

Romani (Gypsy) Music-Making at Weddings in Post-Communist Romania:
Political Transitions and Cultural Adaptations

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Anyone attending a traditional wedding in Romania during the communist period, such as in the 1970s or '80s, and returning to such a celebration during the 1990s or early 2000s would immediately notice that, although structurally the wedding ritual proceeds more or less the same now as before, the non-ritual music and dance that currently form part of the festivities are significantly different. Amplified instruments in many cases have replaced acoustic ones, and electronic instruments have joined and often supplanted traditional ones. Moreover, the songs now widely heard are more frequently "Balkan pop" and "Gypsy" music rather than Romanian traditional repertoire, and "Gypsy" as opposed to Romanian dance forms dominate. This article examines how and why these changes have taken place, and provides a description of a typical contemporary village wedding.

I explore, in particular, how the political and cultural developments in post-communist Romania have affected music-making by Romani (Gypsy) performers at traditional weddings. My primary questions concern how Romanian wedding music and dance repertoire have changed since the communist period and why. I suggest that the developments in traditional dance since 1989 reflect, in cultural terms, Romania's transition from forty-five years of communism to the post-communism of the present and future, envisioned as a democratic market economy in which anticipated membership in the European Union looms on a moderately distant horizon. I argue the following three points: first, the changes that have occurred in the wedding dance repertoire over the past fifteen years have generally represented a shift from Romanian traditional dance genres to genres that are or are coded as Romani. Second, these changes are a result of the more open political and social climate that followed the fall of communism, especially the freedom of speech and contacts with the outside world that were permitted. And third, issues of cultural, ethnic, and gender identity in transition in post-communist Romanian society are mirrored in the dances now performed at weddings. My findings are based on fieldwork in southern Romania, where I have interviewed many Romani musicians and attended numerous weddings at which they performed.(1) My observations are also informed by cultural developments elsewhere in the post-communist Balkan world.(2)

Brief introductory remarks on politics in twentieth-century Romania, Romani musicians, traditional weddings, and communist-period repertoire precede my main discussion of post-communist wedding music and dance genres, including a detailed treatment of two principal forms (the "*manea*" and "*lăutar horă*"). I also include a summary ethnographic account of a village wedding that I attended in 2002 that illustrates, in particular, post-communist celebratory music and dance.

POLITICS AND CULTURE IN ROMANIA: 1944 TO THE PRESENT

The communist period in Romania lasted from August 1944 to December 1989, at which time the Romanian Revolution, an anti-communist popular uprising, took place. As elsewhere in Eastern Europe that year, the communist government collapsed. The dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu (who had ruled since 1965) and his wife Elena were assassinated on December 25, 1989, after which a post-communist political system was put in place. The most coveted civil liberties that had been denied over the preceding forty-five years - freedom of speech and the right to travel abroad - were reinstated. These changes profoundly affected the cultural developments that occurred after the Revolution. Indeed, freedom of speech since 1990 has clearly been part of the democratic process in Romania, as well as throughout post-communist Eastern Europe. But it has also promoted public expression of xenophobia, including increased hatred and discrimination against Romania's Romani minority.

Romani Musicians in Romania: *Lăutari*

Romania's Romani population numbers somewhere around two million in a total population of about twenty three million.(3) Romani musicians, called *lăutari* (sg. *lăutar*) in Romanian, are members of this minority ethnic community (I will utilize the term *lăutar* here since there is no simple English term to replace it). They are male Romani professional musicians who perform in small traditional ensembles usually for non-Romani (mainly ethnic Romanian) society. *Lăutari* are the primary performers of live music at traditional weddings.(4) Their occupation was and still is hereditary, passed along the male kinship line within families. From at least the late fifteenth century in the south of what is now Romania and by the latter sixteenth century elsewhere, *lăutari* were household slaves who made music for the Romanian nobility and clergy. Not only *lăutari* but virtually all Roma in Romania were enslaved over a period of five hundred years, from the late fourteenth to the nineteenth century. Following their emancipation in 1864, they continued to make music professionally for Romanian audiences at weddings and celebrations, a monopoly they have maintained up to the present time.

Romanian Traditional Weddings

Weddings represent the most commemorated ritual event of the life cycle in Romanian society. Traditional weddings - long, festive celebrations - also are the most significant occasions at which people gather to socialize, dance, eat, and drink. Music, performed by *lăutari*, plays a central role at weddings. After various ritual events at the bride's and groom's homes and a ceremony at the church, the wedding banquet takes place: a lengthy, elaborate, all- or late-night feast, accompanied by virtually non-stop music and dancing. I refer here to traditional weddings, by which I mean primarily village weddings that extend over at least two days and include rituals, customs, and specific music. But it should be noted that urban weddings also can be traditional in the same ways. Many of the age-old nuptial customs and ritual songs are still performed at weddings.(5) These include the shaving of the bridegroom, with its specific song; the veiling and unveiling of the bride, which frame the wedding and are accompanied by ritual songs; and *bradul*, "the fir tree," a suggestively symbolic icon of fertility around which people dance. In light of the many other changes that are now occurring in the wedding lore, these persistent rituals and songs exhibit a striking tenacity, due, needless to say, to their underlying

significance as metaphors of separation and fertility within the wedding rite of passage. They are certainly deserving of much attention and discussion in their own right. I am interested here, however, mainly in the non-ritual, that is, social dance genres that, by contrast, have evolved radically since the Romanian Revolution took place.

Wedding Repertoire in the Communist Period

Before we turn to the post-1989 changes in dance repertoire, let us consider what preceded them. Throughout most of the twentieth century, *lăutari* played traditional Romanian music in public. Their instruments included the violin (*vioară*), accordion (*acordeon*), string bass (*bas*), and cimbalom (*tambal*).⁽⁶⁾ Several key dance forms were typical at weddings. The most common among them was the generic Romanian group dance or hora (*horă*), often called the Romanian national dance. It is in duple meter and is danced by both men and women who take diagonal steps forward and back in a closed circle with hands held. The other chief dance in the south is the *sîrbă*, a circle (or semi-circle) dance in duple meter with a shoulder hold.⁽⁷⁾ Between 1944 and 1989, but especially during Ceaușescu's rule, the wedding music and dance repertoire was dictated and monitored by the communist government. *Lăutari* were instructed to perform exclusively "native" genres, conforming to the official attempts to control cultural expression by permitting only "pure, traditional" Romanian music.⁽⁸⁾ The constraints placed on music played in public by *lăutari* became progressively more severe during Ceaușescu's reign in the 1980s.

WEDDING MUSIC AND DANCE IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA

Within the context of strictly regulated dance music at weddings, the Romanian Revolution in December 1989 represented a real threshold, since within a relatively short time, years of cultural restrictions were overturned. By January 1990, new sounds as well as innovative genres and styles were beginning to supplant older ones. Electronic, as opposed to traditional and acoustic instruments became more widespread, gender and ethnic markers of earlier dance styles began to break down, and "non-native" dance genres and styles in many cases superseded "native" ones. Romani music, which had been officially viewed as representing culture that undermined Romania's purported social homogeneity, surfaced and in fact became the craze.

In order to understand where this suddenly popular Romani music came from in the 1990s, we must shift our gaze from the domain of official public Romanian culture to the unofficial private Romani arena. In addition to the traditional mainstream Romanian repertoire that *lăutari* played widely during the communist period at weddings and other celebrations for Romanian society, they also performed another, Romani, repertoire, at Romani, not Romanian, weddings where Romani in-group songs and dances were heard. Indeed, this Romani repertoire formed a type of underground musical culture, one that was increasingly embraced by ethnic Romanians after 1989. Romani musical styles that figured in Romanian public events after 1989 included what are termed "Oriental music" (*muzică orientală*) and "lăutar music" (*muzică lăutărească*) - both songs and dances. The *manea* (pl. *manele*), a term I will adopt since there is no English equivalent, is a dance performed to Oriental music (mainly songs), while the *lăutar hora* (*hora lăutărească*) is danced to *lăutăr* music, both instrumental and vocal. It is to these two dance forms, the *manea* and *lăutăr hora*, that I now turn.

The *Manea* (Oriental Music)

The *manea*, a twentieth-century urban-based vocal-dance genre, is an immensely popular form that dominates at weddings in Romania. It represents a blend of native, Romani, Balkan, Oriental, and Occidental effects.(9) Similar “folk-pop fusion” [Silverman 2003: 129] styles are to be found elsewhere in the Balkans, such as in Bulgaria, where it is called *chalga*, and where, like in Romania, post-communist freedoms allowed for the public performance of previously-banned music.(10) The *manea* reflects a distinctly Middle-Eastern sound (hence its name as “Oriental” music), particularly in rhythm, melody, and instrumentation.

The Oriental music that provides for the dancing of the *manea* departs significantly from Romanian traditional music. It is recognized by its signature syncopated “Middle Eastern” rhythmic pattern in duple meter, often called *chiftitelli*, which contrasts with the more even duple meters of Romanian traditional dance.(11) Oriental music melodies contain intervals that are stereotypically coded as Middle Eastern (especially chromaticisms and augmented seconds) as well as heavily ornamental figures, again a departure from the more uniform diatonic patterns in Romanian genres. Moreover, many of the instruments now played for Oriental music are electronic; all are amplified. They include synthesizers (which create characteristically Middle-Eastern timbres), keyboards, electric guitars and violins, and drum sets, as well as accordions, clarinets, and saxophones - ensembles that differ notably from earlier formations of acoustic, traditional instruments.

The *manea* as dance contrasts sharply with Romanian traditional dances. It is a solo (individual) improvisatory form typified by subtle, sensual movements of the dancer’s outstretched hands and arms as well as small steps in which the feet step forward and back. The effect is more or less suggestively sexual. Because the *manea* is so different from conventional Romanian wedding dances, it has engendered a new cultural identity, one that plainly appeals to many. Indeed, I have attended numerous weddings in post-communist southern Romania, and they reveal an unambiguous picture in terms of preferred dance genres: the *manea* is by far the most popular social dance among Romanians.(12) Romanian fans of the *manea* include mainly rural, rural urbanite, working-class, and, above all, young people. Despite its appeal, however, the *manea* also alienates many listeners (primarily members of the Romanian urban elite), specifically due to what is perceived as its “foreign” music and “vulgar” lyrics, a topic of considerable interest that I do not explore here.(13)

Although the earlier, pre-1990 Romani-performed *manea* as dance was bounded by gender and ethnic lines, these divisions have broken down in post-communist Romania due to a loosening of traditional social conventions and the increased influence of Western media. While the earlier *manea* was a female genre, this gender division collapsed during the 1990s, and although women still dance the *manea* more frequently than men, it is now a mixed-gender form. Moreover, while the *manea* was formerly performed solely at Romani events, it was also adopted by ethnic Romanians at their weddings, especially after 1989. Paradoxically, the *manea*, which was suppressed particularly in the late communist period because of its Romani associations, has by now become standard in the wedding dance repertoire of Romanians.

The *manea* dance form finds analogues elsewhere in the Balkans: in the *chochek*, a Macedonian solo female Romani dance, termed *çoçek* in Albanian and *kiuchek* in Bulgarian. In these last two countries it is also now danced by both men and women as well as by the ethnically dominant (non-Romani) members of

society.(14) This dissolution of gender and ethnic distinctions speaks to a new, far more Western, and indeed global sense of identity that has permeated the post-communist Balkans.

Throughout Romania, and all of Eastern Europe, musical culture changed conspicuously after 1989: borders dissolved and previous restrictions were eliminated or loosened. As I have suggested, these openings were exploited; traditional and popular music, now freely entering from both East and West, were keenly embraced and assimilated by Romani musicians and their Romanian patrons. Freedom of expression in the post-1989 world allowed for the bold adoption of musical style and effects from Romani, south Slavic, Turkish, and other Middle Eastern sources, as well as from the cultures of European and American rock, disco, jazz, hip-hop, and rap. Moreover, by the 1990s, much of this music was danced and performed in a more provocative, “sexy” style than had ever been permitted in public in communist Romania.

The *Lăutar* Hora (*Lăutar* Music)

Let us turn our attention now to the traditional *lăutar* hora, a Romani dance form that, like the *manea*, has circulated since the early twentieth century among Roma and until more recently did not figure prominently in the Romanian wedding repertoire. Also like the *manea*, the *lăutar* hora reflects an urban style that evolved in southern Romania for Romani in-group events. It is a traditional dance in duple meter and is performed on “classic” *lăutar* instruments (especially the accordion, string bass, and cimbalom); moreover, it is danced to both instrumental music and songs. The conspicuous rhythmic bass line that the cimbalom provides is particularly distinctive to this music. The *lăutar* hora is danced individually (solo), a distinct contrast to the Romanian hora, which is executed in a group circle. Also unlike the Romanian hora, the *lăutar* hora is marked by improvisation, sudden changes in direction, active arm movements and finger-snapping, rhythmic foot-stamping, and in general an engaged, energetic style.(15) In other words, the *lăutar* hora is performed in a manner that differs significantly from the Romanian hora. While the Romanian hora was traditionally a favorite social dance at weddings, in today’s world, the *lăutar* hora is replacing it, something I have noticed more and more frequently even during the past several years.

The growing popularity of the *lăutar* hora is representative of a larger phenomenon akin to the appeal of the *manea* - namely, a fascination with Romani culture and expression.(16) Just as the *manea*, coded as Romani, has been adopted by Romanians especially since 1989, so the *lăutar* hora is supplanting the Romanian hora, at least at weddings in southern Romania. Dancing the *lăutar* hora provides an expressive means by which Romanians can articulate an inverted identity; this is effected through empathy and mimicry of what is perceived as Romani. Through the experience of the *lăutar* hora, Romanians are enabled, albeit fleetingly, to assume an exotic persona. While dancing “like a Gypsy” to “Gypsy music,” Romanians can briefly espouse a romanticized Romani identity, momentarily becoming like idealized images of Roma: passionate, intense, and free-spirited. And yet, there is always a tension embedded in this fascination for Romani culture because of the implicit hostility felt by the dominant ethnic group for Roma, even musicians. Perhaps it is precisely this tension that makes performing the *lăutar* hora - as well as the *manea*, for that matter - exciting for Romanians, especially in today’s world of increased public xenophobia.

VILLAGE WEDDING IN GIURGIU COUNTY: AUGUST 2002

In August 2002 I attended a traditional Romanian (Orthodox) wedding that took place over the course of three days in the village of Milcovățu, located southwest of Bucharest in Giurgiu County. My abbreviated account of that wedding presented here focuses primarily on the music, songs and dances, that formed part of the wedding as a public celebration. The wedding festivities began on a Saturday evening and lasted until midnight. They resumed the next morning (Sunday) and continued uninterrupted until early Monday morning. I accompanied the performing ensemble of Romani musicians, most of them members of an extended family from a village in the vicinity. They included a female vocalist and seven male instrumentalists: three accordionists (one of whom was the senior and thus head *lăutar* of the ensemble), a violinist, guitarist, string bass player, and cimbalom player; a guest musician from Bucharest who played the synthesizer also joined them. The background events for the music-making consisted of three main arenas: the traditional nuptial rituals, the village processions, and the non-ritual activities—eating, dancing, and socializing.

Saturday Evening

The festivities began on Saturday evening at eight o'clock at the home of the groom and his parents in Milcovățu; the bride was also present. The music started right away with *lăutar* horas and a *manea*, to which the bride, groom, and a few others danced. Then the ritual shaving of the groom took place in the courtyard. It was accompanied by the customary "Bridegroom's Song" (*Cântecul ginerelei*), sung by the senior *lăutar* to traditional instruments. An hour later, the wedding party, including the *lăutari*, split up: some went to the couple's godparents' house and some to the home of the bride and her parents. Tents and tables had been set up at both the godparents' and bride's. Upon arriving, the various guests were served a meal.

The rest of the evening at both places was spent listening to and dancing (in a space under the tent) to the amplified music played by the *lăutari*. The guests at the bride's home included the groom and other young people; accordingly, the repertoire was contemporary--almost all *manele* (pl. of *manea*). At the godparents', however, where the guests were a somewhat older crowd, the repertoire was more varied. There were traditional Romanian dances (the *hora* and *sîrbă*) but also many, if not more, *lăutar* songs "to listen to" (*de ascultare*), as well as the *lăutar* hora and *manea*, all of which the guests, even older ones, danced with joy and abandon. Because there had been an extremely heavy rain earlier in the evening, it was unusually muddy everywhere, including under the tent. This, however, did not keep anyone from dancing. Indeed, that evening an ethnic Romanian man attracted a good deal of attention since he danced the *lăutar* hora for long periods of time with extraordinary energy and zeal, seemingly uninterested in the food or drink he was served or even in the company he kept. He was truly a *lăutar* hora fanatic (a "type" I have noticed at other weddings as well).

Many of the *lăutar* horas that evening expressed quintessential Romani themes: being proud of one's children and having sufficient money to live well. "I'm a happy father" (*Sînt un tată fericit*) included the following opening stanza:

I'm a happy father;	<i>Sînt un tată fericit;</i>
I've worked hard for my children.	<i>Pentru copii am muncit.</i>
I've worked both night and day	<i>Am muncit și zi și noapte</i>

To do everything I can for my boy [son].

Să fac la băiat de toate.

The refrain was:

I want to be able

Vreau să am putere

To make a fortune

Ca să fac avere

For my boy,

La băiatul meu,

Because he is so precious,

Că e de valoare,

And no one has

Și nimeni nu are

A boy like mine.

Băiat c-al meu.

“All my life I’ve enjoyed having money” (*Toată viață mi-a plăcut să am bani*) also provided brisk music for dancing and began with:

All my life I’ve enjoyed

Toată viață mi-a plăcut

Having money to live well,

Să am bani, să trăiesc mult,

To survive from my wealth,

Să trăiesc din avuție,

To enjoy what I love.

Să iubesc ce-mi place mie.

All my life I’ve enjoyed

Mi-a plăcut toată viața

Having everything I need in my home,

Să am de toate în casa mea,

Working to make my own money,

Să muncesc să am banii mei,

To do what I want with it.

Și să fac ce vreau cu ei.

The refrain echoed these sentiments:

Money, money is my life.

Banii, banii-s viața mea.

Without money I’m not anybody.

Fără bani nu-s cineva.

When I have money and things go well,

Când am bani și-o duc bine,

The whole world is on my side.

Toată lumea e cu mine.

All my life I’ve enjoyed

Toată viață mi-a plăcut

Having money to live well,

Să am bani, să trăiesc mult,

To be happy in my home

Să fiu fericit în casă

With my children and my own dear wife.

Cu copiii și-a mea nevastă.

Sunday to Monday

The next morning around ten o’clock all assembled again at the groom’s house, where the festivities began with the *lăutar* hora. Then the groom, wedding guests, and five of the *lăutari* departed to the home of the godparents. The village procession down the unpaved village roads included a good deal of fanfare and was conspicuously festive as the “news” of the wedding was “broadcast”; the *lăutari* played traditional music as the guests gradually made their way through the streets in circle and line formations of Romanian dances. At the godparents’, more dancing took place as several *manele* were played. In the meantime, the wedding party,

minus the groom (who would join up again later in the afternoon), headed off to the bride's home in another joyful procession. Once there, the *lăutari* gathered around the bride and played to her as she “was made ready” (*s-a gătit*). Still and expressionless in her white gown, she sat on a small veranda while her godmother carefully pinned her veil and a crown-like headpiece on her head and then put her make-up on (the bride's hair had already been “done” at a beauty salon earlier, in fact very early that morning in Bucharest). As this took place, the *lăutari* sang the ritual “Bride's Song” (*Cântecul mireșii*), known for its improvisation and adding style; it began with:

Bid, oh bride, farewell,	<i>Ia-ți, mireasă, ziua bună,</i>
To your father, to your mother,	<i>De la tată, de la mamă,</i>
To your brothers, to your sisters,	<i>De la frați, de la surori,</i>
To your garden full of flowers . . .	<i>De la grădina cu flori . . .</i>

As this familiar song continued, the bride broke down and wept—ritually wept, I should say, since her tears are expected to flow at this particular juncture as she ponders the separation she is about to make from her family. Following this, the *lăutari* played the traditional “Bride's Hora” (*Hora mireșii*), to which all assembled danced.

Much of the afternoon was taken up by additional village processions, accompanied by *lăutari* and traditional music, and various rituals of fertility. At the first, termed literally “the wetting” (*udatul*), the bride, aided by two unmarried young men, ceremonially sprinkled a moistened basil stalk in four directions at three different crossroads (the water for “the wetting” was drawn from wells located at the crossroads). Later in the afternoon, back at the bride's home, a small fir tree (*bradul*) was decorated with colored crêpe paper and girded at its base with a bright red runner as the *lăutari* again sang the signature “Bride's Song.” The little fir tree was then placed in a central spot in the courtyard where members of the wedding party formed a circle around it, dancing to the traditional “Hora of the Fir Tree” (*Hora bradului*).

By mid-afternoon, more food was served to those present, who also danced *lăutar* horas and *manele* as the *lăutari* played. By late afternoon (and several processions later), the bride and her family, godparents, and other wedding guests had arrived at the groom's home. The bride's parents brought gifts (table cloths, towels, and pajamas) which were given to the groom's household, soon to be the home of the bride as well (traditional Romanian society is patrilocal). During this ceremonial gift-giving, the *lăutari* performed the ritual “Wedding Dance” (*nunească*). It was seven o'clock when the wedding party finally departed—with music and dance en route once more—to the Orthodox church in the village for the religious wedding ceremony.

After the church service, which lasted about forty-five minutes, the *lăutari*, who had waited outside the church, once again accompanied the party of revelers as they made their way back to the groom's home. A large tent with four long tables and a raised platform with speakers at one end for the musicians had been set up in the courtyard. It provided the setting for the banquet or “great feast” (*masa mare*), the culmination of the wedding. The *lăutari* assembled at one end of the tent and hooked up the amplification system that ensured the ear-splitting volume that would persist until dawn on Monday morning. The guests, who eventually totaled about two hundred, also arrived at this time and began at once to dance, especially the *manea* and *lăutar* hora.

The evening meal, consisting of four courses and endless wine, was served in a leisurely manner until about four in the morning. During the entire banquet, the *lăutari* performed music, mainly *manele* and *lăutar* horas, and the guests danced constantly, breaking only periodically to eat and drink. Virtually all of the *manele* expressed themes of sexual attraction and desire (from the male point of view). “You Are the Woman of my Dreams” (*Tu ești femeia visurilor mele*) was among the most popular *manele* in 2002; it was performed repeatedly at the wedding and began with:

You have entered my soul,	<i>Tu ai intrat în sufletul meu,</i>
And I simply can't forget you.	<i>Și să te uit îmi este tare greu.</i>
I love you with a pure heart,	<i>Eu te iubesc cu inima curată,</i>
But what a pity that you're married.	<i>Dar ce păcat, ești măritată.</i>

The refrain continued with:

You are the woman of my dreams.	<i>Tu ești femeia visurilor mele.</i>
When I'm with you, you give me strength.	<i>Când sînt cu tine, parcă prind putere.</i>
But what a pity you're not all mine;	<i>Dar ce păcat că nu ești toată a mea;</i>
You also have someone else.	<i>Mai ai pe altcineva.</i>

“Salome” (*Salomeea*), with its Biblical subtext of female treachery, was also a “super hit” that year, though its lyrics were far from subtle. It was heard again and again at the wedding. The refrain began the song and was:

Saloo, Salome	<i>Saloo, Salomeea,</i>
What a beautiful woman she is!	<i>Ce frumoasă e femeia!</i>
But as beautiful as she is,	<i>Atât cât e de frumoasă</i>
She's got you crying at home.	<i>Te face să plîngi în casă.</i>

The first verse was:

As long as I have money in my pocket,	<i>Cât am bani în buzunar,</i>
I don't have a care in the world, yeah, yeah!	<i>De nimica n-am habar, da, da!</i>
Everyone's looking [as us], and I feel good	<i>Se-uită toată, și mi-e bine</i>
With my love at my side.	<i>Cu iubita mea lângă mine.</i>

In the early hours of the morning after the meal had ended, the wedding gifts from the guests to the bride and groom, called literally “the gift” (*darul*), were presented in the form of sums of money that were announced by the senior *lăutar*. Next, the bride was solemnly unveiled as she sat on a chair surrounded by the wedding party. The veil and small wedding crown that had been placed on her head some sixteen hours earlier were removed by her godmother to the familiar strains of “The Bride's Song,” sung one last time by the *lăutari*. A spirited Romanian hora—“the great hora” (*hora mare*)—followed, as well as a few last *manele* and *lăutar* horas. The guests were beginning to leave by then. In the meantime, the bride, groom, and performing *lăutari*

accompanied the couple's godparents to their home, with traditional music en route, even at five o'clock in the morning. The couple then returned to the groom's, now also the bride's, home, and the wedding was over. The sun was rising in the early morning sky.

In this account of a traditional village wedding in southern Romania, I have concentrated on the moments in which music played a role. Two types of such "moments" happened over and over from Saturday evening to Monday morning. The first included the ceremonial events that underscored the ritual meaning of the wedding and marriage. They were invariably accompanied by traditional Romanian wedding songs and dances on acoustic instruments and often took place in courtyards and during processions. This repertoire has persisted for generations and provides a fitting testimony to the tenacious nature of the deep structure and traditional significance of the wedding as a rite of passage.

The other "moments" comprised the non-ceremonial periods, those that occurred precisely when the nuptial rituals were not taking place. They happened intermittently throughout the wedding, but especially during the Saturday and Sunday evening banquets when the wedding activities moved under the tents. It is, in particular, this non-ritual social repertoire that has changed so significantly since the early 1990s. Whereas the social dancing during earlier and communist-period Romanian weddings used to include mostly traditional Romanian repertoire, the contemporary "Oriental" and "Gypsy" songs and dances have, by and large, replaced them. And while (urban elite) Romanians decry the secular, crass and sensual themes and style of many of the *lăutar* horas and *manele*, these genres relate - granted, indecorously - to the larger concerns of the wedding. Through their bold verses, brazen rhythms and seductive body language, the contemporary social dances speak to a dynamic sexuality that underlies and even exemplifies the wedding. They are, after all, courting rituals, and invoke, however crudely, the powerful sexual meaning implicit in the wedding as a rite of passage that enables the journey from uninitiated childhood to married adulthood. The now-popular music and dances sanction this passage through the sexuality that they celebrate.

CONCLUSION

Following the tightly guarded communist era of culture, dancing the *manea* and *lăutar* hora have become celebratory experiences for many Romanians. Clearly one of the trends in post-communist Romania is the appropriation of Romani traditional culture, especially music and dance, by Romanians. During the communist years, both the *manea* and *lăutar* hora were part of a quasi-counter culture. Dancing them in public, even in today's post-communist world, is, though not quite subversive, still immensely engaging and exhilarating, and has come to represent the freedoms and subverting of earlier cultural taboos now possible in the post-1989 world.

The music of the *manea* is powerful and seductive; its vigorous rhythms, exotic melodies, and modern sounds are appreciated as "Oriental," Romani, and Western, creating a strongly contrasting Other as compared to the familiar style of traditional Romanian music and dance. To engage in a formerly banned, erotic Romani dance is stirring and liberating for many Romanians; it combines the allure of the sexy and forbidden with the romance of an imagined "Gypsy" culture. The *manea* as dance is, furthermore, emblematic of the cultural

freedoms and sexual imagery now heavily promoted throughout the Balkans through Western media. It permits, as elsewhere in the Balkans, a more “‘sexualized’ gendered identity” [Sugarman 2003: 106], thanks in large part to this Western mass culture. The popularity of the *lăutar* hora likewise has increased significantly over the fifteen years since Romania’s revolution took place. It too is, for many, an expressive and sensual experience that differs considerably from the more modest and controlled music and dance figures of the Romanian hora.

The changes that took place in the traditional Romanian wedding dance repertoire after 1989 included shifting genres and styles of music, non-traditional instrumentation, and permutations in the gendered and ethnic character of some of the forms. All of these changes have taken place due to the collapse of a political system, and they all represent alternative ways of dealing with culture, ethnicity and gender in the post-communist world. One wonders how much longer these dance forms will continue to delight Romanians, who may find other cultures and worlds in the years ahead permeating their boundaries in new and inspiring ways. In this future Romania, it will be intriguing to view how and why, as well as whether, traditional wedding music and dance repertoire will change.

NOTES

- 1 My observations are based on fieldwork in cities (Bucharest, Craiova, Târgoviște, and Pitești) and villages (Blejeiști, Mărișa, Cartojani, Preajbă, Milcovățu, Palancă, Icoană, Roată, and Celei) in south-central Romania between 1979 and 2004.
- 2 On changes in traditional and popular music in post-communist Eastern Europe, see Slobin 1996.
- 3 The number of Roma in Romania is much disputed; the Zamfirs suggest at least one million [1993: 60] while the Ethnic Federation of Roma in Romania estimates 2.5 million [Pons 1999: 7].
- 4 For a fuller discussion of *lăutari*, see Beissinger 1991, 2001, and 2005.
- 5 On Romanian wedding traditions, especially in the northern region of Maramureș, see Kligman.
- 6 The cimbalom is a type of hammer dulcimer with between twenty and thirty-five courses of strings that are struck by two wooden mallets; for more on traditional instruments employed by *lăutari*, see Beissinger 1991.
- 7 Other traditional dances at weddings in southern Romania include the *brîu*, *breză*, and *geamparale*.
- 8 On communist-era restrictions on Romani music, see Rădulescu 1994.
- 9 For a fuller discussion of the *manea*, see Beissinger 2005; see also Bălașa 2003.
- 10 On “wedding music” in Bulgaria, a genre comparable to Romanian Oriental music in sociomusical ways, of which *chalga* forms a part, see Buchanan 1996.
- 11 On the syncopated Middle Eastern rhythms of the *manea* form, see Garfias 1984.
- 12 On changes in post-communist music-making among Romani musicians in Transylvania, see Buckley 1994 and 2000.
- 13 For a detailed discussion of the simultaneous fascination and disdain for the *manea* in Romanian society, see Beissinger 2005.

- 14 On the Bulgarian and Macedonian dance forms (*kiuchek* and *chochek*), see Silverman 2003; on the Albanian *çoçek*, see Sugarman 2003.
- 15 On the *lăutar* hora, see Giurchescu 2000
- 16 For an account of this phenomenon in Serbia (Vojvodina), see van de Port 1998.

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