INTRODUCTION

The Romungre (singular Romungro) in other words the Hungarian Roma/Gypsies (Hungarian: magyarcigány) is an ethnic category which lumps together a rather heterogeneous population. This category is most often used as an external name (exonym) for a broad variety of Romani groups. Groups classified as Hungarian Roma live in the Carpathian Basin, in the macroregion, which historically formed the Hungarian Kingdom at the eastern part of the Habsburg Empire. After the dissolution of the empire these territories have been incorporated to Hungary, and its neighbouring states: Transcarpathia (Ukraine), Voivodina (Serbia), the southern districts of the present day Slovakia and Transylvania (Romania), which region is in the focus of this article.

In the broadest sense the category is used as collective classification for all those Roma who have settled and have been assimilated in some respects to the local peasantry (who have never been exclusively Magyars). The term Romungre is also used in more restricted sense for Hungarian speaking Roma who are typically seen as musicians (Hungarian: muzsikus).

The exonym in many cases says nothing more than this Romani population is rather similar to the settled peasant population in the sphere of socio-economic and ecological adaptation but there is a variety of the groups regarding the expressive aspects of their culture; including music, dance, folklore, but also the languages spoken. Therefore it is useful to view the Romungre populations as a continuum ranging from groups which are apparently almost assimilated to the Magyars through those groups which continue to preserve a rich cultural variety.

The linguistic criteria (Hungarian as mother tongue) cannot be taken for granted. Some of these groups, most typically those living in the present day Hungary or in Szeklerland (Eastern Transylvania), have lost Romani as their mother tongue and shifted to Hungarian. But many Romungre in central Transylvania (similarly to those living in Slovakia) are native in Romanian even today and they speak other local languages (Romanian and Hungarian). Yet some others, in spite of the denomination, do not speak Hungarian at all and are native in Romanian or Romani. Their main commonality with the Hungarians (peasants) is apparent only if contrasted with other Romani groups: the Vlax Roma or Corturari (‘tent dwellers’).
Compared to the Vlax groups the Romungre historically are an older population in Transylvania. Even if more archival work need to done for a detailed historical account there are sufficient sources indicating their presence before the early 19th century when many of the Vlax Romani groups migrated from the Romanian Principalities (see Kemény 2000). Recent research about the dialects spoken by Transylvanian Romani groups and the connection between features of these dialects and the group-names point also into this direction (Matras 2013). There is a significant match between the exonym and self-identification as Romungre and the speakers of the North Transylvanian (NT) dialect varieties. There is a notable exception, the Gabor Roma, who speak a dialect which can be classified as Southern Transylvanian (ST) and yet they are being associated with the Hungarians while they also sharply distinguish themselves from the Romungre (Urech and van den Heuvel 2011: 156).

The exonym is best understood as a relational term rather than an exact group-name. It suggests an affiliation to Hungarians or more broadly to the peasant lifestyle, and in the same time sets up an opposition to other Romani groups who are seen as ‘less assimilated’. In contrast to the external view the self-identification of the Romungre usually implies belonging to multiple categories. Rather than expressing opposition to Hungarians or to Roma it most often emphasizes belonging to both categories: Roma and Hungarian. Public recognition of this identity is not without tensions since dual belonging and cultural affiliation are often conflicting with exclusivist national claims over cultural purity or ethnic membership. Therefore tensions and a permanent ambivalence are inherent in both external and self-identifications.

Public discourses on the Romungre in Transylvania are dominated by these external perceptions. There are a number of assumptions regarding the cultural processes and socio-economic relations of the people belonging to this ethnic category. First, Romungre are seen as being in the advanced stage of assimilation so they seem to be ‘less Romani’ than other Romani groups. This view often goes so far to claim that they have no culture of their own at all. Second, it was argued by the ethnographers, that what they have as cultural traditions (in particular their folklore and music, but also some of their handicrafts) are archaic forms of the Magyar culture because Romungre ‘preserve’ cultural layers which were already forgotten by the local peasants. Third, there are recurrent claims among the Hungarian elites that Romungre are loosening their ties and loyalty to the Hungarian nation and being increasingly affiliated and assimilated to the majority Romanians in Transylvania.

None of these assumptions are without major methodological, theoretical, and political problems, and as I will show below, the persistence of Romungre identity and cultural particularities should be understood in the long term socio-economic processes in particular the traditional ethnic division of labour, and mutual cultural adaptations framed by the changing political contexts following the unification of Transylvania with Romania a century ago.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF AN AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP

The Romungre historically have been associated with professional music making. The term ‘musician’ often stands as a synonym for Hungarian Roma. Composers have been on the front line of conceptualizing the place of ‘Gypsy Music’ within the Magyar culture. Most notoriously Franz Liszt sparked a debate by publishing his book (1859) about this topic. Liszt claimed that not only the Roma but the music they play in Hungary is of Indian origin which caused general uproar among the romantic nationalist who considered the then-fashionable music style as central feature of national culture which cannot belong to the ‘Gypsies’ (see Kovalcsik 2010 for critical discussion). In fact, as Bálint Sárosi has demonstrated more than a century later, the instrumental music played by the Roma ensembles for the nineteenth century Hungarian audience was born in the early 19th century and reached popularity by the time Liszt encountered it. The particular style (known as ‘magyar nóta’) has nothing to do with the musical traditions of Romani communities but it was romantic innovation to serve the noble and urban publics. The prominence of Roma in performing music was due to the low prestige of the entertaining professions among peasant society. Roma, already stigmatized anyway, chose music making as a
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Galamb-leány / The Pigeon-girl

Hás pes ékhar ek phuri džuljí. Ola džulja džin pe lako tenipó džin pe lako phuripó numa jek raklo ás la. (…) Kan’ ás o raklo oxtó boršíngro, pendjás lake:

- Mámo!
- Só j muro raklo?
- Mámo, me dikhljom ando fóro, ek phuro gadžó, ke šukár feštinél.
- Muro raklo, koda báš škóla stítjilás, džin kaj feštinđás kide.
- Mámo, me te meräw dane na feštináap te me sár vo?
- Na míg muro raklo, ke te tuke kerá jeg mihéje,
dake phiréhe ke škóla haj te tu kidér feštinéha sar koda puro gadžó.

Phírdjás o raklo ke škóla, burtíjas, haj kan’ opré burtíjas, dinjás les les ri daj othé ke koda phuro gadžó kaj dikhljós vo ki sár feštinél. Kan’ othé dinjás les, kerdjás dýj bórë le phurë gadžhé bují, pal dýj bórë maj mítso džanglías sar o gadžó te kérél bují. Nohat dikhljós o raklo ke vo maj bu’ džanel sar o gadžó.

Akor avéljas khéré, kerdjas peske mihélje. Kisi šukar kípi kérélás feštinélas k’ o Dél te ferinél ke ande sástji lume so manúsh sa’ vo nás, kaj te feštinel kide šúkár. Kú ratja kú djese kerlas butj’ ande mihélje. And’ eg ratji ko dešuduj orí avél eg baro ráj leste.

- Lačhi ratji!
- Udjan te dzivés gule rája!
- Dýg mo raklé! Šundjóm tre hivóstar. Ke čé baró feštöši án tu.
- Ape, gule raja?
- Dék, čore raklé! Dék, andjóm tuke te keréis marge ek söbro pal muri gadží.
Muri gadží małjas děšupándž bórë. Haj núma ek kipó hín la mándár.
Kamós te keráv lač’ ek söbro. Po künd suj avelas gula?

by the Ministry of Interior of the Kingdom of Hungary to carry out a comprehensive census of the Roma with the support of the county administrations and the Statistical Office in January 1893. Results of this census revealed that the highest proportion of Roma within Hungary lived in the Transylvanian counties. Only a tiny proportion of Roma (3,25%) belonged to the ‘travelling’ category, 88,5% of the total of 274.940 Roma conducted permanently settled life (Hermann 1895: 12). The census has shown also that few of the settled Roma had landed property, and only a minority made a living of playing music, others were blacksmiths, bricklayers, peddlers, and large num-

Path to upward social mobility (Sárosi 1978). And indeed, even if looked upon with suspicion by the majority, musicians became the ‘aristocracy’ of the Roma from this period and played in restaurants and celebrations all over Hungary.

Research among Roma in Transylvania also emerged in the second half of the 19th century. Heinrich von Wlislocki and Antal Hermann were pioneers of the ethnological approach. Their main focus was on folk traditions, songs, customs, and language of the ‘travelling Gypsies’ (German: Wanderzi-geunern) who were seen as more ‘authentic’ in contrast to the Hungarian Roma. Additionally Hermann was commissioned

Once upon a time there was an old woman. That woman had only one son from his youth until her old age. When the boy was eight years old he told to her mother:

- Mom!
- What it is, my son?
- Mom, I have seen in the town an old man who paints beautifully.
- Oh, my son, that man has attended a lot of schools until he leaned to paint that way.
- Mom, let me die, if I will not paint like him!
- Let it be my son, I will make you a workshop if you finish your school, and you will also paint like that old man

The boy attended the school, he grew up, and when he matured, his mother gave him to work with the old man, which he has seen painting. He was working for two years with the old man, and after two years he worked better than the old man. Then he returned home and opened a workshop for himself. He painted so beautiful pictures, my good Lord! There was none on the whole world who would paint so nicely. He worked in his workshop day and night. One night at twelve o'clock a big lord entered:

- Good evening!
- Let your life be long, my dear lord!
- Look my son! I have heard your fame; what a great painter you are.
- So what, my dear lord?
- Look you poor boy, I came to ask you to make a statue of my wife. My wife died fifteen years ago. I only have one picture of her. I want to make a statue of her. When you can complete it?
'Hungarian Roma' in Transylvania

Dance revival event: dances from Szék / Sic are performed open air during the Hungarian cultural days, Cluj / Kolozsvár, 2013

Photo: László Márkó

The ‘táncház method’ in practice: young boys watching the male dancers, Hungarian cultural days, Cluj / Kolozsvár, 2013

Photo: László Márkó

ber worked as daily laborers. About half of the Roma were native in Romani, a significant proportion having Romanian or Hungarian as their first language. In his report Hermann was particularly worried by the ‘process of Romanianisation’ (Hungarian: eloláhosodás) considering it as a danger both to the ‘national culture’ and to the ‘development of civilization’ among the settled Roma (see Dupcsik 2009: 79-81 for a critical review).

While scholarly interest for Romani traditions was oriented to groups other than the Hungarian Roma, their skills of performing music for the majority was seen bearing the danger of ‘corrupting’ the national culture. Political worries about the settled Roma in Transylvania also increased by fear that they are assimilating to the Romanians. These anxieties among the Hungarian elite existed before Transylvania became incorporated into the Kingdom of Romania (1920) but they persist to this day.

In the period between the two World Wars there was a continued interest in folk music. Music scholars and composers such as Béla Bartók or Zoltán Kodály started to record the music of the peasants including those groups which lived outside Hungary. Bartók and Kodály preferred to collect simple vocal singing or music played on peasant instruments like the bagpipe, flute, or hurdy-gurdy. While Hungarian Roma continued to play a central role in the musical life both of urban and rural Transylvania their relationship to the ‘genuine folk music’ was seen as ambivalent. They served the needs of more than one community in this multiethnic region and the core idea driving the research in this period was that the music is the expression of the ethno-national genius, and the task was to find the simple and pure forms which were supposed to be more archaic, which could hardly be supported by recording the music of the ‘Gypsy bands’.

The late Bartók published an essay on ‘Race Purity in Music’ in which he argued that the ethnic diversity of Eastern Europe is facilitating borrowing melodies between communities, adapting them to the accents, inflections, and syllabic structures of another language, and this is mutually enriching the folk music of all ethnic groups; so – Bartók argued, ‘race impurity’ is definitely beneficial for the peasant music of the region (Bartók 1944). While he was always ready to record the music of all ethnic groups from Transylvania and the larger region, he reached the ultimate clarity of this thesis while taking refuge in America, fighting a deadly disease, and following with horror the political consequences of pursuing ‘racial purity’ in his homeland. This regional approach to folk music can be seen as the progressive paradigm in Hungarian folklore research for the period after the WW2. Hungarian Roma were often in the focus of this research, but even within this new paradigm the traditions recorded among Hungarian Roma were rarely seen on equal footing with traditions of other groups.

The recorded oral traditions led researchers to the conclusion that Romungre are ‘bearers’ of archaic traditions of the Magyar culture. Similarities were particularly conspicuous in the case of folktales and ballads; variants of classical folk-balls transcribed in the 19th century (Kriza 1863) were sung by Roma native in Hungarian in different ethnographical regions of the Szeklerland up to the 1980es. Similarly, complete folktales which were already rather difficult to elicit among the Hungarians were recorded in large numbers among the Roma and published by Olga Nagy and others in the second half of the 20th century (see Pozsony 2001 for an overview of this body of literature). Folk-tales were recorded in Romani in exceptional cases since few researchers took the effort to learning the language.1 The collected material was canonized as part of the Hungarian folklore with a note that the ‘informants’ (Hungarian: adatközlők) are Roma.

Similarly, the most archaic form of male dance the stick-dance (Hungarian: botoló) was captured on film among the Romungre. However, György Martin who pioneered dance research in the period immediately following the WW2, and started to systematically record on film dances of the Roma all over Hungary and Transylvania, was one of the few scholars who recognised that Roma are not simply ‘preserving’ dances and other elements of folk culture but adapt and shape in crea-

1 Nagy Olga recorded tales in Romani without knowing the language but realizing their value. These tales were later translated and published in Budapest (Nagy and Vekerdi 2002).
tive ways an old European tradition which has regional vari-
ants but hardly can be considered as belonging to a particular
ethnic group (see Csilla Könczei 2015). This approach turned
for the first time against the cultural-nationalistic view of the
lower classes (peasants in particular) as reservoir of ‘the folk-
soul’ and opened way for a more cosmopolitan understanding
how cultural traditions are intricately intertwined and layered
textures from earlier historical periods and are shared by differ-
ent ethnic communities.

Based on the work of Martin and others a folk dance re-

vival movement (Hungarian: Táncház) started to flourish by the
1970es in Hungary. This revival movement was characteristi-
cally an urban phenomenon aiming at revitalising folk dances
as form of entertainment for the educated and politically ac-
tive youth (Kürti 2001). From the beginning it was articulated
in sharp contrast with the dominant official ideas of socialist
culture or the folkloristic spectacles of putting dance on stage.
It rather promoted an organic transmission of knowledge from
villagers to the dance halls of the urban centres by face-to-face
contact with those who practiced these traditions in their every-
day lives. Revival musicians and dancers soon reached out to
the ‘tradition bearing’ communities in Transylvania, and even
if the late-socialist Romania officially was not a welcoming
place for such visitors, an increasing body of musical material
and dancing skills were collected from villages. The skills of
Romungro musicians were central to this movement as the live
instrumental music was crucial for all dance events. Budapest-
based revival bands learned their musical style, instrumental
technique, and published albums. Later on, after the fall of the
socialist regime in Romania, some Romungre musicians per-
fomed with colleagues from these professional revival bands
in revival festivals and concert halls and toured worldwide (see
Quigley 2014).

Villages like Szék (Sic), Magyarpalatka (Pálatca), or
Szászsávás (Ceuas) achieved notoriety for their musicians and
dances. Ethnographic regions, such as Kalotaszeg (western part
of Cluj County) or Mezőség (the Transylvanian Plain) became
central focus for the revival movement where revival camps are
organised each summer. In the meantime local musical prac-
tice declined by the end of the 20th century with the passing
of elder musicians as Csongor Könczei (2012) has shown for
Kalotaszeg. Younger musicians also reoriented their services to
the revival events. Still there is a continuity in the musical prac-
tices even if musicians adopt new instruments and styles that
are not always valued by the revivalists (Hooker 2007, Bonini
Baraldi 2013). In the spirit of safeguarding the musical mate-
rial, a large-scale initiative called the Final Hour (Hungarian:
Utolsó Óra) was carried out by the Hungarian Heritage House
based in Budapest. This survey broadened the geographic scope
of the collected musical material.2

Being in the focus of the dance and music revival was not
without problems for Romungre ensembles. While they became
recognised as masters of their style of music, revival organisers
also pursued a particular idea of purity and instrumental arrange-
ment to which musicians are expected to stick. Katalin Kovalcsik
observed that this purism implies the conservation of the social
hierarchy (Kovalcsik 2010: 64). Some successful musicians,
most notably from the Vlax Romani communities in Hungary,
resisted to comply to expectations of this purism but Romungre
most often follow the rules when perform for dance revival
events. Their position was best described with the term ‘liminal-
ity’; while they accept a subordinated role they also manage to
create an atmosphere with their music in which social boundaries
seem to break down (Hooker 2007).

Additional tensions arise from nationalising pressures
on the whole revival movement. Recording and archiving the
music material already involved ethnicising since the music
was labelled as Hungarian even if the musicians are seen as
Roma. Similar pressure was present when Romanian institu-
tions recorded the music often from the very same musician
and published under the Romanian label (see Csongor Könczei
2009). Events within the revival movement in Transylvania
(festivals, summer camps etc) are almost exclusively attended by
Magyars, both locals and from Hungary. In 2011 the UN-
ESCO registered the ‘Táncház method: a Hungarian model for
the transmission of intangible cultural heritage’, as part of Reg-

2  See link: http://utolsoora.hu/
ister of Good Safeguarding Practices. It is notable that it is not the musical material but the method of revival it recognised, but this method also includes extracting practices which are involved in the archiving of the music played by the Romungre for peasant communities and transposing them to the urban environment. Analysing the process in the context of intangible heritage governance of the international organisations Mary Taylor argues that policies promoted by the UNESCO have the unintended effect of reifying culture and turning it into a domain for investment. Along with this process younger Romani musicians are increasingly depriving from the central role in accompanying dance events (Taylor 2009: 53).

The post-socialist marketisation of cultural production also impacted on the ways Romungre are attracted to take part in the Hungarian media. A public TV channel with the collaboration of the Hungarian Heritage House started a talent contest ‘Fly Peacock’ (Főlszállott a páva) where amateur folk-dance ensembles as well as ‘tradition bearer’ singers and dancers compete. Preselection is organized on regional basis and in each edition there is significant participation from Transylvania. During the 5th edition (2017) a Hungarian Romani male singer from the Őrkő, a settlement from Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe) reached to the semi-finals and during the final award ceremony was offered a special price by the Hungarian Ministry for Human Resources. In the same year a Romani duo from Slovakia was even more successful, although not in the traditional register but in pop music; they managed to win the main award during the Hungarian X-Factor contest.

Rico and Claudia also reached to the finals but got the second place in 2014 during the X-Factor of Czech Republic and Slovakia. In 2017 they were coached by a popular Romani musician who was also part of the jury. The ‘Fly Peacock’ competition does not involve direct coaching in the same way nor their jury included Romani musicians (so far).

As complementary to this symbolic or ‘intangible’ common heritage there is a very clear human dimension of the relations between Roma and Hungarians in Transylvania. The centuries of coexistence often brought them into the same institutional frames, and traditional church membership is one of these where Roma share their affiliation with their Hungarian neighbours. In Kalotasvég for example Romungre typically are members of the Reformed (Calvinist) Church. During celebrations, in particular the Confirmation Ritual they are dressed in the peasant costumes and the homogeneous ethnic appearance is maintained symbolically (see Fosztó 2009). In other regions Romungre are Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Unitarians or following other local denominations. There is also a growing influence of the new religious movements which offer a different form of spiritual and social empowerment.

The fall of the socialist regime brought about a decline in the socio-economic conditions of many Roma and the renewal of social tensions. There was an increase of ethno-national tensions and there were several instances of violent confrontations between Roma and local majorities including also Hungarian - Roma conflicts (see Toma 2012 on ethnic segregation and conflict, and on the benefits of ‘local knowledge’ in conflict situation Gheorghe and Pulay 2013). There is however one memorable instance of ethnic conflict when Roma and Hungarians were on the ‘same side of the barricade’ (Puczi 2000). In Târgu Mureş (Hungarian: Marosvásárhely) during the dark days of March 1990 when a Romanian crowd was provoked (with the contribution of the Secret Service) to attack the demonstrating Hungarians, local Roma hurried to join them under the slogan “Hungarians, don’t be afraid, the Gypsies are here!” (Hungarian: Ne féljetek magyarok, itt vannak a cigányok!). As aftermath Romani participants in the conflict suffered persecution and imprisonment disproportionately.

In more peaceful periods there are still some tensions present. Some authors urge the Magyar elite in Transylvania...
The Béla Puczi Memorial

During the summer of 2017 an organisation in Budapest called Roma Press Centre announced its intention to prepare a memorial plaque dedicated to Béla Puczi, a Hungarian Rom from Târgu Mureș who took part in the violent conflict between Romanians and Hungarians in 1990. Puczi sided with the Hungarians and soon after that he was arrested, beaten, kept for eight months in prison, and finally convicted for one-and-half year sentence for ‘street hooliganism’. He tried to take refuge in Hungary but he was not welcomed by the immigration office due to ‘his race’ and was only granted permission to stay after long and humiliating procedure. The Roma Press Centre recorded his autobiography and published it as a book (Puczi 2000) but he has never received any compensation. He died as a homeless person on the streets of Budapest in 2009. Post mortem, his family received a decoration in 2010. The Roma Press Centre managed to collect the funds from public donations and the plaque was ready to be installed on the external wall of the Nyugati Railway station where Puczi spent his last years. It was planned that the event will be part of the Roma Pride March which is annually held in Budapest on the 7th October but the Hungarian Railways have not granted permission for the memorial, since Puczi – they argued, was not an employee of the company. The Minister for Human Resources proposed that the memorial plaque should be placed on the wall of the Roma Cultural Centre yet to be finalised in Budapest, which was seen as an attempt to segregate the commemoration.  The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania issued a statement asking the Hungarian Railways to allow the memorial plaque be installed and suggested that it could be inaugurated on the Day of Hungarian Pride, 23 October 2017.  The head of the Railways finally took the decision to allow the memorial plaque and it was inaugurated on 10 December 2017.  In this way finally Puczi Béla, a Romungro coming from Transylvania, can be remembered as a common hero of Roma and Hungarians.

CONCLUSIONS

The attitudes and relationship of Hungarian elites to Romungre is ridden with ambivalence as demonstrated by this brief overview of different domains (music, dance, folklore, and political loyalty). This ambivalence is present both in the scholarly approaches and public discourses. However one can also see that elements of the Romungre and Magyar culture are intricately connected within the frame of a regional culture which developed over the centuries by mutual exchanges. Ideas about (Hugarian) national culture, cultural purity and the postulated intimate link between folklore, music, and the national soul obscured the facts which can be revealed by closer analyses that the different aspects of cultural traditions among the Romungre communities share many features with their Hungarian or Romanian neighbours. Preserving a symbolic and socio-political subordination of the Roma is often at the centre of the public discourses, and the anxiety of imminent change of hierarchies is a main source of this ambivalence.

The example of the music making and Romani musicians demonstrated that a historical division of labour fa-

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cilitated the professionalization of Romani musicians. Music making, similarly to other jobs performed by members of the Romungre groups brought Roma into intense socio-economic and cultural exchanges with other populations still they main-
tained their cultural particularities while also providing crucial cultural services to the peasants. While with the active contri-
bution of the local institutions, such as the historical churches, the cultural diversity often continued to be hidden under the 
guise of putative ethnic homogeneity during public events.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were recurrent pressures to ethnicise and nationalise the cul-
ture of peasants which impacted on how Romani culture was

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