "a sphere in which people struggle over reality and their place in it, a sphere in which people are continuously working with and within already existing

category, while I introduce 'Gypsy' as an internal one.

relations of power, to make sense of and improve their lives" (Grossberg, 1997: 2.). However, it also implies that the uses of this power could be highly diverse in their actual citations.

On the one hand, the idea that music is 'inherited' through the 'blood' of the Gypsies; the very figure of the 'Gypsy musician' is among the most powerful stereotypical notions concerning the Roma. On the other, music is apparently 'there' in the everyday life of almost any place where Gypsy communities reside without respect to social status and location. In spite of the above cited stereotypes musical performance is one of those terrains that allow looking at "Roms not only as victims but also as actors in the social processes that inform their lives" (Beissinger, 2001: 25.) I have witnessed astonished reactions among my non-Roma acquaintances several times after entering homes in poor Roma neighborhoods in Hungary lacking the proper supply of running water and many other equipments of a 'proper' household – but not the facilities of CD- and DVD-players with the wide set of records. Such examples can prove that music and popular culture provide positive sources for identification in a context that is depicted otherwise almost exclusively with the negative sociological indicators of scarcity and deprivation. Many of the popular and social scientific texts are maintaining this relational way of reasoning when discussing the social embeddedness of Roma musical culture and performativity. Werbner's statement about early immigrant entrepreneurs might be relevant here, referring to those who "with no capital rely heavily on the only capital they can gain access to or even invent – cultural capital." (Werbner, 1999: 564.). Making music is one of those cultural practices which are able to create space for self-formulation and representation for people both characterized by ethnicity and marginalized social position. In such situations music is attached with meanings and messages that cannot be conveyed by

any other medium. An analysis with such assumptions could be fruitful regarding Roma musical performances as the sites of identification and categorization[2].

In the recent years there has been a wide discussion about the frameworks of Romany politics in Central and Eastern Europe including the role of identity, recognition or culture in organizational and state policies (see: Jenne, 2000.; Szalai, 2003.). In comparison much smaller attention has been devoted to the everyday uses and contexts of the very same issues. Regarding the 'micro-politics' of representation and recognition of the Roma the role of music and musical performance cannot be eliminated. Musical practices can be interpreted as symbolic contributions to more explicit discourses on the 'development', 'integration' or 'labeling'. Like black people depicted in Paul Gilroy's accounts (Gilroy, 1991; 1993), the Roma are also lacking a general sense of political cohesion or structure – at least in terms of the patterns associated with centralized forms of nation-building. The suspicion or indifference of local communities towards such initiations help to maintain a structure of relations in which the actually valuated meanings and messages associated with the idea of 'groupness' are transmitted by persons and practices outside of the formally defined terrain of politics.

Identifying the 'uniqueness' and the similarities of cultures named as 'Gypsies' – compared to other minorities, marginal or dispersed groups throughout the world – is one of the recurrent goals of Romany Studies (Okely, 2003.). Nevertheless it should be noted that musical performance and reception are among those scenes where the subjects of research themselves are negotiating the very same issues: their connections with other Romany groups in the world; analogies with other ethnically defined genres of popular culture; and not at least their own positions in the local

[2] For the relationship between identification and categorization, see: Jenkins, 2004.

continuities of ethnic music in which the notions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' are the objects of ongoing cultural debates. What is borrowed from such diverse sources and how is it integrated into their own expressive forms? The answers to such questions are meaningful also in the broader context of modernizational claims both from and towards the Roma. The taking over of patterns from the outside world is not necessary equal with the process of assimilation: the creative factor of performance and identity construction lies in the forms of adaptation that helps to turn something alien into their own (Williams, 1996.).

After 1989, the idea of Roma self-organization was re-formulated amidst the frames of the new public sphere in Hungary. This produced a change in the relation of public musical performance and Roma recognition. The actors of the period's Gypsy cultural self-representation helped to put such musical styles and traditions into the forefront of interests that were outside the public attention before. Their attempts were significant in creating subsequent definitions for the Roma category in Hungary – and also in the development of institutional frameworks for the canonization of 'Roma culture'.

During the 1990's new musical instruments and sounds has been incorporated into the music played by Gypsies in Hungary. The integration of styles like *'Latin'* or *'Rap'* reflected the efforts for framing alternate conceptions of both minority-majority relations and the connections that tie the Roma to other cultures in the world. The current development of the *world music* field (based on a unifying category for all locally rooted musical forms around the globe, see: Feld, 2000.) faced Roma musicians with new challenges. In one of my interviews a young Roma performer from Hungary – who identified himself as a performer of 'world music' – explained the dynamic relation between tradition and innovation this way: "Nowadays the thirty

years old records are considered to be the 'authentic Gypsy music', maybe in thirty years time that music will be taken as authentic which I play today." In sum, such instances are all referring to the ways in which music is becoming a scene for the 'micro-politics' of representation and for the expression of claims for various modes of recognition. In the case of the Roma musical scene these practices can be also regarded as suggestions for the content of the same ethnic category; or in other words as various forms of performing the Roma category. The aim of this paper is to understand such symbolic forms of claim-making by Roma performers and their musical products in contemporary Hungary.

Chapter 1: Ethnicity, performance and music-making

1.1 The cultural politics of dispersal

According to Paul Gilroy's account in *The Black Atlantic*, the contradiction between the idea of nationality and the internal differences of the black Diaspora cannot be solved by a political culture that aims to bring these people into one 'culturally insiderist' unit of national development (Gilroy, 1993.). Since these patterns are exactly the ones which fragment the black peoples, in terms of incorporation Gilroy concentrates on those cultural forms that originated by the processes of dispersal; namely the syncretic and constantly reworked cultural patterns of the black Atlantic "which evoke and affirm a condition in which the negative meanings given to the enforced movements of black are somehow transposed" (Gilroy, 1993: 111.) This approach recalls the strategies of subversion by many stigmatized subjects who

transform the negative meanings of their stigma into a 'privilegized standpoint' (see: Goffman, 1990 [1963]), which often takes place by the tools of expressive culture.

As Gilroy argues, the structure of black Atlantic as both a cultural and a political system requires new ways of understanding to replace the ideas of culture as merely the terrain of aesthetic judgment, detached from the sphere of the 'political'. In this context the politically understood messages are mediated through forms of expressive culture (typically by musical production and performance); and the meanings of expressive culture is interpreted in politically defined ways. In these terms the notion of 'politics' refers to the potential of expressive culture to be a resource in the organization of dispersed or marginalized peoples without following the centralized – and necessarily homogenizing – construction of cultural canons. An elementary factor of this argument is the subversive reading of marginality not merely as a state of deprivation or scarcity but rather as a condition which opens up a wide space for strategizing between various patterns of organization: some of them already exist elsewhere (predominantly reified by the model of the nation-state); but others can be invented currently to overcome former models[3].

However, as Stuart Hall notes concerning the content of the 'black' category: "being black isn't really good enough for me: I want to know what your cultural politics are." (Hall, 1993: 474.) This remark could draw the attention to some problematic features of the original conception of the black Atlantic. Despite of his concerns about the non-essential and decentralized condition of cultures that exist in the form of dispersal, and hence continuous syncretism; Gilroy's supposing a highly autonomous field of cultural production (see: Bourdieu, 1994.; and below). In this framework, the possibilities of exchange are after all limited to the extent which is defined by the very

category of 'black'. This perspective may loose sight of those forms of exchange which take place between horizontally defined but culturally different settings (for the question of horizontal relations of Diasporas, see: Clifford, 1997.). There're several examples for such forms of exchange in cases where the patterns of black expressive cultures – like rap or hip-hop – were adopted by performers of other marginalized and/or ethnic communities (for example the Turkish Rap in Berlin: Caglar, 1998; or the Roma rap in Budapest: Somogyi, 2001). Here the meaning of 'black' could go through significant transformations (while still being referred to) but without the involvement into the networks described by the 'black Atlantic'. Today, this circulation of references seems to be one of the main challenges that are encountered by the performers and their audiences in the world music scene.

1.2 Understanding Roma performance

The practices of cultural performance and performativity have a specific role for peoples living in various forms dispersion or positioned at the margins of social structures. Members of such social categories that are deprived from advantages of marketization, welfare and improvement of living standards – phenomena that can be associated with the general notion of 'modernization' – tend to find symbolic ways to "reposition themselves, sometimes through deploying the very codes of the modern that have framed them as its others" (see: Schein, 1999: 364.).

The groups named as Gypsy or Roma could be taken as an example among these. "Roma, Gypsy type groups (…) have long been global, although in their unique way.

[3] This approach to culture and social marginality resembles some of the discussions about the 'normalization' and/or 'pluralism' of Romany language with reference to the development of transnational ties among Roma residing in different nation-states.

(…) Gypsies provide a special example of culture as created in shared not isolated territory and which consequently involves daily and ubiquitous encounters with non-Gypsies and their representatives." (Okely, 2003: 152.) The term performance has a dual relevance here. As Silverman notes, "it is often necessary for Gypsies to submerge their Gypsy ethnicity entirely, because it is a social stigma." (Silverman, 1988: 265.). Opposed to this strategy, the people of this study – most of them professional performers in one way or another – introduce themselves to various audiences as bearers of qualities associated with the Roma category. In these terms the notion of performance is almost replaceable with the one of 'staged ethnicity'. However, beyond the issues of 'staging' practices, performance has a further reference to the power that is conjured up in the course of ritualized encounters in which social divisions, ethnic identification or the definitions of the self and the other are put into action. In such contexts, participants are "negotiating their location in relation to the social categories that typed them. (…) As performances, these were acts – sometimes speech acts – that made or did something rather than describing something else." (Schein, 1999: 268.) Regarding the Roma, the notion of performance appears to be a counter-part of other modes of identification in some of the literature. As Gay y Blasco notes in her case study on Spain, "unlike citizenship or nationality, Gypsyness is not imposed from above or from the centre, but rather is dependent on the performances of particular Gitano persons." (Blasco, 2002: 179.).

Musical performance is an important site for ethnic differentiation in all of those countries where Roma populations reside. However, in many cases the terrain of music as a form of expressive culture is understood by scholars in a directly oppositional relation with the sphere of everyday life. The role of Roma musicians, their performances and relations to their various audiences are often depicted through

their *liminal character*. According to Turner, the relationship between everyday social processes and cultural performance is dialectical and reflexive: during performance mainstream society generates its opposite, an inverted, to some extent sacred domain of cultural action (Turner, 1988.). Hence the phenomenon of liminality dissolves all factual and commonsense systems into their components and 'play' with them. The terrain of music played by Roma can be a sphere of 'Gypsy dominance' outside the otherwise existing rules and structures, where non-Roma can be only imitators or at least second-rated participants (Thede, 1999.). Margaret H. Beissinger describes another aspect of ambiguity concerning the status of Roma performers – the so called *lăutari* – in Romania: "Inhabiting a niche defined by both vocation and ethnicity, Romani musicians occupy realms of both highly skilled professionalism and low-status ethnicity. Lăutari view themselves as a separate cultural group that has more in common with the dominant populace for whom they perform than with other Roms" (Beissinger, 2001: 25.) As Mattijs Van de Port argues on the basis of a fieldwork done in Serbia, while 'Gypsy' is a common term of abuse among Serbs, the wish to be 'just like a Gypsy' is a recurrent theme in Serbian popular culture (Van de Port, 1999). According to the author's conclusion, such a paradoxical relation could be understood by the idea of projecting unwanted parts of the self onto significant others – namely to the Roma, the 'strangers within' – that is made explicit in the curse of the intimate interactions between Gypsy performers and their audiences. Nevertheless these models – based on a strong opposition between the space of performance and 'everyday life' or even 'normalcy' – seem to be rather limited in terms of understanding the performers' point of view. Maybe it is not accidental that in terms of empirical material many of such interpretations are rather based on the experiences

of those who're 'entertained' but not those who're in the position of the 'entertainer'[4]. In other words, the interpretation of Romany music and performativity on the basis of liminality (and its oppositional nature with other spaces and times of social life) seems to be more fruitful in the understanding of the 'Gypsy' as it is constructed from an external point of view; hence these explanations are rather encouraging our understandings about the representation of Roma as the eternal 'Other'. In these terms the notion of "articulating *other* people's >>soul<<" (Van de Port, 1999: 291) reflects an unequal situation where the Roma performer's task is to express meanings instead of others (namely: the *Gadjos* or non-Gypsies); to mediate feelings that are not his own. Hence the relation between the performer and the audience implies that the former seems to be relatively deprived from agency in the sense of formulating the very same relationship.

One major element of my argument in this paper is related to the ways in which contemporary Roma performers in Hungary are using the tools of performance for the negotiation or even the refusal of such unequal relationships and hence claiming for modes of recognition that are discontinuous with the patterns described above. It might be similar to the case of the Miao minority in China; a social category that is often depicted both as traditional and as 'emblematic antipodes' from the point of view of the Chinese state's discourses on modernization (Schein, 1999.). According to Louisa Schein, "Miao, contrary to the dominant expectations, *performed modernity* in a wide range of practices from formal onstage versions to the very informal but usually involved making culture an object of reflection (…) by performing modernity *as Miao*, these actors refused their consignment to the role of impoverished, rural,

[4] For example in Van de Port's work on Roma musicians in Serbia one could find plentiful descriptions of the performative events and encounters in which Romany musicians are interacting with the members of their Serbian audiences, but these accounts rarely represent the ways in which these encounters were perceived or interpreted by the performers themselves.

tradition bearers and attempted to make membership in the prestigious category of modernity less exclusive, more negotiable." (ibid: 372.) Moreover, as the author notes at another point, it is not only the refusal but also the *transfer* of the externally imposed label that takes place in the curse of the performance: "The performing of modernity worked in tandem with the displacing of traditionality onto others." (ibid: 368.)

The solution to the puzzle of the performances in the intersections of ethnicity, music and the claims for 'recognition' or 'modernity' may be found by interpreting them with reference to the social space 'outside'– in other words not in a direct opposition with everyday life or 'normalcy'. However, in the light of many items from the literature on popular culture, music and society this connection – namely the ways of relating cultural products and performances to social structures – seems to be one of the most problematic points. As Jocelyne Guilbault notes, the model of structural homology – namely the assumption of "homologous relationships between music and social structures" – has been one of the most frequently used frameworks for studies in ethnomusicology (Guilbault, 1997: 36.). The recent reconsideration of the model is based on the idea that "instead of looking at 'structures' as pre-existing things, we must look at how they have been formed": by placing a 'structure' in a different context it could take on different meanings, hence the dynamic aspects of the process become more relevant for our understanding (ibid: 36-37.). Besides the critiques related to the homologous or reinforcing features of cultural performance there're also doubts concerning the exaggeration of the subversive potential that is often attributed to them. Here the question is directed towards the effectiveness of performance with regards to the transformation of space and social relations outside its spheres and occasions. For example, the above referred paradigmatic works of Gilroy – not at

least because of the historical context of his major empirical investigations (see: Gilroy, 1991.) – is about a *counter-culture* that has various methods to remain different (or even independent) from the centralized or industrialized forms of cultural production. In his perspective 'cultural politics' are always foregoing the 'cultural industry'; so the agents of the cross-fertilization are recurrently overcome "those for whom selling is nothing other than a means to greater profit" (Gilroy, 1991: 154.). The criticism is neither about the total refusal of agency in the field of cultural production; nor about rejecting the possibility of 'political' in the sphere of expressive culture. What matters here, is rather a more detailed understanding of the relations between performers, agents, institutions and audiences with respect to the widening global networks of musical production, promotion and reception. In this changing context the maintenance of ethnically defined affiliations by the tools of expressive culture or the (culturally coded) recognition of 'Others' can be embedded into the operation of an advanced 'alterity industry', centered on the organized production of 'authenticity' (Huggan, 2001.). In sum, while much of the theoretical literature on cultural performance and performativity is engaging with the dilemma of 'subversion or intensification', an ethnographic investigation could provide more concerning the points and "nuances (…) where theoretical options become blurred". (Schein, 1999: 369.) As in many other parts of the world, for Roma performers in Hungary most of the above described recent challenges are mediated by the development of the world music field. The remaining part of this review concentrates on the issues of identity politics and musical performance with regards to this evolving context[5].

[5] One of the reasons why the reconsideration of Gilroy's work seems to be a relevant project from the point of view of the literature on world music is that the development of world music (both as a category and as a form of cultural industry) is strongly connected to the representation and reworking of black music. As many authors note it, the 'archetypical' forms of trajectories that performers, careers and songs went along in the context of world music are still related to the black cultures of Africa, the Caribbean, or the US (see: Feld, 2000; Guilbault, 1997.).

1.3 The development of the world music field

World music is nowadays clearly 'in the air'. There's an agreement in the literature that world music should be approached as a symbolic terrain of our age: it could be also an example for notions like 'globalization', 'deterritorialization' or 'cultural imperialism'. The term of world music is among the objects of the contestations that are providing the issues of research and it reflects the power relations between those who are categorizing and those who are categorized with it (for the question of categorization and identification, see: Jenkins, 2004.). "Tensions around the meaning of sonic heterogeneity and homogeneity precisely parallel other tensions that characterize global processes of separation and mixing, with an emphasis on stylistic genericization, hybridization and revitalization" (Feld, 2000: 146.). The parallel debates and the tensions around 'sonic diversity, separation and mixing' have contributions both from those who're living in the areas where world music 'is coming from', and where it is consumed. As Jocelyne Guilbault notes according to her own research about *zouk*, a popular musical genre of the French West Indies: "creolisation has acquired a new status: it used to be looked down upon and ascribed pejorative connotations as a result of colonialism, but now it is considered – at least by a large portion of the local Caribbean populations – as positive, a sign of health and growth, and an openness to the world" (Guilbault, 1997: 35.)

In practical terms world music does not exist as a musical genre with any kind of inherent or stylistic unity (Brennan, 2001., Feld, 2000.; Guilbault, 1997.). The only common feature of the products placed under this label is related to *what they are not*: the mainstream popular music of the West. One major outcome of the ongoing

institutionalization of the world music field (as the notion of the field was used by Bourdieu; see: Bourdieu, 1994.) is the creation of a new system of reference where diverse musical products – which were rarely compared to each other before – are gathered and became fungible with each other as parts of the same segment of consumption. The relevance of discussing world music as a field is also provided by its pathway from being a term "circulated first by academics in the early 1960s to celebrate and promote the study of musical diversity" (opposed to the elitist notions Western art music; see: Feld, 2000: 146.), to becoming a powerful label of a niche-market upon which various elites (economic, intellectual, political, etc.) are struggling for control[6]. The strength and success of the products depend on the identities which are made available with the objects of commodification. From the point of view of the consumers in metropolitan centers world music is an example for the cultural dynamics of an age when there's no more need for any kind of spatial motion or traveling to acquire the experience of cultural differences or a sense of cosmopolitan citizenship. As Timothy Brennen suggests: "In the countries of Europe and North America, the idea is what hearing music from other parts of the world must be, the only we can make of it: namely, not a specific *form* of music (symphonic, choral, written, improvised, rural, or ritual) but a *place* of music – the music of everywhere else." (Brennan, 2001: 45.).

World music is often pictured as a category that opens up a space for understanding of diverse (often 'hybrid', or 'displaced') expressive cultures, so it is taken as a terrain where ideas about tolerance and recognition could be elaborated. Such expectations can be also found in the social scientific discourses on world music. As James

[6] One of the most emblematic conflicts regarding the problems of ownership, performance and 'world music making' took place exactly among these actors, when *Deep Forest* made a worldwide success by the rearrangement of various recordings from ethnomusicological collections – without the

Ferguson notes in his essay on the transnational politics of Cuban music: "peripheral cultures, in their new role of 'other', can begin to use the forces of globalization and transnational activity to develop intellectual capital (...), negotiate modernization, and build relationships in which they are at least a partner, if not a dominant player" (Ferguson, 2003:13.). It's beyond doubts that world music is one of the most important channels where ideas like 'understanding the Other' are becoming goods to acquire by the act of consumption without the need for being a professional – for example an anthropologist. However, the 'missing link' of such interpretations like the one quoted from Ferguson is related to the *mediated* nature of world music; or in other words to the assumption that there's a direct connection between the available products under the world music label and their social and cultural backgrounds. From this point of view, the widespread consumption of exotic products seems to be a newer wave of cultural imperialism. After their involvement into the world music field, the seemingly emancipatory projects of 'peripheral cultures' are reinforcing the hegemonic power, not at least because of the definition of the changing trends or the edition and circulation of the albums are organized by Western centers (Cornell & Gibson, 2004). In this regard world music cannot be more than a form of 'consumer friendly multiculturalism' that promotes 'danceable ethnicity' while it 'banalizes difference' (Feld, 2000; Guilbault, 1997.).

Nevertheless, world music is not the only scene where local musical developments and their confrontation with 'external' or 'global' forces are taking place. Musical incorporation, hybridization or diversification is not a borderless flow: since it is based on the redefinition of taste and style, it also accompanied by various forms of

'permissions' of the original performers (see: Feld, 2000.). For the problem of music and 'ownership' in my case, see below.

selection, negotiation and refusal[7]. Although the altering modes of musical production seem to support the idea of a division between 'global homogenization' and 'local authenticity', a closer look can show up further – and less simplistic – modes of differentiation. As Connel and Gibson argue, "escaping international influences – lyrical, ideological, stylistic or technological – is impossible, and rarely sought, while attempts to produce music with a specific local identity are necessary shaped by global trends: the local and the global are thus relational rather then oppositional" (Connel & Gibson, 2004: 357.). Such puzzles of theoretical approaches are still requiring further empirical research.

After all, one of the relevant questions for investigation could be related to the strategies of the performers themselves. As Gilroy notes, "The assimilation of blacks is not a process of acculturation but of cultural syncretism" (Gilroy, 1991: 153.). Some features of the music played by the Roma also seem to fall out from the formerly reviewed models. "Although many innovations have occurred in Rom culture, they do not point to loss of ethnic identity; rather, change is a strategy of adaptation to new environments – both a strategy of manipulation of new situations and a creative response to them" (Silverman, 1988: 261-2.) In this context, the creative factor of performance lies exactly in the forms of its transformation (Williams, 1996.). These suggestions might be closer to the commitments of research in anthropology or cultural studies: the orientation towards "a structured distribution of practices, codes, and effects, constantly rearticulating itself by incorporating pieces of the margins and excorporating pieces of itself into the margins (Grossberg, 1997: 3.).

[7] For a review of the debates around 'cultural imperialism' and/or the 'displacement of culture' see:

Chapter 2: Entering the Roma musical scene

2.1 Methods and the profile of research

The practical interest of this research – understanding the development of Roma musical performativity and the uses of the world music category in the urban context of Budapest – might associate it with recent 'non-classical' or 'fragmented' models of fieldwork: like the concept of doing anthropology 'at home' or in 'multiple settings' which are rather connected to each other by the networks of participants or the researcher's conceptual framework than by the territorial boundaries of one geographical location (Marcus, 1996). On the one hand, the city where I did the research is the one where I live. On the other, the sources of actions that I interpret are related to scattered places and scenes, often without any further connections beyond the ones made by the appearance of the people I'm writing about. However, in the course of the research these ties and references I came to know a special and in many aspects formerly unknown map of Budapest.

Such conditions of the fieldwork may seem to differentiate it from the more 'localized' manners of research in anthropology or Romany Studies; however I would rather argue for the similarities and common challenges that connected this study to such methodological patterns. Although I had no single 'neighborhood' or 'settlement' to observe, it was obvious right after being introduced to the field that to be involved into the Romany musical scene of Budapest means to enter into a highly interconnected network of relationships. These are both maintained and represented in specific ways and locations which are often 'invisible' to many outsiders. Although

Inda and Rosaldo, 2002.

throughout this time my major interests has been related to the current transformations in Roma musical performances, identity politics and the local uses of the 'world music' category – hence my goal was not the carrying out of a research on 'network-dynamics' – many of my relevant experiences are connected to the very operation of personal relations among Gypsy musicians and their audiences. This is one of the main reasons why I use the notion of the *field* throughout this paper in a way that was elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu in his studies on cultural production; namely as "a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning (…) an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works" maintained by "its specific relations of force, its dominants and its dominated" (Bourdieu, 1994: 162-163.) I also follow the suggestions of Pnina Werbner in her study on ethnic entrepreneurship and the notion of 'success': "one problem with the homology between taste and class (…) is that by definition, in order to exist, a cultural 'field' must include both successes and failures: success is a relative term and is always defined competitively." (Werbner, 1999: 555.)

As I discuss it in the upcoming chapter, in the case of the Roma performers presented in this study the idea that success and failure produces a given field of cultural production together is parallel with another distinction that is between the labels of being different kinds of musicians. The major interests of this research – to understand recent transformations and the identity politics of making 'Roma folklore' and/or 'world music' – separated me from at least two – or probably more – other scenes of musical engagement. First, the circles of those musicians who're involved into the 'bar', 'coffee house' or 'entertaining music'. Most of these people are the descendants of 'musician-dynasties' from the sub-category of Hungarian-speaking Roma, the 'Romungro' (referring to a supposed far-gone process of assimilation to

the Hungarian majority). During the decades of socialism and before many of them were officially recognized professionals of the folklore-inspired genre of 'Hungarian song' ("*magyar nóta*") but nowadays most of them are struggling with the lack of interests towards their achievements and hence serious deprivation. However, beyond the few who are able to maintain the traditional genre, many of the current representatives from these families are making modernized 'bar-music' in the Budapest club-scene or playing jazz or classical music on a professional level[8]. Lately educated Romungro musicians also appeared in ensembles playing 'Roma folklore' – a label that is associated predominantly with the Romany-speaking Vlach Gypsies of the country. While Vlach Gypsy band-members often depicted this development in terms of the musicians' role as 'vanguards' of upcoming social transformations – namely the growing potential for co-operation between the historically divided sub-categories of Roma – the involved Romungro musicians rather ascribed their presence to the general scarcity of better or more demanding works.

Another scene that is not included in this paper is the nowadays vivid Roma pop, rap and hip-hop.[9] The idea of 'Roma pop' in Hungary was mainly initiated by performers who started their carrer as 'folklore musicians' but in the changing postsocialist musical scene turned their profile to more popular soundings – hence developed a genre that had no antecedents before. In terms of predominantly electronic arrangements and the maintenance of 'ethnic' markers in music this genre seems to be the Hungarian equivalent of what is known in as *manele* Romania or in as *chalga* Bulgaria.[10] However, the share of performers in the home-market both in terms of

[8] For a more detailed description and ethnographic study of the Romungro musicians of Hungary, see: Békési, 2003.
[9] To the question of Roma rap and hip-hop in Hungary, see: Somogyi, 2001.
[10] To the problem of *manele* in Romania, see: Beissinger, 2003.; to the problem of *chalga* in Bulgaria, see: Rice, 2002.

Roma and non-Roma audiences; or their power in defining fashions and life-styles are hardly as high as the one of their colleagues in the aforementioned countries.

While the recent 'Roma pop' of Hungary entered both urban and rural settlements successfully and influenced the musical repertoires of weddings and other celebrations[11], 'Roma rap and hip-hop' is rather tied to the specific subcultural context of Budapest, more concretely to the 8. district of the city that Roma rappers often striving to represent as the source of their 'ghetto-experience'. Moreover, the Roma rap and hip-hop of Hungary bears an important parallelism with the below introduced forms of 'world music-making'. Namely, it is based on a dual strategy by which performers on the one hand use the sources of a marginalized and/or ethnically defined culture but on the other they do it with continuous references to other marginalized and/or ethnically defined cultures (in the case of rappers it is obviously the Afro-American) perceived as 'parallel' but also 'more developed' or 'refined' in their elaboration.

The ways in which performers are negotiating 'tradition' and 'modernity' – according to the dynamics of the field – can be exemplified by a situation in which the leader of a Roma band (which is currently among the most successful ones from Hungary in the international stages of world music) was talking to me about another band (which is also tours abroad quite frequently) which he conceived as not only 'more traditional', but also 'less refined' in a comparison with his own formation. As he explained: "We like them; it's good for us that they exist since hereby the audience will be able to perceive the development of our music in relation to the traditional achievement." Ironically, these ideas about the 'mutual interdependence' of bands also based on the fact that the group of the interviewee is promoted as 'traditional Gypsy' in many of

[11] To the transformation of musical repertoires in Roma weddings see: Kovalcsik,

their Western-European public appearances – hence the creation of difference became strategic for him exactly at this point. Later, while commenting on a new band of younger Roma performers – incorporating funk- and jazz-influenced grooves with the traditional tunes of Roma folklore – the same performer said to me that these youngsters aimed "to go too further in one step" with their music.

On the one hand no musician is comparable to the other in the field since everybody is doing 'his own thing', hence willing to develop stylistic characteristics and ideas about playing that is considered as only his own – so everyone deserves the 'respect' of the others. On the other hand, everyone is comparable since all of them are claiming for the same terms of ethnic identification; the authenticity and the legitimate representation of the very category of 'Roma'. In this sense no one could escape from the harsh criticism or even derogation by the others. As I argue in the following chapter, the interpretation of such competing claims could be a constitutive element in the understanding of the identity politics of performers and performances; while it also provides a possible pathway to go beyond the framework which depicts Roma performers only in the state of liminality. In sum, the field of Roma performers could be understood in the constantly changing states of integration and differentiation, hence my main methodological assumption is that such conditions are not just expressed but also shaped by their encounters, discursive and performative contributions. Strategic distinctions related to the local and global production of music can be detected in these relations and obviously in the music of performers.

A significant part of this research is based on the experiences gained by participant observation during the occasions when Roma musicians were performing. Such events can be public or private appearances, providing insights to the changing repertoires of the bands or the differences between musical choices and taste as they

are performed both ‘onstage’ and ‘backstage’. Moreover such performances are also important scenes for the gatherings of Roma musicians: they are taken as rituals of strengthening the internal ties of actors by ‘knowing who’s who and what’s what’. Musicians are frequently commenting on each other’s performances and such critiques or even devaluations reveal to their notions about the ‘proper’ and ‘improper’, ‘traditional’ and ‘innovative’, or even ‘Gypsy’ and ‘non-Gypsy’ ways of performing.

Another source of evidence in this paper is a collection of career-oriented semi-structured interviews with performers. Most of the bands involved into this research are highly structured in the sense of hierarchical relations between band leaders and other members. The career-oriented semi-structured interviews with the leaders in the first round and then with other members were important for the understanding of personal choices and turns in life stories that directed them towards being the performer of an ethnically defined form of expressive culture. My initial question was always: “How did you became a musician?”. This question was suitable to narrow the discussion to the specific problems of this research while it left a relatively open space to the interviewee to construct an image of himself by finding his own balance between personal life story and ‘public’ character – two forms of appearance that were always incorporated in these interviews. Then the interviews followed the periods of career; participation in different ensembles; and the contexts, artistic conceptions and experiences of these periods. The third topic of the interviews was related to the current musical preferences of the interviewee, both in terms of the perceptions of their own context (like attitudes toward other bands and foreign performers); and their current concerns that affect both their musical and ethnic self-representations. My strategy was consequently to ignore any kind of specific terms or

labels to musical genres until these were introduced into our discussion by the interviewee. I did the same with terms that refer to ethnicity and ethnic origin (for example, there are performers who neglect such identifications or use specific categories). Since most of the bands in this research consider themselves as performers of hybrid or at least mixed musical products, it's important to identify the ways in which they're interpreting and adapting such different expressive forms into their own work. Although the limits of this paper leave no space for a more detailed ethnomusicological analysis of musical products, in my argument I recurrently refer to the altering features of styles and orchestrations that are essential in the interpretation of social and cultural changes as they are expressed, symbolized or facilitated by the tools of musical expression.

2.2 The field of Roma performers: networks and autonomy

As it was mentioned in the former chapter, many of the literature on Roma musicians and their performances are based on the idea of *liminality* or the ambiguity of performer's social status. This approach seems to be useful from the perspective of understanding the ways in which the time and space of musical performance is differentiated from other realms of everyday life. Nevertheless, it could leave the performer merely in the role of "articulating other people's soul" (Van de Port, 1999.), so without telling much about the agency of the performers. The image of the Gypsy as the 'stranger from within' might be limiting if the aim is to tell something more about the strategies of performers or the social embeddedness of Roma expressive culture and music. In this chapter my aim is to provide a wider perspective on the maintenance and reproduction of the musicians' ties with each other and their

audiences, hence also their connections to the very notion or 'being Roma' as a performer. A key element here is to elaborate further aspects of the relation between performance and meaning; 'on-stage' and 'back-stage' practices.

Most of these Roma performers I know are not in the position of earning the whole sum of expenses for daily living only by making music. According to the wide-spread opinion among themselves and also my own experiences the scale of active (that is, regularly playing) performers who don't have to work elsewhere to ensure their daily subsistence is lower than one forth of the whole community (that is, those who consider themselves as 'musicians'). This rate also includes those musicians performing only in various bars or restaurants of the city where the recurrent constraint of playing what the audience requests makes them less prestigious in the eye of the other, more autonomous 'on-stage' performers who have more autonomy in their musical choices. While the amount of salaries that those playing 'on stage' get by clubs and other places are highly diverse depending from the event and context, according to my own experiences this scale is not ranging more widely than from approx. 50 thousand forint (approx. 200 EUR) to 3-400 hundred thousand forint (approx. 1200-1600 EUR) for a whole band with around five members. In a comparison, Jocó[12] and his band – one of the well-known groups in the Budapest night from the genre that Roma performers call 'bar-music'– receives around five or six thousand forint (approx. 20-24 EUR) per head from the owner of the club where they play two or three times per a week usually from 9 in the evening until dawn. When not playing, the members of the band are involved into trading and other private deals. The meaning of time-scheduling is also meaningful here since most of

[12] I changed all the forenames of my informants.

the ‘on-stage’ Roma performers are counting their concert charges in hours – even in cases when they’re invited to private events, most frequently weddings.[13]

The division of money among the band-members is another strategic issue in the musician’s discussions among each other: to ‘unveil’ the leader of a band by sharing the information with others that he’s not keeping the rules of equality and have more for himself than for the others is a powerful way of proving this person’s dishonesty. However, most of these amounts are rarely equal with the ones that are taken home by the musicians. It is not only because the money could also include travel expenses; but also because sometimes a part of it – other times the whole sum – could be spent on drinks, or in other words the ‘proper treatment’ and ‘respect’ for those other musicians or closer acquaintances who attended the given concert.

While Roma performers in general tend to exaggerate the general scarcity of occasions for making live shows, it’s quite obvious that various tactics could be found among them for searching, accepting or refusing possibilities for stage-appearances. The frequency and the type of live performance are significant in their mutual positioning and so thus in the creation of the field. The members of a band can be deplored by others if they have one concert after another only in more than a month’s time or more irregularly – almost without respect to what else the members are doing in this time. Misi is often commented by some others since he brought his group to a tour in Romania once where – by proper managerial contribution – they were playing only in high standard hotels and restaurant for the manifold of the thinkable money they knew from Hungary in an average scale. As the others say, Misi is refusing the possibilities for concerts at home while still expecting to become a ‘star’ and to have further invitations there – which seem to be rather unlikely according to their

[13] Carol Silverman interpreted a similar phenomenon with reference to the postsocialist transformation

knowledge about the Roma musical scene in Romania. However, Robi's strategy is also disapproved by those who think that playing in a weekly schedule (or even more frequently) necessarily 'drains' the performer's capacities and makes him boring for the audience. As the young band-leader Gyuszi was arguing to me, with this frequency one could only "force" the audience into good mood (*"erőlteti"* in Hungarian). Of course, Gyuszi himself is also criticized by others since he developed the strategy of not going under a given amount of fee asked for the shows, even if he's band has fewer invitations because of this. In the months when he has fewer occasions to play, he usually takes on small-term jobs in the construction sites where his brothers are working.

The meaning of such criticisms could be understood with regards to these performers' ongoing concerns about reaching or preserving their autonomy – which is after all equal with the autonomy of the field itself. When one is criticized because of the 'too frequent' appearances, it is closely related to the commonly shared threatening image of becoming like the 'entertainer-musicians' of 'bar-music' (*"vendéglátós"*) – one of the major reference points opposed to those performers who has more freedom in the elaboration of their 'on-stage' character and in their choices about what, where or how they would like to play. The aforementioned rarity of those performers who're able to have their daily subsistence only by making music could be taken as a harsh reference to the fact that the Roma performers' scene in Hungary is far from being an autonomous field of cultural production. However, it is exactly because of the various ways of gaining or completing incomes that Roma performers still have a relatively open terrain for strategizing between different forms of public appearances and hence developing various realizations of the 'aura' which is associated with the performance

in Bulgaria, see: Silverman, 1996.

of the ‘Roma’ category. Of course performers have to reserve a highly sensitive balance between these different engagements, times and scenes of their activities. Once coming out from a late afternoon class in the university I found a talented young Roma performer as a cleaner of the lounge in the usual service uniform. While both of us were surprised by the presence of the other, he was asking as many questions as possible about me, so I understood that it is better not to ask too much about him in *this space*. In another case one of the best Roma double-bass players told me after a concert that he saw me walking the day before when he was one of the workers in the reconstruction of the campus, but he decided not to call out for me in such a situation.

The relative lack of autonomy in the field of Roma music-making – with the necessity of undertaking other works for subsistence – is one of the features that keep these performers in a certain ‘unprofessional’ state. Another issue that makes the ideas about ‘professionalism’ explicit in their discourses is related to the introduction of managerial power. Although it is obvious for the performers that the time they have to spend with fulfilling managerial and organizational tasks is taken away mainly from music making; many of them are still hesitating to acquire a specialist and maintaining a practice in which most of such functions are catered by the bandleader. Musicians recalled stories to me many times about managerial abuse in which naïve band-members were scammed, not informed about some important details of an agreement and given less money than they deserved. Managers sometimes appeared to be disturbing elements in the maintenance of personal ties among the musicians. When a performer is in the project of organizing a concert or an event that includes the presence of other bands, he’s rather willing to make an agreement with the other performers personally – not at least because of the possibilities for negotiating the payment with regards to their former or latter common engagements and other mutual

services. If the performer already has a manager and – according to their own division of labor – directs the tenderer to this person; it could be easily understood as a withdrawal and hence as a renunciation of their mutual solidarity. For those performers who already involved a manager – a step that is recognized as a necessity for gaining regular concert-invitations to Western Europe and other requisites of a 'professional' outlook among Roma performers in Hungary – one of the recurrent tasks is to find the proper balance between the 'formal' and 'informal' ways in such cases.

2.3 'Being there' on-stage and back-stage

The identification of performers as Roma is expressed, 'applied' or made explicit in the course of their musical engagement; but it is not limited to this sphere. In other words, a Gypsy musician has to be a 'Gypsy' outside the realm of the stage as well. This 'non-stage' or 'backstage' part of Roma performances has its specific meanings both in the cases of a musician's relation with other Roma or more closely with his colleagues; and with the non-Roma audiences. Being a 'Roma performer' is more than being an individual characterized by the totalizing notion of artistic autonomy. The realizations of the performer's public character devoted for the audience are attempts to create an image of a 'Roma' as someone who's not only 'himself' but also the representative of a whole ethnic category – which is among the main sources of his legitimacy that puts him on the stage at all. This relation is in most cases not only 'symbolic' but practical since many of the others are actually there when one's playing. András, a band leader, singer and guitar player was talking about the latter this way:

A musician should be precise on the stage; you have to make your work properly. But you should be like that as well after leaving the stage. After you left the stage you're not the musician from that band anymore but you're a Gypsy man, this is how they're looking at you, as a Gypsy man. 'Let's see the person himself '– this is what they say. If you made good music than you still need your self-confidence to take yourself as a valuable person, this is what should emanate from you. By music it's possible to make other people becoming interested in you, your behavior and your opinion. If I'm good in these situations then I'll become a positive person in the eyes of other people – but still, as a Gypsy man. Than they realize that not every Gypsy is negative and there're really valuable persons among them, coequal with anybody else. But to be like that, Gypsy men still have to be aware of themselves and take care of their behavior. This way you can influence the whole image of the Gypsies.

The public character that is introduced in the course of performance is central in the understanding of interactions between musicians and their audiences. The performers' ideas about this relation can be grasped through the stories which they tell about *incidents*; namely about situations in which at least some members from the audience behaved in an unexpected or incorrect way, hence endangered the performer's position elaborated in advance.[14] As it was mentioned before, it is the autonomy of the performer – and also of the field – that could be threatened by re-establishing the unequal relation that subordinate the musician explicitly to the non-Roma requests. Among Roma performers in Hungary one of the most powerful images of this role is the one of the Gypsy musician with a piece of money on his forehead which was lapped up there by a Gadjo guest of the place. Once in a club-concert a non-Roma person from the audience wanted to give money for the musicians this way to play the song what he wanted to hear. Jani, the guitar player of the band refused it aloud by saying: "It's not a show of request!" ("*Ez nem kívánságműsor!"*). In another case a duo formed by Elemér and a friend was playing in a small café of Budapest. A non-Roma man entered the place with his female partner, after a few drinks he began to

[14] Similar to the way as Goffman describes the possible offences against or destruction of the 'personal front', see: Goffman, 1959.

comment their way of playing from the position of a self-styled expert and then started to ask for songs, one after another. The musicians patiently listened to the requests and then refused them all by kindly saying that they 'don't know' which tunes are these.

As it was mentioned before, the other aspect of 'non-stage' or 'back-stage' Roma performances are related to the maintenance of ties with other Roma and principally with other performers. If someone refuses the exchange of gestures that are relevant in the maintenance of these ties, it could easily lead to negative judgments by others; to the questioning of their legitimacy as 'bearers' of the very category of Roma; and hence to the risks of being forgotten or an 'outcast' in the community. While I've never experienced such a complete 'disinheritance' in the circles of the Roma performers whom I know; I frequently heard them talking about it or referring to it as possibilities or threats orienting both their own behavior and their attitudes towards the others. The importance of maintaining the ties with other musicians, 'being there' on various collective appearances of the performers and to recurrently participate on their revelries are taken seriously even at the expense of debates and conflicts with female partners or families. Gyuszi was lamenting to me about his recent conflicts with his partner due to evening-outs, which brought their relationship almost to the state of separation. As he said, these conflicts are due to their different "bio-rhythms", but for him not behaving like that would be equal with "confuting himself"; with not being a "true person". For him 'work' and 'entertainment' are inseparable since not to be there on such gatherings of the Gypsies would mean to 'fall out' from these circles and hence to be gone forgotten. Robi similarly explained to me – and also to his wife –that these hanging outs are basically the 'work' for him, namely the sites of networking and having recent information about music and musicians. These

conditions often put the women around the performers into a rather disturbing role in which they're constantly attempt to limit the 'male principles'. Musicians recurrently told me that this condition could last until one adjusts a proper harmonious family life – however, I've seen many cases where this rule was contravened. The role of predominantly male gatherings in the production and reproduction of ethnically defined ties was also included in former ethnographies conducted in Roma settlements (see: Stewart, 1997.). Nevertheless, these are parts of those cultural patterns which are maintained by Roma performers in constantly changing urban contexts – with music and musical performance in the center of them.

Chapter 3: Music, power and Roma performances

3.1 Struggles around appropriation

The idea of 'representing culture' – mainly in terms expressive arts – had a crucial role in the organization of the Roma civil and cultural movement in Hungary from the late seventies. In the context of the socialist state's project for making 'proper workers' out of Gypsies (Stewart, 1997: 97-111.) those were exactly the crowded worker's hostels in industrial areas where Roma intellectuals started to collect folklore and organize concerts or other cultural events. As Ágnes Daróczi – one of the leading figures of these initiations – noted about that period:

> …since we had no possibility for the political representation of our interests, we started our own 'cultural revolution' as part of the counter-culture. In the field of traditional customs and high arts we presented demonstratively: Gypsy culture exists, so Gypsy people exist as well. (Daróczi, 2006; internet source)

Another leading figure of the Roma cultural movement, the politician and musician Jenő Zsigó described the message of Gypsy folk songs – with reference to the idea of 'world music' – in a round-table discussion:

> In these old songs and texts there're the suffering and the life-stories of thousands of people. Would it be world music because of that? We perform, relive and rearrange this music, but for me it could be world music only (…) because the tune and the text are got out from the closed Roma communities and suddenly become a message. It becomes world music because everybody meets what was closed, hidden and enigmatic so far. (Balogh, 2001; internet source)

To sum up these ideas about the social embeddedness of Roma music and musical performance: with the assimilationist policies of the Communist state the Roma had no prospects for political self-organization or claim-making, hence 'culture' became the main asset of expression in their struggles for recognition.[15] Because of the extant forms of this Roma culture and also by following the pre-existing patterns of counter-culture and the Hungarian 'revival movement' (*táncházmozgalom*)[16]; in the project of Roma culture-building traditional customs *and* high arts became the central points of reference. These were 'organic' and hence obviously interrelated forms of expression, both suitable to be prerequisites for the development of a canon that follows the pattern of involving high culture into the process of nation building.[17] And as the second quotation follows, the performer's task is to take out the songs from the small-scale context of their origins and empower them to gain meaning in a broader frame of reference where they'll both create and express the common experience of 'being

[15] To the question of postsocialist developments, the role of self-governments and the discourses of 'recognition', see Szalai, 2003.
[16] To the question of the Hungarian 'revival' or 'dance-house' ("*táncház*") movement as a specific attempt for
the 'revitalization' of folklore, see: Frigyesi, 1996.
[17] To illustrate the ways in which these terrains are taken as interrelated and mutually referring to each other: once I was talking with a young Roma painter and after I answered his question about my field of research, he said: "Yes, the fine arts of Roma in Hungary is not as developed yet as their music, but I

Roma'. As Gusztáv Varga, leader of the Kalyi Jag ensemble – the band which had the first officially published record of 'Roma folklore' music in 1987 – described the huge impact that their music had among the Roma in Hungary:

> I think it was really a smashing success among the Roma, but actually it provided a big impetus for the whole culture. People who weren't daring to say till then that 'I'm Roma, I'm Gypsy' came to undertake themselves courageously. (Dani, 2006; internet source)

The limits of this text do not allow a full interpretation concerning the major premises of the 'Roma cultural movement' during the late socialist and postsocialist period in Hungary. However, it is worth mentioning that many of the current actors in the Hungarian Roma folklore and/or world music field are closely related to those who elaborated such conceptions about Roma music-making as the ones above. Some of them started their musical career in the ensembles organized by these figures or started to play on stage after their inspiration. In these terms the initiators of the Roma movement in Hungary were not only 'culture-builders' in the sense of canonization or institutionalization; but also the founding figures of discourses that are still referred to and negotiated by Roma performers today. Nevertheless, these definitions or the institutionalized forms of 'preserving culture' were not fixed or stable enough to direct – or to hinder – the developments of Roma musical practices.[18] One of the major aspects in which these concepts has been challenged is related to the very idea of 'tradition' or 'traditionalism' as the obvious resources of the performer's activities, defined in terms of 'mediation' or 'rearrangement'. While all the performers introduced in this text are claiming for titles like 'authenticity'; in their actual

promise that in a few years we'll also provide research material for you". To the problem of constructing a 'Gypsy national culture', see: Szuhay, 1995.

[18] Katalin Kovalcsik provides ethnomusicological and ethnographic insights into these processes in several places: about the changing repertoires of Roma wedding-music in Hungary (Kovalcsik, 2003.);

practices the literally understood act of 'bearing the tradition' (*"hagyományőrző"*) seems to be limiting for them and they're rather striving to overcome it in various ways (see below).

Beyond the examples of musical transformation, I met crucial examples of indifference or even refusal towards such 'canonized' or 'fixed' forms of culture among the Roma students of a secondary school in Budapest where the teaching of Roma language, literature, music and dance is integrated into the general curricula. According to the experiences during classroom attendances, most of the children haven't showed any kind of salient achievements in these specific fields compared to the subjects in the normal program of education. Once I participated in an oral exam in 'dance and music' where the students had to respond to questions about reading musical notes, the history and regional features of Gypsy folklore in Hungary, and some fundamentals in classical music. The exam was carried by a well-educated musician and the leader of a 'traditional' Gypsy ensemble. After several students were ranked with medium or lower grades, a boy sat down in front of the teachers and answered straightaway their first question this way: "I don't like any kind of Gypsy music at all." "We cannot ask you any further question after this. Failed." – said one of the teachers. The other continued: "Maybe you're not a Gypsy at all, what kind of a Gypsy is that who says such a thing?" After the exams the leader of the traditional ensemble commented on the situation by saying that "It's really a shame that nowadays many Magyars know more about our culture than we ourselves." However, as it turned out there're many Roma youngsters in the school playing on instruments and making music together in the breaks or in the afternoons, but regarding these the schedule doesn't includes 'practical education'.

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or about the ways in which the songs from officially published 'Gypsy folklore' records were re-

Since the 1990's new instruments, soundings and styles have been involved into the music made by the Roma in Hungary. "In the folklore movement of the 1990s three waves of fashion followed one after another: the fashion of the Russian, the Balkan and then the Spanish Gypsy music." (Kovalcsik, 2006.) The integration of styles like the ones above reflected the efforts for framing altering images of ties that connect the Roma in Hungary to other cultures in the world – both Roma and non-Roma. However, among Roma performers there's a specific form of cultural and musical division that is surely older than the recent discourses around 'globalization and localization'; namely playing 'Gypsy music' or playing any music 'in the Gypsy way'. The meaning of the former could be understood in terms of different countries, regions and sub-groups of origin – hence it might be defined in an essetialist way. The latter is rather dependent on situative judgments, so it opens up a wide space for agency and creative appropriation. While a given form of 'Gypsy music' might be opposed to the 'Gypsy music' of another location, the counterpart of 'playing music in the Gypsy way' is obviously to do it as 'non-Gypsies'. András's band is playing on the international stages of world music quite frequently. That's how he described his encounters and 'backstage experiences' with foreign Roma performers:

> It's really a pleasure to meet Gypsy communities and musicians abroad. They're different, making new and strange music but whatever it is you still feel that it belongs to you. We were in Norway recently, and we met a swing band, you know this Django Reinhardt kind of thing; there was Russian Gypsy music; there was also a Bulgarian band; all of them completely different but still go together. And of course when it is possible to make music together, you can engage in it without any speech or even a single word, it's a very good feeling. Not like when I sit down here at home with whatever kind of non-Gypsy musicians, 'which is this harmony, how to put it together, what is this', and so on. No, we start playing and it's the same if he plays Russian or the other plays like Django, when it comes to his turn, I'll look at him and he'll make a solo in my song or I will sing in his song. It could be in accordance without a word.

appropriated – and also transformed – by local Roma communities (Kovalcsik, 2006).

Of course most of the Roma performers in Hungary rarely find themselves in such stimulating situations like the one described here. However, one could find numerous foreign Roma records – or records from musical genres that Roma perceive to be 'their own', or 'in accordance' with them (see below) – and even more references to Roma stars and styles from abroad also among those who're staying in the country. If there's anything that is similar to a 'Diasporic consciousness' in their case, it is to a large extent mediated by musical exchange and by the ongoing discourses about styles that are recognized as 'Roma' while identified by their places of origin (similarly to Gilroy's conception about the black Atlantic; see: Gilroy, 1993.). One could hear statements like 'We're playing in the Romanian way' or 'in the Spanish way'[19] quite frequently – although the actual meaning of these terms is based on selective forms of reception and appropriation.

The widespread enthusiasm around the 'Romanian style' also seems to be exclusive when it comes to the issue of adaptation. Misi, the guitar player is known as one of the greatest fans of the 'Romanian style' who always receives the latest releases – thanks to his neighbor who's a guest-worker from Romania, traveling back and forth between the two counties frequently. Since I'm known as a 'collector' of Roma music among many of the Roma performers in the Budapest scene, Misi asked me once to make some copies to him from my collection. Following his preferences I tried to compile a set of records with many of those Romanian Roma performers whom I knew as the bests. A week later when we met again, right after the greetings Misi told me this: "It's not good what you brought, it's a Turkish crap!" It was not the first time when I encountered such comments in which 'Turkish' was nothing else but a derogatory label for a kind of music that has 'bumpy' or 'broken' rhythm in the

[19] I cannot give a close translation here since the frequent way of phrasing these terms – which are

interpretation of Roma musicians in Hungary. However, Misi's case might be representative in the sense that the networks through which these musicians and their circles acquire records – and hence shaping their taste – are far from being identical with those that are promoting the music of the same countries under the 'world music' label. Of course a term like 'Romanian style' could have numerous definitions in music. What is worth mentioning here is that for these Roma in Hungary the emblematic figures of what they understood under the 'Romanian' term are hardly the ones that are internationally circulated and acknowledged nowadays among the predominantly non-Roma consumers of world music.[20] The statements of the musicologist David Malvinni concerning the "political reception of Gypsy music" can be extended to this case[21]: "The Gypsy singer Adrian Copilul Minune's cassettes are by far the most popular and sought after in Bucharest. By contrast, Taraf de Haidouks, one of the hottest Gypsy acts in what is called, rather strangely, >>world music<<, is hardly known, even though the members of the band come from Clejani, a village within a forty minute bus ride of the city." (Malvinni, 2003: 249.). Similarly, the choices of these Roma performers in Hungary rather suited to the internal circulation and the average supply of the record market of music played by Roma in Romania – not only because Taraf de Haidouks or others would be completely unknown for them or beyond their reach; but rather because in their understanding the power of current Romanian Roma performance lies exactly in it's self-confident 'modern' character. When another performer, Robi was talking to me about the current stream and popularity of Romanian Roma music in Hungary, above all he emphasized the fact

„románosˮ, or *„spanyolosˮ* in Hungarian – is related to the 'Romanian' or 'Spanish' categories like the meaning of 'jazzy' to the one of 'jazz' in English.

[20] The most emblematic figures, representing Romania in the world music scene are bands like the Taraf de Haidouks or the Fanfare Ciocarlia.

that Gypsy musicians in Romania are able to satisfy both the 'folklore' and the pop-market. This less classifiable 'dual involvement' – based on the idea of blurring the borders between these two – appealed to him very much. As David Malvinni continues ironically: "although Adrian's music is more infused with generic world-beat trends-synthesizers, drum-boxes, hip hop beats, flamenco rhythms and innuendos – his music remains regionally entrapped in Romania and perhaps the Balkans, and virtually unknown in the West." (Malvinni, 2003: 251-252.) After all, in our exchange with Misi, I was representing these 'Western notions' with my compilation, characterized by the idea that through 'world music' one could get to know 'the music' of a given cultural or territorial unit. However, Misi's reaction concerning the "Turkish crap" expressed not merely a refusal to this idea, but also his own understanding of 'Romanian': as for many other Roma whom I know in Hungary, for him 'brass music' and 'broken rhythm' were not valid signifiers of this category.

Some further aspects of Roma musical exchange and appropriation can be revealed by referring to Karcsi, the talented dulcimer-player of both Roma and Hungarian folklore bands. He's also one of the greatest enthusiasts of the so called 'Balkan music' in the Budapest scene. As he said once before going back to the stage in their usual Tuesday club-concert, "the spirit comes from the Balkans in Gypsy music". Referring to this I shared my recent enthusiasm with him concerning a newly published album of a Romanian Roma band that both of us liked. That was his answer:

> But no matter how good is a Balkan Gypsy band, they won't be able to reach the level of the Hungarian Gypsy musicians, 'cause they're the bests. Those cannot get into our music, but for us it's not a matter to get into their music, to play as they do or to do their thing even better than them.

[21] Although I present the author's statements as valid for my case, I should mention that the most popular performers from Romania among Roma whom I know in Hungary are rather Sandu Ciorba and

Karcsi's statement was crucial in terms of the Hungarian Roma performers' self-positioning in international comparisons. His idea about 'Balkan music' was based on an unequal relationship between spatially defined categories of Roma in which 'we' (as the more professional Roma performers of Hungary) are able to enter 'their' terrain of music; but at the same time for 'them' our terrain is enclosed or at least hardly approachable. Almost contrary to the above described notions of the 'Gypsy way' recognized beyond borders, this image recalls a hierarchical pattern of understanding in terms of East-West relations perceived as a 'slope'.[22] The very fact that Karcsi regularly follows the musical developments of the 'Balkans' could represent his own will for a symbolic form of power: the power of knowing the music they're making, hence being able to involve or appropriate it in his own performance and if it comes to that point, even 'replacing' them.

These ideas of musical appropriation might be exceptional or radical compared to the perspectives of other Roma performers who appear in this study. Nevertheless, getting to know Roma music from elsewhere is understood as a possibility for musical takeover by others as well. Tibi, the young percussionist asked me for help by bringing music to him exactly because he was in the period of making 'new songs' with one of his bands. Robi, the singer became fascinated by the track of a klezmer group from Berlin that incorporated the groove of ska music into a Hungarian folk song. Later he learned the tune precisely, figured out the lyrics from the record and then in a club where another Roma ensemble was playing, he introduced the song to other musicians – by singing it immediately – as 'his own'. Jani, the leader of an 'authentic Gypsy band' was talking about musical appropriation and takeover like this:

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above all Nicolae Guta than Adrian Copilul Minune.

I can turn whatever into my own music, I work on it for a while and then you won't even recognize that it was something else before.

The acts of musical appropriation and takeover – as elementary units in the creation of symbolic ties like those described in 'The Black Atlantic' (Gilroy, 1993.) – are making the issues of the 'ownership' of song and music explicit in the discourses of Roma performers. Of course, the very question of "whose song it is?" is not a novelty in the context of Roma music making in Hungary. In their on-stage performances the Roma musicians I know are working with of a wide set of songs known by almost everyone of them. Hence the emphasis on variations as 'personal properties' or the attachment of given songs to given persons can be understood as an act of signification – and hence as the creation and reproduction of symbolic capital[23].

However, the recent challenges towards these notions of informally recognized 'ownership' can be revealed by referring to Jani again, who also shared some of his anxieties with me shortly after expressing the above quoted ideas of musical takeover. As he said, it might be "dangerous" to put his music to the internet because of "piracy", since anyone could download it and then claiming it as his own "composition". The turn from the 'informal ownership' to the idea of "composition" could not be understood without taking into consideration the current institutional forms of musical exchange and mediation – including the development of the world music field – which are to a large extent uncontrollable for the performers. In these terms the limits of appropriation and takeover are designated exactly by the agents of these flows. As Garth Cartwright, the author of the popular travelogue *'Princes*

[22] For the discursive construction of the 'East-West slope' and gradually diminishing civilization in Central and Eastern-Europe, see: Melegh, 2006.

Amongst Men' notes: "Gypsy musicians may tour the West's most esteemed concert halls yet back in the Balkans their music remains a communal property, created and played on the streets." (Carthwright, 2005: 13.) The performers' reactions to the incorporation of such institutional forms – like the internet – into the mediation of music is one among the factors that are dispelling the bounded notions of 'Eastern and Western' or 'Roma' and 'non-Roma' way of music-making. Nevertheless, beyond the issues of musical exchange and takeover from the point of view of the performers the changing notions of 'ownership' are also relevant in terms of their self-images in relation with the 'community' from which they're 'stepping out' to the stage and which they supposed to represent there. The next chapter aims to reveal some further changing aspects of this relationship.

3.2 The 'death of folklore': the birth of world music?

After entering the circles of Roma performers in Hungary – at least those who consider themselves as representatives of 'traditional' and/or 'world music' – one of the first statements which one encounters recurrently is that "Gypsy folklore music is dead" or its "dying" nowadays in Hungary. Such statements cannot be isolated by anthropologists concerned with the ways in which the agents of a cultural context reflect on themselves. That is how Jani, the leader of an 'authentic Gypsy band' phrased it:

[23] These practices are also known from ethnographies on Roma music making in private settings, especially on the role of singing – as making one's own 'true speech' – in the maintenance of social ties (Stewart, 1989; Kovalcsik, 1999).

I think that the Gypsy folklore music is dying out. If you go to a vendor who sells cassettes on the market and you say that you need some good authentic Gypsy music, he'll show you one, two or three records but not more, that's your choice. But if you ask for something that is played on synthesizer, he'll show you ten or twenty. We're also playing with electronic keyboard but only here at home, for our own entertainment. Sometimes we combine here everything from the violin through the keyboards to the dulcimer. But if you ask me, together with us I know only four or five Gypsy folklore bands in Hungary that can publish records and this number is terribly low.

At first sight the performer's statements appear to contradict the rather lively Roma musical scene of Budapest. Recently there has been an increasing number of clubs that are undertaking the inclusion of music played by Roma under the labels of 'authentic', 'Balkan' or 'world music'; hence several Roma performers are able to place themselves on the current 'subcultural map' of the city. Most of these occasions are attended by both Roma and non-Roma audiences which is a phenomena that many observers understood to be 'small-scale experiments' of mutual tolerance and cohabitation in public spaces. Even though the appearance of Roma among the audiences of these events are frequently due to the careful invitations and personal relationships of the band-members – hence in these terms it is not completely 'spontaneous' – these gatherings are able to present genuine counter-examples to the recurrently emerging news and personally shared stories about bars, discos or other public places in Hungary where Gypsies are not allowed to enter.

As it was mentioned at the beginning of the former chapter, one of the leading ideas of the 'Roma cultural movement' in Hungary was the assumption of a referential relation between song and community: the song originates from the community and represents a 'common value' that "becomes a message" by the mediation of the performer. This very idea of a referential relation seems to be challenged by the ways in which many of the Roma performers adopted and apply the term of 'world music' nowadays in the Hungarian scene. Opposed to the 'all-encompassing' definitions of

the world music category applied in its marketing and partly in its social scientific discussions, for these Roma performers in Hungary 'world music' is as much conceived by referring to 'excluded' expressive forms as by the 'included' ones. This is how András was explaining to me the division between the categories of 'folklore' and 'world music':

> For me the border between folklore and world music is at the point when you start to make your music consciously and you're dare to dip into the age-old songs. Some musicians think that if a song was originally played without any instruments and they create a guitar-arrangement to it than they re-arranged it already. But it is not enough, nothing was done with that song, it is not transformed, it is not fashioned into one's own image. Sometimes I saw youngsters playing very traditional music that is not fitting to them at all; it is incompatible with their personalities. For me world music is when I make my own adjustments in the music, make it like to be like me, like my life and personality. World music is when you start to build up your music in a conscious manner. The other thing is that you make world music when other people are also able to enjoy your music, those who have no connection to the Gypsies otherwise. They just simply listen to your music and they find it familiar. They hear a rhythm or an orchestration which they can relate to any other music that is audible in the world. But they still feel that this is you. The point in the whole story is to make the music which is about you, about the person you are. This is something that many of the musicians are still not able to conceive.

In this approach the 'personification' of music exceeds the formerly defined act of 'rearrangement'. It also concerns the ways in which the performer is positioning himself with respect to the 'community'. While the former conceptions about 'rearrangement' and 'common value' defined a rather organic relationship between the performer and the community; most of the Roma performers I know are claiming for a different form of recognition. As many of them emphasized to me, they're striving to represent the opposite of what is known in general as the 'everyday life' of the Roma in Hungary. Instead of representing the "suffering and the life-stories of thousands of people" (see above) they're seeking to articulate a positive image detached from such a self-positioning. As some performers emphasized recurrently: "If we exaggerate poverty and misery all the time, we're just permanently pushing

ourselves downwards." It is also meaningful that usually in their critical comments towards the recent media-representations of the Roma in Hungary they were not claiming for a more 'genuine' display or the 'unveiling' of the majority's racist attitudes; but more specifically for the public introduction of Roma 'success-stories' – like the presentation of successful entrepreneurs or talented youngsters who made their fortune. After all, it is not surprising that for them the reference-system of 'integrating culture' is not the canonization of high cultural products any more but the creation of 'high quality' for the market-niches they can reach or define. As the guitar player Miki explained to me concerning his enthusiasm for the band Gypsy Kings:

> My task is not to be able to play the music of the Gypsy Kings exactly as they do. What I wanted to take over from them is rather about their achievements, that as Gypsy men they reached a very high quality in their own music. They are playing very precisely, even hundred times in the same way. The big thing is that they stand up and appear in front of the whole world as Gypsies and they're reckoned as equal with all the others. They can go to the stage even after someone like Madonna, because yes, they're the Gypsy Kings. And then why would be Madonna better?

World music is not merely a form of empowerment here which is provided by the widening possibilities of creating 'hybrid' musical forms or the incorporation of styles and instruments that were incompatible with the frames of making 'folklore'. It also offers a possibility for the performers to upgrade their activities and to gain power and control over the idea of 'authenticity'. For them 'authenticity' is not something that is a concomitant feature of a Roma musician but a set of patterns they can use and manipulate in constantly changing ways. This strategy is far from being the total refusal of 'authenticity' or other essentially defined qualities associated with Roma performances. It is rather the replacement and the redefinition of the notion as a form of 'implicit knowledge' or as a 'reference' that lies behind musical manifestations instead of being put into the forefront. In other words, it is the 'living alternative' of

the folklore that seems to be 'buried' in the discourses and practices of these Roma performers. In the last chapter of this paper I return to the field and describe a private ceremony that could summarize the meanings of these replaced and redefined Roma performances while it might reveal some further aspects of them as well.

3.3 'The Cuba': Gypsies and Latinos in a private ceremony

On the 20th of March 2007 in Budapest I was invited to the birthday party of Mari, wife of a Roma folk ensemble's bandleader. The party was held in one of the larger rooms of the Gypsy Minority Self-Government's office in the 5th district. Mari's husband Feri called me in the afternoon and after the honorific act of invitation he also asked me to be the 'DJ' that evening; to bring my laptop and my musical collection to the party.

In this case it was not the Roma performers who were supposed to entertain but me – as one of the few non-Roma among the guests of the birthday party. Beyond the lessons about the reflexivity and dialogical character of anthropological fieldwork, in this case I was practically faced with a well-defined role that is given to me by the people whom I'm writing about; a task which I can solve successfully or get completely wrong. Moreover, unlike most of the time that I had spent with Gypsies in concerts, clubs and in various private flats, here the male performers were not in the center of the event (or at least not as much as otherwise). Since the main concern of my fieldwork was related to the identity politics and musical practices of Roma performers – and in the Hungarian context this category is nearly equal with the one of 'male' – my knowledge was even more than partial about the parallel female discourses on music, performance and taste.

On the same day, later in the afternoon, I called one of my closer female acquaintances from the circles of Roma performers to ask her suggestions about what should be the appropriate present to this birthday party. In addition to this advice, she also told me that in terms of music I should have play salsa or other Cuban tracks, not only the 'Gypsy stuff'; since these are the only tunes that the women – including Mari – are willing to dance to. She was right: what I experienced during the night while the guests recurrently turned to me with their requests was an explicit division of musical preferences along gender lines. As if anything that I could play in association with the understandings of the 'Gypsy' label would have been male principles. Those were the men who asked me to play songs from the bands of the Hungarian Roma musical scene, or 'something in the Romanian way' *("valami románosat"*) which mainly referred to the up-tempo beats of Romanian Roma performers like Nicolae Guța or Sandu Ciorba, highly admired stars, whose records are the objects of a wide informal exchange among the Roma whom I know in Hungary. During their songs men gathered around the speakers and made enthusiastic comments, like "Look at these Romanians, they're just eating up the instruments!" (*"megeszik a hangszereket"*), which expressed their definite respect towards virtuosity. These moments usually ended up when somebody – usually a watchful man – said that I should put back on the music that 'the women like'. Although during my preparation I tried to collect as many titles from the above named 'Latino' genres as it was possible, there was a song that was impossible to exceed in terms of popularity: a number from the Soundtrack of the film *Dirty Dancing 2.*, which was usually referred to merely as 'the Cuba'. It was not the first time when I heard 'the Cuba' among my Roma acquaintances – the smash hit with a rather hybrid character based upon a strong hip-hop beat and a repetitive salsa-tune. A few weeks earlier – after a program organized by the Gypsy

Minority Self-Government in the 9th district of Budapest – another Roma performer invited us to the flat of him and his family where we had a rather spontaneous party. That evening also 'the Cuba' was the leading hit but that time I thought it was due to the scarcity of CD-s at home. However, as a 'DJ' in the birthday party of Mari, I had to play 'the Cuba' more than twenty times. It was the only song that started the ball rolling in terms of dancing, although only women were dancing with each other. While such female couples were usual elements of former, rather 'traditional' balls also (for example if there weren't enough male partners) here the 'female dance' was based on salsa-steps that seemed to be unfamiliar to many of the men.

As the night went on, a few men started to piece together an electronic keyboard with the speakers to make live music. After a few up-tempo dance melodies with the traditional Gypsy *'esztám'* beat they turned to slow songs; the songs 'for listening' (*'hallgató'*) or the 'true speech'. According to former researches, the performance of these songs is strongly related to male gatherings, hence to gender roles and divisions. In some cases women were not allowed to take part in singing at all (Stewart, 1997: 186-187.), while elsewhere the women's participation is limited to the accomplishment of their husbands' song and if they come to be in the position of singing, they need their brother, father or husband to ask a ritual permission from the other men for that (Kovalcsik, 1999: 272.). In my case, at the beginning of the men's 'true speech' nearly all of the women left the room and went outside to chat and smoke cigarettes. However, some of them kept on asking me ironically to "stop the men singing" and to put on 'the Cuba' back. While their request was presented obviously as a joke, it was again about the expression of their distinct preferences through providing me a 'task' with it that probably they would never take on (i.e. to stop the men singing in a celebration). Later I was talking with Mari, who had the

birthday. Her family – like many Roma from the current musical scene of Budapest – migrated to the capital city from the North-Eastern rural area of Hungary during the 90s and as for many others it was a rather troublesome split for them. It was also the beginning of a long-standing quest to find and define their place in a new urban context. As she said of the men's singing: "Of course I don't hate these songs, I know them very well; maybe I know them even a bit too much".

Most of my examples throughout this paper were taken from my encounters with Roma performers and the experiences I gained about the operation of their network-ties or relations with their audiences. However, in this private ceremony the negotiation of the Roma category was taking place according to the lines of gender division. At the birthday party of Mari those were the women there who understood the well-known 'Gypsy-way' of party-making as something to refuse or at least to overcome. The men expressed their enthusiasm about the 'Romanian style' – seemingly this term has merely a reference to a country of origin, but in practical use its meaning for the Roma whom I know is 'even more Gypsy than we'; a set of musical representations that they like, imitate and also compete with in their own practices. Male and female preferences were completely different that evening. In a comparison, the male idea of being 'even more Gypsy than we' was crucially different from the female strategy of adopting or imitating the 'Latino'– while also expressing their ambiguities concerning a prospective situation in which they should take on the competition with Gypsy musicians from Romania. As Imi, one of the best male Gypsy dancers in the Budapest scene told me, nobody knows how the appearance of 'Gypsy rumba' – the dance of the birthday party – happened among the Roma in Hungary. It might similar to the former fashion of 'Gypsy rocky', a dance that was elaborated by those Roma who started to attend predominantly non-Roma

clubs and discotheques and thought this style to each other there. Other cases I saw young Roma couples dancing the 'Gypsy rumba' – also including men. This dance provides a great freedom of vibrant motion compared to former ways of female Gypsy dance, while it maintains a sense of difference not at least from the non-Roma who are not dancing like that at all.

However, in the case of the birthday party both performances – the display of 'Romanian' and 'Latino' images – were attempts for the re-definition of the 'Roma' category. These claims were to distance oneself from locally extant negative associations of 'being Roma': not only labels coming from the external world, but also the states or periods already overstepped in personal life-stories (like the migration from rural to urban settlements). However, these performances are not equal to a direct expression of refusal: like the recent fashion of 'Spanish style' among Roma in Hungary, it has also something to do with a re-formulated pattern of identification in which downgraded elements of the Roma category can be thrown out, and positively understood elements can be kept or even developed further. When my Roma acquaintances are making music for themselves they often play with the genres, for example turn from an old Roma folksong into a Brazilian 'bossa nova' without changing the main tunes or the lyrics. These practices are aiming to hold both the 'past' and the 'present' to themselves and connect them together by performative practices.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to understand the cultural politics of Roma music-making in the current arena of 'world music' and musical hybridization. In this framework musical practices can be interpreted as symbolic forms of claim-making with respects to wider public discourses on 'ethnicity', 'recognition', 'modernization', or 'labeling'. Music as a form of cultural capital could provide tools and terrains to negotiate such categories; it is a part of ethnicity-performances both 'on-stage' and 'backstage'.

One of the major goals of the 'Roma cultural movement' in postsocialist Hungary was to make 'traditional Roma music' to be not only a refined expression of 'Roma experience' but also a strategic element in the creation and institutionalization of a cultural canon following the patterns of 'high' or 'national' culture'. However, these fixed and centralized notions were transgressed or refused by many of those Roma who were otherwise supposed to be 'represented' by them. As part of a developing Roma popular cultural scene musical changes were taking place with reference to foreign influences that are appropriated in the articulation of altered self-images associated both with 'tradition' and 'modernity'. In other words, music has a strategic role here in the circulation of references among different locations where Roma reside in Europe, but the local incorporation of these patterns are always selective, supporting the performer's own positionality. Even if these forms of exchange are not creating 'transnational ties' among the Roma, they're a part of a broader transformation in which ethnically defined preferences are expressed in consumer choices, popular culture and taste. In this context for the actors of the Roma musical field in Hungary 'world music' – contrary to its definitions as an all-encompassing

category – means a possibility to upgrade their music by gaining control over the uses of 'authenticity' and also to participate in a newly defined market-niche.

Hence, contrary to the former attempts to integrate 'folklore' into the framework of a developing 'Roma high culture'; for the current actors of the Roma musical field it is rather the 'market' that provides prospects for integration. Moreover, this strategy is in accordance with their aims to create positive definitions for the 'Roma' category detached from not only the labels of the external world but also the representation of the Roma by a centuries-long history of oppression and suffering. The paper provided empirical examples for different performances of the Roma category within this context. The main task for further research should be the comparison of these strategies with the ones that are applied by Roma performers in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe – more specifically Romania and Bulgaria – where the institutionalization, the market-inclusion and the framework of Roma culture and identity-politics developed in a different way compared to the case introduced in this paper.

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