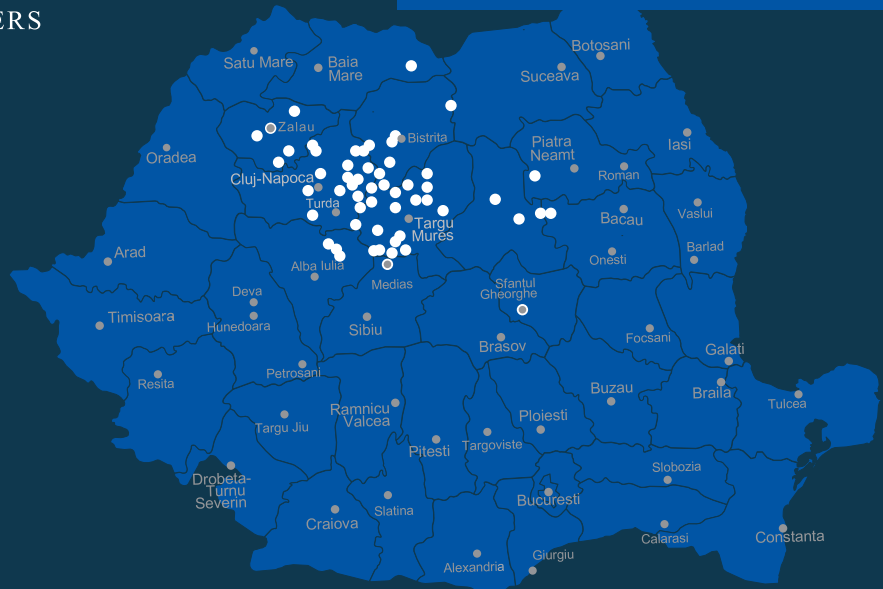




III. 1

- Map of the locations of the musical ensembles from Transylvania who were recorded during the Final Hour programme (starting from 1997)



3.10

# 'Hungarian Roma' in Transylvania

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OpenStreetMap, Foszto László  
Data source: <http://utoisoora.hu/en/final-hour.html>

László Foszto

The position of Hungarian Roma (Romungre) within the ethnic mosaic of Transylvania was seen as ambivalent by generations of Hungarian researchers. This article presents the main elements of this ambivalent relationship. Music, oral folklore, demography, and political loyalties are the main domains discussed and shown that Romungre were and are understood through lenses of cultural nationalism, archaism and purity, or nationalising minority ideologies. Potentially a better approach would be to accept Romungre being both Roma and Hungarian.

## INTRODUCTION

The *Romungre* (singular *Romungro*) in other words the Hungarian Roma/Gypsies (Hungarian: *magyar cigány*) 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 macro region, 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), Vojvodina (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: *muzikus*).

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 Romani 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').

## III. 2

Musician graffiti on a street in Cluj / Kolozsvár, 2016

Photo: László Márkó



## III. 3

Present day musician, Szilágyság, Sălaj county, 2017

Photo: László Fosztó



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 life-style, 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 Romungro 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 AMBIVALENT 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

III. 4, 5

Confirmation ceremony: Romani and Hungarian youth wear local folk costumes, Kalotaszeg, Cluj County, 2004

Photos: László Fosztó



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 Wlislöck 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-guenern*) who were seen as more 'authentic' in contrast to the Hungarian Roma. Additionally Hermann was commissioned

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-

III. 14

## Galamb-leány / The Pigeon-girl

*Hás pes ékhar ek phúri džuljí. Ola džuljá džin pe lako tenipó džin pe lako phurip numa jek raklo ás la. (...) Kan' ás o rakló oxtó boršéngro, pendjás lake:*

- Mámo!
- Só j muro raklo?
- Mámo, me dikhljom ando föro, ek phuró gadžó, ke šukár feštinél.
- Muro raklo, koda búš škola sitjiljas, džin kaj feštinđjás kide.
- Mámo, me té meráw dake na feštináp té me sár vo!
- Na míg muro raklo, ke té tuke kerá jeg mihéje, dake phiréhe ke škola haj té tu kidé feštinéha sar koda puro gadžó.

*Phirdjás o rakló ke škola, barijlás, haj kan' opré barijlás, dinjás les lesri daj othé ke koda phuro gadžó kaj dikhljás vo ki sár feštinél. Kan' othé dinjás les, kerdjás dij bórš le phuré gadžéhe butji, pal dij bórš maj mišto džangljás sar o gadžó te kereł butji. Nohat dikhljás o rakló ke vo maj bú' džanel sar o gadžó. Akor aviljas khéré, kerdjás peske mihélje. Kisi šukar kipi kérélas feštinélas k'o Děl te ferinél ke ande sástji lume so manúš sa'vo nás, kaj te feštinél kide šukár. Kú ratja kú djese kerlas butj' ande mihéje. And' eg ratji ko dešuduj ori avél eg baro ráj leste.*

- Lačhi ratji!
- Údjan te dzivés gule rája!
- Díg mo raklé! Šundjóm tre hiróstar. Ke čé baró feštóši án tu.
- Ape, gule raja?
- Dík, čore raklé! Dík, andjóm tuke te kerés mange ek sóbro pal muri gadži. Muri gadži muljás dešupándž bórš. Haj numa ek kípó hin la mándár. Kamós te keráv lak' ek sóbro. Po kind šáj avelas gáta?

Fragment from a tale in Romugro dialect told by the 19 year old Culi János from Szucság / Suceagu in Cluj County (Nagy-Vekerdi 2002: 120).

*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?

## III. 6

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



## III. 7

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 folkballads 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.<sup>1</sup> 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).

III. 8

Hungarian girls dancing in the inner city of Cluj / Kolozsvár with the occasion of Hungarian cultural days 2015

Photo: László Márkó



III. 9

Musicians play in the cemetery next to a grave, Kalotaszeg, Cluj County, 2004

Photo: László Fosztó



tive ways an old European tradition which has regional variants 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 different ethnic communities.

Based on the work of Martin and others a folk dance revival movement (Hungarian: *Táncház*) started to flourish by the 1970es in Hungary. This revival movement was characteristically an urban phenomenon aiming at revitalising folk dances as form of entertainment for the educated and politically active 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 everyday 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 Romungro musicians performed with colleagues from these professional revival bands in revival festivals and concert halls and toured worldwide (see Quigley 2014).

Villages like Szék (Sic), Magyarpalatka (Pălatca), or Szászcsávás (Ceuaș) 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 practice 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 practices 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 material, 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.<sup>2</sup>

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 arrangement 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 Vlach 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 'liminality'; 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 institutions 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 UNESCO registered the 'Táncház method: a Hungarian model for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage', as part of Reg-

<sup>2</sup> See link: <http://utolsoora.hu/>

III. 10

Romungro leaders and their interpreter during an English language workshop in Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe), 2010

Photo: László Fosztó



III. 11

Ricco & Claudia (Kludia Farkas and Richard Šárkőzi) winners of the Hungarian X-Factor contest in 2017

(c) <http://rtl.hu/rtlklub/xfaktor/ricco-claudia>



ister of Good Safeguarding Practices.<sup>3</sup> 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 deprived 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 the Hungarian Heritage House started a talent contest 'Fly Peacock' (*Fölszállott a páva*) where amateur folk-dance ensembles as well as 'tradition bearer' singers and dancers compete.<sup>4</sup> 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 Örkő, 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.<sup>5</sup> Ricco 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 Kalotaszeg 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 féljete 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

3 See link: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/BSP/tanchaz-method-a-hungarian-model-for-the-transmission-of-intangible-cultural-heritage-00515>

4 See links: <http://hagyományokhaza.hu/folszallottapava/versenykiiras/>, <https://www.mediaklikk.hu/folszallottapava>

5 See link: <http://rtl.hu/rtlklub/xfaktor/ricco-claudia> and <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/hungary-romani-duo-from-slovakia-win-the-x-factor-music-competition>

III. 12

Eötvös Rémusz, a Romungro singer from Órkő, Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe)

(c) <https://www.mediaklikk.hu/crew/eotvos-remus/>



III. 13

The inauguration of the Béla Puczi memorial plaque at the Nyugati Railway Station, Budapest, 10 December 2017

Photo: Gabriella Csozó / FreeDoc



to “nurture a Hungarian-conform Romani elite” (Kiss 2011: 21) in order to ensure the political loyalty of the Romungre and to increase the numbers of Hungarians within schools and other institutions. Similar calls have been voiced (urging that Romungre should register as Magyars) during the preparations the most recent population census (2011). This was presented as particularly important since the number of Hungarians is constantly decreasing in the postsocialist Romania. Political participation is another domain of concern: a politician representing the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania before elections cynically referred to the Romungre as ‘dark-skinned reservist Hungarians’ (Hungarian: *tartalékos barna magyarok*); another politician from the same organisation – after losing elections in front of his Romanian competitor –, blamed the “outsiders living in destitution at the periphery of the town” in a typical scapegoating argument.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://rmdsz.ro/sajtoszoba/hir/frunda-gyorgy-levelet-irt-a-marosvasarhelyiekhez>

## 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 (Hungarian) 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-

III. 15

## 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.

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 maintained their cultural particularities while also providing crucial cultural services to the peasants. While with the active contribution 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 culture of peasants which impacted on how Romani culture was

incorporated into the nationalising process. More recently, entering the twenty-first century, the policies for preserving and governing immaterial heritage promoted by the international organisations continue to reify and canonise cultures. This brings about new ways of cultural production and transmission which are compatible with the late capitalist economy but rarely benefit the local populations. A more balanced approach and cultural policies are yet to be developed in order to serve better and contribute to reproduce the regional richness of the Transylvanian folk cultures including the traditions of the Romungre.

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