

Navigating Balkanist Stereotypes, Stigma and *Manele*

An ethnographic exploration of the activity and identity work of male
Roma musicians in Bucharest

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ABSTRACT

The Roma have been historically “reviled as people and revered as musicians”¹. In present-day Romania, Roma people find themselves in the centre of debates on national and community identity, Europe versus the Orient, or modernity versus tradition. These debates are also reflected in the discourse around *manele*, a controversial, but popular Romanian party music style of Balkan influence, generally performed by Roma musicians. The elites, taking the anti-*manele* hegemonic stance that portrays *manele* as uncultured and tasteless, defend their position on the grounds of protecting the social and moral values of the country, while others challenging them say the discourse enforces a Balkanist representation of the Roma as Romania’s internal Other, marginalising them further. At the same time, the Roma have been customarily portrayed in ethnographic works as “people outside of history”², whose culture is not able to adapt to modernity while keeping its distinctiveness – a culture unable to face the test of time and more likely to disappear due to processes of assimilation or acculturation. In this thesis I argue that different Roma musicians or people involved to a certain degree in the music field, can be both limited by, and benefiting from the *manele* world and stereotypes, sometimes at the same time. In positioning themselves towards *manele*, they engage in dynamic identity-work by drawing on their musical traditions and employing strategic essentialism to achieve a better social status – either within the *manele* world or outside of it. At the same time, *manele* can be restricting their artistic freedom, and can become vessels for Roma stereotypes and further essentialisation.

Through an ethnographic description of Romani music-inspired activities in Bucharest, I tried to bring forward transdisciplinary contemporary perspectives in light of rapid socio-cultural change in Romania and its Roma community. As theoretical foundation for my paper, I take the stance of Kapralski (2005), who states that the customary ethnographic depictions of the Roma miss the ways in which Romani culture can show flexibility and adaptability to socio-political change, while remaining distinct and heterogenous. At the same time, I follow works arguing that the anti-*manele* discourse draws on Balkanism and depicts the Roma as Romania’s ‘internal Other’.

¹ Ruethers, 2013

² Kapralski, 2007

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

When you go about your everyday life in a certain place, many things become part of your habitual behaviour – social norms, values, or even what is socially accepted to like and dislike. Being born and having spent my first 18 years in Bucharest, Romania, I too was influenced by the habitual behaviour. Among others, this meant disliking *manele* (sg. *manea*), a popular type of Balkan pop music with a heavy Oriental influence, performed customarily by Roma musicians. I regarded *manele* as something shameful, disgraceful, and representative of a lower culture I did not want to be associated with. I also had no contact with anyone who identified as ethnically Roma – not for any explicit reasons, but simply because it was *habitual* that the Roma and non-Roma lead their lives as separate communities. Fast forward 7 years, when I found myself at a Balkan music festival in Amsterdam. I was enjoying the music when my body froze as I realised one of the songs played was a Romanian *manea*. ‘How could I possibly enjoy it?’, I thought to myself. Luckily, my recent intercultural experience and education soon made me ask myself a different set of questions – Why *couldn’t* I enjoy it? What was actually at the root of my and many other Romanians’ stance against *manele*? Or even more conflicting, would it be possible that I actually *do* enjoy it?

This was the moment that made me take a look back at the Romanian context around *manele* and start questioning the habitual behaviour I grew up with. Searching through existing literature on the subject provided me with more insight into the stigma around *manele*, and its connection with Balkanism and the discrimination of the Roma in Romania. This research was born out of my interest to find out how Roma musicians experience this context around both *manele* and their community. Drawing on Balkanism and identity politics, the main research question I try to answer in the following chapters is *How do Romanian Roma musicians consider that the stereotypes surrounding the genre of manele influence their work and identity?*. This research looks into topics such as the process of Othering and the identity politics framing the Roma, musicality stereotypes and their role in the actions of the Roma minority against stigmatisation in present-day Romania. Based on my findings, I argue that different Roma musicians or people involved to a certain degree in the music field, can be both limited by, and benefiting from the *manele* world and the stereotypes linked to the music genre, sometimes at the same time. In positioning themselves towards *manele*, they engage in dynamic identity work by drawing on their musical traditions and by employing strategic essentialism to achieve a better social status – either within the *manele* world or outside of it. Meanwhile, *manele* can and do restrict their artistic freedom, and can become vessels for Roma stereotypes and further stigmatisation.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the Roma community and the systemic discrimination they face in Romania and in the wider European context. A quick exploration of the musicality stereotype is presented, in order to further problematise the context of *manele* in light of existing literature and debates. Two main debates framing the identity of the Roma and their connection to *manele* are introduced as well. The first debate is around the anti-*manele* discourse - on the one hand, the Romanian elites see it as a means for protecting the moral values of Romania against the promiscuity of *manele*. On the other hand, other academics argue that the anti-*manele* stance is an effect of Balkanism, portraying the Roma as Romania's internal Other. The second debate is between those portraying Roma identity and culture 'outside of time', a common theme within ethnographic works on the Roma, and others like Kapralski (2005, 2007) who argue that the ethnographic depictions of the Roma are static and miss on reflecting the dynamism and heterogeneity of Roma identity. The debates therefore link to the two theoretical lenses that are at the base of this research - identity politics and Balkanism. The chapter ends with an overview of the methods I used, putting an emphasis on my own positionality as a young, female, non-Roma researcher, and its implications.

Chapter 2 brings forth a more in-depth exploration of the socio-political context of Romanian Roma people and musicians. I present a concise but comprehensive overview of their history, as well as the development of their language and the social organisation of Romanian Roma groups. I then turn to the present and explore the discrimination that can be found in Romania against the Roma, which takes the form of 'antigypsyism'³. The Roma group of *lăutari*, having strong ties to musicianship and being the group many *manele* musicians come from, is introduced in last pages of the chapter.

The third chapter presents the findings on the relation between *manele* and the non-Roma, reflecting my perspective as researcher. The chapter explores the emerging *manele* parties in the old centre of Bucharest, which brings the music genre to young alternative circles. Some reflections of different Roma on these parties are presented as well. I constructed this chapter as an *intermezzo* to the next parts of the report, which bring forth the experiences and vision of Roma musicians themselves.

Chapter 4 introduces the first cases from the field: Roma musicians who take the 'Gypsy' music sound and brand and give it a twist. By doing so, they position themselves as different from what is 'known', and adventure into an exploration of Romani music and other genres - Balkan sounds, classical music, or Rock'n'Roll. Chapter 5 continues on the case study path and introduces the Roma (and non-Roma) musicians who turn to the *lăutărească*⁴ music, characteristic for the group of *lăutari*. In a mix of old and new, these musicians draw on traditions, perform in new formulas and infiltrate new audiences.

The discussion of the findings can be found in Chapter 6. In this Chapter, I analyse the results in terms of the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapter 1, linking them to wider debates. The weaknesses of my research and the theoretical implications of my findings are summarised at the end of the section. The report ends with a conclusion which revisits the contents of the report in order to answer the central research question of the thesis. Moreover, Chapter 7 closes with a few recommendations for future inquiry, which can hopefully bring new insights into the complex context of *manele* as social phenomenon.

³ An alternative spelling is 'anti-gypsyism'. The *Alliance against Antigypsyism* refers to papers using both forms but uses the form 'antigypsyism' in their own papers and communication. I therefore use the same form too.

⁴ Type of music performed by *lăutari* (Romanian Roma musician group)

Background

The Roma in Eastern Europe can be considered an ‘imagined community’, defined not internally like most nation-states in the region, but by the other populations that interacted with them across centuries (Council of Europe, 2015e). Most ethnic Roma ended up speaking different dialects of not only Romani, but also of the languages of the countries they live in or have lived in previously. As a result, some might prefer to take the identity of the specific nation they have had contact with, in a process called “preferred ethnic identity” (Council of Europe, 2015e) ⁵. Therefore, in accordance to the extensive information on Roma history and culture put forward by the Council of Europe, I use the term ‘Roma’ with the meaning of an intergroup ethnic community forming a heterogeneous socio-cultural unit structured based on various internal classifications (Council of Europe, 2015e). When talking about the ‘Roma groups’ in Romania, I draw on the extensive definition provided by the same collaboration, and I refer to individuals who identify as Roma and have a common group consciousness, use a common language, have one or more common current or historical means of subsistence, and who are members of the group only if they were born into it (Council of Europe, 2015e). In the case of the Roma musicians of Romania mostly addressed in this thesis, I customarily refer to the group of *lăutari*, one of the self-defined groups of Roma within Romania. The Roma musicians performing as *lăutari* are mostly male, and thus their male gender is implied when I use the word ‘*lăutari*’ (sg. *lăutar*) or Roma musician, unless stated otherwise. Throughout the report, I also make use of the word ‘Romani’, using it as an adjective to describe a cultural aspect (ex: Romani music).

The Roma, “cast beyond civilisation and the moral order” ⁶

Despite ‘Gypsy’ culture being increasingly embraced in Europe, Roma people still represent one of the most persecuted communities in Europe and the most discriminated ethnic group in Romania by both society and state (Tileagă, 2006; Silverman, 2014). Their history is marked by marginalisation (Tileagă, 2006; Silverman, 2014) and by what Szeman (2009) calls the ‘internal Othering’ - the framing of the Roma as the ‘other’ within one’s country, “feared as deviance, idealized as autonomy” (Silverman, p.9). Tileagă (2006) adds that the Roma have been suffering for centuries from a case of racism drawing on both nationalism and colonialism, living in a form of “European apartheid” (Ruethers, 2013, p.686). This social context has produced and reproduced the cultural and political identity of the Roma, in which the Roma’s pariah status is embedded. In the words of Tileagă (2006), “[the Roma] are cast beyond civilization and the moral order” (p.22).

On a broad level, academia also has its fault in the Orientalist portrayal of the Roma. Slawomir Kapralski’s work on Roma identity formation (2007) draws attention to the way ethnographic materials depict the Roma as being outside the temporality of “our historical world” (p.5), a discourse influenced by modernisation theory and nationalism: “In an epoch shaped by nationalist rhetoric, those people who do not claim a land and a written tradition for themselves, who cannot or do not claim a history,

⁵ Ex: some Roma groups in Bulgaria, Romani and Romanian speaking, prefer to be called *Romanians*

⁶ Tileagă, 2006, p.22

are [...] without a voice in any political process" (Trumpener, 1992, in Kapralski, 2007). Kapralski argues that ethnographers have situated the Roma in the "eternal present" (p.5), therefore denying them a future and deeming their culture unable to keep up with modern life. As a result, Roma traditions have been separated from their historical becoming, and have instead become framed as an essentialist core of the collective identity of the Roma (Kapralski, 2007). This anthropological approach dooms the Roma to "marginalization, assimilation or acculturation" and envisions them as "romantic primitives" (Kapralski, 2007, p.5), instead of considering the ways in which Romani culture can be flexible, adaptive and distinct in time. This academic situation makes Kapralski (2007) argue for the existence of a "hidden agenda" in the ethnography of Roma identity in Europe, which puts the Roma outside history (p.6). By doing so, the author believes hundreds of years of Roma and European people living side by side, "which have not left Europeans with a clear conscience", are disregarded. He calls this process "the obliteration of history through the erasure of interconnection" (p.6) which

"may be thus attributed to the 'European myth of the Gypsies' (in both 'modernist' and 'romantic' versions), the myth that has animated the traditional ethnography of the Romanies. However, the reverse seems to be equally true: the myth has emerged and is perpetuated as a consequence of the processes of marginalization, subjugation and obliteration of Romani history." (Kapralski, 2007, p.6)

An implication of this agenda is that the Roma have not been seen as political actors for their most recent history. However, Roma NGOs in Eastern Europe have been trying to frame the Roma as potent political actors and, by doing so, to protect the ethnic heterogeneity through political homogenisation (Kapralski, 2007). Nevertheless, these efforts have been met with resistance on two fronts: the first one within the more traditional Roma communities, whose *Romanipen* ('Roma way of life') advises against close contact with the non-Roma ways; and the second one by the non-Roma who see the Roma as an issue to be resolved through processes of assimilation and adaptation, a position reflected in the hidden agenda described above (Kapralski, 2007). As Ian Hancock noticed already in 1991, having the Roma as potent political actors is seen as a contradiction with the romanticised imagery of the Gypsy:

"If Gypsies have such aspirations, they are charged with having been contaminated by the outside world, and with no longer being <<proper>> Gypsies. [...] When non-Gypsies go from wagon to automobile, it is called progress; when Gypsies do the same thing, it is disappointment." (Hancock, 1991, in Kapralski, 2004)

In Romania, the Roma represent 8% of the total population. Their history on the Romanian territories is said to have started somewhere in between the 11th and the 13th century, when migrants from the North of India are thought to have crossed the European borders. Their history is marked by marginalisation and subjugation - from being used as slaves for medieval boyars to losing 25% of their people during the Holocaust, and being socially and culturally repressed during communism (Council of Europe, 2015c, 2015d). Due to the lack of a common European identity, the Roma have what Ruethers (2013) calls a "permanent migrant status" (p.686). Nevertheless, in the case of Romanian Roma, their nomadism is "fitting closely into the regular migration patterns of other Romanian & Bulgarian citizens looking for opportunities abroad" (Pusca, 2010, p.5). The term itself, 'Roma', has been an attempt to step away from the stigmatized image of the Gypsies (Vermeersch, 2006), but in return divided the community into adepts of the term and others rejecting it as they feel "outraged by what

they perceive as claims of superior authenticity by Vlach ⁷ Roma" (Gheorghe & Atcon, 2011, in Vermeersch, 2006, p.13).

Considering the Roma's historical background, it does not come as a surprise that Amnesty International warns on the current systemic discrimination of Roma present in Romania, within areas ranging from education and healthcare to citizenship and access to justice ("Romania 2017/2018", 2018). Negative attitudes and stereotypes about Roma are deeply embedded in the Romanian society, where the hegemonic identity policy around the Roma community draws on essentialist thoughts, clustering negative traits as inherently representative of the Roma community (Tileagă, 2006). The media, the political discourse, and the general society portray Roma people as intrinsically unruly, thieving, uneducated and generally to be avoided (Tileagă, 2006). The essentialist stereotypes framing the Roma identity are also visible in the difference in discourses addressing criminality - or simply bad behaviour - in poor communities. While the Romanians and Bulgarians' bad conduct is generally regarded as a result of the "transition from communism", in the case of the Roma anti-social behaviour is framed as due to an "innate attribute that has historically exhibited the same problem" (Pușcă, 2010, p.4). As an example of this, in 2006 more than 80% of the Romanians believed the Roma are criminals, and 36% thought the Roma should live separately from Romanians, while most cases of violence against the Romanian Roma were not a result of extremist political behaviour, but of "a kind of violent ideology of social exclusion" (Tileagă, 2006, p.21).

Musicality, *manele* and the Balkanist discourse

Imre (2008) extends her analysis of the marginalisation of Eastern European Roma to the music field, arguing that the Roma have been labelled as 'entertainers' for most of their European history, restricting their access to legitimate citizenship and professions. Nevertheless, Balkan Romani music has recently become more prevalent in the Western music scene (Szeman, 2009) - from Gypsy music festivals to DJ's mixing Balkan sounds - showcasing a different attitude towards Romani culture (Figure 1), or, perhaps, a more positive stereotype embraced by the community themselves (Imre, 2008). Imre (2008) further argues that the Roma musicians are seen as "the local embodiment of ghetto music" (p.330), partly explaining their success on an international music scene always looking for the next exotic thing.

What could be regarded as a 'positive' stereotype, the musicality stereotype framing Roma's identity often leads to the cultural appropriation of Romani art & identity: "the same Roma who are condemned for 'shaming' their countries in front of Europe and the EU [...] are proudly embraced as the nation's representatives when it comes to claiming cultural credits abroad" (Imre, 2008, p.331). Ruethers (2013) writes about the same phenomenon, stating that the "Roma are reviled as people and revered as musicians" (p.680). Another implication of this process is that Roma musicians themselves re-appropriate the musicality stereotype, engaging in what Spivak calls 'strategic essentialism', and transforming music into a surviving strategy within a socio-political context that rejects them iteratively (Imre, 2008). Romanian Roma musicians such as Taraf de Haïdouks, Fanfare Ciocărlia, or Mahala Raï Banda stand as an example of this, having been managed by non-Romanian companies and performing mostly for Western audiences while embodying the "authentic Balkan Gypsy musician"

⁷ *Vlach* (adj.) refers to the the Southern part of Romania, which used to be a principality called *Wallachia*. Therefore, 'Vlach Roma' means 'Romanian Roma'.

(Szeman, 2009, p.99). This reflects in research and academia as well. The existing academic work on the Roma is dominated by two main topics - the Roma as migration issue, or the Roma craze in the music market, while the low or lack of transfer to schools and the media further enforces the Gypsy fetish (Ruethers, 2013).



Figure 1. Taraf de Haidouks and actor Johnny Depp in Paris, 1999 (Unknown, n.d.) - Image hyperlinked to video material

Imre (2008) points out that although the Roma musicians express themselves politically through hybrid music forms, they are still under the threat of national racial contexts and of commercial overtake by the international music market. Perhaps the most evident manifestation of this can be seen in the case of the *manele* music genre, a type of party music in Romania, widely attributed to Roma performers. *Manele* (sing. *manea*) represent a hybrid music genre absorbing Romanian-Romani folk music, Oriental rhythms and Western sounds. The *manele* world is a 'man's world', as the imagery around the genre suggests as well: the main themes - love, wealth, social status - are presented mostly from a male perspective, women being usually the objects of interest and only rarely the producers of music. The musicians are therefore mostly male, part of a Roma group linked to musicianship, called *lăutari* (from *lăută*, or 'lute' in English, a musical instrument) (Stoichiță & De La Breteque, 2012). Nevertheless, the repertoire of *lăutari* is generally represented by traditional *lăutărească* music (*muzică lăutărească*), usually performed professionally at various life events such as weddings or baptisms (Oancea, 2016). *Manele* are therefore a different type of music, that draws among others on *muzică lăutărească*. While widely associated with the Roma ethnicity, *manele* are widely consumed by Romanian non-Roma audiences, according to the musicians themselves (Stoichiță & De La Breteque, 2012). However, this does not change the popular association between *manele* and the Roma, turning ethnicity into what Stoichiță & De La Breteque (2012) regard as "a kind of shared cultural background for most debates on the social significance of this music" (p.7).

The two authors further argue that *manele* showcase a "paradoxical exoticism" (p.3) through their mix of Western and Oriental sounds, generating intense reactions in listeners - either positive or negative. This idea is shared by Oancea (2016), who argues that *manele* are controversial because of their association with the Roma, because of the Oriental sound, and because of the sexualised and materialistic lyrics (Figure 2). The controversy lead to an intense intellectual debate in public media. On the one hand, intellectuals such as Cerșeanu and Pruteanu - linguists and politicians - employ the

hegemonic anti-*manele* discourse, arguing *manele* represent the “weeds of popular culture”, polluting the nation’s cultural life (Haliliuc, 2014, p.298). Stoichiță & De La Breteque (2012) argue that being “against *manele*” has become the standard ethical position for the Romanian elites and nationalists, who see *manele* as “a threat to social and moral values” (p.8). Nevertheless, the authors add that the fact that many Romanians still consume *manele* might point towards a change of attitude towards the ‘Gypsy’ culture. Nevertheless, the rhetoric around *manele* as ‘moral degradation’ runs deep, leading to the boycott of a governmental anti-drug campaign using *manele* music, an example among many others (Haliliuc, 2014).



Figure 2. Typical *manele* imagery about wealth, wiseguys, and women (Salam, 2015)
- Image hyperlinked to video material

On the other hand, Romanian academics such as ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu or anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu argue that *manele* represent the Western influenced, post-communist “Romanian Dream”, “the phantasm of the absolute winner facing society, [...] a recurring theme in lyrics of *manele*” (Oancea, 2016, p.211). Constantiniu (2017) sees *manele* as less of a dream and more of a reality, arguing that they represent first and foremost a mirror of the post-1989 Romanian society with its transformations that took place in the so-called ‘transition period’. Stoichiță & De La Breteque (2012) reflect both positions, maintaining that *manele* represent an “enchanted world” (p.9) without a real meaning, which allows listeners to “mirror, exaggerate or contradict ideas and behaviors borrowed from their daily lives” (p.9).

Adrian Schiop, who stirred up the spirits in Romania with his PhD paper on *manele* published in 2017, is critical towards the elitist anti-*manele* discourse and its anti-Roma character: “I’m not saying that the elites are ultimately at fault for the atomised social landscape in Romania [...] I’m only saying that they have not done their duties as elites: they identified [the Roma] as the cause of the problem and got themselves out of it” (Haliliuc, 2014). Rădulescu, dubbed ‘the mother of *lăutari*’ and ‘the guardian of traditional Romanian music’, is perhaps the strongest voice representing this view on *manele*, generating strong reactions among Romanians that sometimes take a tragicomic turn, such as when a man filed a criminal complaint against her for national betrayal (Rădulescu, 2014):

“I think we dislike this music because we dislike the people it clinged to: the swindlers, the *bosses*, the criminals. [...] But I think intellectuals also got offended by the Oriental influence of *manele*. Why? Because for some, the Orient, the Balkans, mean savagery, lack of civilisation, backwardness, continuous mutiny! So we hate this music - *manele* - which has obvious

connections to the Balkan world. [...] The society produced *manele*, the *manele* are not modeling society. [...] You don't like *manele*? Then go ahead and change the society which produces them, society which holds thieves in power. [...] That is why *manele* are about the swindlers: they are the ones in power. [...] They created a social ideal." (Rădulescu, 2014)

During a conference on *manele* that took place in 2007, Mihăilescu said that "the story of *manele* is parallel to that of Romanians" (Mihăilescu, 2007, in Beissinger, Rădulescu, Mihăilescu, Moisil, & Schiop, 2007). He added that "We [Romanians] decided that we are no longer Oriental, but Occidental, within one generation" and argued that therefore "Romanians have a Balkan ego and an Occidental superego⁸, and like usual - these two fight at times" (Mihăilescu, 2007, in Beissinger et al, 2007). In this context, the anthropologist explained his view on the stigma around *manele*: "This orientalisation [the *manea*] is therefore a big fright. Are we going back in the Orient, right now when we finally want, can, and have the opportunity to become real Europeans?" (Mihăilescu, 2007, in Beissinger et al, 2007). In other words, he concluded that

"the ones who hate *manele* have no idea what they are talking about. The ones who hate the elites have no idea what they're talking about as well. But everyone is happy, because they have someone to hate. Through *manele*, we can hate each other, and know who we all are." (Mihăilescu, 2007, in Beissinger et al, 2007)

Amid this debate, a certain segment of the Bucharest youth, highly educated and part of the upper-middle class, different than the typical portrait of *manele* listeners, started a new phenomenon: the *manele* party as the new *hipster* event in town. Mihăilescu sees this as something understandable, arguing that these *hipsters* are generally rejecting the mainstream, which in turn rejects *manele*. Therefore, they embrace *manele* as a way of

"letting off the steam created by the wild Romanian capitalist society. [...] When this body is under pressure for 20 out of 24 hours, it feels the need to explode. And this is how it can do it. We have no Argentinian tango, we have this thing called *manele*. Good enough!" (Mihăilescu in Avram, 2016)

Similarly, while the Roma performers of Romania are targets of negative stereotypes such as the ones linking the *manele* context to their community, they receive a relatively greater appreciation on international stages. Nevertheless, this too can be seen a result of Balkanist narratives, usually uncovered by Western, non-Roma managers marketing the *bona fide* Gypsy musician and imagery (Szeman, 2009, p. 98). This process is similar to the 'sister' musical styles of *manele* from the Balkan region (such as Bulgarian *chalga*, or Serbian *turbofolk*), and represents what Rădulescu calls "regional globalization": they take influences from various music styles such as flamenco, jazz or hip-hop, while also expanding their audience internationally (Bârlea, 2013).

Therefore, the discourse around *manele* place Roma musicians in the middle of debates about national and community identity, Europe versus the Orient, modernity versus tradition (Szeman, 2009). Haliliuc (2014) argues that the Roma, as well as *manele*, are portrayed as "Romania's Other" by public intellectuals drawing on the Balkanist ideology of separating Romania from its Balkan context.

⁸ In psychological terms, the ego represents the reality, the social norms and normal behaviour, while the superego suggests the morality, the ideal self and aspirations (McLeod, 2016)

Constantiniu (2016) points out that the conflict between the ‘civilised’ people and *manele* fans is one based on class and race antagonisms. *Manele*, their singers and their public represent either an ethnic Other (when they are Roma), or a socio-economic one (generally having a precarious education and financial status). In this context, *manele* have been regarded in the Romanian public space as a threat to the national culture and morality, risking to compromise the country’s European aspirations (Constantiniu, 2016). This reflects Romania’s post-World War I efforts to separate itself from its Ottoman past (see Chapter 2), when the public discourse was focused on underlining “Romanian exceptionalism” within the Balkan area, and ‘balkanist’ became a derogatory term (Haliliuc, 2015, p.295). Similarly, the essentialist musicality of the Roma got framed through what Imre (2009) calls “the discursive ghetto of inferiority” (p.329), overlooking the complexity of Romani music’s hybridity. Therefore, *manele* are not simply a music genre in Romania, but a socio-cultural phenomenon (Oancea, 2016).

Theoretical framework

As mentioned before, the research draws on Balkanism and on identity politics. The first framework is provided by Balkanism as defined by Maria Todorova and others building on her work. The concept of Balkanism, the characteristics of Romanian Balkanism, and my reasons for using this framework instead of Said's Orientalism (1978) are explained in the first part of this section. As the research topic also deals with the identity of the Roma musicians and stereotypes, the broad topic of 'identity' needs attention as well. Under the umbrella of 'identity politics' - referring to the use of identity as means for articulating political claims - concepts such as collective identity, strategic essentialism, and performativity are described in the second part of the theoretical framework.

Balkanism

Origins

Balkanism, rooted in Orientalism, provides a lens for analysing the way Roma musicians, as part of a marginalised community, act vis-a-vis the stereotypes framing their community. Maria Todorova conceptualised Balkanism in 1997 as a subspecies of Orientalism, and not a sole variation of it (Dix, 2015). Balkanism can be defined as "the range of discursive practices, political projects, and representational motifs found in writings on South-East Europe" (Hammond, 2007, p.203). Balkanism manifests itself in two different ways: through dehumanising Western stereotypes of the Balkans used to "politically ghettoize" the region, and through local elitist discourses that "fuse continental patterns of representation with picturesque nationalistic folklore" (Obad, 2014, p.21). The term has been gaining more ground in recent years, as an alternative to the previous Orientalist perspective employed when discussing the Balkan context (see Bakić-Hayden & Hayden, 1992; Bakić-Hayden, 1995). The term can also be encountered in its geographical and historical sense, reflecting the linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity of the Balkan area, as well as its successive dominations by greater powers (Russia, Turkey, Austria etc.), which lead to repeated alteration of regional borders "with concrete consequences in the forging of states, nations, alliances, and, ultimately, of cultural identities" (Bârlea, 2013,p.20). For my research I use the term with Todorova's conceptualisation in mind.

Hammond (2007), in his work on distinguishing Balkanism and Orientalism, analyses Todorova's concept and argues that, on the one hand, Balkanism and Orientalism are to a certain extent similar. He compares the way the Balkans are framed as the ruthless part of Europe with the moral critique of the Middle East and argues that the Balkan area has been essentialised through Orientalist mechanisms: "mystery, degeneracy, savagery, immorality, chaos" (p. 202). He refers to Larry Wolff's view of the invention of Eastern Europe as "an intellectual project of demi-Orientalisation" (p.202). On the other hand, Balkanism differs from Orientalism in many ways, making Todorova and other adepts of Balkanism argue for the necessity of the field. The Balkan area represents "the other within, a liminal self that undermines continental unity and stability by more subtle erosion" (Todorova in Hammond, 2007, p.205), whereas the Orient has always been an imaginary Other outside Europe. Todorova (2009) adds that the Balkan conglomeration of sometimes

contradictory languages, ethnicities and religions living side by side, together with their transitional status, turned the Balkan area into an “incomplete self” (p.15) in the Western perspective. Similarly, Dix (2015) states that Todorova contrasts the Balkans – defined as the “continental East”, a concrete area always in transition – with the Orient representing the “diverse [...] mystical global East [...] portrayed as a *world*: complete in itself” (p.975). In other words, she contrasts the fragmented concrete existence of the Balkan area with the cohesive mysticism of the Orient. Juxtaposing the Balkans and the Orient, Todorova (2009) states that the construction of a single Balkan self-identity (instead of more self-identities) by the West was done to contrast the Oriental Other.

The small amount of Western interest received by South-East Europe (compared to the Middle East) is also an important factor for defining Todorova's Balkanism (Hammond, 2007). She underlines the lack of colonial historical baggage within the Balkan area in comparison with the Orient, arguing that Balkanism is the result of “the disappointment of the West Europeans’ ‘classical’ expectations in the Balkans” (Todorova, 2009, p.20). The author also addresses the static collective representation of the Balkans, unchanged due to the marginality of Balkan anthropology, which lacked the postcolonial cultural criticism that addresses colonial representations of the Third World. In this context, Obad (2014) argues that through Balkanism, “symbolic subordination – which came to be justified in a number of Western as well as local elite discourses of the 1990s through the essentialised and generalised notions of the culture and history of nations in the regions – began to be defined as a form of oppression” (p.21-22). He compares the role of the theoretical approach criticising Balkanism to what Laclau and Mouffe call “a discursive ‘exterior’ from which the discourse of subordination can be interrupted” (Laclau and Mouffe in Obad, 2014, p. 22). In other words, Obad (2014) sees the conceptualisation of Balkanism as an important step in addressing and perhaps changing the symbolic subordination of the Balkan area, which has been produced and reproduced in both Western contexts and regional elitist discourses.

Characteristics

Several characteristics are typical of the portrayal of the Balkans. In the Western imagination, the Balkans represents “an [...] unsettling presence loosed from clear identity, an obscure boundary along the European peripheries where categories, oppositions, and essentialized groupings are cast into confusion” (p.204), an area which does not fully belong to either the East or the West (Hammond, 2007). Bârlea (2013) argues that the peninsula has had a complex history filled with local conflicts leaving their mark on the people who found themselves in the middle of political conflicts, but at the outskirts of political alliances. It is therefore not surprising that the local populations engage with the Balkanist discourse in various ways. The term ‘Balkan’ is used by Balkan populations in a neutral sense, but also deprecatory, the latter being encountered especially in Greek, Romanian and Serbo-Croatian, where ‘Balkan’ mostly means the backward who failed to modernise, the barbarian and the uneducated (Todorova, 2009).

Romania embeds a special type of Balkanism, according to Todorova (2009) and other authors drawing on her work. The country's history is marked by the transition from the domination of the Turks to the submission to the Russian empire. As a result, Romania has been reflecting a certain “cultural Narcissism” (p.46) since World War I, insisting on its linkages to Western Europe and Latinism in order to set itself apart from the “sea of (Slavic and Turkic) barbarians” (Todorova, 2009, p.46). Romanian intellectuals have refused for most of the recent history to be associated with the Balkans, perceiving the country's Ottoman past as a sign of backwardness (Todorova, 2009), similar

to the rest of the Balkan nations ⁹. The narrative of Romania's uniqueness was enhanced during Communism as a coping mechanism for the feeling of ambiguity rooted in "the in-betweenness of the East and West" (Todorova, 2009, p.48). Perhaps the most defining element of Romania's Balkanist discourse is, according to Todorova (2009), the repulsion of 'the peasant' and 'the rural', as a means to delimit Romania from the Balkan area which usually glorifies the peasant. Bârlea (2013) extends his analysis of Romanian Balkanism to popular culture, reflecting on *manele* as the mirror of the in-betweenness of the country:

"Orient and Occident: they contain images peopled with belly dancers, transparent shalwars, bazaars, big male rings, but also luxury cars, high-power motorcycles, swimming pools, sumptuous villas. In other words, popular culture [...] – a defining element of cultural identity – proves once more the fact that the Balkans represent a borderland world, an interland between the great empires and great cultures." (Bârlea, 2013, p.27)

Kiss (2017) builds on the Romanian elites' effort to delimit themselves from the Balkans – effort dubbed "the impossible escape" (p. 565) – and presents Sorin Antohi's (2002) framework of strategies employed by these elites to take distance from the Balkans. Three strategies are described. The first one is 'sublimation', referring to the artistic transformation of so-called Balkan characteristics into products suitable for international markets; the second one is 'ethnic ontology', represented by the sum of discourses that address and enhance the unitary Romanian uniqueness; the last strategy is called 'geopolitical bovarism', displaying Romania's focus on its links to the West and rejection of the geographic Balkan context, an example of which can be the framing of Bucharest as "little Paris" (Kiss, 2017, p. 565). While a rather controversial figure in Romanian academia, Antohi delivers some well-contoured strategies that I find useful in identifying Balkanism in the discourses around *manele*. I therefore use them as guidelines and will refer to them in the discussion later on.

⁹ By contrast, Hayden (1992) argues that the states under Ottoman domination were often more 'democratic' than those under Habsburgic domination, highlighting the effect of the Balkanist discourse within the Balkan countries themselves, influenced by the representation of the West as cultural, civilised Europe.

Identity politics

Identity politics refers to the use of identity as a means for articulating political claims and for catalysing political action, generally in the context of inequality, in order to frame a group as distinct from others, and to gain more power and acknowledgement. The term can also refer to the tensions over who gets the right to define the essence of a specific group - in other words, who gets to define the identity of a specific group (Neofotistos, 2013). Hobsbawm (1996) points out that one danger of identity politics is that it essentialises individuals and groups, who are pushed to choose “one among the many identities” they have to dominate their politics: “being a woman, if you are a feminist, [...] being homosexual is you are in the gay movement. This is both dangerous and absurd” (p.41). Therefore, he argues, identity politics are not inherently natural for people, but rather imposed from the outside “in the way in which Serb, Croat and Muslim inhabitants of Bosnia who lived together, socialised and intermarried, have been forced to separate, or in less brutal ways” (Hobsbawm, 1996, p. 41).

As Silverman (2014) argues, “performance of identity is always embedded in hierarchies of power and class” (p.5). Though seemingly non-political, the anti-*manele* hegemonic discourse frames the social and political identity of the Romanian Roma (Haliliuc, 2014). Therefore, the identity politics lens provides a framework to analyse how the Roma musicians can and/or do generate alternative conceptions of their ethnic group identity. In doing so, I will make use of the concepts of *collective identity*, *essentialism* and *performativity*.

(Collective) identity

Hall (1996) stresses the connection between identity and discourse, with its embedded power relation. The author argues that “identities are constructed within, not outside discourse” (p.4) making them rooted in specific historic, systematic power contexts. He concludes that identities are generally a result of processes of difference and exclusion, and not of a “naturally-constituted unity” or sameness, arguing that identity can be build “only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks” (p.4). Tilley (2006) also brings forth the importance of power relations in the definition of identity and explains that the actors with less or no power in a certain group tend to adopt symbols of the most powerful members of another group in order to tip the scales in their favour.

According to Even-Zohar (2011), a group’s collective identity legitimises the group’s status as a separate entity distinct from other groups, making collective identity imperative for keeping a group cohesive. In contrast to Hall, Even-Zohar (2011) argues that collective identity can also become an asset in the form of “a symbolic capital that allows for the group’s status claims” (p.34) and maintains that identity work is a tool that groups employ when unstable in order to secure their preservation. During (2011) argues that in transition periods, communities go through a process of redefining their identity by either clinging to old identities, or by continuously redefining themselves. In the same line, Tilley (2006) mentions that “a symbolic return to the past often acts as a retreat from the uncertainties of the present” (p.14). By contrast, already cohesive groups put less emphasis on identity work and focus more on the commodification of existing elements of the group’s collective “repertoire” (During, 2011, p.36).

In this thesis I take the position of Kapralski (2005) who argues that ethnographic depictions of the Roma identity are rather static and essentialist, presenting the ethnic group as being separated from the rest of the world and having a pristine identity. Adopting a post-structuralist approach in his work on identity, Tilley (2006) maintains that identities are “always responding to change, mobile rather than fixed and static [...]”. From such a perspective notions of identity as being forever grounded, stable and immutable can only have a mythic status” (p.8). This contrasts with what Kapralski (2005) regarded as the ‘hidden agenda’ of ethnographic work on the Roma. Tilley (2006) further argues that in this old way of analysing identities, traditions are the expression of past experiences dictating the present and taking it to the future (p.9). On the other hand, in the case of the Roma musicians, tradition and identity are strongly tied together, as *lăutărească* music is often a tradition that is passed from one generation to another and governs the activity of the Roma. I do not, however, see identity work involving traditions as a static way of dealing with the ethnic identity of the Roma, but rather as an important starting point of how they use their agency to engage with the musical tradition and adapt to the nowadays context of *manele*. In the words of Tilley (2006):

“Collective identities are always bound up with notions of collective traditions and shared material forms. That is they are imagined in a historically and materially specific way. But that which they imagine, or present to consciousness is not always the same. For example the meaning of being a Muslim or a Hindu, or being Cornish or Breton may change fundamentally through time although the use of the same term produces a semblance of continuity.” (p.12)

Therefore, I believe it is important to understand how traditions are engaged in identity work in order to inspect how the identity of diverse Roma musicians is influenced by the context of *manele* music in present-day Romania. Kapralski (2007), in his chapter on how the Roma Holocaust became an important factor in the identity work of the Roma from Eastern Europe, adapts the model of national memory formation by Fentress and Wickham (1992) in order to explain the creation of traditions as part of identity formation. The author argues that a tradition must be implemented through bodily experiences, and therefore must have a “performative nature” (Kapralski, 2007) in order to become part of collective memory and identity. Three steps are described in this process: (1) The construction of tradition by elites; (2) The creation of a rhetorical discourse related to the given tradition and directed to internal or external opponents; (3) The conveyance of the tradition to the collective memory and creation of popular discourse that make up the substructure of (national) historical consciousness. I use Kapralski’s (2007) adaptation of the model to show that the *lăutari*’s tradition of musicality is important not only for their professional activity, but for the identity work of the Roma in Romania. Therefore, *manele* and the stigma around them has the potential to influence the whole Roma community, and not only the musicians, enhancing the Othering of the Roma in Romania.

Essentialism

One process of defining a collective identity exogenously is *essentialism*. A very contested idea within social sciences and postcolonial studies, essentialism assumes that a group has certain exclusive defining characteristics that cannot be found in other groups (Eide, 2010). The authors challenging categories such as race and nationality build on the critique of essentialist representations (Eide, 2010). As mentioned in discussion on Balkanism, Balkanist stereotypes - inherently essentialist - have been relatively unchanged in most recent history, as they have not had the same critical treatment as

Orientalist stereotypes, due to the region's lack of colonial heritage (Todorova, 2009). Therefore, considering essentialism would enhance the needed critical look at the Balkanist stereotypes and stigma surrounding the Romanian Roma.

Spivak developed the concept of *strategic essentialism* in the 1980s to underline the “agency of relatively disempowered social groups” (Morton, 2007, p.126). Eide (2010) describes strategic essentialism as the process of the members of a group perpetuating an essentialising own image - and therefore a simplified group identity - in order to achieve specific goals, although the group is usually internally heterogeneous. Spivak later disputed the term, as she was not pleased with the way it was used for promoting non-strategic essentialism in nationalist contexts (Darius, Jonsson & Spivak, 1993). Nevertheless, it remains a very used term when discussing the identity work of marginalised social groups, and a popular strategy used by minority groups for influencing the hegemony (Eide, 2010). I use strategic essentialism to show how Roma musicians make use of the musicality stereotype to progress professionally and socially, or to break away from the stigma around *manele*.

Performativity

As mentioned before, Hall (1996) stresses the connection between identity and discourse. Butler's concept of *performativity*, originating in gender studies, reflects this connection. Performativity is defined as “the process of subject formation, which creates that which it purports to describe and occurs through linguistic means, as well as via other social practices” (Cavanaugh, 2015, Introduction section, Para. 1). Therefore, Butler sees identity as “enacted through the forced reiteration of norms” (McKinlay, 2010, p. 235) and defines a performative speech act as categorising individuals or groups, with their behaviour and attitudes, while “[allowing] others to recognise the difference signified” (McKinlay, 2010, p. 235). While maintaining his critique on Butler's concept as being too abstract and not easily applicable empirically, McKinlay (2010) argues that performativity is an important concept as it promises to reject essentialism and as it highlights the fragility of hegemonic identities: “No matter how deeply entrenched a given identity appears, it is always and can only be provisional” (p. 236). I use the concept of performativity to reflect on how the Roma identity is enacted or created through discourse and enforced through laws and norms, and how musical performance reacts to the interplay of collective identity, stereotypes and stigma.

Problem statement & research questions

Much attention is given in international academic literature to understanding the marginalisation processes of the Roma, the hybridity of Romani music and, more recently, of *manele*, and the process of Balkanism in the wider European context. While one can find various works on the re-appropriation of musicality stereotypes by the Roma musicians on transnational stages, as well as the double-edged sword represented by the exotisation of Roma music, there is little work on the way the Roma musicians engage with their 'internal Othering' in their own countries, as well as with the colonialist-like portrayals of their community. In the case of Romania, little attention is awarded to the way in which Romanian Roma musicians *experience* negative stereotypes and how this may link to the *manele* musical genre. The existing literature on the subject made me question: where *are* the Roma? What is *their* own opinion on the double-sided stereotype of exotisation and marginalisation? How do Romanian Roma musicians perceive and navigate among these stereotypes? How do *manele* affect them?

Manele are, as seen before, a controversial topic among elites and intellectuals in Romania. Most highly-educated people, from students to professors, prefer to delimit themselves completely from the world of *manele* (Haliliuc, 2014), making it even more important that works such as Rădulescu's or Schiop's bring *manele* as a social phenomenon into both mainstream academia and media, although still agitating public opinion. At the same time, I believe it is important to address the culture and identity of the Roma in a more dynamic way and therefore to step away from essentialist, colonialist-inspired depictions of the Roma. Thus, as Kapralski (2007) argues, it is important to see the ways in which Roma culture and collective identity can be flexible and adaptive with the passing of time and socio-political change, while maintaining its particularity and heterogeneity.

My research sets out to further bring *manele* into an academic discussion, in order to understand and analyse the phenomenon while showcasing its effects on the Roma musician community and its identity work dynamics. For doing so, I take the stance of Kapralski and look at the Roma musicality tradition in its historical context, while trying to understand how it affects the dynamics of current Roma musicians' performance of identity. In a broader theoretical sense, while Romania has had large contributions to Balkan studies, it has never regarded the academic field as such, but instead referred to it as "South Eastern European Studies" (Todorova, 2009), which can be seen as another example of the country's efforts to delimit itself from the Balkan context. Recently there have been more works on Romanian Balkanism, and with this research proposal I aim to follow this trend by taking the position of Haliliuc and others arguing for Balkanism as root of the anti-*manele* discourse.

The research aims to also be of social relevance as it engages with the personal experiences with stigmatisation and 'Otherisation' of Roma musicians or other Roma involved to a certain extent in the music field, and therefore brings transdisciplinary contemporary perspectives in light of rapid socio-cultural change in Romania and its Roma community. At the same time, I try to display the ways in which the Roma musicians position themselves towards *manele* and perform their musical and ethnic identity.

Using a Balkanism perspective and drawing on identity politics, I answer the following question (RQ): "*How do Romanian Roma musicians consider that the stereotypes surrounding the genre of manele influence their activity and identity?*". In order to focus the data collection and analysis, the following sub-questions (SRQ) have been devised:

SRQ 1: What are the wider political and social processes influencing the Romanian Roma musicians' identity and activity?

SRQ 2: How do the Romanian Roma musicians perceive the place of *manele* in their activity and in the music scene?

SRQ 3: How do different Roma musicians engage in strategic essentialism, within or outside the *manele* world?

Methodology

Research design

This research takes the shape of an ethnographic description of the Romani music-inspired activities in Bucharest, through which I try to bring forward transdisciplinary contemporary perspectives in light of rapid socio-cultural change in Romania and its Roma community. The phenomenon of interest for the thesis is the musicians' perception on stereotypes surrounding *manele* and on the ways they are influencing their activity in the music industry and identity work. Participant observation took a central position in my fieldwork, allowing me to encounter and embody the Romani music context, as well as to talk to people in an informal context, which many times proved to be the most fruitful way of gathering data. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews with Roma musicians, people involved to a certain extent in Romani music-inspired activities, as well as people who have knowledge on the Roma culture were conducted to uncover how Roma musicians experience and engage with the stereotypes around their community, and/or define their collective identity against the hegemonic identity policy. The research schedule can be found in Appendix 1.1.

Research methods & field access

The research was conducted between September 2018 and March 2019, with a fieldwork of 3.5 months between October 2018 and January 2019 in Bucharest, Romania. Most interviews were arranged via George Rădulescu, Roma sociologist, who has been my main informant in the field and therefore key to my field access. George is also a member of *Sastipen*, a well-known NGO activating in the field of Roma rights in Romania, focusing on health care access. Working with George has been a great opportunity, as I could make use of his extensive Roma network in Bucharest, which included from internationally-acclaimed Romani music bands, to the director of the National Centre for Roma Culture Romano Kher (CNCR). Being Romanian myself, I had no language issues, as most Romanian Roma speak Romanian.

As with all plans, my pre-fieldwork plan underwent several changes once in the field. I initially planned to have around 30 interviews and to participate in at least five rounds of participant observation. However, this proved to be not suitable due to both unexpected circumstances further detailed in the 'Positionality and limitations' section, and to a new range of opportunities that appeared while in Bucharest. Therefore, I adapted my methodology using a ground theory approach, and ended up having 13 interviews and participating in 15 events where I turned into a participant observant or an observing participant. The data was further enriched with secondary data gathered via desk research. The methods are individually described below, and an overview of the planning can be found in Appendix 1.2.

Semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews and informal conversations were used during the fieldwork in order to find out more about the Romanian Roma musicians' perception and experience with the stereotypes presented above and their musical activity. These conversations were important as the (sub)research question(s) aimed to uncovering details about personal

experiences with the Roma's 'internal Othering', their engagement in strategic essentialism, or ways of performing their Roma musician identity in a cultural context influenced by Balkanism. As starting point for the interviews, I developed an interview guide (Appendix 2) that allowed for some flexibility during the semi-structured interviews, while providing a broad guideline to keep in mind during unstructured interviews. During fieldwork, I conducted 13 interviews with Roma musicians, Roma people activating in the cultural sector, and other participants in Romani music-inspired events. Respectively, seven semi-structured interviews and six unstructured ended up as base for part of the data presented in this report. I had a series of more interviews and conversations with two of the respondents, as they could help answer new questions that arose during fieldwork and therefore deepened my insight into some case studies. At the same time, they also became part of my own personal network.

The interviews with Georgian Stanciu (Fratii Stanciu), Mihai Neacșu (National Council for Roma Culture), Shaun Williams (Taraful Jean Americanul) and Daniel (accordionist) were organised with George Rădulescu's help, who acted as my main informant in the field, while the others were planned through my own network. The informal conversations with both Roma and non-Roma people were gathered through both participatory observation and everyday life conversations, helping me (re-)immerse into the local cultural context.

As mentioned previously, I made use of *participant observation techniques* to engage with the field environment in order to experience the Roma musicians' context while aiming at gathering data unavailable otherwise: besides gathering data from interviews, I observed how the Romanian Roma stereotypes manifest in everyday life situations, and how the musicians themselves engage with the stigma, as these may involve habitual factors that tend to be self-evident and therefore might not always come out of interviews. In total I had 15 sessions of observation and depending on the situation, I took the role of a *participant observant* (such as in everyday life situations), or of an *observing participant* (as concert or party goer, as participant at conferences, courses or other events). I attended a wide range of events, that included concerts, *manele* parties, charity events, conferences, and courses. An overview can be found in Appendix 1.2. This allowed me to experience the events, observe the people and the locations, and perhaps most importantly, to *feel* the music itself. On some occasions, such as the Romano Kher Orchestra concert, I also managed to observe the politics and raise more questions that I addressed later on.

In order to back up factual data gathered via the abovementioned methods, I also did *desk research* and looked into both written and video materials. Desk research on Roma history and culture, antigypsyism, and *lăutărească* music enriched the data presented in the second Chapter which explores the socio-political context of the Roma. Chapter 3 on *manele* also refers to data gathered from several mass-media articles on *manele* parties, or *manele* as transnational music, in order to provide more depth to the experiences described by interviewees, as well as to my personal encounters during participant observation.

Data management

Data gathering and recording

As sampling strategy, I used a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling, due to several factors: (1) George Rădulescu was my main informant, who referred me to most interviewees, however (2) not all interviewees managed to further refer me to other people, either as they did not

know who to recommend, or I did not manage to contact their referrals (due to time limitations or their unwillingness to participate in an interview); (3) several unstructured interviews were conducted while attending various events and can be therefore the result of convenience. An overview of the data sources can also be found in Appendix 1.3.

The data gathered was recorded via fieldnotes in the case of participatory observation and informal conversations, interview recordings where possible in the case of semi-structured and unstructured interviews, summaries of the interviews, and transcriptions of the most salient parts to allow the use of direct quotes where suitable. Most conversations and interviews were conducted in Romanian, and all the written data was done or translated into English. Appendix 1.2 provides an overview of the chosen data recording methods for each occasion, which can be summarised as follows:

- Interviews & conversations:
 - Audio recordings for three interviews that allowed for or required this medium: Mariana Sandu, historian; Mihai Neacsu, director of CNCR; Aurel Ioniță, leader of Mahala Raï Banda;
 - Interview transcript in Romanian and its translation to English, for the interview with the director of CNCR, who required to see and check the transcript due to his political position;
 - Interview summaries for the other audio recorded interviews, as well as for other interviews which were recorded on the spot via quick notes;
 - Fieldnotes for conversations and several unstructured interviews.
- Participant observation:
 - Fieldnotes for most all participant observation events;
 - Summary developed from quick notes gathered during one course on the history of Roma music lead by George Duminica.

Triangulation was done through the use of several methods (semi-structured and unstructured interviews, informal conversations, participant observation, backed up by desk research) and of sources (Roma musicians, Roma involved in the field of Roma culture, non-Roma informants where suitable), and by cross-checking my data and interpretation of it with other researchers (colleagues and George). Taking a ground theory approach to the data collection allowed me to check themes and ideas that emerged from interviews as I went on with fieldwork. For example, the case of Elvis Romano (Tudor Lakatos), presented in Chapter 4, is based on data gathered from an unstructured interview I had with him, the participant observation of one of his concerts, and finding more information about his activity from his manager, Shaun Williams, who himself represents another case.

Data analysis

After returning from the field, I performed content analysis based on coding. For the coding, I made use of several themes derived from the previous literature review and from the theoretical framework, while adding new topics as the fieldwork advanced and more ideas were emerging. This is what Bernard (2011) calls a coding style in between inductive and deductive coding. The codes were then put together in a coding matrix (Appendix 3) that informed the later structuring of results.

All transcripts, summaries and field notes were recorded in Google Drive. Due to limited facilities, but also to the manageable amount of information, I used Google Documents to code the texts, underlining pieces of information and attaching a code in a separate column. I later used the 'find' function to retrieve the needed codes. In order to keep a strong focus on the data analysis, I used memoing to continuously reflect on my thoughts on newly found information and on how this might fit into broader themes and theoretical models. While reading the coded texts, I made comments as ideas for the data analysis and discussion came up. These memos were later centralised and used as base for the discussion and conclusion of the thesis.

Positionality & limitations

As the research is based on qualitative methods, my focus was on guarding the internal validity of my work. These methods also imply low or no external validity, which means the research is not statistically generalisable to the whole Romanian Roma musician population, or replicable in another similar context.

I encountered several limitations during the three and a half months of fieldwork. Firstly, there was a time limitation, as I deemed the period of time spent in Bucharest to be short for accommodating all interviews I had in mind. While I considered the period before Christmas to be a suitable one for interviews, as many musicians who customarily perform at weddings would be free (no weddings are organised during fasting periods), it turned out that this estimation was not right. Several musicians I tried to contact were not available in Bucharest, either as they were touring the country, or they were away to their own families for the holiday season. At the same time, I had an episode of pneumonia which made me unavailable for any fieldwork for two and a half weeks in November, right before the fasting period began. A longer period of time would have allowed me to deepen the cases presented in this thesis, and to gather a larger sample of musicians.

The most important limitation was field access, and this reflected on my positionality. While having George Rădulescu as an informant was a great advantage, I still found many doors closed due to my condition as a young, non-Roma female researcher. This resulted in several unexpected circumstances. On the one hand, several musicians did not want to speak with me, as they were insecure and, according to George, 'too shy to speak with a young woman'. This proved to be an unfortunate situation, as my access to several older *lăutari* was made difficult. On the other hand, I found it difficult to connect to *manele* musicians, as George drew my attention on the unflattering ways in which some musicians treat young women, and the difficulty I might have in getting information out of them. These were, of course, George's pieces of advice, and had I followed through some of these leads, it would have been possible that George's concerns would not have materialised. I decided however not to insist on several leads for these reasons, but in return I lost the opportunity to interview one or two musicians who only play *manele*. Lastly, related to the former two cases, many *manele* contexts are situations where a young woman would not go unaccompanied, if not for security reasons, then at least because I would not go unnoticed and my research would be made very difficult. Places such as *manele* clubs, restaurants, or marginal neighborhood bars where *manele* are sung and listened to by locals were therefore out of my reach. I also did not manage to find someone to accompany me, as either people did not want to go to a (stigmatised) *manele* place, or they did not find the time.

Therefore, I did not access some places that could have provided very interesting insights into how both Roma and non-Roma audiences relate to *manele* outside of the Bucharest centre. This

resulted, however, in a more specific group of cases that I could access - a network of rather established (male) Roma musicians. Therefore, I tried to be flexible in the methodological approach, and included desk research as a method of backing up my field data. I also had several interviews with George Rădulescu and documented his experiences in various *manele* circles, as well as with Shaun Williams, American ethnomusicologist with a vast experience in both studying and performing with Roma musicians, who could provide me with valuable insights in a part of the Roma musicians' lives that was inaccessible to me. A downside of this decision is that the data is filtered through their own personal experience, and there is low replicability.

My personal bias, and therefore subjectivity, could have been a potential limitation as well. Although having lived outside Romania for more than seven years, I recall my own position towards the Roma community and *manele* while being in Bucharest. I myself was engaged in the elitist, anti-*manele* discourse, and was distant to the Roma community. This changed after my own mother started working for a Roma NGO, and since I have been living in the Netherlands, both instances allowing me to reflect on my own biases and reconsider my position by trying to understand the complex social phenomenon of *manele*, and the systematic stigmatisation that the Romanian Roma suffer from. Nevertheless, I believe my own position and subjective interest in the topic was also an asset during the short fieldwork, as it made me very passionate and resourceful in finding solutions to unexpected limitations like those described in this section.

Chapter 2: Context

Understanding the relation that Roma musicians have with *manele* would be almost impossible without a good foundation to provide insight into who the Roma are. Through this chapter I try to contextualise the socio-political situation of the Roma in Romania, by presenting a concise but comprehensive overview of their history, as well as the development of their language and the social organisation of Romanian Roma groups. The next section brings the conversation to the present and provides insight into the societal racism that can be found in Romania against the Roma, taking the form of antigypsyism. The group of *lăutari*, having a tradition of musicianship and being the group many *manele* musicians come from, is introduced in last part that explores the history of *lăutari* as entertainers and their status in both the Roma community and in the wider Romanian context. This links the historical background and the current situation of Roma people in Romania, and therefore provides a bridge to the next sections exploring *manele* and the diverse ways in which different Roma musicians engage in strategic essentialism.

History of Romanian Roma

The history of this community is so difficult, it's a hazard. I can give you stories, opinions, but the actual path of the Roma people - I cannot give you that.
(M.Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018)

The musicianship of today's Romanian Roma, as well as their social status, are strongly rooted in their history. Therefore, in this section I provide an insight into the history of the Roma people, which influences their social status and relations with the non-Roma up to this day. The following information was gathered mostly from desk research and from an interview with Mariana Sandu, sociologist and historian, who shared her insights into Roma history with me, from the perspective of both scholar and Roma woman.

"Who are the Roma people?" I asked. Mariana smiled and the smile did not leave her for the two hours we discussed. "When we talk about the Roma, we talk about a multitude of experiences. And every group of Roma people says <<I am the real Roma!>>" (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018). Currently there are 18 different groups of Roma in Romania, mostly named after professions they had in their past. Their presence on the Romanian territories started around 500 years ago, when their slavery was first documented (Council of Europe, 2015c). However, having an oral tradition and being marginalised for most of their history, the Roma as a group have only recently begun to explore their history, and to become active tellers of their own story. While there are still some loose ends in the narrative, several accepted theories of their provenience, ethnicity and language have contoured in recent years the historical becoming of the Roma.

From India to Europe

Transdisciplinary studies on the Roma concluded that they represent an ethnic group that originated in India, coming from a homogenous Indian group that further differentiated after their arrival in Europe (Council of Europe, 2015a). The exact Indian group that represents the ancestors of nowadays Roma is not known. Similarly, their way to Europe, the exact time of the migration, and their status in their original land are still open for discussion and speculation: it is estimated that they left India between the 3rd and 10th century (Council of Europe, 2015a) - a rather wide time frame.

Most theories, however, show that the Roma entered Europe through Greece, then part of the Byzantine Empire, from where they started their migration within Europe. Roma are documented to having already lived in the Peloponnese peninsula in the 13th century (Council of Europe, 2015b), but it is nevertheless possible that they entered the lands much earlier. Greece is also where the Roma supposedly got their *athingani* name, meaning 'untouchable', name which is believed to be the basis for how the Roma came to be known in Europe and, more specifically, in the Romanian territories: by the rather pejorative *țigani* (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018). The first documented presence of the Roma in the Romanian territories was in 1385, after which more reliable evidence of their migration appeared. The Roma were widely present in Europe by 1435 (Council of

Europe, 2015b). These first registers of the Roma are also the earliest known depictions of the stereotypes surrounding the group:

“Many of the earliest sources accuse the Roma of immorality and godlessness, or of espionage for the Turks, and, in general, paint a picture of a <<treacherous>> and <<disloyal>> people, however, without any evidence. The earliest European accounts thus shape a clear picture of the Roma; it is, however, a distorted picture, a caricature, which still shapes the non-Roma’s picture of the Roma until today.” (Council of Europe, 2015c, p.2)

It is therefore believed that the Roma entered Romania from the South, coming from Balkan area. The first attestations of Roma people in Romania are also the first proof we have about their enslavement. The 1385 document mentions Dan I Voivode of Wallachia ¹⁰ offering 40 families of ‘atigani’ to the monastery of Tismana, and similar practices are recorded in the neighbouring Moldova¹¹. Therefore, between the 14th century at the latest, and up until 1856, the Roma in the Romanian principalities were property of the state, Church, or local boyars, being enslaved or working as bondsmen (Council of Europe, 2015c).

Slavery in the Romanian territories

Mariana told me about the ‘donation’ document of 1385 but added that “the Roma could have been enslaved [in Romania] earlier too, by at least 200 years” (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018). The largest slave-owning organisations were the Romanian monasteries, followed by the state and local boyars, who were highly ranked landowners and members of the aristocracy, second only to the ruling class (Council of Europe, 2015c). Therefore, the Roma have been officially enslaved for more than 500 years, making it the longest time any population has been enslaved in human history, comparable in atrocities and length with the slavery of Afro-Americans in the United States (Council of Europe, 2015c). Slaves were not included in the censuses of those times, but an estimation done in the 1850s after the abolition of slavery shows there were between 250,000 and 300,000 Roma in Wallachia and Moldova, representing 7% of the total population (Council of Europe, 2015c). The Roma were not, however, enslaved in Transylvania. “Who we [the Roma] are, why we got enslaved so quickly, these things still need research”, said Mariana. No matter the trigger for enslaving the Roma,

“slaves were good for anything, equivalent to any value, sold, given as wedding presents or dowries, gifted to the monastery so that the master’s name was mentioned during mass, and exchanged for animals or cloth trousers; should they fail to submit, <<they should be beaten very hard>>.” (Council of Europe, 2015c, p.3)

As mentioned before, the duties and treatment of the Roma slaves are comparable to the slavery in the United States. Common punishments were beatings, strokes on the back until bleeding, or metal spikes around their necks so that they cannot rest (Council of Europe, 2015c). Among other horrible

¹⁰ Romanian principality representing the Southern part of present day Romania

¹¹ Romanian principality representing the Eastern part of present day Romania

punishment measures for the Roma was the ‘smoking room’, when the slaves had to stay in a hut where hot peppers were smoked for a day (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018).

Roma slaves were therefore not seen as people, but as property of their owners, and this influenced the relationships between the descendants of both the Roma bondsmen and the slave owners in ways that can be seen up to this day (Council of Europe, 2015c). Many present-day Roma customs can be traced to their history as bondsmen. For example, the marriage of the Roma at a young age was already a custom during their slavery, when the lords married their slaves early in order to have more children in their service, and therefore increase their fortune (Council of Europe, 2015c). Mariana also mentioned this, and further explained that as boyars often had the right to the ‘first night’ of a young Roma slave girl, her family was rushing to marry her to someone from her own Roma group, in order to guard her safety and deem her less valuable as she would not be a virgin anymore (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018). The musicality of the *lăutari* Roma group can be also traced to their history as entertainers, and more about this is discussed in the last part of this chapter, “*Lăutari* and musicianship”.

Together with the new European socio-political influences that began to infiltrate the Romanian space in the 19th century, talks about the emancipation of the Roma started on national level as well. Being seen as a “dishonour for the image of the Romanian people” (Council of Europe, 2015c, p.7), Roma slavery was abolished, and state-owned slaves were freed in 1843, whereas monastery slaves followed in 1847. The last slaves to be emancipated were those of private individuals, who were freed in 1856, not before their former masters were compensated for their loss. The ex-slave owners were absolved of any responsibility towards the former slaves, while the Roma received no compensation for the atrocities committed towards them, and so, the newly freed people entered a form of economic dependence (Council of Europe, 2015c).

The slavery history of Romanian Roma came up in many ways during fieldwork, in both direct ways - as when speaking with Mariana Sandu -, or indirect - when musicians reflected on their status as Romanian ‘Gypsies’. One of these occasions was a theatre play called *Marea Rușine* (‘The Great Shame’), that told the story of a Roma Master’s student doing her thesis research of the history of Roma slavery in Romania. The play mirrors some of the stigma that many Roma face every day, such as antigypsyism, double standards, or even their perceived connection to *manele*. An interesting point addressed is the official terminology used when talking about the Roma slavery in the Romanian public space. The terms *rob* (‘serf’) and *robie* (‘bondage’) are used the most, in the detriment of *sclav* (‘slave’) and *sclavie* (‘slavery’), despite the fact that the Roma slavery is widely documented and established as a historical fact. The play allegedly reflects the story of a real Roma student, who faced backlash from her university for wanting to use the term *sclavie* in her paper. The National Centre for Roma Culture (CNCR) predominantly uses the term *sclavie*, which can be also seen in the official documentation on their website (CNCR, 2015).

During the play, the protagonist mentions that it would be interesting to know our ancestors and proposes a program where one can insert their name and see if their ancestors were slaves, or, in the case of the *gadje* (non-Roma), if they come from slave owners. Albeit an artistic moment, the play was done in collaboration with CNCR, and is based on historical facts, according to both the director Alina Serban, a young but relatively well-known Roma actress, and CNCR itself (M. Neacsu, personal communication, October 9, 2018). The idea that it would be perhaps possible to find out if my ancestors were slave owners stayed with me, leaving me with an intrinsic sense of shame - a ‘great shame’, for that matter, as the title of the play refers not to the dark past of the Romanian Roma, but to the collective shame the Romanian people should feel every time they use the word *țigan*, and therefore identifying themselves as ‘slave owners’ (as it was revealed towards the end of the show).

Holocaust

Around 100 years after the liberation of the Roma slaves in Romania, the holocaust brought yet another grim period in the history of this people. Historians estimate that at least 25% of the entire Roma population of Europe was exterminated during the holocaust¹², moment in history that received the name of *Samudaripen*, meaning 'collective murder' in Romani (Council of Europe, n.d.). Under the influence of the Iron Curtain and a state ideology based on ethnic homogeneity, Romanian eugenics enthusiasts turned their eyes on the Roma once again (Council of Europe, 2015d).

Roma, seen as 'undesirable people', started to be deported in 1942 to Transnistria, a South-Western region of Ukraine that remained a dark place in the collective memory of the Roma in Romania up to this day. The people were taken by train, wagon, or by foot, without any of their belongings (Council of Europe, 2015d). Once in Transnistria, the Roma were settled into 'Gypsy colonies', where thousands lost their lives due to the lack of basic facilities - there food rations were low or non-existent, there was no firewood, medical assistance, or medicine, while many had no clothes as their belongings have been confiscated by the state (Council of Europe, 2015d). In 1943, some organised labour was introduced to improve somehow the condition of some of the deported Roma, who could earn some income to provide for their families, but many remained out of work and had to instead rely on begging or stealing from other Ukrainian villages (Council of Europe, 2015d). After the end of the war, the surviving Roma from Transnistria returned to Romania, where they have been swiftly given back their rights as they were before the deportation. However,

“for the new government, the Roma became once again what they were before Antonescu came to power: a marginalised social category, rather than an ethnic minority. [...] There is no evidence indicating that the deportees received reparations, and the Roma's problems did not make it onto the political parties' agendas.” (Council of Europe, 2015d, p.8)

The deportation of the Roma was only briefly discussed during the trials of war criminals in the post-war period, and until 1989, the Roma did not manage to achieve the status of official ethnic minority in Romania. In 2003, Romania became the first Eastern European state to put the slavery and holocaust of the Roma on the public agenda, by creating the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania (Council of Europe, 2015d).

¹² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.

Romani language and Roma groups in Romania

The complex history of the Roma is reflected in their organisation & language as well. There are currently 18 groups of Roma in Romania, mostly named after their ancestral professions (Council of Europe, n.d.). In our interview, Mariana talked about each of these groups as a ‘people’ (using the Romanian word *neam*, translated as a ‘people’ or ‘nation’). The Roma groups have slightly different occupations, language, and ways of dressing up: “the community is not very unified overall, but in groups. But when you get to be a bit educated, you can appreciate this diversity and the existence of a common root, and you can say <<this is my people>>” (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018).

However, Roma people are not always aware of this organisation of their ethnic group: their tradition has been and to a large extent still is preserved orally, and most Roma consider the question of their early origin, if anything, a political one in terms of the various emancipation processes that started only recently (Council of Europe, 2015a). Mariana’s own experience stands as an example of this. Before coming to study in Bucharest in 2000, she believed that the only groups of Roma were the ones she grew up closely to in her village from the North of the country: *căldărari* (translated as ‘cauldron makers’), the ones seen as more ‘exotic’, and *lăieși* (translated as ‘the black ones’), living at the edges of villages and seen as more marginal, due to their darker-skin. Mariana herself is part of the Roma group called *ursari* (translated as ‘bear tamers’), whose origins are traced to circus entertainers. Once in Bucharest, she learnt from her husband that there are other Roma groups, such as *lăutari*, the musicians, whom her husband believed to not speak the (Romani) language. She was surprised to also find differences between the dialects spoken by her and her husband, although they are both *ursari*. She has, according to her husband, words from other groups, whereas her husband uses a lot of Romanian words.

The Romani language is considered a modern Indo-Aryan language (Council of Europe, 2015a), and one can find in the Romani lexicon many borrowed words from other countries that they may have passed on their migration path (Council of Europe, 2015a). French linguist Courthiade is one of the scholars who shed most light on the provenience of the Roma, by showing the languages that influenced the Romani language (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018). In Romania, Romani is divided into four main dialects, having a common root that represents around 70% of each of them. The Roma groups of Romania all speak a variation or a combination of these dialects, sometimes influenced by their proximity to other groups, as in Mariana and her husband’s case. The official Romani language taught in Romania, called ‘Common Romani’, was synthesised artificially by a Romanian linguist, who worked with good Romani speakers that knew the dialects well: “Even if some people reject the language as they see it as artificial - and there are some - the reality is that this language can help you understand other Roma from other countries” (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018). On the European level, the common root goes down to representing at least 50% of local dialects.

Mariana had many interesting stories about the Romani language, and her experiences underline the surprising unity of the Romani language, which - prior to our interview - I believed to be a group of many dialects which are intelligible between each other. Mariana’s face lit up as she happily recalled meeting a *calé*¹³ 80 years Roma woman in Spain whom she could understand, despite

¹³ One of the groups of Roma people in Spain

being from a group that is not present in Romania. The woman knew a mix of different dialects, which Mariana found very interesting and exciting: “Seeing all these things made me believe no more that *my* group is the real Roma group [laughing]” (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018). She also recalls meeting an old woman in Hungary who spoke the same Romani dialect like she did, and even some old Romanian sentences that the woman believed to be Romani. These experiences strengthened Mariana’s belief in Courthiade’s theory that the Romani language borrowed from the places the Roma have been in their historical path.

Racism and antigypsyism

“Whereas other forms of racism have varying degrees of social and moral stigma attached to them, antigypsyism is usually exempt from this rule. Institutional racism as well as everyday hate speech are the norm rather than the outrageous exception. [...] If people were as outraged about students dressing up as Gypsies as they were about them dressing up as Black people, it would be a start.”
(Lee, 2018, para. 5-12)

One grey, mid-December afternoon, I was working on my field notes while a popular television afternoon show was on in the background. At one moment, something caught my eye: a band of people dressed in traditional Romanian clothes were singing Romanian popular music songs, while in the middle there were two people – a man and a woman – dressed in Roma clothes and dancing what looked like Roma dances. What struck me was that their faces were painted black. A third person was dressed in a bear costume, dancing as well in the middle ¹⁴. In Romania, the cause of Afro-American discrimination and of ‘blackface’ is less known, as the country has had a relatively distant relation with African countries, and there are not that many historical ties with colonialism. Nevertheless, the fact that these people were, in other words, wearing blackface and ‘Gypsy’ clothes during a rather popular afternoon show was extremely unsettling for me. I recorded the moment for ‘safekeeping’ and linked it below.



Figure 3. Dancers wearing black face paint and gypsy clothes dancing in the middle of a group of traditional Romanian dancers – Image hyperlinked to video material

¹⁴ an allusion to the Romanian tradition of people dressing up in bear costumes and dancing around New Year's Day on the streets In Romania in order to ward off evil

The term ‘antigypsyism’ expresses the racism towards the Roma, embedded in the European culture. According to Lee (2018) and his article on antigypsyism published by the European Roma Rights Centre, the term even transcends racism and negative stereotypes, and is instead

“rooted in half a millennium of hatred, suspicion and persecution. [...] Discrimination against Roma is not just racism; it is a component of Europe, which has grown alongside European civilisation since the Middle Ages. It’s the staggering, systematic depth of it that sets it apart, and once you start noticing it, you can’t un-notice it. [...] It is a common heritage for all of Europe.” (Lee, 2018, para. 5-12)

In Romania, the agency called *Împreună* (“Together”) published a report titled “Searching for Dignity” in 2016, dealing with antigypsyism. The term ‘antigypsyism’ (in Romanian *anti-țiganism*) is used to underline the negative connotations of the word *țigan* (Gypsy), which, according to them, refers to a deviant social group but reflects on the whole Roma community. Sayings such as ‘if you’re not a good kid, the gypsy will come and steal you’, ‘the Gypsy is no man not even on Eastern day’, or ‘Once a Gypsy, always a Gypsy’ express the pejorative meaning behind the use of the term ‘Gypsy’ (Asociația “Împreună”, 2016). This was one of the triggers behind the promotion of the term *rom* (Roma) instead of *țigan* (Gypsy) in Romania, along with the fact that the Roma themselves identify with the former. Roma people customarily consider all non-Roma *gadje*, or *gagii* in Romanian, word which also means “settled” or “farmer” in Romani (Council of Europe, n.d.).



Figure 4. A CNCR tent with the spray-canned words *Moartea Țiganilor* ('Death to Gypsies') (Asociația “Împreună”, 2016)

The slavery history of the Roma reflects on the current marginalisation and exclusion of Roma from the Romanian social space: 17% of the Roma finished a high school or university, compared to 60% of non-Roma; 67% of the Roma have a regular income, compared to 96% of non-Roma (Asociația “Împreună”, 2016). Overall, two main lines of antigypsyism discourse were identified: (1) A discourse

of ignorance, of not knowing the history of the Roma, of misunderstanding multiculturalism, and (2) a categoric discourse against the Gypsies, not necessarily from an ethnic perspective, but perceiving the Roma as deviant group (Asociatia “Împreună”, 2016). The front picture of the report shows an information tent of the National Centre for Roma Culture vandalised with the spray-canned words *Moartea Tiganilor* (Death to Gypsies) (Figure 4). The authors go on and explain that such messages are common in the public Romanian space, and gives the example of the anti-refugee discourse, which doesn't forget the Roma: *nu vrem refugiați, avem și noi ciorile noastre* (We don't want refugees, we have our own crows).

Several subtypes of online antigypsyism were found, and I will shortly present some of them below, as they are important for painting the image of the antigypsyism embedded in most of Romania's society, that sometimes reflect in the anti-*manele* discourse as well. One of the first is the attribution of negative characteristics to the Roma, an example of which is the fact that 62% of the terms associated by non-Roma with the Roma ethnicity are negative, depicting non-humanity (terms such as ‘crows’, ‘vermin’, ‘parasites’, ‘smoked pigeons’, ‘carcasses’), criminality (terms such as ‘thieves’, ‘rapists’, ‘beggars’, ‘criminals’), behaviour (terms such as ‘cowards’, ‘infectious’, ‘brawlers’, ‘bastards’) and physical aspect (terms such as ‘stinky’, ‘disfigured’, ‘ugly’, ‘grungy’) (Asociatia “Împreună”, 2016). Then, Roma culture or genetics are portrayed as a negative determinant factor of the ethnic Roma character, resulting in a general association of the Roma ‘species or race’ with negative traits, while the ones who do not fit this image are seen as “civilised” (Asociatia “Împreună”, 2016). The report further presents another category of antigypsyism perpetrators - those who seem unable to understand why non-Roma are fighting for the inclusion of Roma, arguing that the efforts should start with the ‘Gypsies’ themselves: “The rich gypsies, the *manele* singers, what have they done for their ethnicity? I'm telling them: NOTHING! (...) Do you want respect? You have to win it! To respect the society you live in. To bow to its rules” (n.d., in Asociatia Impreuna, 2016, p.13). Last, and perhaps the most disturbing, are the direct or indirect threats to Roma people, about which the authors say that although widespread, they are always difficult to read as “you know they are directed towards you [Roma people]” (Anonymous, n.d., in Asociatia “Împreună”, 2016, p.14). The comments presented in the report are difficult to read, but I believe it is important to show the extremist attitudes present in the no-so-marginal corners of the Romanian mainstream online media: “I loathe them down to their last hair, they are some deplorable beings, incapable of anything good on this earth. They have the seed of evil in them! Damn the day they appeared on this earth!” (Anonymous, n.d., in Asociatia Impreuna, 2016, p.14).

*

“There is no racism in Romania, definitely not as in the US. Discrimination, yes. But not racism”, said V., a young non-Roma I met at a *lăutărească* music concert. In light of the knowledge on antigypsyism, I asked Mariana Sandu about the topic, and to my surprise, she agreed with V., and said she wouldn't compare the fate of the Afro-Americans with what happened to Roma people in Romania:

“Maybe in both cases the colour [of the skin] had its toll. [...] There were different types of slavery in Romania, but I would never say that Romanians are racist, in the radical sense. [...] Some of my best friends are not Roma, and I love to meet up with them, when ethnicity does not matter. [...] It would be unfair of me to talk about an exclusively racist society in Romania. [...] Maybe the racist ones hide behind a screen and write those horrendous comments with <<death to all gypsies>>, because they don't even have the courage to express them in real life.

But I believe there is no such thing as an exclusively racist society, nowhere in this world.” (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018)

On the other hand, she agreed that institutional racism is one of the founding bricks of the Romanian state. However, she argued, institutional racism is not against the Roma alone, but rather against the lower class in general, taking the form of ‘classism’: “Maybe what we have nowadays is not racism, but the hate of poverty, of the marginal, of the unknown, of strangers...” (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018). She explained that she feels saddened to see how people are many times seen as ‘outdated’ when they don’t adapt to new norms and languages: “The Roma feel this all the time, they cannot climb the social ladder as fast as others. And they’re not in a hurry” (M. Sandu, personal communication, October 15, 2018).

Lăutari and musicianship



Figure 5. Painting depicting *lăutari* wearing Turkish clothes (left) to aristocrats wearing Western inspired clothing, in Bucharest (Aman, 1981)

During the fieldwork I was lucky to attend a course on the contribution of Roma musicians to Romanian music, at the University of Bucharest, organised by Gelu Duminica, a Roma sociologist and activist. I looked forward to it, not only due to the topic, but as I knew that Mahala Raï Banda, a Balkan Gypsy music band, was be invited to play along, and because *manele* are reputedly played as well at the end of the course. The course itself, called *În căutarea demnității* ('Searching for dignity'), looked into the evolution of the *lăutari* Roma group, the ones that gave and still give many Roma musicians, including those who play *manele*.

The becoming of 'lăutari'

The lecturer explained that during the slavery of the Roma, boyars would use some of their slaves as entertainers. One of these groups was the *lăutari* (musicians). As the Romanian principalities were under Ottoman influence, boyars would send their *lăutari* slaves to Byzantine lands to study local music and bring back the tunes and melodies. These are seen as the origins of the 'Oriental' sounds in the Romanian territories (G. Duminica, personal communication, November 5, 2018). As a result, the *lăutari* were customarily playing two types of music: church music - as many were enslaved by monasteries, and so-called 'aristocrat' music, played for the local boyars. In other words, music

became a means of communication, but not among the Roma - as they were playing *gadje* music in Romanian (G. Duminica, personal communication, November 5, 2018), underlying the importance of Romani language for the Roma identity. Therefore, Duminica argued that *lăutărească* music became a form of identity music of the Romanian territories, sang by the Roma, in Romanian. An important moment for Roma music, identity, and the connection between the two, was the song *Dă-mi boierule nevasta* ('Boyar, give my wife back'), telling the story of a Roma couple broken up by a boyar who steals the wife. The song included a few lyrics in Romani which are considered by many the first testimony of the Romani language in Romania.

The end of slavery did not mean the end of misery for Roma in Romania, as shown in the previous chapter. However, things worked out the best for musicians, as they had a skill that allowed them to make a living, playing for most life events and celebrations (wedding, baptism, death) or for the new aristocracy or small business owners (Figure 5). The musicians started to roam the Romanian lands, searching for folklore, reworking it, and passing it forward, in a process that made them the bearers of Romanian folklore (G. Duminica, personal communication, November 5, 2018). The message of the songs changed as well in this transition. While Barbu Lăutarul, the most well-known Romanian Roma musician, was singing about his condition as *lăutar*, the newly freed *lăutari* started playing about new, contemporary values and themes: love, wealth, friends and foes, evening at inns drenched in alcohol and courtesans. In many ways, those values are not much different from nowadays ones, said Duminica (personal communication, November 5, 2018). At the same time, the elites of late 19th century were promoting their wish for Romanians to become more 'European' and insisted that "[Romanians] should behave European and dress European. We cannot behave European, if the crow without teeth comes and plays the lute. Because that reminds us of the filthy Iranian bazaar, and we have nothing to do with that world" (Anonymous, n.d., in Simion, 2017).

After the abolition of slavery, more public Roma figures started emerging, having either Roma or mixed ethnicity. One of them is Anton Pann, known by Romanians as the one who composed the national anthem. Gelu Duminica described this situation as "patriotic music composed by Roma musicians, his name is even written on the ceiling of the Romanian Athenaeum, which is a very nice symbol for us, Roma of today" (personal communication, November 5, 2018). However, many Roma public figures lead their lives as 'invisible Roma', by hiding their ethnic background out of fear of discrimination (G. Duminica, personal communication, November 5, 2018). After WWI, many Roma rights organisations and associations appeared, and some *lăutari* became local celebrities. Their lyrics continued to elaborate the previous themes - love, wealth, family -, revolutionizing local music and music from the urban *mahala* (outskirts, slums) while containing lyrics that could be considered bold today as well. One of these songs, played live by Mahala Raï Banda, raised a few eyebrows and giggles from the audience. A fragment goes like this:

*Foaie verde ca aluna, / Si-aseara fusei la una, / Un'se duce toata lumea, / Unde ma duc totdeauna.
/ Si-aseara fusei la una, / Unde ma duc totdeauna. / Sa traiasca mama ta! / C-a stiut ce legana!*

(Green leaf like the hazelnut / Yesterday I went to a woman / Where everyone else goes. /
Yesterday I went to a woman / Where I always go. / Oh, dear God, may your mother live long! /
The woman knew what she was swinging.)

During communism, *lăutari* became a means for carrying the communist message into illiterate communities, giving birth to songs with communist themes: the cooperative, the pleasures of working a crane, or driving a tractor (G. Duminica, personal communication, November 5, 2018). Many singers

of Roma ethnicity became famous Romanian popular music singers, performing for both Roma and Romanian audiences. The preconception that folk music is sung by the Roma slowly changes in this period. In Bucharest, *lăutari* singers were becoming more and more famous in closer elitist circles, bringing back Oriental rhythms, forbidden back then by the regime. Duminica explained that these are the origins of the ‘belly dancing’ rhythms in modern Romanian music, and people requested these songs in the early hours of the day, by asking for a “Turkish one” (personal communication, November 5, 2018). Romica Puceanu was considered ‘the queen of *lăutărească* music worldwide’ (Figure 6). Other Roma singers brought jazz manouche in Romania, such as Aura Urziceanu and Johnny Răducanu.



Figure 6. Romica Puceanu performing with a band of musicians (Asphalt Tango Records, 2006) -
Image hyperlinked to video material

The beginnings of manele

Say what you will about ‘manele’, I saw your index fingers moving up and down [on the rhythm]! [...] sure, all the people [hating ‘manele’], they listen to Bach and Beethoven at weddings, and when they want the party started they play some Handel too!

(G. Duminica , personal communication, November 5, 2018)

The 90’s brought a young democracy and the revival of interbellum themes such as money, love and friends. People, formerly unable to have materials possessions, were now able to ‘show off’ everything they couldn’t have during communist times. *Lăutari*, like always, adapted to the new trends, this time bringing melodies and sounds from nearby countries, such as Serbia and Bulgaria, creating a more Balkan sound that is still encountered nowadays. Dan Armeanca (Figure 7), a Roma artist, was the first to record an album fully in Romani in 1992. He is also considered the first to change the sound of ‘slum music’ or ‘party music’ towards creating what is now known as the famous *manea* (G. Duminica,

personal communication, November 5, 2018). This period is also when many underground Bucharest clubs and bars started to invite *manele* musicians to perform, and well-known artists from today's *manele* scene started their activity there. Soon, the Roma musicians started singing in Romanian, to appeal to a wider audience. The link between *manele* and the underworld established then as well, as well-known mafia leaders were known to be either owners of these clubs or sponsors of some *maneliști* (Waldron, Bagnall, & Tipurita, 2016).



Figure 7. A guest giving money to Dan Armeanca's manele band performing at a party in the 90's in Bucharest (Musetescu, 2016) - Image hyperlinked to video material

After Gelu Duminica explained the evolution of *lăutărească* music towards *manele*, Mahala Raï Banda went on and played one famous *manea* about money and wealth to the sociologist's amusement, who said he noticed all faces in the audience light up and fingers and feet moving rhythmically:

Buzunarul meu vorbeste orice limba isi doreste / Si engleza si franceza chiar si limba japoneza / Este plin de fericire, euro, dolari si lire / Fericire, fericire oriunde merg esti cu mine (x2) / Las s-auda toti dusmanii Ca eu stau bine cu banii / Nu mai e niciun secret / Am cel mai mare talent!

(‘My pocket speaks whatever language it wants / Be it English, French, or even Japanese, / It is full of happiness, Euros, Dollars and Pounds, / Happiness, happiness, wherever I go, you’re with me! (x2) / Let all my enemies hear / That I’m doing well with money. / It is no longer a secret / That I have the greatest talent!’)

The sociologist said that there is, however, Romani music sung in Romani, but that it is usually labelled as ‘Balkan’ music, Mahala Raï Banda being one example. He added that while in Serbia the ‘authentic Balkan Gypsy’ music trend took off in the 90s, in Romania it didn’t become so popular, as it was seen

as 'Gypsy music' (G. Duminica, personal communication, November 5, 2018). Nevertheless, Duminica said that in Romania, the *lăutărească* music - perceived as being Romani folklore - was many times 'borrowed' by Romanian artists, who transformed and promoted it. One example is a popular song sung by Smiley, a Romanian pop artist, who remixed an old *lăutărească* music song, called *In statie la Lizeanu* (At the Lizeanu bus stop): while Smiley's version is a hit, the original one is seen by many as "inferior *lăutărească* music" (G. Duminica, personal communication, November 5, 2018).

Concluding the course, Duminica highlighted that the Roma *lăutari* did not "steal" Romanian music like many say but contributed to it and passed it on from generation to generation. As a staple of the Roma contribution, he reminded us about the Romanian anthem, written by someone who is "part Romanian, part Roma" (G. Duminica, personal communication, November 5, 2018). Before leaving, the band played the Roma anthem, "Jelem Jelem". All students stood up, and I was very happy to have been part of that - a session of Romanian / Romani music shaking the University of Sociology building to the core, ending in the Roma anthem being played live in front of a mixed audience standing up and applauding vigorously at the end. "Mahala Rai Banda loves you!", added Aurel Ioniță, the leader of the band, before leaving, while the students were going about their day.

Chapter 2 Outro

The history of the heterogeneous minority called the Roma is influencing the relationship between Roma and *gadje* up to today. The stereotyping portrayal of the Roma started since the first group of migrants set foot in Europe and has evolved alongside them ever since. In the Romanian territories, the musicality of the Roma was established during their enslavement, when some Roma slaves were performing as *lăutari* for the local boyars. Being under the influence of the Ottoman empire, then-Romanian boyars had a taste for the Oriental - and sent their musician slaves to the Byzantine world to learn the sounds and rhythms and bring them back to the Romanian principalities. Therefore, the origins of the Oriental sounds in Romania are tied with the Roma, but they did not do it by choice, but rather at the wish of the Romanian aristocracy. Romani, the language of the Roma, becomes an important element in their collective identity, one of the elements bridging an otherwise heterogeneous minority. Although divided into many dialects, Romani has a core that can be found in 70% of the Romani dialects present on the Romanian territory, while allowing for communication with various Roma groups from other countries. Therefore, the question of authenticity comes into play when talking about *lăutărească* music - if not sung in Romani, is it even Roma music? Or is it more likely the music of the Romanian space, with all its ethnic minorities? *Lăutari* and their music have evolved alongside Romanian society, reflecting the values of the time, up until the emergence of *manele* in the post-communist, freshly discovered 90s democracy. How *manele* affect the Roma musicians, and once again reflect the relations between Roma and non-Roma, is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: *Manele* & the young *gadje* of Bucharest

“Now it’s the best time to look into *manele*”, M. told me smiling as we were sitting down at a table at a bar downtown Bucharest. She went on to tell me there were many *manele* parties happening in Bucharest at the time, to which her and her friends were often going. This left me a bit surprised, as although I knew about the ‘anti-mainstream’ *manele* parties, I expected them to be still an underground event. “There are quite some people interested in *manele*, it’s a phenomenon happening since 2015, among people like us... hipsters, let’s just call them by their name... It’s quite fun and popular to go to these parties!”, she added happily.

Whenever I introduced my thesis topic to someone, I always got a certain reaction back. From fascination and surprise, to advice to be ‘cautious’ about the world I planned to immerse myself in, or pure amusement, most non-Roma I encountered had a thing or two to say about *manele*. Few were the occasions when people would just acknowledge the newly received information. This third chapter, which I see as an *intermezzo* to the cases of various Roma musicians I encountered in Bucharest, presents an insight into everyday life experiences with *manele* that I, as a non-Roma, had during my fieldwork. The central focus of this chapter is represented by the *manele* parties I encountered and/or participated in, as well as people’s opinions about these events - both Roma and non-Roma.

Maneloteca : the manele party

“At the [multi culti] party with Wefa and Denisa, we leave the Occidental sphere and we dance on rhythms from the Middle East. We forget about international charts and we listen to musical tunes from our neighbours from the Balkans. We free ourselves from the norms of the West and we find ourselves in Turkish psychedelic folk. We reject cultural imperialism and we revolt dancing on manele and proto-manele all night long”
(Fieldnote 057, 12 November 2018)

This was the description of what seemed like a party where *maneie* would be played, in a club downtown Bucharest known for its alternative crowd. The description brought forward several interesting things to me: a party with music from the Orient and the Balkans, an anti-mainstream and anti-Western stance, and more importantly, the central place the alternative Bucharest crowd gives *maneie* in this story. During fieldwork, however, I went to another *maneie* party in a place called Macaz, a cooperative bar which prides itself with its anti-capitalist and pro-minority rights position. The recurring event is called ‘Maneloteca’, a wordplay between *maneie* and *discoteca* (‘disco’).

“Oh, so you were not joking when you said you’re going for research purposes”, said S., a friend I met before the party (Fieldnote 028, 26 October 2018). I asked him and his friends if they would like to join, but they laughed and said that they would perhaps come after 00:00, when they would have had some more drinks. I reminded them that they did dance on *maneie* at a recent wedding we had all attended, but they disagreed jokingly: “they were those foreign *maneie*, so they were not in Romanian. They were the original *maneie*, that the Romanian *maneie* singers stole [laughter]” (Fieldnote 028, 26 October 2018). I did indeed recall a song of a Romanian *maneie* singer, Florin Salam, which had at least three other versions around the Balkans: the original Bulgarian, the Greek version we heard at the wedding, and a Serbian one. One of the friends continued to explain his ironic position towards *maneie*, by saying the lyrics are at fault: “It’s all about the lyrics. That’s what people don’t like, because the songs, well, you can find them everywhere. You know Romania is like a Mecca for *maneie*-type of music, all Balkan countries know us for it!” he added, with what I perceived to be just a drop of pride.

Around 00:00 it was time to go towards the party itself, together with another friend. After strolling down a few empty old town streets, with decadent but beautiful buildings – some renovated poorly, some still held by wooden poles or partially covered with construction protection wraps – we saw a large group of people in front of the bar that looked like our destination. I knew it was a popular party, but I wasn’t expecting such a crowd: the place, located at the ground floor of a small apartment building, was full. A crowd was in front of it on the stairs, smoking, talking or drinking beer, up until the road, while some people were even on the tram lines on the street (Figure 8). Others were across it, under a building that looked like it could collapse at any moment. But what surprised me the most were the people themselves. Having a rather equal ratio of men and women, the crowd struck me as any other hip crowd from any other downtown bar in Bucharest. But there was something else: there seemed to be a more relaxed atmosphere, people were smiling, being polite with each other, and they generally gave the impression of a pretty educated crowd. There were guys with long hair, beards and metal bands T-shirts, girls wearing sneakers, men in shirts, ladies in casual jackets.

We made way through the crowd of people and went inside after paying a 10 RON entrance fee. *Manele* were playing quite loud. The club itself was a dark, large room. On the left there was a long bar, with two ladies serving behind it. Right after the bar there was a dancing crowd, jumping and singing the lyrics to the *manele* played. I too recognised the songs, as I remembered the lyrics from somewhere I could not place, which made me realise that these basic lyrics are very easily remembered. Another thing that struck me was that people didn't *look* like the typical *manele* listener. But overall, I also didn't see many people that looked like Roma - ethnically, there seemed to be a rather homogeneous crowd. However, I felt like the people were genuinely enjoying themselves. It was one of the most joyous atmospheres I've seen recently.



Figure 8. People outside the Macaz bar during a *manele* party - Image hyperlinked to video material

The lyrics of *manele*, be it that they were written with a serious message in mind or not, are difficult to be perceived as such, especially by what seemed to be an educated crowd. For example, at one point one *manea* about a football club from the city of Galați played, calling the club “the greatest from the Carpathians”, although the city is at least 100 km away from the mountains (Fieldnote 028, 26 October 2018). Another *manea* was about how Băsescu, a former president of Romania known for his informal humour, racist comments and money laundering schemes involved in the Romanian naval fleet, was the one who would set Romania free from criminals and wiseguys. The irony was hard to miss.

After I expressed my surprise regarding the crowd mix, my friend told me that it was a different crowd that what he had experienced before: “I’ve been to another party, [...] somewhere closer to the centre. And that was very different, more ‘authentic’”, he said smiling. “Yeah, there were more Roma, and I’m telling you, I was very surprised, there were real Gypsy women, with flowery skirts and all! The crowd was more mixed!” (Fieldnote 033, 27 October 2018). The evening ended there, but I continued the conversation with him after a few days, as I was curious to hear why he, as someone who does not listen to *manele*, goes to these parties.

This sort of parties is not the only way *manele* are brought towards the young, urban non-Roma audience. Continuing our conversation on the new ‘hipster’ *manele* scene in Bucharest, M. told me about Outernational Days, a festival for all kinds of ‘ethnic’ music that had just taken place in Bucharest. Florin Salam, perhaps the most well-known *manele* singer, was the headliner of one day. Having my curiosity piqued, I later checked the promotional video for the festival, and the imagery reminded me of what is generally regarded as ‘world music’: a fast paced drum beat in the background, with shots from last year’s edition, featuring everything from African dances, Turkish bands, and last but not least, Florin Salam performing on stage with his band of musicians (Figure 9). Shots of the crowd showed a mix of youngsters, elderly people, and people who could be Roma, dancing together with their hands up in the air.



Figure 9. Florin Salam and his band on stage at Outernational Days in 2017 (The Attic Magazine, 2017) - Image hyperlinked to video material

Aftermath: general opinions

Catching up with A., my *Maneloteca* companion, he told me he likes *manele* parties as he believes that people get over racism and classism and focus solely on the music. Although he does not listen to *manele* at home, he likes that their messages are universal, like in any other artistic creation, talking about the whole range of feelings: love, sadness, luck etcetera. Therefore, he said, it is impossible that someone actually doesn't understand a *manea*, or that there is absolutely no *manea* that resonates with how they are feeling (A., personal communication, November 4, 2018). Regarding the crowd, he

said that statistically speaking, there probably are people who come there to make fun of *manele*. However, at least in Macaz, he thought people were there because they were tolerant and because they probably think that “if we eliminate social layers, we’re not very different as people, this being valid worldwide as well” (A., personal communication, November 4, 2018). A. soon added that he does not actually like *manele*, because he does not like the rhythm and the style. However, he feels the same about Oriental music, be it Turkish, Indian and so on. Nevertheless, he said he finds the lyrics interesting, and curiosity drives him to go to *manele* parties from time to time, to “try and dance”. He gave the example of the *manea* about the football club, called “Oțelul Galați”. He said the first lyrics line is “Since I was a child, I’ve been dreaming to become a football player”. He believes this is the example of a child’s view on life, as one does not “become” a football player but must work his way to that position. He finds *manele*

“music with a magic message... It appeals to the small child in us in its adult environment. The idea that money is not a worry anymore, there is no obstacle from others (the enemies), love is eternal. Probably typical for the music of a marginalised community if you ask me, these communities are not 100% mature.” (A., personal communication, November 4, 2018)

The vision of *manele* parties as a combination between social activism and the exotic came up a few times during the fieldwork. V., another young non-Roma I met at an event, expressed how he likes to go to *manele* parties, as well as *lăutărească* concerts. “I have just been to a *manele* party! It wasn’t in a hipster bar like [Apollo 111], but more like a dodgy bar with slot machines and all!”, V. told me visibly excited, after I let him know of my research topic. He said he finds these types of events and parties nice, as he gets to blend in with various people, both Roma and non-Roma, and he genuinely likes the music. He didn’t feel that people were making fun of the Roma or of *manele* in these circles. V. said he also went to some parties in Ferentari, an outskirts neighbourhood where a lot of lower-class Roma families live, and which doesn’t have a very good reputation. However, these parties, although popular, divide people between supporters and those more critical of the phenomenon. Many times, the critiques come from Roma themselves. One Roma actress, Mihaela Dragan, responded to an article on Ferentari *manele* parties and their “lively, exotic, eccentric and modest crowd” (Sandu, 2016), saying their attendees make use of stereotypes about the Roma community:

“The ‘exotic’ term is not positive, quite the contrary. It is connected to racism. I have been to numerous *manele* parties for hipsters, where I felt that they were making fun of the music, the fashion style. The hipsters were dressed in kitsch clothes, believing they imitate the Roma. So I, as a Roma woman, become worried when the *gadje* go to Ferentari looking for adventure and exotism.” (Sandu, 2016)

However, most Roma artists I talked to during fieldwork did not know about the phenomenon, with a few exceptions. Mihai Neacșu, the director of the National Centre for Roma Culture (CNCR), was aware of these events happening downtown Bucharest or in Ferentari, but he was also not very positive about them. He diplomatically explained his position during our interview:

“The hipsters are people that are anti-racists, and I believe they truly are. But there are some that are just that, hipsters. And after [...] the *manea* stops playing, he is unfortunately left with his prejudice...[...]; he takes only the entertainment part, like with the tweezers, from the Roma. [...] We talk there at the party like we’re the defenders of Roma rights, and we’re all

friends. But in practice, they are not. [...] It's not something consistent, and I doubt they understand something more from all that jumping around. But I don't really like [*manele* parties], because... I think the majority of people will stop after that night. [...] If you believe there is a small injustice in the society and you want to promote, with rights, and with the underground *manea*, like it was with hip-hop in America, it would mean that after the concert is done your individual behaviour towards the Roma and the minorities and the others is better. But if you say <<Roma are my brothers, screw the fags>>, I don't think you're someone who's built in a healthy way. The Roma won't believe you either..." (M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018)

One of the first ones to organise such parties was Adrian Schiop, the anthropologist who wrote his PhD paper on *manele* and moved to Ferentari to study the phenomenon. Amidst the critical opinions about his events, he maintained that he doesn't promote himself as having an impeccable moral position, but that he dislikes "moral purism" and "posh people" (Sandu, 2016, paragraph 20). Others, having the same opinion, argued that there doesn't seem to be a good middle ground no matter what people try in order to bridge the communities:

"if the Gypsies come to the centre, it's not good because they are loud. If the hipsters go to Ferentari, also not good because they gentrify. If they stay separated it's not good, because you ghettoize [Ferentari]. Damn it..." (Sandu, 2016)

At the same time, *manele* fusion genres emerged in the same alternative scene, reviving old *manele* labelled as *proto-manele* in some circles, or reworking them into *electro-manele* (Dumitrescu, 2016b), which I have heard played at the *Maneloteca*, as well as after several concerts in downtown bars. Ion Dumitrescu, currently part of the Future Nuggets music label which produces these so-called *electro-manele*, discusses the 'outernational' character of the genre in a two-part article published by 'Electronic Beats', and defines it as follows: "unlike international music scenes, the outernational is an uneven terrain that's perforated by numerous holes and discontinuities and marked by lack of memory and archival consciousness" (Dumitrescu, 2016a). This purgatory-like musical category is marked by the lack of copyright logic, the difficulty in tracing the origins of certain songs, and the overwhelming presence of the music on channels such as YouTube or pirate radio stations, contrasting with its absence from mainstream platforms. Therefore, according to him, the existence and success of *manele* can be explained – perhaps paradoxically – through their 'outernational' character and their marginal status, as it allowed the music genre to develop "in another dimension [...] at the edge of Romanian culture" (Dumitrescu, 2016a). He believes there was a gap between *manele* and the alternative crowd, and that his label has a say in it:

"I would say that the *manele* musicians missed the chance to address social, political and cultural problems. That said, I've always viewed Future Nuggets, aside from being a label of self-assumed Romanian obscurities, as a bridge builder. And not just locally between *manele* and other alternative cultures, but also toward the rest of the world." (Dumitrescu, 2016b)

*

The theatre play mentioned in the previous chapter, *Marea Rusine* ("The great shame"), took an ironic stance towards the hipster word that *manele* recently entered. In one scene that drew some laughter

from the audience, three students dressed in colourful party clothes, wearing sunglasses and funky hats, join the opening class for a Romani Culture course. When asked by the teacher why made them enrol, hilarity unfolds as they say they “want to give a voice to the voiceless Roma”, that they “want to make a future-Gypsy-electro-fusion musical project”, or as another girl mentions she likes all the *proto-manele* and *electro-manele* parties in Macaz, goes to all Balkan music festivals, likes Goran Bregovic, but doesn’t really like *manele* or ‘gypsy’ music, “just Balkan music” (Fieldnote 019, 12 October 2018). As she is sent out of the room, she asks the teacher if she wouldn’t like some invitations to a *proto-manele* party that weekend.

Chapter 3 Outro

The emergence of *manele* parties within alternative crowds in Bucharest is a relatively new phenomenon, that many attribute to the so-called *hipsters*. While many people attending these parties say they go for the fun, the open-mindedness and the wish to break borders between social categories, others - among which different Roma - are more critical and see the phenomenon as an example of exoticizing both ‘Gypsies’ and *manele*. While the party I attended seemed to have a rather ethnically homogeneous crowd, others mentioned that both Romanian and Roma can be usually found at similar events. The appearance of *electro-manele* and similar fusion genres can be seen as a characteristic of the new urban context in which *manele* can be found, and while the genre is popular at some events, it is also criticised by others and seen as a way in which non-Roma can enjoy a stigma-free version of *manele*, in a form of cultural appropriation. Nevertheless, through these variations, *manele* enter a new market and expand their audiences, albeit in an exoticized or gentrified version.

Chapter 4: “Gypsy” fusions and variations

As more time in the field passed by, I realised I must capture the many ways in which Roma musicians perform, outside of *manele* and *lăutărească* music. While expecting to find a clearly-cut division between those who play *manele* and those who do not, this ended up not being the case. Their musical path & activity, their reasons behind their choices and their view on ‘Gypsy’ music and *manele* were closely intertwined, and I am grateful to have managed to sit down with a few of these musicians. Therefore, Chapter 4 aims to present the stories and activities of those musicians that engaged in strategic essentialism to take their activity and identity to the next level, or simply on an unbeaten path. Several cases of ‘Gypsy music with a twist’ are presented in the following pages. I start with exploring the efforts of the National Centre for Roma Culture to centralise the musical talent found amongst the Roma community, and give Romanian Roma a better image through music. Then, the stories of established musicians and their careers in ‘Balkan music’ are presented, the chapter ending with probably the biggest twist – Rock’n’*Rrom*.

National Centre for Roma Culture – Romano Kher Orchestra

Centrul Național de Cultură a Romilor – Romano Kher, or the National Centre for Roma Culture (CNCR), is a public institution under the Ministry of Culture that aims to conserve, promote and develop the ethno-cultural values of the Roma community in Bucharest (CNCR, n.d.). Among others, CNCR mentions that it also deals with the modern culture embedded in the current Roma identity, which includes “Romani classical music (opera, musical, symphonic etc.) and modern (etno, pop, rhythm and blues, rock, jazz, house, dance etc.)” (CNCR, n.d.). Under the guidance of Mihai Neacsu, its director, CNCR put together the Romano Kher Orchestra by bringing established Roma musicians from different orchestras or musical groups together and developing a repertoire around classical music and traditional Romani music. Therefore, I wanted to get an insight into the activity of the Roma cultural centre, and to approach the topic of *manele* as well.

Mihai Neacșu , director of the National Centre for Roma Culture (CNCR)

“Sure, I’ve been to parties with violins, [...] with jazz, with the dance of the newlyweds, with beautiful things. But at a certain moment, [...] no matter how snobbish the wedding is, [...] they feel the need for the hora, the sârba, and a manea.”

(M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018)

George Rădulescu, my main help on the field, told me with a mix of amusement and appreciation that Mihai Neacșu is crazy for doing what he had done with the Romano Kher Orchestra. My curiosity was aroused, so early October I went to CNCR to have an interview with Neacșu himself. The building where the centre is located is a 20-story high communist architectural masterpiece. However, the building was not in the best state: many windows were cracked, and the brickwork was exposed. At the main entrance, there was no sign to show where the CNCR was, or any other institution that might have been in that area. Luckily, I knew in advance that I had to go to the 9th floor to find Neacsu’s office. After wandering on what looked like a school corridor for a while, looking to no avail for a sign to indicate where his office might be, a young employee came out of another room and directed me to the right place. Five minutes in, after I was brought a coffee, Neacșu came in, apologised for the wait and asked me to introduce my research topic once more. He agreed to be recorded, as long as he could check the transcripts afterwards – although he said he trusts me and my recommendations, he had had bad experiences in the past when people took advantage of his political position and made up interview lines.

Mr. Neacșu began to explain that since he arrived at the centre, he and his team have tried to change the popular perception on Roma music:

“[...] we kept the taraf, what’s good must be kept and promoted. But next to it we brought other types of music – classical music, jazz, Balkan music [...]. So we tried to bring some balance, so that people would not know us from one type of music only – lăutărească music,

when it's good, or... well, *manele*, when it's not so good.” (M. Neacșu , personal communication, October 9, 2018)

While explaining this, he took his phone out to show me a classical arrangement of the ‘Barbu Lăutaru’ song, performed by their musicians (Figure 10): “It sounds completely different... So, a hammer dulcimer playing classical music... And a viola, cello, violin... It sounds completely different... We like how it sounds.” (M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018). He went on to explain that these classical music arrangements have another role - that of writing Romani music on sheets, so that the children of current musicians can also have access to it in the future, and to promote the musical talent existing in the Roma musician community: “There are hundreds of young Roma musicians in all symphonic orchestras, because their *lăutari* parents sent them to study music. So we wanted to capitalise the qualified human resource, to come with a new product on the market” (M. Neacșu , personal communication, October 9, 2018). Neacșu considered that so far the audience has been receiving the orchestra well, as they usually do not know what to expect, and they seem pleasantly surprised by the musical arrangements, the use of the hammer dulcimer for something else besides *lăutărească* music, always leaving with a smile.



Figure 10. The Romano Kher orchestra on stage at a show in Bucharest, in November 2018 -
Image hyperlinked to video material

I was curious on how he sees the overall Romani music scene, but he seemed rather disappointed in the current state of events. Neacșu mentioned that Romani music is not organised at the moment, as there is a lack of professionalism in many contexts. While several bands like Mahala Raï Banda and Zuralia are professionally managed and have great success with their Balkan repertoire, he mentioned that former well-known groups of *lăutărească* music have had a negative development in the recent years, by adapting a more promiscuous imagery - such as having backup dancers with “skimpy clothes” - in order to make more money (M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018). Other

tarafs have flexible formations, which is not a good thing according to Neacșu, as you cannot know what musicians you will get when booking a certain group. *Manele*, he said, have a very well-set place in this market:

“Sure, I’ve been to parties with violins, [...] with jazz, with the dance of the newlyweds, with beautiful things. But at a certain moment, if we talk about parties like a baptism, a wedding, a divorce if people are happy ... I’m kidding [laughter]. [...] No matter how snobbish the wedding is, and no matter how important those people are, they feel the need for the *hora*¹⁵, the *sârba*¹⁶, and a *manea*. One hour of that night is filled with both folk dances and *manele*, it’s a schizophrenia. Politicians too. <<Yes, we want [manele], but people shouldn’t know about it>>. Like you associate yourself with a leper, but... No, it’s a very weird thing...”

(M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018)

He believes this ‘schizophrenia’ around *manele* happens because of the association with the Roma, although he says there are many non-Roma *manele* musicians as well, as there is high demand for the genre. On the other hand, he also argues that the “exhibitionist” way in which some *maneliști* promote themselves does them more harm than good. He then imitated the custom of giving large sums of money to *lăutari* at weddings in front of the audience in order to dedicate songs and to hear the giver’s name spoken in the microphone, and called the money the musician receives a “bribe”:

“this *manele* show affects [people] mentally, visually... You don’t feel good, no matter who you are, what ethnicity you have - Roma, Romanian, Hungarian... when X earns that money and you see him in a Ferrari. [...] I’m not comfortable if I go to a wedding, and a rich guy comes and monopolises the music for half an hour, because he has 1000 Euros to give. You don’t listen to the music program anymore; you listen to what the guy wants. You get my point? [...] That’s the sad and ugly side of it.”

(M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018)

Visibly critical of this dedication custom, he said that musicians encourage this behaviour as it brings them money - customarily, when one guest pays the *lăutar* and dedicates a song to a few people, at least one of them will return the dedication to him and a few others, generating a chain reaction. Neacșu said people do this as they believe their social status improves “because besides the costume [the person] wears, [...] he affords to spend money at the wedding too. He’s a boyar, he’s a boss” (M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018). This custom lead to critiques from many non-Roma who argue that the untaxed money received by musicians is the reason the Romanian economy is not performing. Nevertheless, the Romanian tax authority (ANAF) has taken more and more interest in the musicians, which Neacșu thinks is not a bad thing but represents a risk of the strategy *lăutari* employ. Some *manele* impresarios, like Dan Bursuc (‘Dan the Badger’), started to offer receipts and make contracts for booking artists, which the CNCR director believes to be a good move - the artists pay taxes, although out of fear, and the customer is sure he has the musicians booked (M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018).

Another downside of the *manele* context is, according to Neacșu, that the musicians’ “talent gets reduced a lot, they get labelled as *maneliști* or, even worse, as Gypsies who play by the ear...”

¹⁵ Traditional Romanian dance where people hold hands and dance in a circle while doing a sequence of steps on the rhythms

¹⁶ Popular Romanian fast-paced folk dance, where people hold hands and dance in various formations

because they don't have music school, otherwise they play heavenly" (M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018). He believes that even if *manele* artists would sing a Balkan music style like Mahala Raï Banda, they still would not have success within the same audience, as they would not be able to separate themselves from the label of *maneliști*: "No matter what they play, no matter where they play, they are *manele* singers. Even if they played opera, they would still be *manele* signers. Therefore, the brand is stronger than the content" (M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018). Neacșu also believes that many *manele* artists have great skills and have a good musical culture, listening in their free time to a wide range of genres and "the great musicians of humankind, from Sting to Elton John. They don't really like Andre Rieu, they don't believe he's a great musician, they think he's commercial... the *manelist* of that area [laughter]" (M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018). However, due to people's prejudice and lack of musical culture, *manele* artists get generally dismissed. As an example, he mentioned Florin Salam, the *manele* star, and compared him to a pop star that was also mentioned in the course by Gelu Duminica:

"if they were to play on the same stage, Smiley and Florin Salam, one of them would have to go home and never sing again, and that wouldn't be Florin Salam [...]. [*Manele* musicians] are very talented, the stigma exists, because of being both a "Gypsy" and a *manele* singer; but their showing off bothers everyone, including me."

(M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018)

Therefore, Neacșu argued, *manele* limit the artistic expression of the musicians, which he believes play this genre not necessarily because they like it, but because they make money from it. He added that an artist like Florin Salam can make 4000 EUR for a one hour and a half set during an event, but nevertheless this job is one "they many times dislike doing, [...] they have their moments too, when they are offended, because they don't only play for ladies and gentlemen...they play for all kinds of ...people from the underworld, the mafia..." (M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018).

Hearing the appreciative way Neacșu talked about many *manele* musicians, I wondered why CNCR does not get involved into the genre. I therefore asked him why *manele* did not make the cut in the explanation of what Romani modern music is, published on their website. After letting the question settle in, he said that *manele* are associated with the Roma, and part of both Romani and Romanian cultures. Older *manele*, such as the 'Turkish' songs played by famous *lăutari* like Romica Puceanu (Chapter 2), made their way into the repertoire of the orchestra. He explained, however, that *manele* are not a sustainable model for the community, and the content of most *manele* makes it difficult to involve them in the centre's activity:

"Their content, <<my boss, you are a wiseguy and you have money>>, does not generate any form of education for me, as an education institute. [...] If the musician plays at the philharmonic orchestra, the young man sees him too. He sees him at the restaurant, he sees him on stage, he knows that if he plays there, he can read music, and has finished a music school. [...] The model of the *manele* artist, for me as an institute - while trying not to be close minded - it's not a model to be followed, because... there are [...] let's say 50 *manele* bands in the whole country that actually do well for themselves [...]. But all the others don't do well. They play for little money, not often, they have 20 parties per year, and if they get 200 Euros per party for the less fortunate ones, [...] it's not that good. I mean it's not a job that allows everyone that do it to earn well. Being a *manelist* is not like being an IT guy."

(M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9, 2018)

While appreciating the skills of *manele* artists, Neacșu believes most *manele* are not music, but a rather simplified rhythm that you can play without any musical, or even educational background. He adds that some artists are amused by being always asked for these simple songs, as they can perform much more complex arrangements. At the same time, the CNCR director believes *maneliști* are also to blame for the negative way in which people see them, and that besides the existing stereotypes and stigma,

“there is also the self-flagellation of those who promote and practice this image. If [...] you find a video in which you received 100 million from Fane Spoitoru [mafia boss] - he died, God forgive him - [...] do you expect people to say <<what an extraordinary artist he is?>> [ironic]. The connoisseurs will say <<as a musician he has a fantastic voice, but he plays some skimpy songs to take money from fools>>, that’s the colloquial language.”
(M. Neacșu, personal communication, October 9. 2018)

Romano Kher orchestra concert

At the end of November, I had the chance to go see the Romano Kher orchestra at their show that ended a national tour called ‘The Caravan of the Great Union’, in celebration of Romania’s 100th anniversary. I was accompanied by my mother, who used to work in a Roma NGO and was interested in the event herself. The two main stars of the evening were Giani Lincan, a cymbalist that now lives in Amsterdam, and Emil Dragoi, a well-known accordionist. Although being 15 minutes late, upon our arrival the show had not started yet. It seemed pretty busy already, and only a few seats on the last rows were still empty. People were talking in groups, which made me think they already knew each other. My mother started to notice a lot of people, and I also recognised Gelu Duminica, the sociologist who held the course on Romani music, and Mihai Neacșu himself. “Well, at these events, a lot of NGO people come... or are sent here, to be more precise”, my mother said, explaining how she knew so many people in the audience (Fieldnote 070). She told me that when official events like the one we were attending take place, invitations are first sent to various NGOs, and then the directors decide who should go and represent their organisation. This made me wonder how many people were there as I was - because of seeing the event online - but also how many Roma youngsters were there because they found the initiative inspiring.

The host appeared on stage at 19:10, 40 minutes after the scheduled beginning time, starting what turned out to be a rather long and politically tense introduction to the artistic program. After the Romanian and the Roma anthems were sung by a young Roma girl, the host introduced the next guests to speak: Mihai Neacșu and, to my surprise, two of Prime Minister Viorica Dancilă’s counsellors, and the one Roma politician active in the Parliament at the moment. The first speaker was a non-Roma woman counsellor, who thanked the organisers of the event and mentioned “Mrs. Prime-Minister” at least five times in her speech while delivering the Prime-Minister’s message for the Roma community: “Union means belief, only united we can be equal. We are all Romanians and we all love Romania” (Fieldnote 071). While I found this message appropriate during a celebratory event of Union Day, it also reflected what Mrs. Dancilă has been promoting in the public space for the previous weeks, as a reply to criticism against her and her party, as well as to the many civil protests that seemed to spark wherever she and her government set foot. The second speaker was the Roma congressman, delivering a slightly shorter message and also thanking the government and Mrs. Prime-Minister

Dancilă. The talks about the absent Prime-Minister made me a bit restless and bored, and although I did not talk with people around me at the event, I felt their faces were expressing the same feeling. The slight boredom soon changed into tension as the third speaker, Dana Varga, a Roma woman and counsellor of the Prime-Minister, started her talk with a rather aggressive and impatient tone, silencing the audience: "I should be fast, but I have some things to say. I know Mr. Neacșu is frustrated because [not intelligible] as he is a technocrat and does not know how it is to be a politician" (Fieldnote 071). Besides seeming to come out of nowhere, Varga's message was similar to the current government's incisive attitude towards technocratic politicians, who are some of the harshest critics of the government. Varga went on to mention Mrs. Dancilă and said that the government did many good things for the Romanians and the Roma community. Mr. Neacșu was the last to speak, calmly saying to a sobered audience: "Before we start, I'd say let's smile, this is a nice event. I am indeed not a politician, as you well know" (Fieldnote 071). He then told a story about an old Roma man who asked to be buried standing up:

"<<my whole life I've been brought on my knees, as a Roma. At least in burial I want to be standing tall.>> This is what we've been trying to change, at CNCR. To make Roma people in Romania feel proud, and stand tall." (Fieldnote 071)

Mr. Neacșu soon left, not before ending his speech by saying that "the government must invest in all its citizens, not in only a few", with the same calm tone of voice (Fieldnote 071). I did wonder if the nuances of Neacșu's speech were not too subtle for the government's representatives to grasp.

The artistic show started right away. The first act was a Ukrainian dance group that performed a few traditional Ukrainian dances, although I missed the connection with the Roma community - if any. The next act, introduced by the lively host, was a group of four men dancing traditional Roma dances. As the stage was already occupied with the instruments and seats for the orchestra, the dances were done in front of the stage, at the level of the chairs, which made it a bit difficult to see. Engaging the audience to clap fast, the men started one by one to dance what looked like tap dancing but involved a lot of fast slapping of the legs, feet and body, while jumping and moving around. There was no music, only the rhythm of the body slaps, and the clapping and finger snapping. It was definitely entertaining to watch, especially as from time to time the men were challenging each other to a dance face-off.



*Figure 11. Roma dance group performing during the Romano Kher show in November 2018
- Image hyperlinked to video material*

After the dance, the host came back and asked the audience what they came there for. “Music!” some voices yelled (Fieldnote 072). The Romano Kher chamber orchestra came on stage, where around 15 musicians elegantly dressed took their seats. The two ‘stars’ were introduced separately: Giani Lincan and Emil Dragoi. While the orchestra played, a painter was painting live in the left corner of the stage, inspired by the event. It was very beautiful to watch how shapes were born and changed throughout the performance. The first song was an arrangement of “Barbu Lăutaru”, the song I encountered a lot during my fieldwork (Figure 10). More pieces followed – both classical music pieces and interpretations of modern songs. Several moments stood out for me: at one moment, the accordionist invited his two daughters on stage, to play with them. Two girls, of around 12 and 15, entered with their violins. Their father looked extremely proud to play with them, giving them indications and looking at them lovingly. After a few songs, Emil Dragoi, with his fully-black accordion, had an amazing jazz solo. I was really impressed by his skills and by his use of the instrument. I was too mesmerized to videotape it, and while I regret it, I am happy I could take in the moment fully. Another lively moment was when the orchestra played a variant of ‘Kibori’, a song of Mahala Raï Banda, accompanied by the Romani dance group, this time joined by women wearing traditional Romani clothing (Figure 11). Quite some people in the audience stood up and applauded. The show ended with a piece lead by Giani Lincan and his hammer dulcimer.

To my disappointment, once the host announced that this would be the last song, many people started to leave already. As the musicians were bowing and saying their goodbyes, half the room was empty. I wondered if people in the audience were there because they were actually interested in the music and the cultural side, or because they were sent there by their organisations. “Well, if you look at how many people left before the end of the show....”, my mother said rhetorically (Fieldnote 073). The show ended rather abruptly, right after the last piece. The painting in the corner was done, and the painter was not there anymore. On the canvas, figures and heads were contoured through dark lines and colours – black, red, blue. A beautiful painting, with an underlying melancholic tone.

Mahala Raï Banda – Balkan Gypsy craze



Figure 12. Four of the Mahala Raï Banda members on stage (Asphalt Tango Productions, 2018) - Image hyperlinked to video material

“Having ripped up stages across the USA and Europe, Romanian roots rockers Mahala Raï Banda are to blast stages all over the world with their fierce Gypsy funk. The 11-piece brass band’s blend of hard Balkan brass with minor key violin & accordion melodies has made them as a force to be reckoned with. Having taken shape on the mean streets of Bucharest, Mahala Raï Banda’s sound is 21st Century Gypsy music: rooted in tradition but with hints of dub and soul, Turkish and Arabic assimilated into their roaring dance mix. When Mahala Raï Banda hit the stage ancient Gypsy campfire tunes blend with the raucous din of Balkan Mafia clubs.” (Asphalt Tango Productions, 2018, para.1)

When I received a text from Mariana Sandu saying “xxxxxxx, Aurel’s number. Call him.” my heart skipped a beat. Aurel Ioniță is the founder, violinist and main composer of Mahala Raï Banda (Figure 12), a rather popular ‘Balkan Beat’ music band that I had known for a while. Despite being a little star-struck, I called him right away. After telling him who I was and who referred me, he agreed to meet up with me the following week, should I remind him. I followed up after a few days and he suggested to meet in one hour. He offered to drive somewhere close to where I was, so we ended up meeting on

the terrace of a small cafe. We talked for more than an hour and a half, as he gave me a lot of valuable insight into the life and musical experience of an established musician.

As he arrived at the terrace where we agreed to meet, I stood up and went in for a handshake, but to my surprise Mr. Aurel took my hand and kissed it. After being initially a bit flustered, knowing that he is the founder of a band that I appreciate very much, I became more relaxed and shared more stories as well, from my interviews, experience and living abroad. I started the interview by introducing my topic, and we then began to talk about the Romani music scene in Bucharest. Although he found it to be diverse, he also said there is a lack of reference points in the music industry, as “we all have a laptop, a TV station, and, like it or not, these things influence us, for better or for worse. I am not the one to decide this...” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). He said electronic music is gaining more ground while traditional instruments disappear, with a hint on nostalgia in his voice:

“More beat, and that’s about it... that’s my opinion at least. There are no musicians to start a new trend. I believe, and I am a bit nostalgic, that before the Revolution there were a few *lăutari* which were setting the tone. Unfortunately, they are gone, nothing new comes by anymore... but who knows? Maybe we will return to those traditions and customs. Of course, this is solely my opinion, as a *lăutar*.”

(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

Beginnings

Mr. Aurel believes he was lucky to be born in Clejani, a famous village where many *lăutari* come from, including Taraf de Haidouks. He explained that when he was younger, he used to play as a *lăutar* from Saturday to Monday. However, after the Revolution, more opportunities appeared in the West, and he left as well for a while to tour with the band. Nevertheless, after 18 years of tours, he wanted to return to Romania for a little longer, where he believes that the band’s international success had a positive influence on their path: “Here, the public accepts us because we had a say abroad, and here there are many who employ us because they say <<Hey, I’ve seen them on TV>>, but have no idea what we do” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). He went on to say that had they stayed in Romania, they would not have had the same success, as many good musicians he knows didn’t have either the luck nor the right vision for success: “I am sure of that. After we had international success in 2004 with *Mahalageasca* [song], the local mass-media started to write about us, they became interested, and said <<oh, when are you gonna come play for us too?>>” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018).

Despite their international success, he said he didn’t believe in his musical project at first, until a couple of Belgian producers became interested in their music. Amused, he recalled how he had thought the Belgians were “more retrograde” than him, as their appearance was not up to the post-communist consumerist standards: “when the Belgians came with a 1970’s Citroen, wearing funny clothes, I thought ... well... .never mind [laughter]” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). While his activity in Romania was going well, he was looking for something more and different, as “this [was] not the future, the others [did] exactly the same” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). Together with the Belgian producers, Mr. Aurel put together a *taraf* called Taraf B, toured the world, and became interested in the international direction. After a few months playing

both on the streets and in restaurants abroad, he had the opportunity to work on an album for Taraf de Haidouks. The gig led him to another opportunity, this time for Fanfare Ciocarlia, another famous Romanian Gypsy band. Wondering what his next steps would be,

“I decided to make my own band, to expose my ideas, and I created what was in those times neither fish nor fowl, something bizarre, a combination of *fanfare* and *taraf*¹⁷. When I had a sort of casting in Bucharest, and I told my friends about my plans, they called me crazy. <<How can you associate a tuba with a violin?!>> I told them <<guys, trust me, it will work>>. At that time, in the 2000’s, there was nothing like that in Europe. Taraf de Haidouks, Goran Bregovic were popular. But they all had a very precise direction. I believe that for those times, I had a very futurist idea, to play Gypsy funk, with a *fanfare*, together with a violin and an accordion. It was bizarre for those times.”

(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

The first demo album was made with the band’s own resources. Mr. Aurel then sent it to both Asphalt Tango Productions and Divano Records (the Belgians). What surprised him was that he received offers from both record labels, so he organised two different events, in two different locations, and planned to sign with whoever puts an offer on the table first (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). Divano (now Crammed Disk) signed Mahala Raï Banda in the end: “well actually we didn’t [sign], as we had no idea how a contract is made. So we shook hands and all [laughter]” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). To showcase their band, he decided together with their former manager to go on a small tour through France, in order to get people’s trust for future projects. In the meanwhile, they were working on their repertoire for a new album, but they were still one song short. The search for this last song led them to international success (Figure 13). Mr. Aurel remembered an old Roma man from Clejani who used to sing a certain song called *Hora lui Pisoï*. Seeing his fellow band members liked how the song sounded, Mr. Aurel began to write music for each instrument. The result was what he now calls:

“the most copied Gypsy song in the world - *Mahalageasca*. Honestly, I didn’t believe in it at the beginning. It was just a song to fill the album. I believed in other songs. If you listen to the album, you’ll see other songs are much more complex and calibrated. Or so I thought... But now, *Mahalageasca* is the song that never lets me down. There’s never a time when people don’t dance to it. [...] It’s been on soundtracks, commercials, computer games, and others. That’s life!”

(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

¹⁷ A *fanfare* is a brass band, while a *taraf* is mostly using string-based instruments.



Figure 13. Aurel Ioniță performing 'Mahalageasca' with his band at the Romane Dyvesa festival (Film Brothers & Asphalt Tango Records, 2011) - Image hyperlinked to video material

That was the moment their career took off. They went on other world tours, including World Music Festivals. He found it difficult to say where he liked to play the most, but Glastonbury came to his mind: "it was like the Apocalypse for me", he said, while recalling people drenched in mud jumping on their van, hugging the band dressed in white and saying they loved them. Visibly amused, he also talked about a French festival, where everyone was very drunk: "I went to say 'hi' to the mayor, and he was lying drunk on the table. From the policeman to the others, all drunk. But 3 hours after the festival ended, everything was cleaned up. I said <<oh, so here lies the difference...>>" (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). To my delight and amusement, Mr. Aurel had a story about the Netherlands as well, when after their concert at the Melkweg, Amsterdam, he went to a bar to grab a beer, only to be told it's forbidden and offered weed instead: "I thought <<are you crazy?>>. I ran, you can imagine... I don't like these things. Although I heard that they make you dream and influence you positively. But I prefer to drink, it's better, I know how it works" (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018).

Mr. Aurel said he meant for Mahala Raï Banda to be music for everyone, "global music, which can be listened to in the morning, afternoon and evening" (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). I was curious to see what place he thought Mahala Raï Banda has in the Gypsy music scene in Romania and abroad, about which Mr. Aurel was surprisingly sceptical: "In the end, what does Gypsy music mean? Music with *pathos*, with feeling, with energy, for laughing and for crying" (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). I wondered if maybe that is why Western audiences are eager for Balkan music, as they express feelings in a different way that the audiences might be used to, "or if they were used to it", he said, "they lost it" (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). While there are good Roma musicians, including internationally-based and acclaimed ones like Giani Lincan, he believes they do not play 'Gypsy' music: "they had not had the opportunity to develop this Gypsy music area. Here in Romania, sure, we can talk about it... but who accepts that you sing for them?... You get me in a complicated discussion [laughing]", said Aurel, with what I perceived as a hint

towards antigypsyism (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). Mr. Aurel explained that the only Roma music played by and for the Roma can be found in Banat ¹⁸, which made him say that ‘Gypsy’ music is perceived nowadays in Romania as “either you sing [songs from] Banat, or you sing *manele* (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018):

“after 800 (sic) years of slavery, you cannot talk about your own culture, music, cuisine, it’s not possible...there were some efforts in the 70’s-80’s, with Romica Puceanu, Dumitru Siminica, Gabi Lunca, but you see, they were perceived by the majority as *lăutărească* music, or ‘blue heart music’, because at the time there were no ‘Gypsies’ in Romania. No. You had Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, and ‘other nationalities’. So under ‘other nationalities’, there were no specifics... I am not a big knower of history, but I have come across some of these things, so I believe we cannot pretend we have our own music. First of all, there were no songs in Romani, cause you were not allowed. Only a few had a quarter of a phrase, like Siminica, in Romani. Romica Puceanu was definitely singing *lăutărească* music, but in Romanian, and Gabi Lunca - with all due respect - she was singing to please the *gadje*.” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

Back to Romania

After touring the world, he decided he wanted to come back to Romania for a longer period. Mr. Aurel said that Mahala Raï Banda is becoming increasingly appreciated at home. However, this is the result of a lot of hard work, self-promotion and intense activity. Although he hoped the Romanian music scene will become as competitive as in the West, he said that “there is money in Romania. An artist which has to pay 10 people tells you this [laughter]” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). He now believes that the Romanian audience looks more and more like the one abroad - abroad he usually sees people eager for authentic music, for the exotic, and

“a lot of hipsters [laughter], which is not a bad thing. People without prejudice. And in Romania, people who are above average, who have money, who want to have us at their event together with other artists. That’s what we’ve been doing the past days. In Romania, *Mahala* plays for people with financial possibilities. Not that it is very expensive, but people are influenced by this economic situation now... They’d rather get a keyboard and a voice, it doesn’t matter what they play. So we cannot talk about a quality/price thing anymore.” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

On one hand he appreciates that their success in Europe got them more fans at home, fans who saw their international shows online. However, he believes that access to technology also means that people are less likely to come to their shows, “or I play a new song to see how the public reacts, and the next morning it’s suddenly not my song anymore [laughing]. Someone else took it” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). Imitation is something that Mr. Aurel both likes and dislikes. He said that some bands steal their identity, their name, or their repertoire: “when we’re there, at the same event, and [they] play our songs - it’s not nice. Big artists do that in Romania, I won’t

¹⁸ Region in the West of Romania

give names” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). He went on to describe a rather weird situation that happened recently, when he got called by a soundcheck team which asked him when they should start with setting up the gear in location A. However, Aurel knew nothing about that location, so he got back to the soundcheck team who told him that they were with “some guys, with a trumpet and other instruments, and they call themselves Mahala Raï Banda. They believe if they have a trumpet and a trombone, singing one of our songs, that’s it, they are Mahala Raï Banda...” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018).

I was of course curious to hear his opinion on *manele*. Mr. Aurel said he sees the genre as any other genre - some songs are good, some are bad, and it all comes down to personal taste. During our interview, he repeated several times that he believes *manele* musicians are often very good. Most of his friends’ children, after finishing the Conservatorium, are playing *manele* as it is financially rewarding. His own children, also absolvents of the Conservatorium, make no exception. Mr. Aurel said he cannot blame them for wanting to play *manele* for money, and he appreciated their dedication to study new *manele* and practice them: “It’s not a laughing matter. What other opportunities are there?” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). However, he seemed to know that even *manele* cannot always bring financial security: “Yes, there are a few *manele* players who earn well [...]. The rest... I don’t know any others, there are some in the Second Division, to say it like that.... and then the others are a mess” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). He mentioned Taraf TV, a TV channel that focuses solely on *manele* and party music, sometimes not of the highest quality, and said it is representative for the lower-class audience and musician community. Hearing this, I told him about the efforts of Mihai Neacșu and CNCR to promote another model for musicians, but Mr. Aurel seemed rather sceptical. “With all due respect...”, he said and sighted slowly, after which he explained that he believes it’s difficult to achieve and implement a new model:

“It all starts with education. If you don’t start from the kindergarten. How can I explain to a young adult now, that my music is better than Salam’s, when he sees Salam on TV with the greatest cars, the nicest adventures? I can say that I’ve been to the Netherlands, there at the Melkweg... Well, it’s not that impressive anymore. They can say <<leave me alone with your Netherlands>>. Going abroad is not such a big deal anymore, like it used to be. Now you see musicians on every corner [abroad]... from Romania, from Macedonia...”
(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

Nevertheless, he believes the young, talented Roma musicians gave *manea* a very modern sound of American-pop inspiration. Although having another musical style himself, Mr. Aurel said he appreciates the harmonies in *manele* and gets inspired by some songs, while considering many *manele* artists to be great musicians: “I saw Salam a few times, both in events and concerts, and I would say he is like James Brown, the Gypsy version.” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). Regarding the rather controversial lyrics of *manele*, Mr. Aurel explained to me while laughing that the message of the music is not that important for him, so he doesn’t focus on it, sometimes forgetting the lyrics of their own songs. All in all, he finds *manele*

“the music of our times. After the ‘90s, the craze with the Turkish and the Oriental sounds started, and there was not stop to it - there is no stop to it nowadays either. If you look at what’s on radio, I’d say 80% are *manele*, judging by their beat [...]”
(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

While Mahala Raï Banda's repertoire is different from *manele*, Mr. Aurel said he is sometimes asked to adapt to local demands. In the West, he said, he would never bring an electric keyboard or use special sound effects during a Mahala Raï Banda show. However, he found the sound requested in Romania because "this is the culture. I am not the one doing that. [...] I sell 10 musicians, 10 different characters, who all want to have their moment." (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). At the same time, the current demands of more direct and sexualised themes affect their music as well: "So you, as an artist, as a *lăutar*, are obliged to do this too. The moment you do music only for yourself, you stay home and starve. It's great if you can do that." (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). He believes this is happening as some *manele* artists got inspired from Western music styles. As an example of this, he recalled how one of their bolder songs came to existence:

"What *manele* singers do nowadays, with their more aggressive sound - I think they looked at the American rappers, and though why shouldn't I do that? We have one song, 'Red Bull, Sexy Bul' ¹⁹, with more obscene lyrics... Our late Belgian manager, God bless him, he kept showing us what those rappers were saying, and asked us if we cannot also do that. And I said <<no, we're a bit more prude, we cannot sing those things, that I'm macho and all>>. Well, despite our appearance as strong, macho guys, we are actually quite shy and gentile."
(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

Mr. Aurel's experience in the world of private events also showed the popularity of *manele*. He told me about a recent event organised at Antena Group, a large media outlet, where young girls were dancing on *manele*. However, "the wedding is the show of our lives. We are directors, scenographers etcetera", he said smiling. Mr. Aurel said that at Romanian weddings (Figure 14) the night usually ends in "a *hora*, a *sârba*...at the end one or two *manele*... But nowadays, after 2AM, you always play *manele* or 'Balkan' songs at weddings, like they call them, so they got a cover" (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). This made me smile, as I encountered the same behaviour among many non-Roma I know. While their repertoire is not *manele* based, Mr. Aurel said that they often perform at the same events as other *manele* musicians. The weekend after our interview they were to perform at a Roma wedding, after two famous *manele* singers. In these situations, he said he always asks people prior to the event if they are familiar with Mahala Raï Banda's style:

"They sometimes see us as a cover band - At Romanian weddings, it's now popular to have a cover band, a popular music band, and a Balkan band, so they end up on a crazy note. Well, the Roma saw this, and they want this too! They have *Salam, Adrian* ²⁰, and they want to have Mahala Raï Banda too. People evolved, they want show, they want something else."
(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

¹⁹ Meaning 'Red Bull, sexy ass' in Romani

²⁰ Famous *manele* singers



Figure 14. Mahala Raï Banda performing at a wedding in Romania (Mahala Raï Banda, 2018)

Mr. Aurel said that he wasn't interested in going abroad any time soon, as business in Romania is going well for Mahala Raï Banda. While saying this, he took out his phone and showed me his agenda while thanking God for his agent - the calendar was full of bookings, having around five events per week for 2018 and well into 2019. "Sometimes I also play one *manea* or two, you know. Yes, we play if we're asked. The same person who says no *manele*, come back and ask me <<can you play one?>>" (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). Despite not being bothered to play a few *manele* for private events, he mentioned he is displeased with some of the *manele* themes, and with a wedding custom that Mihai Neacșu also talked about previously:

"There's only one thing I don't like. When some people give you money, they think you're at their service the whole evening. It happened a few times, and I said <<no, stop. We're Mahala Raï Banda, and we're gonna stop now>>. I can do that, but others, poor things, who are just starting, cannot do it... 2-3 hours playing for one person who has a lot of money. Also if we play *manele*, we play the ones a bit more <<washed out>>. There are many types of *manele* too. But look, other *manele*... Salam got a new one out, it says <<my pocket speaks / whatever language it wants / English, French / and even Japanese>>. So, look, what's the message here?! Yeah, I play *manele* at private events. For concerts no, just my repertoire. But if the bride comes, and asks politely..."

(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

Although he didn't know about the 'hipster' *manele* parties in Bucharest, he found them "normal. Look in Greece, in Turkey, not to mention Bulgaria", he said hinting at the popularity of *manele*-like genres

across the Balkans. During one of his trips in Turkey, he saw there were many musicians playing what he called *manele* on the streets and in bars. In Greece, he said *manele* were listened to in the bus, and they were part of everyday life. I therefore asked him what makes a song a *manea* in Romania. “I dunno, it’s the thing that <<I get associated with a *manelist*, with the mafia, with the Gypsies etcetera... so I don’t wanna get associated to it.>> But then we hear Greek music and jump, saying <<Greek music ! >>” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018).

I wanted to go deeper in the stereotypes surrounding *manele*, and I wondered what Mr. Aurel thought regarding the contrast between the popularity of *manele* and the stigma around them. Mr. Aurel said people who have frustrations and prejudice are the ones who usually complain about *manele*. Similar to other encounters during my fieldwork, Mr. Aurel seemed to restrain himself from saying Romanian people are racist. Although aware of the weak methodological approach, I asked him if he believes racism is at fault as well for people’s hatred of *manele* and ‘Gypsy’ music, as I felt this is what he was hinting at. “For sure, for sure”, he said, and made an allegory of the way Americans used to be worried that Spanish would become the official language in the US, saying that he sometimes jokes and says Romani will become the official language in Europe:

“If you want, I’ll push myself and say this too [laughter] – why did the *majoritarians* start to hate *manele*, with the nasty lyrics? The Gypsies did not make them. I remember about LA²¹, they had the lascivious texts first. Look at hip-hop. So what are we talking about? It’s easy to go around and point fingers.”

(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

His stories made him believe that some Romanians don’t only feel the need to have a ‘cover’ for liking *manele*, but also for enjoying ‘Gypsy’ music in general. To give a concrete example, he told me a story that he found equally amusing and worrying. A few years ago, Mahala Raï Banda went to play at a private event, but as they arrived, they saw everyone dressed in Gypsy clothing. He was in shock and wondered if he had mistaken the location, as he knew the guests were government officials and public figures. When he asked the organisers for an explanation, he was told that this way the guests have a ‘cover’ in case paparazzies showed up and saw all the VIPs dancing on the table – this way, they could say it was a thematic party: “For *majoritarians* ²², ‘Gypsy’ still means hats, moustache, flowery shirts, and if you can have a horse as well, even better. Well, things evolved, musically as well as socially... you cannot do that” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). On another occasion, Mahala Raï Banda was invited to play for the Youth United National *Marea Loja* of Romania (National Mason Group) at the Palace of the People, where around 800 people were attending a charity event:

“Half [of the people] wanted to dance, but they didn’t want to be seen dancing on Gypsy music. The other half didn’t know what to do, they looked around to see what others do. A quarter were with one foot on the dancefloor and the other moving on the rhythm. So I wondered <<what am I doing here?>>, but I answered myself: <<It’s normal. When there is money, ego, posh, there is also prejudice. They are not free people>>.”

(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

²¹ LA was a popular *manele* band in the early 2000’s, founded by non-Roma Costi Ioniță

²² Word some Roma use to talk about non-Roma Romanians

Romanians and the Balkans

Mr. Aurel believed many of these contradictions regarding *manele* are connected to the Balkan spirit in Romania: “we are crazy, crazy. But maybe this is our beauty. We dislike each other, we hate each other, then we love each other. I think it’s a Balkan thing. But in Romania it’s more...” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). Being interested in the topic myself, we went off script and talked about the Balkans a bit. I told him one of my ideas that came out of the desk research - that perhaps Romanians would be less critical of *manele* and ‘Gypsy’ music if they accepted that they belong to the Balkan cultural space. He seemed triggered by the idea and asked what exactly I meant by ‘Balkan’. I explained that most people think of something rough, barbaric, or loud when they use the term. Mr. Aurel smiled and asked rhetorically:

“how are the Italians then? The Spanish? The Portuguese? I believe there are various interests that we look a big rough, a bit stupid, more aggressive... that’s what I see when I look at Romanians. When you go in Germany, in France, and we’re like four people, our voices are covering everyone else’s...but that’s how we are, what’s wrong with it?! That I open my heart to you and put my soul into anything I do? That I don’t like it when you don’t wanna sit down and eat with me? I think our issue is that we jump from one mood to another. Think of the funeral. After the mourning of the burial, we raise the glass to the person and starts talking about his life, and cheer. Life must go on. What’s so wrong with it?...”

(A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018)

The Balkan spirit is something that he thinks people abroad enjoyed, as there is usually always dancing at their concerts. However, Mr. Aurel said the same Balkan spirit can also lead to peculiar situations, recalling a former Mahala Raï Banda concert at the Barbican Centre in London, a very elegant place. At one point, from the crowd of seated people, a Serb stood up and stuck money bills to the musicians’ foreheads. “There are nice things, and things you cannot control... the Balkan spirit, fun until exhaustion” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018). By contrast, he remembers one concert they had in Japan, where people were dressed up in their office attire and danced vigorously, only to automatically calm down and leave the floor once the concert was over, “like nothing happened. Ha, we don’t do that... We continue [partying] on the road, at home. That’s what makes the difference between us [the Balkan people] and others, I believe” (A. Ioniță, personal communication, October 22, 2018).

As we said goodbye, he invited me to the premiere of a film just praised in Cannes, “Alone at my Wedding”, for which Mahala Raï Banda wrote part of the soundtrack. I later saw them playing during the course on Roma music covered in Chapter 2. As Aurel Ioniță showed me during the interview, the band’s schedule consisted mostly of private events, and while he initially said I could perhaps go with them one time, he later added that it might prove difficult as it is, in the end, someone’s private wedding. “When will you come to the Netherlands?”, I asked as we parted ways. “Whenever you invite us!” he said smiling and kissed my hand once more before heading to his car.

Georgian Stanciu (*Fratii Stanciu* band) – From *café-concert* to Balkan beats

“Well, manele are loud, loud music! If you sing manele quietly, slowly, it has no impact. No one will like it. [...] Manele, everyone wants them to generate maximum hubbub!”
(G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018)

Georgian Stanciu is quite a well-known Roma musician, especially from his activity with the *Fratii Stanciu* band (“Brothers Stanciu”), where both he and his brother play the clarinet together with other musicians, some of whom are relatives. Their repertoire is Balkan-inspired music, and they are quite popular among high-class weddings or other popular events. George, my field help, called me one afternoon while I was at home nursing a flu, and gave me the number of Georgian, telling me that he plays jazz in his spare time and Balkan music with *Fratii Stanciu*, but at private events he plays *manele* too. He also told me Georgian is usually very busy, so it would be good if I could catch him one evening at Casa Doina, a high-end restaurant in Bucharest where he performs sometimes. I called him right away, and Georgian replied, surprised that I called him so fast. He seemed very nice on the phone and told me to meet him a few days later at the coffee corner of Casa Doina, between 19:00 and 19:30.



Figure 15. Georgian Stanciu (left), his cousin (right) and another musician (back) performing at Casa Doina restaurant during dinner time – Image hyperlinked to video material

On the day of the meeting I arrived at 19:10 and asked for the coffee area at the reception. The lady seemed confused by my request: “There is no coffee area here, only the restaurant...” (Fieldnote 058).

I told her I am meeting with Georgian Stanciu, and then she led me to the back of the restaurant, which was a separate hall, still connected to the main restaurant through a series of open doors. She said she'll bring Georgian to me when he'll arrive, so I ordered a warm tea and waited patiently. The place looked quite fancy, and although it was not very busy, I felt a bit inadequate to be there with my recovering flu and in my casual attire. At 19:30, Georgian was not there yet, although I saw some musicians, all dressed up very elegantly, arranging their instruments. I texted Georgian that I am in the restaurant and wondered if I would recognize him. My hesitation went away quite quickly when he arrived - he was hard to miss. A tall man, of around 1.90m, Georgian was wearing a beret, and a pair of what looked like sunglasses. He was dressed up elegantly, with a tie and a buttoned-up vest under his back coat (Figure 15). His fingers were decorated with gold rings. "Oh, hey there!", he said casually. "Sorry for being late, I know I said 19:00-19:30" (Fieldnote 058). It was 19:40. We shook hands and had some small talk before he told me: "well, you know, we'll play soon, in around 20 minutes. We'll play for 40-45 minutes, then I have some more time for the interview. You can also listen to us this way, is it ok? Are you time bound?" (Fieldnote 058). I said that I am a little, but that it was alright, while thinking that it would have been perhaps better to reschedule due to my poor health. During the evening, I listened to their music for around one hour, managing to sit down with him in between for some shorter rounds of talks. I was very happy to have managed to meet him, but I would have also liked to have the chance to talk to him outside of his job, in order to not feel a certain sense of rush.

After we shook hands, Georgian sat down for a few minutes, and after introducing his cousin to me (playing the violin that evening), he told me he was happy that I could also see what they play as well. Georgian described their repertoire from that night as classical music, cafe-concert and jazz. "This is what I like to play the most!" (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). He seemed very happy to discuss about his musical activity. When asked how he became a musician, he smirked and said "well, we have been musicians for 200 years!" (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). The musical talent has been in his family on both his parents' sides. His father has been playing in the philharmonic orchestra, and his mother's grandfather was a renowned violinist, Tudor Pana. "I have been seeing musical instruments in my house all my life - violins, clarinets, the piano..." (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). His father, one of the best clarinet players in Romania according to Georgian, was his first teacher as well. He bought him his first mini-clarinet when he was only 6 years old, "and you know what my first song was? *C'est si bon*", he said smiling (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018).

Georgian started to play music at home, learning from his father. All siblings were talented, "except my sister. We told her to do something else", he added amused (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). His older brother, Pepicu, plays the violin and learnt the skill from their grandparents, who raised him. His younger brother, Bebe, started off as a piano player. "He used to be one of the greatest piano players, really, he was very talented" (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). Georgian seemed very proud of his brother's talent and told me that when Bebe was going to the Dinu Lipatti Music High School, his teacher asked everyone to play a certain piece of classical music for an exam. Bebe went to the piano and started playing a complex jazz song, instead of a classical piece. After he was done, his teacher said "very nice, you played very well. Now please, next time come with your parents to school", as he realised that he must have learnt the jazz piece somewhere else, and also because Bebe disregarded the teacher's request. "Yeah, he was a great piano player, my father taught him too" (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). Besides his father, another renowned teacher named Costandanche guided the boys.

In the 1980s, Georgian said he started to join his grandparents at various restaurants where they were playing: “you can study at home a lot, but you really learn how to play in the restaurant” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). His grandparents played in famous hotels and restaurants such as Hotel București or Hotel Capsa. At 15, Georgian and his brothers started to play with his grandfather professionally, at a restaurant called Pescarus. This was done next to school, however he added that “we liked it more at the restaurant, but you need the school” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). When he was 18, he and his brother auditioned for a tour in Japan. Georgian said that there were many skilled *lăutari* auditioning, but the jury liked him and his brother best. He added happily, but not boastfully, that “they probably liked us best because we were young...but also talented” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). Therefore, in 1998, they went on to play in Japan. He has been there on and off for almost nine years, together with other Romanian musicians, both pop artists and *lăutari*, which I found very impressive. “It’s a different world there!” he said with a notch of amazement in his voice (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). Georgian was happy to share stories from his time in Japan. He described how one time he wanted to buy a camera battery, like he saw people in Japan having. He gave the money to the shop assistant but forgot to take the change as well. The next thing he remembered was the shop assistant running after him with his change. “At first I thought, <<I didn’t steal anything!>> [laughing]” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). He was surprised to hear the woman apologising to him and saying that she did not remember to check if he took the change.

Coming back to present day, Georgian said that he plays in the restaurant as a side project: “This is not my main job, I do this as a side thing, you know how it is...” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). He said that in these contexts, like Casa Doina, they play classical music, jazz, cover songs and cafe-concert. His main band, Fratii Stanciu, is more Balkan-oriented, and they play mostly party music (Figure 16). He added, however, that “I find myself in this music here the most. My soul song is a classical piece, it’s slow. We’ll play it for you later!”, which he did (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). Georgian said he plays Balkan and party music for money, and “to entertain people”. They play at both private events and other shows. Later on, when he went to play the set for the evening, he performed the song he said it was his favourite. Perhaps a funny coincidence, his phone started ringing while he was performing, with a very Balkan sounding ringtone.



Figure 16. Image taken from video clip for *Fratii Stanciu's* cover of 'Baba Vanga' (Stanciu, 2017) - Image hyperlinked to video material

Georgian said that besides talent, success is also about luck. Although he did not elaborate on this, he hinted that this is because musicianship is not appreciated in Romania:

"There are many great saxophonists in Romania, but they are not known. No one gives them any gigs, nothing. It's the same with Johnny Raducanu ²³, he only became well-known after he passed away - why not when he was alive?"

(G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018)

Switching to *manele*, he said that "yes, we play *manele* as well, because this is what is requested" (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). Georgian said he doesn't like *manele* that much, and repeated that his heart lies with classical music and cafe-concert. He described *manele* as a "musical trend, it caught on after 1995", a trend influenced by other Balkan music styles in the region. He says that many *manele* hits are actually pop hits from Turkey or other countries in the Balkans, that have nothing to do with the old school *manea* sung by *lăutari* like Romica Puceanu (see Chapter 2): "Many times *manele* are songs taken from pop music from those regions. We just approach it differently, we add lyrics about mother, father, brother... something that hits home for everyone" (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). Georgian followed by saying something I had been hearing quite often during the fieldwork - that although many times when musicians are invited to weddings, the groom or bride say they don't want *manele*, but after midnight and several glasses of alcohol, everyone asks for them. I was of course interested to see his view on this contrast. "Well, *manele* are loud, loud music!", he said. "If you sing *manele* quietly, slowly [imitating a slow *manea*], it has no impact. No one will like it. For *manele*, everyone wants them to generate maximum hubbub!" (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). He then ran to the second round of music and played beautifully with his team. I was a bit sad to see that the room in which we were was almost empty, while the adjacent one was hosting a large dinner, but no one was attentive to where the music came from. After each song, a few moments of deep silence filled the room.

²³ Famous jazz musician of Roma background

When he came back, I asked him about how he felt *manele* influenced him or others as Roma musicians. Georgian smiled and said that *manele* are a good thing for musicians, as they bring more gigs. He said, however, that *manele* cannot be seen as only Roma music: “*Manele* are both the music of the Roma and of Romanians” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). He added that some Romanians also play *manele*, as they understood that “it is a nice job, and it brings money” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). Georgian also said that there are indeed some scandals surrounding the genre, but that it mainly depends on the context the musician is active in, and not the music itself.

Having a bit more time until he had to perform again, he told me some stories of how his musical activity changed over the years. Georgian said that in the ‘80s and ‘90s he used to play mostly for Romanians, or for other families of *lăutari*. Nowadays, he sees that people care more about the aspect of musicians, and the overall look of the band. As an example, he recalled performing at an event for a mayor in Alexandria ²⁴, which had many politicians and other upper-class guests. The organiser told them before the event that “I want you to be spotless! Dress well!” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). They went dressed in tuxedos, although Georgian said that there were 30 degrees Celsius outside. They played their *cafe-concert* repertoire while the guests were arriving, and afterwards. When their set was over, Nicolae Guta, a famous *manele* musician, followed. However, Guta came dressed inadequately: wearing a tank top, shorts and flip-flops, while his band was not looking differently either. The mayor, shocked, came to Georgian and complained about Guta’s appearance, and asked Georgian if it would have been possible that they played more. So, after half an hour, Georgian and his band took over the stage once more. I saw Georgian being very happy while telling this story, and while I thought he liked the hilarity of the situation, I felt he also used it as an example of showcasing that the Fratii Stanciu band represent a more professional class of musicians, although he did not say so explicitly.

I was interested to see what Georgian thinks of the popularity of *manele* in the various alternative contexts where I encountered them. I therefore told him about the *manele* parties which are very popular nowadays in the centre of Bucharest, and he added happily “oh yes, we also played at some *manele* parties, they last till the early morning!” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). He described parties in clubs such as Mia Musica or Hanul Drumetului, clubs and restaurants which I knew had a *party music* profile. I told him that the parties I have seen or attended are not there, but in the old centre of Bucharest. He did not know about these, but he was intrigued: “In the old centre, you mean? I didn’t know... interesting, I guess because it is danceable music, it makes everyone dance!” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). I agreed and described how at the party I attended everyone seemed to have a good time, including people who looked like metalheads. Georgian laughed at the idea and said that people are not as anti-*manele* as they used to be.

Asked about the Gypsy music scene in Romania, he said that music is a lucrative business here. However, he added, “the offer is greater than the demand. Romanians started to make [party] music as well, nowadays. Before there used to be ten good party music bands in Bucharest, now they are maybe 80” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). He told me with a sort of nostalgic feeling that previously there used to be a certificate system in place, and musicians could get a certificate graded from A to D, assessed by a musician committee, to show how good they were. Musicians could then get employed based on this certificate. Now, he says, the quality of the music is pretty bad – many “musician bands” being people who come to the event with a recorded beat and a

²⁴ City in Southern Romania

singer. Also, as party music gets more requested, musicians started to get greedy as well. Georgian told me a story about someone who wanted to employ a band to play for 2000 Euros at a wedding. As the band had no hammer dulcimer, the employer asked if they could also bring one cymbalist. The band allegedly said “<<sure, that would be 3000 Euros extra>>. With that money you can get your own dulcimer!”, Georgian added amused (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018).

Talking about the new generation of musicians, he first said jokingly “well, first of all you know, I’m not that old either, I am 38” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018). He said however that the young musicians have nothing to do with *lăutărească* music anymore, as they start to play *manele* from the beginning. One of his clarinet students, when asked by Georgian what he’d like to learn to play, said he just wanted to know how the buttons function so he could get to work. *Manele*, therefore, are a job for many, a means to an end. Georgian said that *manele* are quick and easy to learn, and they bring money. Plus, nowadays a lot of people learn from YouTube very fast - compared to learning using the cassette player, like he used to. A *lăutar* might get 300 RON (70 EUR) for a show in a club, but a *manele* player can get up to 1000 EUR, Georgian argued.

It was 21:00 and Georgian had to go and play one more round. As it was getting late, and I could unfortunately feel my fever taking over, I apologised and said I needed to leave. I thanked him for the interview, he thanked me back, and said I shouldn’t worry about my tea, as he would pay for it. “Kisses! Have a nice eve!”, he told me while I was waving goodbye and leaving the room.

Elvis Rromano (Tudor Lakatoș) - *Rock'n'Rrom*

“I am Elvis Rromano, the only one in the world who dares to sing Elvis Presley in the Roma language” (BBC, 2014). This is how Tudor Lakatoș, alias Elvis Rromano, introduces himself. Elvis Rromano, 47 years old, is an Elvis Presley cover artist. He has been adapting Elvis' songs to Romani and Romanian themes and lyrics since he was young. He plays what he calls *Rock'n'Rrom*, a fusion of the Rock'n'Roll he started loving as a young man and *lăutărească* or party music rhythms.

Tudor Lakatoș grew up in a rather poor community in a Northern Romanian village. While many *lăutari* were in the area, his father worked hard in a regional mine in order that his children would have a better future. Tudor worked in the mine as well for one year but said that the first time he heard an Elvis Presley song, 'Don't Step On My Blue Suede Shoes', he got goose bumps (BBC, 2014). His mother was the first one to make him a 'shiny' Elvis shirt, by sewing sequins and beads on a silk shirt. As a child, Tudor felt discriminated for being Roma, but

“as soon as I picked up the guitar, I had a new status. In our community, [the *lăutari*] played traditional Gypsy music. I wasn't interested in that. I was interested in Elvis! And people would call me - Elvis, Elvis! They were probably making fun of me. But I found it liberating. I said: that's me!” (T. Lakatos in BBC, 2014)

Out of the spotlight, Tudor is a Roma history and language teacher in his community. He is also working for his NGO, through which he built an English after-school in his own house, for the village children to learn English. Children who have trouble with their homework can also get help there in order to graduate and not stay illiterate: “It's very important that we can read Roma history books today, about where we [the Roma] come from, and to tell the kids about the holocaust, [...] about the connection to India, and about what 'Gypsy' and 'Roma' mean” (T. Lakatos in BBC, 2014). He said he wants to give a life example, of an honest man who puts bread on the table.

I found Tudor's story both interesting and heart-warming, so when I had heard from many people about his concert at the end of November 2018, I was eager to go. His 'unofficial' manager, the American ethnomusicologist and *lăutărească* music enthusiast Shaun Williams, was to perform with Elvis that evening, along with a couple of other Roma musicians: Gigi Hendrix on guitar, and Stelian Frunza on piano. Therefore, on Friday the 30th of November, I went together with my visiting Dutch friend to see Elvis Rromano play a small gig in the Armenian neighbourhood of Bucharest. After going through the beautiful, but dark and empty streets of the area, we arrived at Londohome, a bar which looked like a regular house from the outside, if it wasn't for the bar sign on the fence. It was freezing outside, being one of the coldest nights till that day, with -10 degrees showing in the thermometers. It was 19:00, and as the show was starting only at 20:00, the place was almost empty. In the 'concert room' next to the bar, which could have had around 25 square meters, Shaun was rehearsing his dulcimer parts and Elvis was checking his guitar.

We took two mulled wines and asked where we had to pay for the entrance. “Oh, is there an entrance fee?”, one girl from the bar said smiling. “Yes, I think so, the other one replied” (Fieldnote 074). They checked the Facebook event to see for sure. It was 20 RON, so she handed me a big jar where I could put the 'donation', as they called it. We went back to a table in the first room and waited patiently for the bar to fill up. After a while, we took our wines outside so that my friend could smoke

a cigarette. As it was very cold, we were happy to see some outdoor heaters. One was already surrounded by people, but the other one, in the back of the garden where a summer bar probably was, was empty. As we approached it, I saw Elvis going there to have a cigarette himself. He went 'behind the counter', and we approached him from the other side of the bar.

We said "Hi", he returned the salute, and I asked him if he was ready for the show. "Oh, that was the show. I am done now", he replied jokingly (Fieldnote 075). I laughed and translated what he said to my friend, which made Elvis curious about his country of origin. "*Olanda*", I said smiling. "Well, and a bit of Spain. *Olanda-Spania*" (Fieldnote 075). From that moment, he started speaking with us in both English and Romanian, switching from one to another. At first, it seemed to me that he was more eager to speak to my foreign friend. At one point, he asked me where I am from as well, and what I was doing there. I told him about researching about *manele* and *lăutărească* music, and he said "Aha! Nice!". I then felt that Elvis liked us, so I stayed a bit longer to talk to him and perhaps find out more about his activity. He then began to tell us that he performed a lot in the Nordic countries, especially in Norway, where he said he had great success. He told us he is not an Elvis imitator, and I thought that this was quite a surprising and funny thing to say, considering he was dressed exactly like Elvis (Figure 17). He said his name is Tudor Lakatoș, and he is from the North of Romania, from Bucovina, where apparently it was warmer than in Bucharest. "The weather flipped, it used to be the other way around!" he added (Fieldnote 075).



Figure 17. *Elvis Rromano (Tudor Lakatos) performing at Londohome (Elvis Rromano, 2018)*
- Image hyperlinked to video material (Londophone, 2018)

Tudor said that Norwegians were usually asking him to play his "Romanian, Gypsy music", as they are tired of the "boring Rock'n'Roll": "You know, I play something different, some Rock'n'Roll is slow and, you know... [starts singing 'Love Me Tender' in a low, slow and rather monotonous voice]. But I give it

something else! I make it livelier!” (Fieldnote 076). He said he also adapts the songs to the context of the Roma, and he sings in Romani as well, besides Romanian and English:

“You know that song, ‘Don’t Step on My Blue Suede Shoes’? At first I didn’t know what they were saying. So when I wrote the lyrics in Romani to the song, I didn’t say <<don’t step on my shoes>>, as we don’t have shoes there, we are poor Gypsies! So in Romani I sing <<don’t step on my foot!>>” (Fieldnote 076)

He was not boastful, but he seemed proud of what he was doing. He told us that he is also a teacher of English, and of Romani language and history to the children in his village. Jumping on the opportunity, I asked him more things about the Roma and *manele*. He said that the Roma come from India, who went through Egypt (sic) and came to Europe. The language comes from Sanskrit, he said, and indeed Roma from different countries can understand each other: “They speak kind of different dialects, but they can understand each other” (Fieldnote 076). We discussed about the term *rom*, and I explained to my friend how some Romanians complain that there is confusion with the word *România*, many not knowing that *Rom* is an older word. Elvis agreed: “Yes, it is old! *Rom* means human, man. It’s how we’ve been calling ourselves, we didn’t have the word *țigan*, that’s how the others were calling us. It comes from *athinganos*, meaning <<the untouchable, the dirty one>>” (Fieldnote 076). I also asked him what he thinks about *manele*. He smiled, stopped for a second, then said that people usually say that they don’t like them, but then they all dance to them. “Some people don’t like them as they think *manele* means something dirty, that it means *țigan*” (Fieldnote 076). Elvis soon said that we’d better go in, as we were freezing, and he had to start playing in a few minutes. As we went towards the entrance, I came across Shaun, who was in charge of selling the tickets until the show started. We talked for 2 minutes, then went in to see the show.

The show started a bit over 20:30. Elvis apologised for the delay and started playing, accompanied by Shaun at the dulcimer, and the other musicians. Shaun had a black t-shirt, with the word BOSS written in golden sequins on the chest, which made me smile. He later told me his fellow musician colleagues gave it to him. People gathered around Elvis, and the room was soon full. It wasn’t a large audience, but around 50 people were filling the room, dancing on his songs and drinking mulled wines. The people were mostly young, in their 20’s and 30’s, and seemed to enjoy the music. Elvis played covers of the King of Rock’n’Roll, giving them a Romanian twist – singing about cities like Baia Mare or Constanta, about the neighbour who smokes Kent cigarettes, or about stepping on Gypsy “shoes”. It was a fun, yet completely musical experience. Towards the end of the set, his daughter Ranya joined him to sing one song while playing the electric guitar. “Look how proud he is, he is melting!” said my friend about Elvis, who was looking lovingly at his daughter (Fieldnote 077).

After around 2 hours of music, the show ended officially. However, the musicians stayed to play a few more songs, some with Elvis and some by themselves, as people were still dancing on rhythms which became more *Oriental* as time passed by, with only an infusion of Rock’n’Roll. The musicians seemed to have a good time, playing a few songs for the audience to dance, then taking a break, only to return to play some more. It seemed to me that it was improvised in the moment, as they saw the audience wanted some more music. A few minutes and mulled wines later, after some dancing and singing, we took our coats to leave, not before having one more cigarette.

We saw Elvis smoking outside and talking to people, and we went next to him. It seemed to me that he saw us and came to talk to us, especially as my friend was very eager to speak to him too. “You two look alike!”, he said to us (Fieldnote 078). We congratulated him for the show, saying it was great and definitely “something else”. He agreed and said that he is trying to do something else with

his music, to make people happy, but also to be a good example for his community. My friend told him that his daughter played very nice as well, and that you can see that he is very proud of her: “Yes, I asked her to come help me out, she is a good musician as well, I am proud of her” (Fieldnote 078). He added that he has four children in total. Before we left, I asked him with a fake-naivety if the last songs the musicians improvised for the dancing crowd were *manele*, as the rhythms and instruments sounded very Oriental and like party music: “Oh, no no, those were party music songs, not *manele*. It’s what we play, we mix with Rock’n’Roll as well...” he said, and I could see the teacher in him for a second (Fieldnote 078). While talking to him, a girl who seemed to be quite inebriated came towards us and positioned herself between Elvis and us, telling him in Romanian “Elvis, please give me a hug !!!” (Fieldnote 078). Elvis looked at her, but continued his conversation with us, either as he saw she was very drunk or because she interrupted our conversation. To my surprise, the girl fell to her knees, and stood there for a few seconds before standing up and leaving. Somehow, the whole image seemed pretty Rock’n’Roll to me.

It was already 01:30, so we decided to call it a night, although I would have loved to stay longer, talk to Elvis and see how the party developed. Before we left, we thanked Elvis for his show and for his time. My Dutch friend gave him a big hug, which Elvis returned warmly. We left having the memory of a very nice evening and feeling grateful for having the chance to talk with Elvis one on one.

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“[Tudor]’s such a nice guy”, I told Shaun, Elvis’ manager, when we met to chat over a coffee. He smirked, before saying “Yeah he is...I mean, he is also family...” (Fieldnote 090). Shaun is also the godfather of Tudor’s youngest child. He added that people regard him as Elvis’ manager, although he does it for free, because he has a large network and wants to help Tudor out. One of the things on his mind was that Tudor is usually eager to appear on television, as he believed this way the children in his community can see him. However, Shaun said that most TV shows that are interested in Elvis are not good publicity: “They see him as the strange Roma guy who imitates Elvis, they’re not interested that he also has a story to tell” (Fieldnote 090). Shaun was therefore not sure if the TV exposure would reach the community they want, as in the end he knew only of older people that found out about Elvis from TV. He told me some stories that I found very disappointing. Tudor prepared in advance for one morning show he was invited to and sent to the producers some material with his campaigns and activities in his community, where he helped build some schools. After seeing the videos, the show representatives called and asked if Tudor could just come in for 10 minutes and sing. When Shaun replied that Tudor would like to talk about his projects too, they said that perhaps it was better he came by another time and cancelled the meeting. On another show, the musician started to talk about his projects, but was promptly interrupted by the host, who asked him: “So, would you say that because of Elvis, you’re not dying out of hunger?” (Fieldnote 090). Apparently, Elvis replied diplomatically that he isn’t dying out of hunger because of his hardworking parents, who worked in a mine to support their children. During yet another show I saw online, Tudor was asked if his school helps lazy children graduate, the host using the word *puturosi* for ‘lazy’, which also means ‘stinky’. Tudor was visibly angered by this and said that the children from his Roma community have less chances and facilities in life. When the host explained he just meant ‘lazy’, Tudor once more explained that Roma children want to get educated, but their personal, financial and social situations make it very difficult (Antena 1, 2018). A girl also commented on the video page and said: “I am a student of Mr.

Tudor, and I am very happy with what I have learnt”. I asked Shaun about a recent radio show Elvis attended at Rock FM. “That was alright, actually, that was a bit different”, Shaun replied, and hoped to find more suitable platforms for his artist, and friend.

Chapter 4 Outro

The different ways in which Roma musicians choose to develop their talents and their musical activities are both heterogeneous and drawing on a musical tradition. In their own ways, each of the artists or teams covered in this chapter try to position themselves as different from what is being ‘known’, and to distance themselves from the stigma surrounding both the Roma community and the *manele* genre. CNCR’s efforts try to take it a step further and show the wide array of musical genres in which Roma are active, in order to not only fight the stigma, but break away from Roma stereotypes. Aurel Ioniță draws on his origins at the border of two different traditions of *lăutărească* music and positions Mahala Raï Banda as a Balkan product that is suitable for the West, which now helps the band find both status and success at home. Georgian Stanciu performs in different formations, navigating different genres and generally presenting himself and his family as highly skilled and educated musicians, ensuring a status among both the Roma and Romanian private events world. Tudor Lakatos finds freedom of expression in his Elvis alias, while also trying to step away from stigma and make use of his success to help his community. In most of these musicians’ repertoires, *manele* don’t take a central place, but a constant one nevertheless, mostly due to market dynamics. However, *manele* sometimes provide inspiration as well, besides the financial reward. While most of these artists are coming from families or communities of *lăutari*, in this Chapter I tried to bridge those musical activities that fall outside the standard *lăutărească* and *manele* genres, though as it could be seen in several cases, the lines are very blurry. In the next chapter, the musicians who chose to rediscover or perpetuate the traditional music are presented, in an exploration of *lăutărească* music artists and their stories.

Chapter 5: *Lăutărească* music

During the fieldwork I encountered many situations in which traditional *lăutărească* music was performed, either as an effort to go *against manele* or simply as another variation of the Roma musicians' diverse musical directions. I start this chapter by covering the *lăutărească* music contexts in which I was an observing participant: from *taraf* concerts in alternative bars downtown Bucharest, to charity events for the upcoming generation of *lăutari*. Shaun Williams, an American ethnomusicologist living in Romania and performing *lăutărească* music, provided many valuable insights into the male-dominated world of *lăutari*, as well as in the young crowds of Bucharest. His project, 'Corina Sirghi & Taraful Jean Americanu', is one of the successful examples of bringing *lăutărească* music to a diverse audience. Daniel, a young *lăutar* and former *manele* musician, has an interesting story about what made him give up *manele* and take another path. Last but not least, my field informant and great help George Rădulescu comes from a family of *lăutari* himself but did not choose the music path. His perspective on many topics covered in this research report is presented in the last part of this chapter, providing an organic wrap-up of the fieldwork results.

Introducing the *taraf* concerts

Arriving in Bucharest, I was expecting to find a wide range of places and situations in which *manele* are played or performed. What I did not expect was the amount of *taraf* concerts around the city, especially in hip places in the old centre. A *taraf*, as explained before, is the classic formation in which musicians, many times Roma, perform *lăutărească* music, customarily at events. The first participatory observation I did in my fieldwork was partaking in one such a concert – *Simion Bogdan-Mihai & Lăutarii de Matase*, roughly translated as Simion Bogdan-Mihai & the Silk *Lăutari*.

The concert was organised in Apollo 111, a bar / theatre in the centre of Bucharest, next to Cismigiu park. The combination itself was striking at first – traditional, *lăutărească* music in one of the alternative places in Bucharest frequented by millennials. When my friend and I arrived, the place was still empty although the show was scheduled to start soon. The bar itself was a large room, relatively dark, with a dim light coming from what looked like a massive balloon shining a pink light, hung from the high ceiling. For this event, the small stage was placed at the side opposite to the bar, in front of three long tables with around 20 seats each. Out in the smoking room there were not many people, but in the back, under a neon-lit ceiling, were three men who stood out – elderly men, with elegant but rather outdated clothes, smoking and talking to themselves. They were the *lăutari*. When going back in, I saw a young man with a black shirt and a moustache twisted at the ends, writing something on a piece of paper. I recognized him as the ‘leader’ of the *taraf*: Simion Bogdan – Mihai, a literature PhD graduate, the one who gathered various *lăutărească* music from the country and decided to tour together with the band. Surprisingly or not, he looked like part of the Apollo 111 crowd more than the *lăutari* did. While waiting at the bar, my friend overheard a group of young men jokingly asking themselves when they saw the young leader of the *lăutari*: “Is that the hipster that’s gonna play?” (Fieldnote 015).

Similar to the impression of the place, the crowd was not what I would have expect from a *lăutărească* music concert: young people, millennials, and yuppies. This made me ask myself if the concert had been somewhere at the outskirts of Bucharest, would it have brought the same crowd? As we sat down at a small bar table placed on one side, I noticed the stage was already prepared. An accordion, a bass, a hammer dulcimer and a *kobsa* (a lute used by *tarafs*) were placed on the stage, waiting for their masters. Behind them there hung a large poster, depicting the image of a man making a barbecue in front of what looked like an old yacht. All of this was pictured in front of what seemed like the entrance of a typical Bucharest communist apartment building. The image made me smile. On one hand, it was depicting a standard Bucharest apartment building scene, on the other hand it was pretty dramatic yet not impossible.

The concert started at 21:02, one hour after the scheduled time. It turned out the young man leading the band was also the singer and the kobzar (Figure 18). The first song started at full speed, with fast *lăutărească* rhythms filling the room. The crowd seemed relatively conservative, with little if any movement at first, except for one young man in the middle of the room who had been dancing since the first chords. He seemed very happy and apparently knew the lyrics as well. Seeing him so happy made me smile too. What struck me at the beginning was that in this context, *lăutărească* music – by definition a type of party or celebration music – seemed to be turned into room concert music, with a still audience applauding after each song. During the first songs (Figure 18), the only dance moves I saw were those of the tip of the foot, or the rhythmic slapping of the hand to the leg. As the

concert went on, I found myself observing each of the *lăutari*. They seemed completely involved in their playing, looking to the leader of the band for rhythm indications. When the crowd applauded them, they seemed both happy and a little bit shy. I found their faces to express a lot of kindness. During the first break, while my friend was waiting in line for a new round of drinks, she saw the three of them behind her and offered to give them her spot. They however refused, and said “oh no no, please, after you, miss” (Fieldnote 016).



Figure 18. Simion Bogdan Mihai & Lăutarii de Matase performing at Apollo 111 in October 2018 - Image hyperlinked to video material

Towards the end of the concert, it seemed like the crowd became more engaged. At the back of the room, where the bar was, people were dancing or at least applauding throughout the songs. There was more cheering at the end of the songs, and more calls for “another one!” (Fieldnote 016). Before the very end, the leader said that they would not “play that game, when we pretend to go, then you call - Bis! Bis! - and we come back. No. We also won’t do any dedications, or stuff like that...” (Fieldnote 016). Nevertheless, they played two more songs, as the audience was yelling “not one more, two! Two more!” (Fieldnote 016). And indeed, as the show ended and the crowd was getting livelier, the band kept their promise and left after a few more rounds of standing ovations. The musicians took their instruments and left the building after a few more drinks. I also headed towards home soon after, and while leaving, I noticed the music coming from the speakers of the bar was familiar. I soon recognised what it was - some *electro-manele* and *proto-manele*.

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Many similar events took place in Bucharest while I was in the field. For example, during the *Culese din Balkani* (“Handpicked from the Balkans”) anthropological film festival, a *taraf* called *Taraful*

Bucurestilor ('Taraf of Bucharest') performed one evening at *Clubul Taranului*, a restaurant within the Museum of the Romanian Peasant. The setting was different than that of Apollo 111, being more traditional. The tables inside were full, with people drinking and eating traditional foods, so I had to stay outside. The *taraf* was playing well known folkloric and *mahala* songs, and people were enjoying. Most of the crowd was young, with people in their 30s. At the back of the room, several people were standing up to dance next to their tables, in traditional *hora* movements.

The *taraf* and the tradition of *lăutărească* music was also covered during some documentaries played at the same festival. One of them, called *Muzica de petrecere* (party music), was about three young Roma children - one of 4 years old, one of 13 and one of 16 - who were pursuing their dream to become *lăutari*. It was a very touching documentary. The first boy was Giani, a four-year-old Roma who was trying to play his own small trumpet, like he saw his grandfather do in his *fanfare*. His mother was explaining how she came from a family of *lăutari*, and all men in her family were musicians. She hoped Giani would do the same, as he was very talented and loved to hear his grandfather play. She would like him to become a *lăutar* in order to have a good future. The second boy was 13 years old, and a talented young singer. He was shown performing in school during music class, together with his cousin who played the keyboard, and with his younger sister. The boy's idols were some *lăutari* and folklore music singers, as well as some *manele* singers. He said he wanted to focus on "party music", because that's how he thought he could make a living for himself in the future (Fieldnote 045). The documentary also showed the children rehearsing at home. At one point, they started playing one *manea*, which they treated like any other song. Last but not least, the 16-year-old boy was a young prodigy, playing the piano with great talent and focus. In one scene, he was playing as part of a band at a wedding, while the drunk guests were dancing or asking him to play certain songs, or even asked to join him in singing. That scene was rather touching, as you could see how much the teenager rehearsed and how talented he was, while at the wedding he was just part of the musical decor. His father said he supported his dream, however he wanted his son to also go to the Conservatorium to learn music, so that he would not end up playing only at weddings and private events. After this line, I heard some people behind me whispering "exactly..." approvingly (Fieldnote 045).

I noticed that the three people in front of me, who could have been in the early 20's, were laughing when Giani was first shown - either when he was trying to play his trumpet, or when his name was announced (Giani is not a typical Romanian name but is more common in the Roma community). After the documentary, during the Q&A, I was surprised to see some stereotypes of the Roma emerging from the moderator and the director of the documentary themselves. While asking the director if it was difficult to get the children to play for him, the moderator added rhetorically "well, I know for them, it's in their blood!" referring to musical talent (Fieldnote 046). The film director, asked about the moment when the children were playing a *manea*, said that they did not have any musical references. However, the comment which drew my attention was when the director said:

"well, I am a musician myself, I studied classic guitar, and you know, the children were genuinely happy that they managed to play that *manea*. Just like I used to be happy that my Bach rehearsal succeeded, they were happy they played that *manea* well." (Fieldnote 046)

On a different note, the director also said that at the countryside, party music or *lăutărească* music are still a tradition that gets passed from generation to generation, whereas in Bucharest parents encourage their children to do this for money, for the opportunities the job offers them.

Shaun Williams: *Taraf* Jean Americanu' & more

If the lyrics of manele are a problem, then how about Madonna? Or Aerosmith? Or pop-rock music in general? The lyrics of many rock bands are also very sexual.
(S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018)

Shaun Williams is a young American ethnomusicologist, who moved to Romania around 5 years ago to study *lăutărească* music. Travelling the country, he became quite well known among some *lăutari* groups, and nowadays he even performs as one, playing the accordion or the hammer dulcimer. One of his main projects is 'Corina Sirghi & Taraf Jean Americanu', a taraf he put together with several Roma musicians and with Corina Sirghi, a young Romanian singer that fell in love with old songs. Shaun is also part of Saraiman, a project that organises various musical events in Bucharest - from *lăutărească* music concerts to *manele* parties or charity events. Last but not least, he is Elvis Rromano's 'unofficial' manager as mentioned in the previous chapter, and since recently also part of his family.

Shaun got his name of 'Jean Americanu' from the *lăutari* he met during his fieldwork in Romania. He said that 'Shaun' was too hard to pronounce for many, so they decided to call him 'Jean the American', resulting in both a funny story and a good stage name for the ethnomusicologist who performs in different groups. I first saw him during the *Culese din Balkani* ('Picked from the Balkans') festival, where his documentary on a Ukrainian *taraf* premiered. I was very interested to hear his stories about *lăutari* from all over the country, as well as to understand his involvement in the *manele* scene in Bucharest. After I wrote him a message in English, he replied in perfect Romanian and we set up a first meeting. We met several times during the fieldwork, both for informal interviews and while attending the same events.

Sitting down with Shaun

Our first meeting took place at the beginning of November, in a cafe in the centre of Bucharest. If I hadn't known that he was American, I probably would have just assumed Shaun was a local. We sat down and started talking in Romanian. I first asked him what he thinks about *manele*. He smiled a bit, and said that he sees *manele* as party music, and he likes some songs, but not all of them. He also noticed they were quite popular among the 'hipsters', but he felt some might listen to the genre only because it's "cool" (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). He also considered the idea of *proto-manele* as being a hipster concept, "merely an invention" (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). With his Saraiman project, Shaun organises concerts and parties with *lăutari* and *manele* singers that he wishes to promote or help out: "It's a bit difficult [to be negative about hipsters], because we also profit off the hipster trend" (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). What I found very interesting is that the events of Saraiman also feature elderly *lăutari*, who cannot play at weddings anymore due to their old age. Playing at weddings, especially in more traditional contexts, is a rather heavy job as it involves performing for long periods

of time. They also don't usually have access to Facebook and social media, which Shaun called "the stock market of the *lăutari*" (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). Therefore, Shaun said, the project is born out of passion, as he wanted to give something back to the *lăutari* he encountered. He didn't plan to become an artist manager.

In general, Shaun believes *lăutărească* music is not appreciated by Romanians. While *muzica lăutărească* is different than *muzica populară* (standardized folk music, popular in rural areas and heavily promoted during the communist regime), many regard *lăutărească* music as "soviet nonsense" (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). In this respect, he compared Romania to former USSR countries. Unlike Romania, traditional music and instruments are still taught in education institutes in neighbouring countries like Ukraine and Moldavia. However, the music and instruments have been processed so that they become "classic", or more standard in a sense (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). Shaun said that Ceaușescu did not touch *lăutărească* music in Romania during communism. Instead, some elements from it were borrowed and turned into "etno" music, orchestrating melodies in a "communist manner" and censoring both lyrics and the Romani language (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). The *lăutărească* music has therefore remained more traditional and local than in Moldavia, where it was standardized. Therefore, Shaun appreciates the traditional elements of *lăutărească* music, as ethnomusicologist and activist for Roma rights.

He went on further to discuss about *lăutărească* music, and I did not interfere as I wanted to dive deeper into his knowledge. Shaun said that *lăutărească* music has not changed very much along the years, as it has been passed on from generation to generation by *lăutari*. This way, he said, *lăutărească* music remained an occupation, a job. An exception to this would be the *lăutari* from Bucharest or Chisinau (capital of Moldavia), which are slightly different as people from non-*lăutari* families sometimes take the musical path for the opportunities it provides. He believes the way Roma musicians are treated in Romania is worse than in the neighbouring Moldavia. The standardization of *lăutărească* music in Moldavia brought a difference in the status of the *lăutar*: Moldavian *lăutari* (*lăutari muzicanți*) are respected more than their Romanian counterparts, who Shaun believes receive almost no respect in many cases. On the other hand, he said that in Romania it is normal to be Roma and a *lăutar*, whereas in Moldavia this is less the case. He also talked about the song *Da-mi boierule nevasta* ("Boyar give my wife back"), which Gelu Duminica and others mentioned as the first song with Romani lyrics in the Romania territories during the slavery of the Roma. However, Shaun is sceptical about the actual age of the song and believes it is actually more recent. While looking in the Romanian Folkloric Archives he found almost no recordings of the song prior to 1952, when more recordings were registered. He also found in the lyrics the term MAT, which was a typical communist shop. Nevertheless, he said the age of the song is not very important - what's important is that it depicts the relation between the Roma and the *Gadje*.



Figure 19. Shaun Williams playing the accordion (Bondrila, 2018)

He gave the definition of a *lăutar* as someone who is implicitly Roma, who grew up with *lăutărească* music, and who comes from a family of *lăutari*. Otherwise, he believes, you are not a real *lăutar*. Although a male dominated field, some girls from *lăutari* families also follow their parents' footsteps, Shaun said. As passing on the skills is very important for *lăutari* families, some parents end up taking their children to more talented musicians for lessons. These lessons can add up to almost 100 EUR per month, which is not something easily afforded by everyone. This confirms what I heard from others such as Georgian Stanciu. Shaun does not regard himself as a *lăutar*, although he has been studying and performing the music for a while now among Roma musicians, and he speaks Romani (Figure 19). I was therefore curious to find out how he is perceived by other *lăutari*, as he is a foreigner. Shaun said that some might see some profit in him, as he is a foreigner who “learnt the trade”, while others like to play with him because they say he plays well (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). He said that there is no rule, and it mostly depends on the case and the person. He learnt to play *lăutărească* music from YouTube. While some *lăutari* say he plays well, others argue he doesn't know the right way to play, and that they can teach him. Some “classes” offered cost up to 200 RON per hour, he said while smiling ironically.

While I loved his stories about *lăutărească* music, I was curious to understand also how he views *manele* and how he thinks they influenced the musicians he encountered and studied. Some older *lăutari* refuse to play *manele*, Shaun said, as they get bored, or simply think of *manele* as “nonsense” (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). However, this made them loose ground (and audiences) to younger *lăutari*, who adapted to the needs of the market. He then talked about the wave of hatred against *manele* that started in the early 2000's. Since then, some *lăutari* and

Roma singers tried to take distance from *manele* as a music genre. He also believes that promoting *manele* is a political issue as well. For example, CNCR probably cannot promote *manele* as the funding it receives might be threatened, he believes. I briefly told him about my interview with Mihai Neacșu of CNCR, and about the course of Roma music that I attended, which ended on the note that *manele*, being sung in Romanian and reflective of the Romanian space, might be more the music of the non-Roma Romanians. However, Shaun did not agree completely. He said that it is not right to say that *manele* are the music of Romanians alone, as in many neighbourhoods where large Roma communities live *manele* are the music of choice:

“Anthropologically speaking, a culture is of those who use it on an everyday basis. Who always listen to *manele*, who cannot conceive having a wedding without *manele*? *Manele* are not exclusively Roma culture, but they are definitely Roma culture as well.” (Fieldnote 092)

The talk about *manele* being Roma music or not lead on another occasion to another discussion about the activity of CNCR. Shaun and I discussed the Romano Kher orchestra concert that we both attended, although we didn’t meet. While I liked it, Shaun was less impressed: “For me, as a musician, it was boring” (Fieldnote 091). He also mentioned how he felt it was unprofessional how the host and other organisers were scrolling on their phones while the orchestra was playing. Coming back to music, I told him I liked the concert. He didn’t seem to like it that much:

“First of all, the setup was so weird, you could only enter a row on one side, are they crazy?! Then, the stage was way too small for the musicians. For the dances, I couldn’t see anything, besides some moving heads - and those dances are all about the footwork!” (Fieldnote 091)

He also seemed to share my opinion about the crowd: “Half of them had to be there, and the other half were sent there” (Fieldnote 091). In general, he didn’t seem to be impressed by the activity of the CNCR. “They should do much more than this for the Roma culture. Why do you have to combine *muzica lăutărească* with classical music? I find *lăutărească* music very complex. Is it valuable only if combined with classical music?”, he asked rhetorically. His view on CNCR’s efforts differed from mine. I told him that many view the efforts of Neacșu as brave, or even crazy. “Crazy?! Why? There’s nothing crazy about it, the same old political events as always...” (Fieldnote 091). I nodded, while adding that the inflexibility and conservative direction of Romanian state institutions might also play a role in CNCR’s activity. From this perspective, CNCR’s current activities are still changing the status-quo of the Roma somewhat. “Well, that is interesting, maybe...so you mean that CNCR is bound by the political view on culture for funding...They should still do much more” (Fieldnote 091). I told him about the Roma dancers that performed and asked if that was what he meant by more *authentic* Roma culture. “I liked the dances the most actually! As much as I could see of them, I only saw some heads moving up and down, but yes!” (Fieldnote 091).

Overall, Shaun believes the hatred against *manele* is racial as well and recalled many conversations he had with Romanians who hate *manele* and complain about the “promiscuity of the lyrics” and so on (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). Shaun asked rhetorically: “if the lyrics of *manele* are a problem, then how about Madonna? Or Aerosmith? Or pop-rock music in general? The lyrics of many rock bands are also very sexual” (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). Shaun made a comparison between *manele* and the *gangsta* rap of the ‘90s that he was listening to secretly. Rap was viewed as something bad, the “white parents’ nightmare, a case of moral panic” (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). There was some racial

tension involved, but no one was talking about it, just as in the case of *manele*, Shaun believes. Gangsta rap was presented as “morally corrupt, moral decay” (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018), and while he said that, I saw the similarities with the elitist, anti-*manele* discourse in Romania.

Shaun also mentioned how many people dislike *manele* because they see *lăutărească* music as something of a higher moral value. He often hears that people dismiss *manele* while saying that “the music is not the problem; the offensive text is! It’s all about money and *dușmani* [enemies]... there is no more beauty and poetry in the lyrics, like in traditional *lăutărească* music” (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). However, he argued, *lăutărească* music has many times had a very similar rhetoric. Ioana Radu, a *lăutărească* singer for example, had a song which talks about her wish for her enemies to drink from a poisoned spring. Maria Tanase, perhaps the most well-known Romanian *lăutărească* and popular music singer, had many songs about curses and enemies. The “cash” theme appeared a bit later, in the 90’s, at the same time when migrant labour intensified as people started going abroad for work more. The 00’s brought the “wise guy” theme back, as it used to be present in the 1920’s rhetoric as well.

To my surprise, he also talked about two *manele* women singers that he felt were using *manele* as a tool against sexism: “One of them is actually branding herself a feminist *manele* singer, as she sings about being an empowered woman” (Fieldnote 092). Shaun himself met her, but I unfortunately didn’t have the time to do so. He also recalled a time when he went to a *manele* studio, and he was surprised by the way its activity worked:

“I was there, just observing, it’s crazy how these studios work. So on one hand they have people coming with some songs they recorded on a stick, and they want them produced. So they pay the studio, the studio then mixes the *manea* electronically, so much that the voice has nothing to do with the original, and off they go. And the other part is the more well-known artists who come there to have music and videos produced.” (Fieldnote 091)

He also went on to describe the women that perform in videos more or less naked:

“It’s a very interesting setup. People sometimes think these women are some easy, frivolous women, but in reality, they sometimes come there with their children, the camera rolls, they dance, and then leave after the shot is done. It’s not like they are pressed to be there or something, it’s just another gig.” (Fieldnote 091)

Shaun did not think that Bucharest has a Romani music scene. The ‘scene’ is rather depended on neighbourhoods and bars. He said there are a few places where *manele* are played, such as *La Mia Musica*, which is a bit expensive, *Hanul Drumetului*, or the former *La Tiganci* (‘At the Gypsy Women’s’), a restaurant whose clientele was almost entirely Roma, Shaun recalled. Macaz, the place where the *manele* party I attended happened, is a “non-racist” place, although there might not be a lot of Roma people coming there (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). Shaun told me that when a family of Roma living in a nearby abandoned building was evacuated in the middle of the night by authorities, the people from Macaz welcomed them, raised funds for them and helped out. However, he does not organise concerts there often, as Macaz is a ‘non-capitalist bar’ and the management usually don’t want to charge more than 10 Lei for the entrance, which Shaun finds to be too low for the musicians to actually get a fair pay. Regarding the *manele* parties in Ferentari, Shaun said he does find them a little bit weird. On the one hand, the people from the bars there always increase their prices when they see the hipster crowd coming to Ferentari. On the other hand, these

parties remind him of ghetto tourism, as middle class hipsters come to neighbourhoods that usually have a bad name, just to show off that they are in Ferentari: “You know, some take a picture so that they can say <<Look at me, I’m in Ferentari!>>” (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018).

Shaun said he liked our conversation, as he doesn’t often get to talk to people with the same ethnographic interests. I was surprised but also impressed with the extent of his network: he knew Mihai Neacșu from CNCR and had a good relationship with Aurel Ioniță of Mahala Raî Banda. He also knew George Rădulescu, my field help, and Mariana Sandu, the historian. He also mentioned Speranta Rădulescu, the Romanian ethnomusicologist that studies *lăutărească* music and, more recently, *manele*. This reminded me of her lectures I saw online, and the surprise I had when I heard her using the word *țigan* instead of *rom*. I decided to ask Shaun how he viewed the *țigan* vs. *rom* debate. The discussion about “Roma” or “Gypsy” is, according to Shaun, not about political correctness, but about self-identification. As an academic and a public person, he feels it is correct to use the term ‘Roma’, and he always uses it, unless the *lăutar* tells him to call him *țigan* (Gypsy). He recalled one moment when he was talking to some *lăutari* about to go to an event, and they mentioned they would play for “those Roma from the NGOs” (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). Shaun deducted that in a way, ‘Roma’ meant for the *lăutari* a segment of the Roma community that is higher educated and has a different social status, or that is active in the Roma NGO scene in Bucharest.

Although the schedule interview time was over, we talked a bit more about the Balkan context. Overall, Shaun’s opinions were in line with most literature on Balkanism and the Roma. He said *manele* are similar to other types of “post-Ottoman” music, like *chalga* in Bulgaria, as a result of the Ottoman past of the Balkan countries. Seen as ‘backwards’, ‘anti-elite’, ‘non-intellectual’, the Roma became grouped in with the Balkans, with the Balkan non-progressive ideas. “They are seen as a threat to Europeaness” (S. Williams, personal communication, November 9, 2018). Therefore, regarding music and *manele*, Roma musicians are also seen as the carriers of these particular types of music that draw on the Ottoman influences. He said the image of the Roma outside the Balkans is not much more different. As an example, he talked about Gypsy Lore Society, an organisation that wants to make the ‘Gypsies’ known to society. However, it is a mostly non-Roma organisation, a colonialist enterprise. One of their meetups happened in Bucharest a few years ago, but a few Roma activists boycotted the event. Some, on the other hand, went there. CNCR had a representative as well, with a presentation about the Roma holocaust, Shaun recalls.

Charity concert for ‘a little lăutar with big dreams’

As mentioned before, Shaun organises many events through his Saraiman project, such as Elvis’ concert covered in the previous chapter. At the beginning of December, he organised a charity concert in the same club, Londohome. The concert would raise money for a seven-year-old boy called Florentin (Figure 20). Florentin is from Clejani, the famous village that gave the world some of its most renowned *lăutari*. He is the great-grandson of Nicolae Neacsu, considered one of the greatest Roma violinists, who taught Caliu of *Taraf de Haidouks* to play the violin. Florentin’s grandfather is Tagoi, a well-known accordionist. The young boy got the music fever from his grandfather, next to whom he’s been playing *lăutărească* music, as well as some *manele*, on the piano. However, he needed to advance in his study of the instrument and move towards the accordion. As his family did not have the funds a

teacher would require, the event was organised. Presented as a “*lăutărească* party”, I was looking forward to the event, and hoped it would be a successful one.



Figure 20. Poster for the charity event featuring Florentin (left) and his grandfather Tagoi (right) (Saraiman, 2018) - Image hyperlinked to video material

The line-up itself was impressive: Florentin would play a few songs next to his grandfather, Tagoi. Caliu's nephew would play the violin, and the Frunza brothers would accompany them. Shaun was also to perform with his *Taraful Jean Americanu' & Corina Sirghi* project. All in all, a lively evening was expected. We arrived at 19:40, 20 minutes before the start. I already knew the place was not large, but most tables were already full. Another event was just finishing up, so after the people left, we managed to find a table in front of the bar. I had a quick look in the other room, where I saw the musicians

sitting at a table. I thought to myself that the event was probably going to start late again, seeing the setting up had just started.

Soon, more people started showing up. The place became full within minutes, becoming even more crowded than at Elvis' concert. However, there was still no one at the door to collect the donations (25 LEI recommended donation), so I kept the money in my hand. After two more girls sat next to me and my friend at the table, a few more started to find a small spot for themselves behind our seats. The club was packed.

It soon became certain that the concert would indeed be late. Around 20:30 the first violin sounds were heard, but they were only some sound checks. Soon after, a young man came to collect the donations. He had the Saraiman logo on his shirt and was going around the tables. We gave our donations and he moved on to the lady next to us, who asked if it's possible to give more than 25 RON. The first songs started and despite seeing how busy it was, I was still surprised I couldn't even manage to see the musicians while standing up on the chair. They started the set at around 21:00 with a very rhythmical *lăutărească* song, and they kept the pace for the following songs as well (Figure 20). I could see people's heads bouncing on the rhythm, and people at the bar dancing to the music. The second song was rhythmically more Oriental, making me think of *manele* rhythms. It was interesting to see how people became more animated once the song started. This made me think again about why *manele* are enjoyed by many - they have a simple but effective rhythm, and they purely make people dance, or at least shake their foot on the beat.

One of the things that impressed me most was the crowd. Being a charity concert, I shouldn't have been surprised that people were nice. However, I did notice how polite and smiling everyone was - from the busy bar staff to the people next to us who were trying to find an extra cm² of space. While sitting at the entrance of the concert room and trying to see something, a girl next to me invited me to go in front of her, where there was a bit more space, so that I could advance a little. There, three young people were dancing avidly on the music, and they also invited me to go a bit more to the front, where some other girls we met were. Looking around, I could see many familiar faces, and although I did not know them personally, I thought I probably saw them at other events I attended during fieldwork. I then thought that perhaps these events and the people involved are part of a sort of network, and that *lăutărească* music events or even some *manele* parties in the old centre have a small, but loyal following.

Around 22:30, the musicians took the first break, but as I couldn't stay longer, I left. *Corina Sirghi & Taraful Jean Americanu* had not started to play yet, and I later heard that the party lasted till early morning. Florentin, however, went to bed at around 23:00 at Shaun's place, as he was tired. I later saw on the event page that 3000 RON were donated, which covered around two months of lessons for Florentin. The information was accompanied by a picture of Florentin, watching carefully as his teacher explained the accordion notes in a music book (Figure 21).



Figure 21. Florentin (right) holding an accordion and watching his teacher explain music theory (Saraiman, 2018)

Corina Sirghi & Taraful Jean Americanu' concert

Corina, with the mahala music in the background, chooses to complete the urban landscape with an a-temporal voice for today, which makes it even more special, managing to revive old romantic songs and folklore, in a note that is both actual and nostalgic.
(Eventbook, 2019)

The last event I attended during fieldwork happened to be the concert of Shaun's main project, *Corina Sirghi & Taraful Jean Americanu'*. I couldn't go to his previous concerts, so I was looking forward to this event. However, by the time I wanted to buy the tickets, it was already sold out. I was happy for them, but sad for my missed opportunity. Shaun, however, was nice enough to put me and my mother

on the guest list but said that he unfortunately doesn't think there would still be places at the tables. I was very happy nevertheless.

On January 5th I therefore went to finally see them perform at *Clubul Taranului*, together with my mother, as I thought she would appreciate the music as well. As we arrived there, 15 minutes before the show was scheduled to start, the place was overflowing with people. The room itself was rather small by default, but the crowd made it look even more so. There were around 15-20 square tables where people were seated, but in between and especially in the back of the room people were standing up, squeezed to the walls. The hallway leading to the room was also full of people trying to find a place to see and listen to the music. With great struggle I found a place at the back of the room, opposite to the entrance, next to what looked like an empty bar.

The show started a bit later, which by now I was expecting. The repertoire was made of old *lăutărească* music songs. Corina Sirghi, the singer, was wearing a beautiful red dress, and sang like a bird. She was accompanied by Shaun at the accordion, and three other musicians playing the violin, dulcimer, and bass. After each song, the audience was applauding vigorously. There wasn't much dancing going on, mainly because some people were seated, while others were too stuck together to be able to move. Nevertheless, the music was beautiful, and we were very happy to see how the *taraf* was reinterpreting old songs (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Corina Sirghi (front) and Taraful Jean Americanu' (Raicu, 2019)
- Image hyperlinked to video material

However, we soon realised we were staying right behind an outdoor heater, placed inside the unused bar, which for some reason was on and burning hot. We decided to move behind the unused bar, which was a good decision as it also gave us space to dance. Towards the end of the set, Corina said that they will play a *manea*, “because I taught you wrong” (Fieldnote 099). I could hear some laughs from the crowd, and a more Oriental-sounding song began. I was not sure if It was a current *manea* or an older one, because live and with non-electronic instruments it sounded very different than what a *manea* usually sounds like. The crowd seemed to become more alive, and soon after I could hear people shouting song requests directed to the stage. After the end of the show, the audience asked for a ‘bis’ two times, and the musicians complied. They re-played two songs from the set, after which Corina said they were really done that time. The musicians left the stage while everyone was applauding, and the lights were put on again.

Daniel: *Lăutărească* music accordionist, former *manele* musician

The second time [the wedding guests] just went for it. They waited for me at the car, punched me and sliced the accordion belts off of me.

(D., personal communication, November 21, 2018)

Daniel is a 26-year-old musician who plays the accordion and the piano, as he studied for 12 years at the music school. He used to play *manele*, but now focuses on the accordion only, also as a way to change his image. He also works as a music teacher, one of his students being George. On the phone, he seemed like a very nice person, and already told me “you know, I don’t play *manele* anymore, but I have a lot of stories to tell” (Fieldnote 059). I told him I was excited to hear them over a coffee. He asked if he needs to prepare something, but I said that it would not be necessary. He only had time to talk with me after his work, so we agreed to meet at 19:00. Luckily enough, Daniel works close to the place I lived. I waited upstairs in the cafe for him, but decided to not take my laptop with me, in order to not make it too formal. While on his way, he called to tell me that he would arrive shortly, but that he is wearing his work clothes and hoped that was alright, which made me think Daniel was a very thoughtful person. When he arrived, I saw that he was probably my own age, so there was no need for formalities. Daniel said he was a bit tired from work and apologised throughout the conversation for being sleepy and a bit slow in talking. However, I did not mind at all. He had some interesting, but sad stories to tell about his musician career, and about life in general. I appreciated his time very much.

I already knew from Daniel that he had bad experiences with the world of *manele* that almost made him give up musicianship altogether. Therefore, the first thing I wanted to ask him was how he sees *manele* nowadays. He looked serious when he said that *manele* and the world around them used to be “alright” before (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). Even the people who said *manele* are not good music knew the lyrics, he said, which I completely agreed to. Nowadays, however, he thinks *manele* represent a bad world in which he doesn’t want to be involved anymore. He mostly plays folkloric, ‘etno’ music and party music like *lăutărească*.

Daniel had two main experiences that made him decide to put *manele* aside. In both occasions, his accordion was stolen. The first time, he was playing at a wedding with Denisa, a well-known *manele* singer who passed away recently. After their set, they put their instruments in the car. After the wedding finished, he went to the car to leave, only to find out the tyres had been sliced open and the window was broken. The accordion was gone as well. I asked him who could have done it, and he said that probably some of the guests there. The second time he was even more unlucky: “The second time they just went for it. They waited for me at the car, punched me and sliced the accordion belts off of me” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). I was surprised by how violent the event was, so I told him that as well. “Yes, that’s why I gave up *manele*. I didn’t want to have anything to do with that world again” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). Daniel also mentioned that it was a very unhealthy lifestyle, as everyone in that world consumes a lot of alcohol and sometimes drugs. Therefore, another reason he gave up *manele* was the fact that he himself started to use all kinds of substances. As he is also the father of a five-year-old, his priorities changed.

Daniel said that Romanians listen to *manele* as well, but not to all *manele* singers: “Romanians prefer Vijelie, Salam²⁵... but not everything. Nowadays, old *manele* are requested again, like Azur and Generic²⁶” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). I told him I saw both that these bands had recently performed at a venue nearby called Beraria H, and they both had had sold out shows. He said that at weddings, *manele* are being played after 2 o’clock and never before, as the people who might be disturbed by *manele* usually leave before that, and the people who enjoy them come later on at weddings. Nevertheless, he said that “nowadays, *manele* are played loud, as loud as possible, and this has nothing to do with musical culture” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). He added that “manele singers appear every day, but their success doesn’t. They saturated the market” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). This is something that I had been hearing in various forms from more people.

Coming back to his bad experiences, I asked him if he believes *manele* were to blame. He said that this was not the case, as the context of *manele* depends largely on the people that gather in certain circles. He said that “as long as you sing about ‘being number 1’, ‘being the boss’, ‘death to my enemies’ etcetera, you can imagine what kind of people you’re playing for” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). Daniel also believes that *manele* singers sometimes become “slaves” to the wealthy wedding guests who believe they can hold the musician “hostage” for hours, as long as they give him money for dedicating songs to other people:

“And not only that, sometimes you get in conflict with them. They say loudly <<look, I give him 25 million [2500 RON]>>, then he asks you [the musician] whispering in your ear to give him back 20 [2000 RON]. Then again, <<I give him 15 million! [1500 RON]>>, and tells you as a musicians to give him back 11 [1100 RON]. Sometimes, at the end of an event, when people get drunk, they forget how much they gave you and how much you gave them back and become aggressive. It’s not a nice environment.”

(D., personal communication, November 21, 2018)

He gave the example of Dani Mocanu (Figure 23), a rather controversial *manele* singer (even more than the regular *manelist*), who, according to Dani, “has nothing to do with music. He has six or seven songs on YouTube, and all he sings about is prison, drugs, heavy stuff...” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). I later searched online for Dani Mocanu and indeed, the themes were easily identifiable, even for the non-Romanians. One song, linked to the image below, is called *Am bani de ma enerveaza* (‘I have so much money that it annoys me’), and talks about being a mafia boss whose money can solve all issues in life, bribe politicians, policemen and even death itself.

²⁵ Popular *manele* singers

²⁶ Party music bands popular in the 80’s - 90’s, whose songs are nowadays regarded in certain circles as proto-manele



Figure 23. Dani Mocanu in his music video for “Am bani de ma enerveaza”, in a scene depicting him raising from the coffin after bribing death - Image hyperlinked to video material

I asked Daniel if he knew about the *manele* parties organised in Ferentari or in the city centre. He seemed very surprised by the Ferentari parties, as he himself lives in the neighbourhood, and asked me to find an article about the events. I found something, although not what I wanted, and gave him to read: “I cannot imagine where these parties would be, there are no big clubs there!” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). I told him that they were organised in small bars, and that people come there by taxi or even by minivans. He seemed intrigued, as well as sceptical: “I can imagine it’s like a holiday for some, something new, to come to Ferentari” he said, partially serious.

When comparing *lăutari* and *manele* singers, Daniel said that first of all, they have a different reputation, and a different civic sense: “*Manele* singers sometimes don’t pay their fellow band members” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). He said this happened to him as well a few times, when the *manele* singer, seen as the leader of the band, left after a certain event with all the money, and without paying him or other band members. To my surprise, he mentioned that during winter times, many people play for free in various bars and only rely on the tips they get. Daniel also mentioned that the *manele* world and themes changed along the years - the first *manele* were sung by Dan Armeanca, Daniel said, having lyrics about love, and songs such as *Se marita Mona* (“Mona gets married”) were widespread. When *manele* became popular in the 00’s, the songs were still about love, but “now it’s adapted. If you sing to the right guy and call him ‘the boss’, that gives you 100 million RON [10000 RON]” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). He also gave the example of a local PSD ²⁷ group, party currently in power in Romania, heavily criticised by a large segment of the population and most of the diaspora. Before a civil protest announced for 10 August 2018, when Romanians from abroad said they would come home to join the protest, a local PSD organisation had a party: “You remember that song, <<Let the diaspora come>>?” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). I did indeed - a *manea* was sung at the event by a singer, the chorus saying, “Let the diaspora come / Coz we gonna piss on it” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). Also,

²⁷ PSD is the abbreviation for ‘Partidul Social Democrat’, the Social-Democrat Party

he mentioned the wedding of the PDS leader's son, Dragnea, also a heavily controversial politician. Florin Salam was the lead act, making Daniel critical of the artist's involvement in "dirty" politics, among those with questionable morals (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). I asked Daniel how he felt about the fact that *manele* are labelled as the music of the Roma. He did not disagree with the statement, adding ironically that "who launched the first *manele*, Fuego ²⁸?" (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). He went on to talk about how for many people, *manele* are a good way of earning some extra money, recalling of a man who worked as a painter during the week, and sang *manele* during the weekend, earning up to 500 EUR / weekend.

Changing the topic to Romania and discrimination, I asked him about the difference between *Gypsy* and *Roma* as terms. He said the terms are very different, and that *Gypsy* should be someone who acts in a bad way. However, he said that his father, who spent his life working hard for a big record label, was often called a "Gypsy" or a "crow" (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018): "I am a bit luckier, let's say, because I am mixed [Roma father and non-Roma mother], so my skin is lighter. Although it sometimes happens to me as well [to be called a Gypsy or another derogatory term]" (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). Daniel seemed depressed when talking about these issues: "We will never recover", he said, about both Romania and the Roma of the country. "We have two Roma in the parliament, that's it..." he said disappointed, seemingly also in the efforts (or the lack of) done by these Roma (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). Daniel said that discrimination against the Roma is also partly the fault of the Roma themselves. He recalls how sometimes when he played at weddings, he was called various names: "You cannot let people call you like that" (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). He said that some *manele* players who get insulted during their work still continue to do their job, as "they live well, not only the big *manele* players, but also the small ones" (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018).

Daniel said that he also listens to some *manele* here and there, to know what is being requested at weddings. He seemed to still play one or two songs if requested, but he was not going to the old circles where he had had bad experiences. He said that many *manele* are covers of foreign songs. He gave the example of Dorel de la Popești, a *manele* / party music singer, whose songs people dismiss. Daniel said Dorel de la Popești has some *manele* which are covers of Luis Miguel songs (Puerto Rican singer): "People have no culture, they don't know when they're listening to good music" (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). I asked Daniel what he thinks about those who are strongly anti-*manele*. He said promptly: "If you don't like something, you don't listen to it. There are other things more important than *manele*. If you make fun of *manele*, you can easily make fun of many other things" (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). He added that people are perhaps annoyed by those who sing and have bad grammar, because they associate *manele* with "antisocial people, and with a certain behaviour" (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). Daniel said that during parties and other events, people have adapted, but not totally: "At weddings you now have first a *cvartet* playing, then *manele*" (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). He also said that not all Roma musicians are *manele* players, as some have only started to play *manele* in order to adapt to the demand.

Daniel said that after high school, he enrolled in a distance learning bachelor program in management, but according to him, he was unlucky as at the Dinu Lipatti Music High School no one taught anyone any math. Therefore, he felt he did not understand anything during his bachelor. To support himself and his family, he started to play at various events, but soon he could not manage anymore with the busy schedule. As he got married young, he abandoned school in the end. Daniel

²⁸ Folkloric music singer, non-Roma

seemed sad about this and said partially jokingly that “I should've stayed unmarried, to be with the same woman for 7 years, and I am 26 now.... And to have a five-year-old son...It's not easy” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). Besides music, he said he's passionate about cooking, but it is difficult to start with this new direction, as cooking is a rocky path.

Reflecting on the large number of people who decide to become *manele* players after finishing the Conservatorium, he said that “there are 500 people applying for a teaching job afterwards. What else could these people do?” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018). Talking about *manele* and career change, he mentioned Liviu Pustiu, a former *manele* singer who got out of the Romanian *manele* scene and now has concerts in America, focusing mostly on *lăutărească* music and folkloric music. Daniel added that sadly, people who wanted to focus on playing an instrument well and to make a career out of it left Romania: “trust me, if I could, I would go tomorrow as well” (D., personal communication, November 21, 2018).

George Rădulescu: Field informant

Besides being my field entry and informant, George is also coming from a family of *lăutari*. However, he did not follow the tradition, and only recently became interested in music and is currently learning his ways around the accordion. He also learnt to speak Romani later in his life, as at home it was not being spoken. George is a sociologist and has been working in many NGOs active in the Roma community, while currently he is working as a therapist as well. Although not a musician, I found his story, of someone coming from a *lăutari* family but not choosing the musical path, as a different example of the diversity of Roma identity work. I therefore chose to dedicate this last section of the results to George as in a way, his views and life experiences provide a great wrap of the three results chapter, bridging the context of the Roma and identity work, *manele* and the tradition of musicality.

*

“What do I think about *manele*? Haha... well... I had two phases in relation with *manele*...”, George said amused during one of our first field conversations (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018). He told me that when he was young, he used to go with his father to various weddings and events where his father was playing. He remembers seeing happy people, which gave him a good feeling. He added: “these were nice weddings you know, with all the Romanian traditions... with the stealing of the bride²⁹ and all that, but not like in Bucharest, with all guests going in the street to yell and all...” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018). He saw his father also going around the tables, receiving money so that he would play specific songs, as *lăutari* many times do.

When he moved to Bucharest, George lived in the Berceni neighbourhood, a place at the outskirts of Bucharest with a rather negative reputation, where a lot of Roma people live as well. He said that one day he heard from the nearby block of flats a very loud sound, which sounded like “Gypsy” music but was different than what he knew. He asked his neighbour, a Roma woman, what was happening there. She replied: “oh, those wiseguys there listen to *manele* all the time” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018). She did not sound happy. George remembered hearing “those 90’s *manele* lyrics, about being number 1, being a boss, a wiseguy” and not liking what he heard (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018). His first encounter with *manele* was therefore in Berceni, Bucharest.

He went on to tell me how his group of friends used to get together at parties, where there was usually one person who had a copied *manele* videotape. People were quite proud to show it, George recalled. He remembered seeing Adrian Copilu’ Minune (roughly translated ‘Adrian the Wonder Kid’), one of the most well-known *manele* singers, and seeing how people were throwing cash at him:

“It was a weird image for me...to see Adrian Copilu’ Minune, a short guy with a kid’s voice, accompanied with a band of tall guys behind him, and people from the audience throwing cash at him. He was drowning in it. It was weird.”

(G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018)

²⁹ Romanian wedding tradition, when the family or friends of the groom take the bride away to a location outside the wedding venue. The groom must find the bride and pay the ‘kidnapers’ off in order to get her back.

George later on saw Adrian live at an event, and remembered when his disgust for *manele* started:

“The godfather went to Adrian to give him 1 million LEI (100 RON), and then seemed to want to go away. Adrian started to chant in the microphone, in the *manele* style: <<1 million from the godfather! 2 million! 3 million!>> and I could see the godfather feeling a bit uncomfortable. He felt like he had to give more money.”

(G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018)

The godfather ended up giving 600 RON, which made a very bad impression on George: “From that moment on, I was done with *manele*. It looked like slavery” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018).

George said he was on a ‘*manele*-free cure’ for three months after the event. However, he said he only lasted the three months as he couldn’t resist to stay without *manele* any longer, and this made me smile. He said he likes *manele*, although not all of them – he likes the instrumental parts the best, as he doesn’t care that much about the lyrics. He felt the instrumental parts are very difficult and that the musicians are very skilled. I expressed my appreciation for Florin Salam’s live band. He nodded and said he once saw him live and had goose bumps for three hours straight. *Manele* give him a very happy and uplifting feeling: “The feeling I get from them is great, I could even meditate on those songs” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018). George recalled how he had played *manele* on a long drive and time just flew by. He also bought an accordion to try play the *manele* instrumental parts that he liked: “And guess what, I couldn’t do it. They were too complicated for me”, he said admiratively (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018). Currently, he is being taught to play the accordion by Daniel, who used to be George’s student in a personal development course.

George however thought that *manele* lyrics are a bad influence on people. During his work with Sastipen he went to various Roma communities in Romania. He said that one of the questions he had to ask children in a particular program was

“<<what do you wanna be when you grow up?>> You know what they answered mostly? That they want to be *manele* singers. Or that they want to be a wiseguy. I then asked them <<what do you mean by ‘wiseguy’?>>, and they replied <<a wiseguy, a *barosan*³⁰, like Salam sings about>>.”

(G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018)

Therefore, George told me that various Roma NGOs tried to delimit themselves from the *manele* universe. He also recalls his one-year coaching at the Dinu Lipatti Music High School in Bucharest, where he also met Daniel. He said there were many extremely talented children there, among which a lot of Roma students. They also wanted to become *manele* players, and when asked why, they answered “well, you know, to make a bit of money...” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, October 5, 2018). George said these children were sometimes making 150 EUR per event back then already, and now they are having a very good financial situation.

During our many talks trying to identify potential interviewees, George had a lot of insight in the musician field which influenced my field activity. He mentioned that elderly *lăutari* might be difficult to connect with, as they are shy and mostly reply monosyllabically. While he initially

³⁰ *Barosan* is roughly translated as *boss* or *big guy*, referring to a well-off person. The term is widely used in some *manele* with the wealth theme

suggested it might have been an interesting idea to go to a *lăutar*'s home and see him practice, he soon agreed with his colleague that said that “as she’s a young girl, [the *lăutari*’s] wives will probably not let her be there” (Fieldnote 020). *Manele* musicians were also a bit difficult to reach. After coming up with a few names, George told me that in general, a lot of *manele* players are rather sexist and do not interact well with women: “What can I say, a lot of these guys are a bit, well, churlish. They think that if you’re a nice girl, treating them with respect, that it means you like them, and they start hitting on you. They don’t treat women very well...” (Fieldnote 056). He therefore explained that this was the reason he had to be careful who to recommend to me. He also talked about some bigger names in the industry, like Florin Salam and Adrian Copilu’ Minune, but considered they would not be good leads, as either they often asked for money in return for interviews or were “a bit of a wiseguy” (Fieldnote 056).

Towards the end of fieldwork, I checked in with George to ask for more insight into different matters that came up. One of the first questions was related to my impression that he didn’t like Gelu Duminica’s course on the history of Roma music, so I asked him to elaborate. He said that indeed he is not very keen of the course, and he called it a *bufoneala*, or a “mascarade”. He said that he would maybe see such a lesson at the end of a more in-depth course about Roma history and music, and not as a course on its own, as it is maybe “not enough” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, December 21, 2018). George mentioned that at some past editions, the musicians brought there were not behaving accordingly, as they were hitting on girls and saying to each other thing such as “Hey, have you seen that one? Did you see her? [George imitating the musicians]” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, December 21, 2018): “He asked me - Gelu - what I thought about the course. And I told him that I think it’s a mascarade and I don’t know if it’s well to do it like this, to bring those musicians there” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, December 21, 2018).

I also told George about my experience at the Romano Kher concert, and asked him about the political tensions between Mihai Neacșu and Varga. He put it rather in a political light, saying that it’s a complicated dynamic between who supports who, and which political parties back up who. Varga being a PSD member, and Neacșu having an NGO background, George said there was some friction: “It’s about measuring muscles” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, December 21, 2018). George went on to explain that there is a lot of bureaucracy involved in the content of CNCR, as CNCR is an organisation under the Ministry of Culture. Regarding the content of the concert, George agreed with Shaun’s vision that *lăutărească* music doesn’t need to be given a classical twist in order to be valuable: “If I were to organise the event, I would bring 200 *lăutari* on the stage. I’d ask them prior to learn 4-5 songs, and the rest - improvisation! Whatever they feel like playing” (G. Rădulescu, personal communication, December 21, 2018).

Besides *manele* and music in general, I had the opportunity to talk to George about matters such as identity of the Roma. Amongst others, he told me that many times people think he is not Romanian, because while he is dark skinned, his beard and style don’t fit the Romanian’s view of what a Roma looks like. Even a few minutes before we met, while he was shopping for his children, the shop assistant was trying to speak to him in English: “I used to be a bit pissed and say <<Man, I’m Romanian! I am Gypsy!>>, but now I don’t even bother anymore, I just let them have it their way” (Fieldnote 055). I smiled as I found this to be quite a surprising circumstance, but I saw that George was not laughing. I realised that these situations must mean something more serious to him. I apologised and acknowledged that the situation was a problem to him:

“oh yes, yes, it is, a big one I would say. I’ve had this a lot, also during my therapy sessions. I see people’s expressions when they come in for the first time, and ask <<are...are you...Romanian?>>, and I always say <<yes, yes, I am>>. But I got used to it I guess.”

(G. Rădulescu, personal communication, December 21, 2018)

Chapter 5 Outro

Similar to *manele* events in the centre, many *lăutărească* music concerts took place in popular clubs and bars, but were mostly seen as less outrageous, and more of an occasion to enjoy the traditional music of Romania. In some ways, *lăutărească* music is a safer zone than *manele*, either metaphorically – as less stigma is linked to *lăutărească* music than to *manele*, or physically – as in Daniel’s case, who gave up on *manele* due to the dangers it involved. The *lăutărească* music contexts I observed were in general widely appreciated by both the young and the old, be it due to a need for returning to a musical place of tradition and skill, or by contrast, to exoticize an old musical tradition in the cityscape. The music was generally regarded with a mix of nostalgia, appreciation or exoticism. While all Roma musicians encountered came from *lăutari* families, the ones covered in this chapter chose to identify themselves with this line of musical tradition: while the musicians in Chapter 4 positioned themselves as different than what is ‘known’, the ones presented in Chapter 5 take their ‘characteristic’ *lăutărească* music into their present. Of course, many *lăutari* perform customarily at life events, such as Daniel. Others, such as Shaun’s team or *Lautarii de Matase*, reach new audiences and places, sometimes in hybrid formations, with younger / non-Roma members or leaders. Last but not least, *lăutari* represent a Roma group, not an inherent musical path and talent, and the brief case of George stands as an example of this.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The research problem I based this thesis on was the brief existing academic work on the way the Roma musicians engage with their ‘internal Othering’ in their own countries, and with the colonialist-like portrayal of their community, despite the existence of various works on the re-appropriation of musicality stereotypes by the Roma musicians on transnational stages and the exoticisation of Romani music. In Romania, little attention is awarded to the way Romanian Roma musicians experience negative stereotypes and how these stereotypes might be linked to the *manele* musical genre. I therefore positioned this research amidst two main debates: one around the anti-*manele* discourse, the other one on the portrayal of Roma identity in ethnographic studies. Within the first debate, I followed the works of Todorova (2009) on Balkanism, advanced by authors like Haliliuc (2014) and Beissinger et al (2016) in the study of the *manele* phenomenon. The latter authors argued that the elitist anti-*manele* discourse draws on Balkanism and portrays the Roma as the inner Other of Romania, dismissing *manele* by association with the ethnic community. This contradicts those employing the elitist discourse, who argue that elites are against *manele* as they represent a threat to the moral values of the Romanian society. At the same time, I took the stance of Kapralski (2005, 2007) who argues that there is a standard structuralist portrayal of the Roma in ethnographic studies depicting the ethnic group as having a rather fixed, a-temporal and inflexible identity dissociated from change and the flow of time. According to the author, this representation of the Roma does not reflect the dynamism of Roma culture and identity. I therefore employed Tilley’s (2006) post-structuralist understanding of identities as responsive to change and flexible across time, arguing that collective identities follow the same dynamics, although they always draw on collective traditions which might be perceived as static. Therefore, I maintain that different Roma musicians engage in dynamic identity work drawing on the *lăutari*’s tradition of musicality. This results in processes of identity construction that are adaptive to socio-political changes and are rooted in traditions while remaining heterogeneous at the same time. I start the discussion below by diving into the Balkanist discourse and its implications encountered during the fieldwork, and later describing the identity work done by the Roma musicians I came across. I then present the potential weaknesses of my research and how they might influence the results, before I end the chapter by summarising the theoretical implications of the overall findings as a bridge to the conclusion chapter.

The anti-*manele* discourse in Romania draws on Balkanism, portraying the Roma as Romania’s internal Other. In other words, my findings suggest the anti-*manele* discourse is about the frivolity and superficiality of *manele* themes and imagery only on the surface. In essence, the stigma around the music genre reflects a society whose morals and mentality are heavily influenced by Balkanism, drawing on nationalist feelings, like Todorova (2009) mentioned in her description of Romanian Balkanism. Roma are customarily framed as simply non-Romanians, non-European, the ‘internal Other’ living amongst the ‘civilised’ Romanians, while Roma musicians are seen as the carriers of Oriental flavours in both culture and mentality. At the same time, I believe the findings of this research suggest that the anti-*manele* discourse goes further than Balkanism, and sometimes reflects the antigypsyism present in Romania. Below I first explain why the findings suggest Balkanism stands as base for the anti-*manele* discourse, and later I discuss my position on antigypsyism.

Mihăilescu argued that “Romanians have a Balkan ego and an Occidental superego” (Beissinger et al, 2007), which are many times in conflict. I found this to be an excellent analogy of *manele* as a

socio-political phenomenon. From a psychological perspective, the ego represents reality, with its social norms and etiquettes. The superego, on the other hand, represents morality, the sense one has about their ideal self, which can result in guilt if the moral rules are not followed (McLeod, 2016). Therefore, in Mihăilescu's vision, the Romanian social norms and everyday behaviours are Balkan-influenced, drawing on Romania's history intertwined with the other Balkan states. Similarly, the imaginary picture of how the Romanians *should* be is inspired by the West, against the 'barbaric' Balkan essence of the region. The contrast between the two does not result only in conflict between those who enjoy the *manele* and those who reject their Balkan flavour, but also in a sense of *guilt* which can be seen in the discrepancy between the popularity and stigma of *manele*.

This discrepancy between the popularity and reputation of *manele* was very visible during fieldwork. While most people interviewed mentioned that *manele* are a musical trend started in the 90's leading to the almost indisputable presence of *manele* during life event celebrations, most public opinions about the genre are negative. In general, the findings suggest that *manele* are controversial as they have materialistic and sexual lyrics, are associated with the underworld, and with the Roma, which is aligned with the existing literature on the subject (see Stoichiță & De La Breteque, 2012; Haliliuc, 2014; Oancea, 2016). The 'schizophrenia' of requesting *manele* while disassociating from them, as Mihai Neacșu of CNCR called it, is apparent in the many stories told by interviewees and seen during participatory observation. Aurel Ioniță mentioned attending high class parties where *manele* were playing, as well as performing for events where people were dressed as 'Gypsies' in order to have a cover in case they are seen dancing on his music. *Manele*, therefore, can be seen as a 'guilty pleasure' for many. *Manele* musicians are sometimes regarded as highly skilled, especially by other Roma musicians. Mihai Neacșu of CNCR, despite not including *manele* in the centre's cultural programme, found *maneliști* to be very talented and explained that the stigma these musicians have to face is due to their ethnicity and their link to *manele*, as well as due to the 'showing off' of many established *manele* musicians. He also argued that many non-Roma musicians admire *maneliști* for their talent, although not expressing it publicly. In my perspective, the fact that despite the popularity of *manele* and the demand for the genre, *maneliști* are still dismissed as proper artists, further enhances the status of the Roma as Romania's internal Other. Therefore, the feelings of guilt or repulsion towards *manele* can be explained as a reaction to the Balkan 'ego' of Romanians and their Balkanist 'superego', the former concentrating the cultural narcissism present in Romania's stance of rejecting its Balkan status (Todorova, 2009).

Similar with Mihăilescu's idea that "the story of *manele* is parallel to that of Romanians" (Beissinger et al, 2007), I believe the evolution of Romanian's attitude towards *manele* is also parallel with the evolution of Romania. In other words, under the Ottoman and Phanariot domination, Oriental music (or what we nowadays call old *manele*) were highly regarded as they were connected to the boyars and the ruling class. Later on, as Romania wanted to get out of the domination of the East and to gaze towards the West, the Oriental rhythms became regarded as something of a lesser nature. Therefore, the popularity of *manele* might be perceived as a step backward towards a less *developed* version of the nation. Meanwhile, Balkan sister-genres of *manele* are sometimes received better than *manele*, and at times regarded as the original source for the Romanian songs. One of the explanations of this (found with both Roma and non-Roma) was that these similar genres are simply not sung in Romanian, therefore they are not *manele*, so they are stigma-free. This line of discourses can be regarded as part of the ethnic ontology strategy of escaping the Balkans, developed by Antohi³¹ (2002,

³¹ Sorin Antohi has a controversial academic career, being suspected for being a former communist informant, for fraud, and for plagiarism, among others. Nevertheless, I found his strategies for 'escaping the Balkans' appropriate for reflecting on the

in Kiss, 2017), a strategy which involves the many discourses addressing a unitary Romanian uniqueness. Therefore, these other Balkan genres are enjoyed publicly more easily as they are regarded as separate from the Romanian context, and not influencing the perceived Romanian uniqueness. By contrast, *manele* and their Roma performers link Romania tightly to its Balkan context, and therefore contradicting the ‘Romanian uniqueness’ thesis. Another similar example is the ‘Balkan Gypsy’ image that Mahala Raï Banda promotes, which now attracts more audiences in Romania, after the band has already gained international support. This is a case of that Antohi calls the strategy of sublimation – transforming Balkan characteristics into products suitable for the international market.

The very same friction between *manele* and the ‘elites’ against them feeds into the increasing presence of *manele* in the alternative scene of Bucharest, populated mainly by yuppies. Here, the Oriental foundations of the genre are a way of going against the (main)stream, to “free ourselves from the norms of the West” and to “revolt while dancing on *manele*” (Fieldnote 057, 12 November 2018). The extent to which these events reflect an anti-mainstream stance based on a deeper dissatisfaction with societal injustice, or one based solely on a wish to follow trends, was debatable amongst most people interviewed during fieldwork. Most Roma people interviewed see *manele* events among the young *gadje* as purely a ‘trendy’ activity. A few, like Georgian Stanciu, regard them as a normal thing, as “*manele* are danceable music” (G. Stanciu, personal communication, November 20, 2018), reflecting one of the simple explanations I found around the ‘popularity vs. reputation’ context of *manele*: if the stigma is taken away, *manele* remain rhythmic, party music meant to be enjoyed lightly. Using Antohi’s framework of ‘escaping the Balkans’, the *hipster manele* parties can be seen as a result of the sublimation strategy mentioned beforehand. Therefore, *manele* and other Romani music become acceptable when framed (and tamed) as Westernised concepts: parties in alternative downtown clubs; *manele*-hybrid styles like *electro-manele* mixed by non-Roma DJ’s; or ‘exotic’ theme parties reminding of slum tourism in poor neighbourhoods like Ferentari, where non-Roma can act like stereotyped Roma. No matter the line of analysis around these events, the increasing presence of *manele* amidst the alternative circles of Bucharest seemed to leave out one important group – Roma people, who are only fugitive presences in these contexts, many times still as performers, and less as participants. At best, Roma musicians perform at *manele* parties while the social activist *gadje* enjoy the music in an effort of break down the walls between the Roma and non-Roma. At worst, Roma are further essentialised and exoticised as non-Roma dress up in ‘Gypsy’ clothing and imitate the dance moves of *maneliști*, while proudly saying they have been to Ferentari.

Therefore, the Balkanist discourse around *manele* has a negative effect of the Roma. In many ways, *manele* put forward several embedded Roma stereotypes – criminality, corruption, lascivity or wealth acquired through illegal means. This attribution of negative characteristics to the Roma also stands as an example of how antigypsyism can manifest online, as shown by Asociația “Impreună” (2016), covered in Chapter 2. Thus, the themes of *manele* can feed into antigypsyism, which manifests then into derogatory terms about the Roma depicting criminality and bad behaviour. As seen previously, these stereotypes are also found in the Balkanist portrayal of the Balkan space. However, the Roma of Romania become the objects of this essentialisation as Romania’s internal Other. Although not related directly to music, some interviewees used self-humour to position themselves towards these stereotypes around their minority: Aurel Ioniță describing how the Roma are portrayed as having hats, moustaches, and a horse, or Georgian Stanciu saying he had not stolen anything when a shop attendant came running after him. Although the themes of *manele* many times perpetuate these stereotypes, most people interviewed argued that *manele* convey these themes due to market

condition of *manele* and the Roma, and I briefly refer to them, without them representing the main theoretical framework of this thesis report.

demand, adding that not many musicians can afford to go against it. In practice, *manele* sometimes reflect the dark history of Roma slavery. Many people interviewed were bothered not as much by the lyrics of *manele* and their imagery, as by the custom of dedicating songs at weddings, when a musician receives money to perform certain songs. Albeit a custom open to all guests, mostly the wealthy make use of it, ending up monopolising the musical program and keeping the musicians stuck in a process of performing his identity as entertainer. The guest giving money positions himself as ‘a boyar’ or ‘a boss’ which reminds some of the historical position of the Roma as slaves. Thus, Roma musicians performing *manele* on various occasions are caught in a Balkanist vicious circle, between *manele* as financial opportunity, and the lack of other alternatives or role models. This leads to their further essentialisation, and replicates on some occasions the former relationship between the boyar and the Roma entertainer, a relationship perpetuated into the present-day context of Roma musicians.

Moreover, I believe the anti-*manele* discourse, drawing on Balkanism and therefore on the history of Romania, is also reflective of the widespread antigypsyism present in contemporary society, and thus doesn’t only mirror a rejection of the Balkan space. In this respect, I consider the comparison of *manele* with other music styles a good example from the fieldwork. Many other musical genres and international artists make use of promiscuous texts and bold imagery, without receiving the same critical attention as *manele*. On top of that, not only *manele* are rejected publicly, but anything seemingly *Gypsy*. Some Roma interviewees also indicated that racism is one explanation for the hatred of *manele*, although they might not have named it explicitly or without further inquiry from my side. One mentionable exception is Mariana Sandu, Roma historian, who does not believe Romania displays social racism towards the Roma, but only institutional racism which many times takes the form of discriminating the lower class. Nevertheless, the existence of antigypsyism in Romania is based on numbers as well, as presented in the Introduction (Tileaga, 2006) and in Chapter 2 (Asociația “Împreună”, 2016). Therefore, I believe that being against *manele* is not only about protecting the ‘morality’ of Romanian society, and it goes further than the framing of the Roma at Romania’s internal Other. It is about rejecting a social class and an ethnic group that are customarily associated with the world of *manele*. Therefore, my findings suggest that antigypsyism is also at the base of the anti-*manele* discourse, drawing on both a case of classism, as explained by Mariana Sandu, and on racism against the Roma ethnic group. This complements the view of Stoichita & De La Breteque (2012) who see ethnicity as the cultural background in the debates around *manele*. Nevertheless, the two authors add that the popularity of *manele* among Romanians might show a change in the perception of Roma culture – a point that I disagree with on the basis of my findings which suggest otherwise: *manele* are widely popular as they reflect the realities of the Romanian space, and they are rhythmic, party music. On the other hand, the Balkanist portrayal of the Roma as the internal Other goes against a possible increasing embracing of Roma culture. Among my findings, the only case where the popularity of *manele* indicate a change in the perception of Roma culture can perhaps be found in the emergence of *manele* to new, young audiences. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, this is rather debatable and limited to a network of place-based events and audiences.

As mentioned previously, my findings suggest that the identity work of the Roma is flexible, culturally adaptable to change, while remaining distinct and heterogeneous. One of the starting points for the inquest into Roma identity work was the musicality stereotype around the community. In a way, being a musician or a *lăutar* is seen as something intrinsically Roma, even by many Roma themselves, reflecting the fixed ethnographic portrayal of the Roma which Kapralski (2007) discusses. This musicality was perceived by Roma interviewees as something innate, something they have ‘in their blood’. After more questioning, some explained the musical talent of the Roma as a cultural concept and not a biological one, saying it is something normal considering the people in their families

have been exposed to music on an everyday basis, perpetuating the familial model. As a result, most Roma musicians encountered during fieldwork were engaging in a form of strategic essentialism, using both their perceived connection to *manele* and the general musicality stereotype in their activity. Engaging in strategic essentialism is not something new for Roma musicians, as the findings on the historical becoming of *lăutari* suggest. After the abolition of slavery, the performance of musicality represented both an immediate necessity for survival for *lăutari*, and later a choice of taking over musical activities and becoming the carriers of folklore found in the Romanian principalities. Nowadays, although coming from a heterogeneous group, or sometimes even from different Roma groups, *lăutari* assume this identity as a way of achieving professional and social success. Their performance of the *lăutari* identity might contrast with their personal interests and traits, such as in the case of Daniel, who would have liked to become a chef, or Aurel Ioniță, who explained that despite the macho image that they are requested to display as part of the ‘authentic Gypsy’ image, they are rather shy and gentle.

Even-Zohar (2011) mentions that a group’s collective identity is imperative for maintaining group cohesion. The *lăutari*, having a collective identity, are more cohesive and have achieved a certain status amongst the Roma and Romanians alike. Applying Kapralski’s model (2007) for traditions becoming part of group identities³², we can have an overview of how musicality became part of the collective memory and identity of the Roma. The first step was the construction of the *lăutărească* music tradition by both Roma and non-Roma elites – the former non-Roma slave owners gave (perhaps unintentionally) the entertainer slave a better position and skill set, while the Roma *lăutari* later had a better status in the Roma community, due to their advantage in skills and opportunities. The second step was the creation of a rhetorical discourse around the musicality of the Roma, directed both internally and externally. The rhetoric of ‘Roma having music in their blood’, employed by both Roma and non-Roma, could fulfil the function of such a discourse, expressing both an essentialist image of the Roma and the strategic essentialism the musicians engage in. The last step was conveying the tradition of musicality to the collective memory of the Roma, positioning Roma as skilled musicians. CNCR’s efforts are an example of this, as among other cultural activities, music and the orchestra represent their most visible efforts. At the same time, Roma musicians position themselves as the ‘must-have’ entertainers for life events, and they are an almost certain presence at any Romanian wedding. Thus, the central place musicality takes in the identity work of both Roma musicians and non-musician Roma groups suggests the strong impact *manele* can have on the perception of the Roma as ethnic group. *Manele* don’t only mean that Roma musicians are perceived as unskilled, lascivious or uneducated; they also frame the collective identity of the Romanian Roma community.

For many Roma musicians, performing *manele* is not just a quick way to make money, but rather one of the only options for their professional development in a society that discriminates the Roma systematically. In this context, *manele* generated a role model for the Roma musicians, both highly educated and beginners. Daniel mentioned that many Roma students who finish the Conservatorium end up playing *manele* as there are no other opportunities, and suggested the only professional future for musicians who want to master their skills is abroad. Similarly, Aurel Ioniță described how his university-educated sons play *manele* as they are lucrative, and George Rădulescu recalled how some of the Roma students he was coaching at the Conservatorium were playing gigs at

³² I described this model in the Theoretical Framework as consisting of three stages: the creation of tradition by elites; the creation of rhetorical discourse about said tradition; conveying the tradition into the collective memory and creating popular discourses that make up the substructure of (national) historical consciousness.

various events to earn some money. Although not acting in antithesis with *manele*, Tudor Lakatos (Elvis Rromano) also explained how he wishes to be a role model for his community. The role model image that *manele* created is encountered outside the Roma musician community as well, as George described how some Roma children he met during fieldwork wanted to become a 'boss' or a 'wise guy' when growing up, influenced by *manele* imagery. In this context, CNCR's efforts are directly targeted at the creation of new role models for young Roma musicians, against what is being 'known'. In other words, as one of the sole role models for the Roma musicians, being a *manelist* becomes an essentialised identity that many starting musicians need to take on in order to support themselves.

Therefore, the identity of a *lăutar* is a symbolic capital employed by the Roma by clinging to old identities in the case of traditional *lăutari*, and by redefining themselves in the case of *maneliști* and other artists. This way of engaging in identity work (by drawing on traditions through either clinging on them or redefining them) is how During (2011) describes the search for identity within communities in transition. In many ways, the Roma are such a community: during communism Roma were not recognised as an ethnic minority but were placed within the category of 'other nationalities', making their identity work efforts rather recent. Therefore, this engagement in strategic essentialism drawing on the heritage of musicality can be seen as what Tilley (2006) calls "a symbolic return to the past", often acting "as a retreat from the uncertainties of the present" (p.14). Nevertheless, Tilley (2006) also argues that although collective identities are linked to collective traditions, "what they image or present to consciousness" always changes through time (p.12). Therefore, the musicians' self-identification as *lăutari* produces a "semblance of continuity", while being a Roma musician changes through time and in reaction to different contexts. In other words, the activities of most Roma musicians encountered during fieldwork differed from each other, although the musicians might be regarded as *lăutari*.

To summarise, I found that the diverse Roma musicians encountered in the field perform their various musical identities among the interplay of collective identity, Balkanist stereotypes, antigypsyism and stigma. The works of CNCR, although some may see them as lacking focus or not trying 'hard enough', are an example of trying to reject essentialist images of the Roma and performing alternative, internally-defined identities. These efforts are met with curiosity from the audience, but also seem to reach a rather closed network of people active in governmental and non-governmental organisations. At the same time, the musicians' membership of the *lăutari* Roma group is a strategy for promoting their musical talent, and they many times say proudly that they come from families with strong musical traditions. Georgian Stanciu stands as a clear example, being proud of his family being *lăutari* for 200 years, while Aurel Ioniță said he felt lucky to come from two different *lăutărească* music traditions whose fusion brought him success. Some other musicians interviewed were 'returning' to *lăutărească* music, by positioning themselves as traditional, skilled musicians. The new, hybrid formulas they sometimes perform in - having young, highly educated non-Roma leaders or band members, reaching an audience of yuppies, performing in bars that contrast with the traditional characteristic of the music - suggest a highly flexible and adaptable musician identity that moulds to the market requests and the change of the times. Although none of the interviewed musicians were promoting themselves as *manele* musicians, most of them performed *manele* on request at private events as a means to an end. Although I did not interview them directly, the feminist *manele* singers are redefining their *maneliste* label, by going against the sexist world and fighting for their place in the male-dominated *manele* industry. However, these are success stories of established musicians. Just as many interviewees pointed out, other less successful musicians cannot escape the path of *manele* if they want to make a living. Many times, this leads to the perpetuation of Roma stereotypes, as shown previously. Thus, although providing financial security and inspiration, *manele* are also

limiting the activity of musicians. In other words, although the Roma music scene is fragmented, it showcases a multitude of diverse identities that draw on the Roma musician stereotype.

Weaknesses

There are several weaknesses that I identified while conducting and analysing this research. I consider the main weakness to be the profile of the interviewees. Although all musicians interviewed perform *manele* by request (perhaps with the exception of Tudor Lakatos), I did not manage to reach any musician that only performs this genre, due to the limitations explained in the introduction. At the same time, my field access influenced the place-based network of events I observed. My research took the shape of an urban ethnographic mapping of the *manele* and Romani music-related activities in Bucharest, being of relevance for the urban, middle-class, highly educated crowd of both Roma and non-Roma people. It is therefore not generalisable to the whole urban context on *manele*. While I believe my research findings are applicable to a middle-upper class of established Roma musicians, it did not manage to reach directly the ways in which *manele* influence the activity and identity work of lower class or starting musicians. The insights into the struggles of this musician segment are taken from other people's experiences, and therefore filtered through their personal view. At the same time, while my findings suggest the financial benefits *manele* bring to musicians, they mostly show the downsides of *manele* in relation to the activity and identity work of the Roma. Therefore, other benefits of *manele* and different mechanisms of engaging with the genre were potentially missed due to the specific target group. Such findings could have changed my portrayal of *manele* as 'limiting opportunity'. Moreover, although I believe it is unlikely that strong pro-*manele* sentiments exist among *manele* fans against the anti-*manele* voices, reaching more *manele* fans could have added another level of understanding how *manele* are perceived outside of stigma, besides being catchy, rhythmic music suitable for dancing. I therefore consider the lack of access to a large part of the *manele* scene the main weakness of my study, as it might influence the results the most. Knowing the limitations I encountered and their implications, I believe rethinking field access could be done in case of replicating the research. Identifying a male field informant in the early phases of the research who would be available to join me for research activities could have been one solution to the limitation and a way to reach a wider *manele* musician and listener group.

As mentioned previously, *manele* represent a man's world, in which women are rarely active outside the role of love interest. The possibility to involve a few female *manele* musicians came up towards the end of the fieldwork, and therefore did not fit in the schedule anymore. Having this knowledge, I believe reaching the female *manele* musicians and listeners would provide great insight into how women navigate around not only the stigma around *manele*, but also the misogynist world *within manele*. Therefore, my research mostly reflects the male view on the world of *manele*. A possible research topic that would enrich my findings would therefore be the way female *manele* artists are active at the middle of *manele* stigma, Roma stereotypes and misogyny. Should the opportunity arise, I would be eager to dive into this subject. More recommendations on this topic are offered in the next, concluding chapter.

Another weakness can be found in the general idea of racism and antigypsyism. I was surprised to see that some Roma interviewees were very reluctant to say explicitly that racism against their ethnic group exists in Romania. Exception to this were mostly outsiders (non-Roma) or activists, like Gelu Duminica and Shaun Williams. Mariana Sandu, although giving me a detailed overview of the atrocities that happened to the Roma in their history, argued for the existence of institutional racism, but not a social one. Instead, she believes Romanians rather display classism - a discriminatory

behaviour towards the lower, uneducated class, in which the Roma happen to be included. While I argued my position that the anti-*manele* discourse draws on antigypsyism as well - an argument derived from both field- and secondary data - I believe more insight into the perception of antigypsyism from the Roma community can add another dimension to the analysis and argument, while also shedding light on the reasons behind the lack of consensus among the Roma on the existence of racism.

Summary

The findings resulting from my fieldwork generally confirm the literature I engaged with. On the one hand, I complement the works of Haliliuc (2014) and Beissinger et al (2016) who argue that the anti-*manele* discourse in Romania draws on Balkanism and portrays the Roma as Romania's internal Other, the carriers of the Orient within the country. Besides discussing the existing context of *manele*, I contextualise the historical becoming of the Roma musicians and the tradition of musicality in order to frame their present situation better. This historical exploration also allowed me to attempt to theorise how musicality became central to the collective identity of *lăutari* and the Roma in general, by applying the model of traditions and collective memory formation devised by Kapralski (2005). Unlike Constantiniu (2016), who indicates that the popularity of *manele* might point towards Romanians embracing Roma culture more, I suggest this is not the case. Instead, I argue the popularity of *manele* is due to the genre's danceable rhythms, and due to its appealing themes to a Romania as a country with a Balkan culture, following the position of Mihăilescu (2007) on *manele*. On the other hand, while the reputation of *manele* is due to the Balkanist-driven discourse around them and the Roma, I add that antigypsyism is also at the root of the anti-*manele* stance in several cases, drawing on racism and classism. Using Tilley (2006)'s post-structuralist take on identity, my findings reflect Kapralski (2005)'s critique on the static ethnographic depiction of Roma identity, and show how Roma musicians can in reality maintain a distinct yet resilient identity, making use of the tradition of musicality in very diverse ways. Therefore, I add to existing literature and I explain how different Roma musicians, finding themselves in a socio-political context that discriminates them, are affected by and engage with Balkanism in a process of dynamic identity work that involves strategic essentialism and draws on traditions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis has sought to find out how Romanian Roma musicians consider that the stereotypes surrounding the genre of *manele* influence their activity and identity. Three sub-questions were devised to focus the data collection by understanding (1) what the wider political and social processes influencing the Romanian Roma musicians' identity and activity are; (2) how Romanian Roma musicians perceive the place of *manele* in their activity and in the music scene; and (3) how different Roma musicians engage in strategic essentialism, within or outside the *manele* world.

The socio-political context in which Romanian Roma perform is one influenced by antigypsyism and Balkanism, which produce Roma stereotypes that portray them in a very specific way – as Romania's internal Other, uncivilised, the carriers of Orient, uneducated and with loose morals. The stigmatisation of Romanian Roma has its roots in the history of Roma slavery, which reflects in the status of the Roma musician as well. The tradition of *lăutarie* started as medieval boyars used some slaves as entertainers, sending them to the Byzantine lands to learn the musical trade of the Orient. Therefore, the Roma musicians became the carriers of Oriental music within the Romanian principalities, further influencing their current status as the 'Other within', the symbols of the 'barbaric' Balkan space within Romania. Currently, the song dedication custom at weddings, widespread and central to the performance of *manele*, is regarded as slavery by some Roma as well as non-Roma, reproducing former boyar-slave relationships and power dynamics. Nevertheless, many Roma musicians continue to perform in situations where they are discriminated and reduced to negative stereotypes, due to both the financial benefits the gigs bring or to a lack of power to escape. Therefore, at this moment the Roma community finds itself in a process of defining their social, ethnic and political identity, efforts which can also be seen in the activity of various musicians or organisations like the National Centre for Roma Culture (CNCR), which strives to create new role models for the Roma youth.

Within this context, Roma musicians have been linked to *manele* and their Balkanist stigma. *Manele* take a constant position within the activity of most Roma musicians interviewed, although not always a central one. It seems the genre has a secure place in the private (life) event scene, where *manele* are most of the time a must, and Roma musicians a regular presence. *Manele* sometimes share this scene with its Balkan sister-genres, which are often less stigmatised and seen as non-Romanian, and therefore don't reflect Romania's place in its Balkan context which disturbs those employing the elitist anti-*manele* discourse. Despite their popularity, *manele* are not breaking through to the mainstream music scene due to the Balkanist stigma attached to them, although some Roma musicians argued that most songs played on the radio are rhythmically and lyrically similar to *manele*. Besides taking their secure place in the margins and within the private event business, *manele* also entered the young alternative scene on Bucharest, and its alternative parties or 'world music' festivals – either as a result of the social activism and open-mindedness of (non-Roma) youth, or as *manele* represent the next 'anti-mainstream' trend.

As a result, Roma musicians display a range of dynamic identity work by using the familial tradition of musicality for strategic essentialism. On the one hand, some musicians follow the footsteps of other family members and the existing status model of the *lăutar*. The tradition of *lăutărească* music is part of the core of Roma's collective cultural identity, which often manifests in Roma presenting themselves as people with 'music is in their blood'. Nevertheless, this does not make

the Roma musicians' identity static, as most collective identities are essentialist by definition and can become symbolic capitals to be employed for a group's claims to status. The musicians performing *manele* follow the *lăutari* path and bring in into the present, as *manele* represent a way of securing a financial status for many Roma musicians. This model is effective, and other Roma from non-musical backgrounds, as well as non-Roma, adopt the *lăutar* identity for financial security. On the other hand, some Roma musicians use the musicality stereotype to break away from the stigma around *manele*. These musicians perform an identity that is 'different' while still rooted in an established tradition. Some examples of these identity 'variations' were identified. Mahala Raï Banda's performance as 'authentic Balkan Gypsies' advances an essentialised musician image that brought them success on international and later national stages. The efforts of CNCR aim to lift *lăutărească* music to 'high culture' through its Romano Kher orchestra, and to distance the public perception of Roma musicians from *manele*. In doing so, CNCR doesn't reject *manele* as Roma culture, but as a potent social and educational model for the Roma. Fratii Stanciu embed the image of the schooled musician and bring it to the private event scene, where they engage with Balkan sounds. Connecting personal interests, community activism and musicality stereotypes, Tudor Lakatos, alias Elvis Rromano, raises awareness of his village community and aids its development through his 'Rock'n'Rrom'. Tudor therefore turns his *lăutari* background and an initially-ironic 'Elvis' nickname into an identity that allows him to break boundaries and express himself freely. In other cases, performing as the authentic, traditional *lăutari* brings new audiences to the traditional music, as seen during the charity event for Florentin. Daniel found an *the good* in returning to *lăutărească* music, away from *the bad* and *the ugly* of the *manele* world. Other groups like *Lautarii de Matase* and *Corina Sirghi & Tariful Jean Americanu* re-engage with traditional *lăutărească* music in new formations, involving young, non-Roma members that open new doors to alternative audiences and places while using modern methods of promotion.

On the basis of the foregoing, in this thesis I argued that different Roma musicians or people involved to a certain degree in the music field can be both limited by, and benefiting from, the *manele* world and its stereotypes, sometimes at the same time. In positioning themselves towards *manele*, they engage in dynamic identity work by drawing on their musical traditions and employing strategic essentialism to achieve a better social status – either within the *manele* world or outside of it. At the same time, *manele* can be restricting their artistic freedom, and can become vessels for Roma stereotypes and further essentialisation. Firstly, I showed that *manele* limit the musician's effort to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes surrounding the community, the genre becoming a vessel for the stigma Roma people must face. *Manele* musicians are often the sole role models for social status, within both the Roma musician group and the wider Roma community. Nevertheless, the lyrics, rhythms and imagery of *manele* produce and reproduce Roma stereotypes, performing a Roma identity mostly out of the musician's control. Secondly, I showed how various Roma musicians engage in dynamic identity work by using strategic essentialism. Some musicians use the status-model of being a *lăutar* to promote themselves as respectable musicians and perform *manele* in contexts where they are highly requested and therefore able to bring a good financial status. Other musicians use the same musicality stereotype to show new, varied forms the identity of Roma musician can take, bringing forth the impressive heterogeneity the 'Roma musician' label describes.

One of the weaknesses identified in the previous chapter is the limited direct insight into the less established Roma musicians, the ones outside the "50 *manele* bands that do well for themselves", as Mihai Neacșu mentioned. Such an insight could bring forth more benefits or drawbacks of *manele*, as well as different mechanisms of engaging with the genre and the stigma around it, which might therefore lead the researcher beyond seeing *manele* as a 'limiting opportunity' or might deepen the meaning of this portrayal. A research with this focus could also shed light onto the sentiments *manele*

fans have towards the genre and thus address another weakness of my current research. Therefore, a recommendation for future research would be to get insight into the way the starter or less established *maneliști* engage with the stereotypes and stigma around the music genre and their community.

As mentioned previously, the world of *manele* is a male-dominated one. Its themes place women in the role of love interests or under the protectorate of the well-off male *manelist*. Nevertheless, there are a few Roma female musicians who perform *manele*. Denisa, the singer Daniel was performing with before she passed away, was one of the more well-known *maneliste*. Although I was unable to interview them, several female *manele* singers exist in the current scene, and as one interviewee mentioned, at least one argues she sings feminist *manele*. While works on male Roma musicians and *manele* exist, very little has been written on their female counterparts. Therefore, I believe the most substantial recommendation for future research would be to investigate the way female *manele* musicians experience the same stigmatised context of the Roma and of *manele*, while also navigating sexism and ‘a man’s world’. For such a research, potential points of interest would be the motives behind the women’s involvement in *manele*, the mechanisms they employ for acting in a male-dominated world, or how the often-misogynist themes influence their identity. Also, as *lăutari* are most of the time male, it would be interesting to see if the female *manele* performers also come from families with musical traditions, and if they also employ strategic essentialism to construct their musical identity. Last but not least, if feminist *manele* exist – what do they mean? What does their audience look like, and are men also part of it? Therefore, further research on female *manele* performers would add a different facet to understanding the influence *manele* have on the work and identity of Roma musicians, with an emphasis on the relation between *manele* and gender. Perhaps even more importantly, it would bring forth the double fight Roma women have to carry – stigma as Roma, and misogyny.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 - Data gathering

1.1 Research schedule

| Phase | Activity | Timeline |
|---|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Thesis proposal (August - September 2019) | First draft thesis proposal | 28 August 2018 |
| | Proposal presentation | 29 August 2018 |
| | Feedback & Update | 1 -25 September 2018 |
| | Final thesis proposal | 25 September 2018 |
| Fieldwork (October 2018 - January 2019) | Flight to Bucharest | 28 September 2018 |
| | Total fieldwork | 1 October - 10 January 2019 |
| | Interviews | 3 October - 20 December 2018 |
| | Participant observation | October - January 2019 |
| | Data recording | October - January 2019 |
| Thesis report (January - February 2019) | Flight to Amsterdam | 15 January 2019 |
| | Data analysis | 15 January - 15 February 2019 |
| | Finalise report & Thesis defense | 15 February - 15 March 2019 |

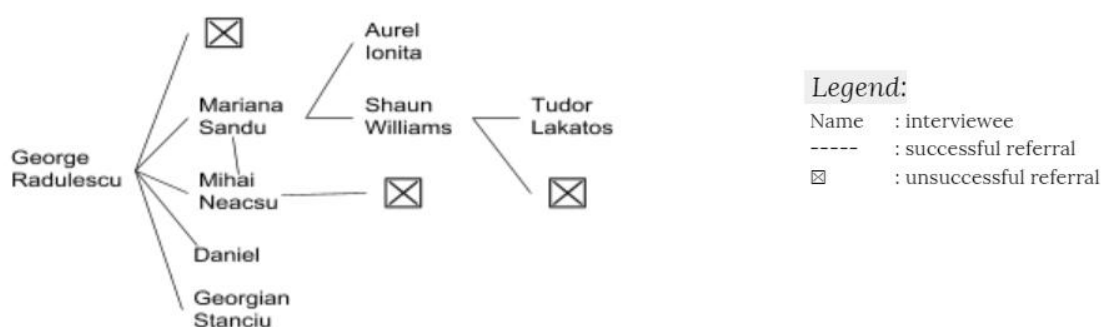
1.2 Fieldwork planning

| INTERVIEWS | | | | | |
|----------------------|--|------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Who | Role | When | Where | TYPE | RECORDING |
| George Radulescu I | Roma Sociologist From Lautari family | Fri, 5/10 | Ibis Parlament | unstructured | summary |
| George Radulescu II | Roma Sociologist From Lautari family | Fri, 20/12 | Orhideea | unstructured | summary |
| George Radulescu III | Roma Sociologist From Lautari family | Sat, 9/11 | Orhideea | semi-structured | fieldnotes |
| Mihai Neacsu | Director Romano Kher | Tue, 9/10 | Romano Kher | semi-structured | audio + transcript |
| Aurel Ioniță | Mahala Rai Banda musician | Mo, 21/10 | French Bakery Domenii | semi-structured | audio + summary |
| Shaun Williams I | Ethnologist Saraiman (Music project) | Fri, 9/11 | Diane 3 | semi-structured | summary |
| Shaun Williams II | Ethnologist Saraiman (Music project) | Thu, 13/12 | Beans & Dotts | unstructured | fieldnotes |
| Mariana Sandu | Roma Historian | Mo, 15/10 | Sastipen | semi-structured | audio + summary |
| A. V. | manele party goer - non-Roma | Thu, 11/10 | Cismigiu | unstructured | fieldnotes |
| A. L. | manele party goer - non-Roma | Su, 4/11 | MTR | unstructured | summary |
| Georgian Stanciu | Roma musician - Fratii Stanciu | Tu, 20/11 | Casa Doina | semi-structured | summary |
| Daniel | Roma accordionist | Wed, 21/11 | French Bakery Domenii | semi-structured | summary |
| M. O. | manele party goer - non-Roma | Wed, 2/10 | Control | conversation | fieldnotes |
| Elvis Romano | Rock-n-Rom musician | Fri, 30/11 | Londohome | unstructured | fieldnotes |

| OBSERVATIONS | | | | | |
|--|--------------|---|--------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Title | Type | Description | Where | When | Recording |
| Simion Bogdan - Mihai și lăutarii de mătase | concert | Traditional Gypsy music | Apollo 111 | 11-Oct-2018, 20:00 | fieldnotes |
| Marea Rusine | theatre play | Roma history theatre play | Excelsior | 12-Oct-2018, 19:00 | fieldnotes |
| Maneloteca | party | manele urban party | Macaz Bar Teatru Coop | 26-Oct-2018, 23:00 | fieldnotes |
| Re-imagining the Balkans: Blurring political borders with Artist's Lenses? | conference | Antropologica l lab | Clubul Taranului | 29-Oct-2018, 18:00 | fieldnotes |
| Balcanii, între identitate europeană și stereotipurile Vestului | conference | Antropologica l lab | Clubul Taranului | 31-Oct-2018, 18:00 | fieldnotes |
| Taraful Bucureștilor concert live | concert | Traditional Lautareasca music concert | Clubul Taranului | 1-Nov-2018, 21:30 | fieldnotes |
| Muzică de petrecere R: Andrei Teodorescu 2017 | conference | Documentary about three Roma wanting to become musicians | Cinema Muzeul Taranului | 3-Nov-2018, 17:30 | fieldnotes |
| Zakarpattia R: Shaun Williams 2018 85' USA PREMIERĂ mondială Q&A | conference | Documentary about Ukrainian taraf | Cinema Muzeul Taranului | 3-Nov-2018, 19:00 | fieldnotes |
| Petrecere Transcarpatică cu Taraful Manyo | concert | taraf playing in downtown Bucharest bar | Clubul Taranului | 03-Nov-2018, 22:00 | fieldnotes |
| Debate: In cautarea demnitatii | course | Debate on Roma music, stigma and dignity, by Sociologist Gelu Duminica & Mahala Rai Banda | Faculty of Sociology, room 201 | 5-Nov-2018, 14:00 | summary |
| Concert filarmonica Romano Kher | concert | CNCR Roma Filarmonica concert | Ministerul Culturii | 29-Nov-2018, 18:30 | fieldnotes |
| Elvis Rromano & His Rock'n'Rrom Band | concert | Rock-n-roll + Rroma beats artist | Londohome | 30-Nov-2018, 20:00 | fieldnotes |
| Concert Trei Parale | concert | Old Romanian Music Concert | Nicolae Minovici museum | 11-Dec-2018, 19:00 | fieldnotes |

| | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|--|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Concert caritabil pentru un lautar mic | concert charity | Charity concert for a young boy who wants to become a lautar like his family | Londohome | 7-Dec-2018, 20:00 | fieldnotes |
| Concert Corina Sirghi si Jean Americanu | concert | lautareasca music | Clubul Taranului | 5-Jan-2018, 21:00 | fieldnotes |

1.3 Data sources sampling



Appendix 2 - Interview guide

1.1 Roma musicians

English -----

Political and Social context of the Romanian Roma

- How would you describe being a Roma in Romania and Bucharest?
- What are the main stereotypes you encounter everyday as a Roma musician? How do they influence your daily life?

Romanian Roma music scene

- How did you become a musician? How would you describe your music?
- How about a Roma musician? How would you characterise the profile of the Roma musician nowadays?
- How would you characterise the Roma music scene in Romania?
- How has the Roma musician profile changed in the past years?
- How does the Roma musician fit in the wider Romanian music scene?
- How would you characterise your audience?

Manele

- What is your opinion about Manele?
- Do you engage with Manele, and if so, how do they fit in your musical activity?
- How do you see the place of Manele in the wider Romanian music scene?
- How do you experience the link between Manele and the Roma community?
- Do Manele offer you any drawbacks or opportunities?

Romanian -----

Contextul politico-social al Romilor în România

- Cum este să fiți parte din comunitatea Roma din București / România?
- Care sunt stereotipurile pe care le întâlniți în viața de zi cu zi, legate de comunitatea Roma? Cum va influențează ?

Scena muzicală roma în România

- Cum ați ajuns să fiți muzician? Cum ați descrie muzica pe care o cântați?
- Cum este să fiți un muzician Rom ? Cum ați caracteriza profilul unui muzician Rom în București / România?
- Cum ați caracteriza scena muzicală Roma în România? Există așa ceva
- S-a schimbat profilul muzicianului Rom în ultimii ani? Dacă da, cum?
- Cum este perceput muzicianul Rom în scena muzicală românească?
- Cum v-ați caracteriza audiența?

Manele

- Pentru început, ce credeți despre manele ca stil muzical? Dar despre reputația manelelor?
- Dvs. cântați sau implementați manele în activitatea dvs. Muzicală? Dacă da, cum? Dacă nu, de ce?
- Care este locul manelelor în scena muzicală românească? Dar în comunitatea roma?
- Cum percepeți legătura dintre manele și comunitatea Roma?
- Ce oportunități sau piedici vă oferă manelele în activitatea dvs. Muzicală?

1.2 Romani culture experts

Romanian -----

Intro:

Pentru lucrarea mea de master vreau să mă concentrez pe cum sunt percepute manele și stereotipurile legate de acest gen muzical în rândul muzicienilor Romi, pentru că există în mass-media și în societate percepția unei legături strânse între cultura roma și manele, legătura marcată de stereotipuri cu tentă elitistă sau chiar rasistă. În același timp, manelele devin din ce în ce mai populare în rândul tinerilor “hipsteri”. De aceea sunt interesată de cum percep muzicienii Romi acest context și cum le influențează manelele, ca fenomen social, activitatea..

General:

- Cum activează organizația dvs. în domeniul muzicii Rome din România? Care sunt cele mai mari realizări în acest domeniu?

Contextul politico-social al Romilor in Romania

- Care sunt stereotipurile pe care le întâlniți încă în viața de zi cu zi, legate de comunitatea Roma? Cum va influențează ? S-au schimbat acestea în ultimii ani?
- Cum este a fi rom în România și în București în ziua de azi?

Scena muzicală roma in Romania

- Cum ați caracteriza scena muzicală Roma în Romania? Există așa ceva?
- Cum ați caracteriza profilul unui muzician Rom în București / România?
- S-a schimbat profilul muzicianului Rom în ultimii ani? Dacă da, cum?
- Cum este perceput muzicianul Rom în scena muzică la românească?

Manele

- Pentru început, ce credeți despre manele ca stil muzical? Dar despre reputația manelelor?
- *Romano Kher*: pe siteul dumneavoastră scrie că printre altele, va preocupa cultura modernă a Romilor, care include și muzica romani modernă. Aceasta include: "etno, pop, rythm and blues, rock, jazz, house, dance etc.". Manelele nu sunt menționate direct. De ce?
- Care considerați este locul manelelor în scena muzicală românească? Dar în comunitatea roma?
- Ce credeți despre popularitatea petrecerilor de manele din cluburile din centrul Bucureștiului?
- Cum percepeți legătura dintre manele și comunitatea Roma?
- Ce oportunități sau piedici credeți că oferă manelele în activitatea muzicienilor Romi?

Follow up / Outro:

- Cu ce alți muzicieni / oameni din domeniu mi-ați recomanda să vorbesc pe acest subiect?

English -----

Intro:

For my master thesis I want to focus on manele and the stereotypes around this field are perceived among Roma musicians, because there is a strong perception of the link between the Roma community and manele is mass media and the wider society, this perceived link being marked by elitist or even racist stereotypes. At the same time, manele become more popular among young 'hipsters'. Therefore I am interested in how the Roma musicians perceive this context and how manele - as social phenomenon - influence their activity.

General:

- How does your organisation activate in the field of Romani music? Any main achievements in the past year?

Political and Social context of the Romanian Roma

- How would you describe being a Roma in Romania and Bucharest?
- What are the main stereotypes you encounter everyday as a Roma musician? How do they influence your daily life? Have these changed in the past years?

Romanian Roma music scene

- How would you characterise the Roma music scene in Romania?
- How would you characterise the profile of the Roma musician nowadays? Does it exist?
- How has the Roma musician profile changed in the past years? If so, how?
- How does the Roma musician fit in the wider Romanian music scene?

Manele

- What is your opinion about Manele?

- *Romano Kher*: on your website it says, among others, that you are involved in the modern Romani culture, which includes also modern Romani music, which is described as “etno, pop, rhythm and blues, rock, jazz, house, dance etc.”.. Manele are not directly mentioned. Why?
- How do you see the place of Manele in the wider Romanian music scene?
 - How do you feel about the increasing popularity of Manele parties among the hipsters?
- How do you experience the link between Manele and the Roma community?
- Do Manele offer any drawbacks or opportunities to Roma musicians?

Follow up / Outro:

- Could you recommend me a few other musicians / experts in the field that I could talk to for my research?

1.3 Romani history experts

Romanian -----

Contextul politico-social al rromilor în România

- În afara, am observat ca în contextul de zi cu zi, nu se ştiu foarte multe despre comunitatea rroma. Cum ati descrie pe scurt dvs. comunitatea rroma? Cine sunt rromii?
- În contextul de zi cu zi în România, am auzit de multe ori faptul ca “în România nu exista rasism, nu se poate compara discriminarea afro-americanilor şi istoria lor cu discriminarea rromilor din România”. Care este opinia dvs., cum ati raspunde unei afirmatii de genul?

Romanian Roma music scene & Manele

- Cum au ajuns rromi sa fie asociati cu muzicalitatea?
- Cum ati caracteriza scena muzicala rroma în Romania? Exista asa ceva?
- Ce credeţi despre manele ca stil muzical? Dar despre reputaţia manelelor?
 - Ce oportunităţi sau piedici credeţi ca oferă manelele în activitatea muzicienilor rromi?
 - Ce credeţi despre popularitatea petrecerilor de manele din cluburile din centrul Bucureştiului?
 - Cum percepeti legatura dintre manele si comunitatea rroma?

Balkanism

- Pentru lucrarea mea de master ma voi inspira din lucrările Mariei Todorova pe Balkanism (în special pe cum au devenit “balcanii” ceva rău, şi cum România încearca sa se dezica de orice e perceput ca fiind “balcanic”).
 - Cum ştiu de termenul de “balkanism” de doar cateva luni, ati putea sa imi descrieti ce intelegeti dvs. prin balkanism?
 - În opinia dvs, este prezent balkanismul în România şi în felul în care comunitatea rroma este prezentata în discursul public?

English -----

Political and Social context of the Romanian Roma

- Both abroad and în România, people many times don't know much about the Roma, besides stereotypes. How would you describe the Roma community? Who are the Roma?
- I heard many times în Romania being said that “there is no racism în Romania, not like with afro-americans în the US for example”. What would you answer to such an affirmation?

Scena muzicala rroma in România & Manelele

- How did the Roma become associated with musicality?
- How would you characterise the Roma music scene in Romania? Does it exist?
- What do you think about manele as a music genre? What about their reputation?
 - Do Manele offer any drawbacks or opportunities to Roma musicians?
 - How do you feel about the increasing popularity of Manele parties among the hipsters?
 - How do you experience the link between Manele and the Roma community?

Balkanism

- What do you understand through “balkanism”?
- In your opinion, is balkanism present in Romania and in the way the Roma community is presented in the public space?

Appendix 3 - Coding matrix

(000)BALKANISM

- (010)Definition
- (011)Balkanist traits of people in Romania
- (012)Romania is not Balkan (geopolitical bovarism)
- (013)Romania is Balkan
- (014)Balkan traits seen as fine when Western-approved (sublimation)
- (015)Balkan music seen as shameful
- (016)Manele as balkan music

(100)SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE ROMA AND THE ROMA MUSICIAN

- (110) Roma history
 - (111)Roma and Romanians living together
 - (112)Roma as internal Other
 - (113)Current efforts of the Roma to engage with own history
 - (114)Diversity of Roma groups
 - (115)Unity of Roma language
 - (116)Romani dialects
 - (117)Common Roma roots
- (120) Discrimination
 - (121)Discrimination of the Roma
 - (122)Roma slavery
 - (123)Comparison with slavery in the US
 - (124)Classism
 - (125)Manele as political correctness
 - (126)Antigypsyism/Racism
- (130) Roma stereotypes
 - (131)musical stereotypes
 - (132)double standards
 - (133)need/wish to prove themselves
 - (134)loudness
 - (135)crookedness
 - (136)Manele as vessels for Roma stereotypes
 - (137)Wholehearted Roma
 - (138)Romanian sayings about the Roma
 - (139) Exotic/Orientalist stereotype
- (140) Terminology: Tigan vs Rom
 - (141)Rom as political correctness

- (142)Rom as self-identification
 - (143)Negative meaning of 'tigan'
- (150) The 'lautari' Roma group
 - (151)The status of the lautar
 - (152)The historical becoming of lautari
 - (153)The familial factor of lautarie
 - (154)Roma people as entertainers
 - (155)Roma are skilled musicians
- (160) Activism through music
 - (161)Manelisti as non-activists
 - (162)Manelisti as should-be activists
 - (163)The need for Roma role models
 - (164)Efforts to change the perception of the Roma
 - (165)Lautareasca music as activism
- (200)"GYPSY" MUSIC SCENE : VARIATIONS OF ROMANI MUSIC
 - (210)Authenticity & identity
 - (211)Lautareasca music as Roma music
 - (212)Manele music as Romanians' music
 - (213)Manele music as Roma music
 - (214)Balkan music as authentic Roma music
 - (215)Transylvanian music as authentic Roma music
 - (216)Lautareasca music as Romanian music
 - (217)Roma searching for identity
 - (220)Diversity of Roma/Gypsy music scene
 - (221)The role of manele
 - (222)Lautareasca music as valuable Roma tradition (strategic essentialism)
 - (223)The popularity of lautareasca music
 - (224)----
 - (225)More to Roma music than known
 - (226)Fragmentation of the Roma music scene
 - (227)Lack of professionalism
 - (228)Success stories
 - (230)"Gypsy" music listeners
 - (231)People looking for the exotic
 - (232)People without prejudice
 - (233)Hipsters
 - (234)People following trends
 - (235)Guilty-pleasure-rs
- (300)MANELE
 - (310)Media presence of manele
 - (311)TV presence
 - (312)Radio presence
 - (313)Censorship
 - (320)Opinions on manele
 - (321)The connection of manele and the crooked world
 - (322)Manele as transnational music
 - (323)Popularity versus reputation
 - (324)Controversial topic
 - (325)Negative feelings towards manele
 - (326)Positive feelings towards manele
 - (327)Manelisti as skilled musicians
 - (328)Manele lyrics
 - (329)Manele as party music
 - (330)Manele as a job
 - (331)Manele bringing financial security
 - (332)The custom of wedding dedications

- (333)Manele on request
- (334)Manelisti as slaves
- (335)Manele as guilty pleasure
- (336)Dangers of being a manele musician
- (337)Manele clubs
- (340)Manele & manele parties as exotic products
 - (341)Manele enjoyed by non-Roma
 - (342)Electro manele
 - (343)Manele as uncharted creative territory
 - (344)Popularity of manele parties
 - (345)Manele parties and hipsters
 - (346)Social activism at manele parties
 - (347)Manele parties as trends
 - (348)Manele parties and hypocrisy