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**Clejani Gypsies on the Global Market  
Taraf de Haidouks and the Label of Racism in the World Music Discourse**

**Gergö Pulay**

**Introduction**

Like many other books, internet-sites and other publications attempting to help the orientation of world music-enthusiasts, the book-series *Rough Guide to World Music* aims to introduce all the relevant styles and performers in the category. This particular inheritor of the encyclopedic works which once set out to describe 'all peoples and cultures of the world', includes the following in its chapter about Romania:

„...today, traditional music still flourishes throughout Romania – and perhaps more than anywhere else in Europe. The isolation of the country and its almost medieval lifestyle preserved traditions that have been modernized out of existence elsewhere“ (Broughton – Ellingham, 2000: 240.)

As the ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman notes, the reader can „open the Rough Guides just about anywhere to witness the conditions of ethnomusicological encounter today“: the volumes not only serve as guides to musical recordings and performers, but also to contemporary „world-hopping tourism“, while at the same time producing and reproducing „a discourse that embraces and analyses hybridity, fusion, and border-crossing, in other words the conditions of globalization that are inescapable today.“ (Bohlman, 2002: 144-145.)

Many of the contradictory features which make world music specific in the production of popular culture are apparent in the light of such sources as the Rough Guides. World music is based on the celebration – but at the same time also the production and intensification – of cultural 'otherness' and fusion. It attributes an increasing value to 'places' and their 'cultures', which are made available for a growing circle of audiences – going along with the creation of an image, as if the 'places' and their 'cultures' would have been pre-existent without their representation and market-driven mediation. As Timothy Brennan suggests, in world music „(t)wo sides of a contradiction come together without being recognized as contradictory: the appeal to difference, and the announcement that these differences are happily disappearing.“ (Brennan, 2001:50.)

It is enough to take a look at the latest top lists of leading music journals as 'Songlines' and 'fRoots' or the recent nominees and winners of the BBC's annual World Music awards to acknowledge that during the last decade and a half Romania became one of the great European powers in the production of world music. **Besides Taraf de Haidouks, the brass band Fanfare Ciocărlia from the village of Zece Prajeni also reinforced this fame. More**

**recently, a Berlin-based world music agency and record label have been successfully promoting re-published archival records of classical *lăutari* performers internationally.**<sup>1</sup>

The authors of the Rough Guide quoted above obviously have such developments in mind when they write about Romania's 'flourishing traditional music' associated with its „almost medieval lifestyle“.

Taraf de Haïdouks become one of Romania's major products dedicated to cultural export in this period. The band's international success is closely related to the postsocialist transition which made it possible for Romania to be included in the global networks of popular cultural production associated with the world music label. Hence, the story of Taraf de Haïdouks and the discursive profile of the band which has been elaborated in the musical media can provide us meaningful insights about who represents Romania – or Eastern-Europe for that matter – and in what ways - on the map of world music. From the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, Taraf de Haïdouks' career advanced together with the development of the world music market. It was not only the market itself which determined their reception and activity, but their case also became a paradigm of the ways in which musical products with the Eastern-European/Balkan/Gypsy label – each one of which seems almost interchangeable here – can be marketed in a context of the 'global popular' (During, 1997). At the same time the emerging discourse around Taraf de Haïdouks could not dismiss the fact that the band remained almost completely unknown in its country of origin. As I argue in this paper, the representation of 'local rootedness' that goes along with the detachment from that very 'locality' is particularly meaningful for our understanding of world music in the context of contemporary global cultural production. Earlier articles already discussed the Taraf's international reception as a „politically manufactured one, and dependent on the figure of the Western economy“ (Malvinni, 2003:

249.; see also: Marian-Bălașa, 2004: 205-209.; Silverman, 2007.) The aim of this paper is to pay attention to the way the label of racism was introduced into the discourse around the Taraf and Romania. The argument that it's the prevalent racism of Romanians which kept the band unknown in their country was an effective strategy to veil some of the contradictory outcomes resulted from the Taraf's trajectory as a commodity on the global market of world music.

### **World music: the production and consumption of cultural difference**

World music is nowadays clearly 'in the air'. There's an agreement in the literature that world music should be approached as a symbolic terrain of our age: as much an illustration of notions like 'globalization' and 'deterritorialization' as it is of 'cultural imperialism'. The term itself is widely understood as an umbrella-category for 'musical otherness' and also as a recent market-force towards creating 'mixed' or 'hybridized' musical forms (Feld, 2000; Guilbault, 1994.). However, in a practical sense world music does not exist as a musical genre with any kind of inherent or stylistic unity. The only common feature of the products placed under this label is related to what they are not: the mainstream popular music of the West. Whatever the actual definition may be, during the last two decades 'world music' has provided effective tools and mediums for the recognition, 'empowerment' and the market-involvement of expressive cultural forms associated with marginalized or peripheral social and cultural categories.

As Steven Feld notes, the term (was) „circulated first by academics in the early 1960s to celebrate and promote the study of musical diversity“ (opposed to the elitist notions Western art music; see: Feld, 2000: 146.). The idea of a liberal mission associated with 'world music' also remained a constitutive element of the field after its transformation into a powerful musical niche-market from the late 1980s. One major outcome

of the ongoing institutionalization of the world music field (as the notion of the field was used by Bourdieu; see: Bourdieu, 1994.) is the creation of a new system of reference where diverse musical products – which had rarely ever been viewed as elements of the same category – are gathered and became comparable with each other as parts of a united segment of consumption.

It's beyond doubt that world music provides one of the most significant channels today where ideas like 'recognizing' or 'understanding' the Other are becoming goods, which can be acquired by the act of consumption, without the need for professional knowledge or status – for example, being an anthropologist. From the point of view of the consumers in metropolitan centres world music is a demonstration of the cultural dynamics in an age when there's no more need for any kind of spatial motion or travelling if you want to acquire the experience of differences, or the sense of being a cosmopolitan citizen. The hopes associated with the emancipatory forces being activated by world music can be also found in certain social scientific interpretations. As James Ferguson notes in his essay on the transnational politics of Cuban music: „peripheral cultures, in their new role of 'other', can begin to use the forces of globalization and transnational activity to develop intellectual capital (...), negotiate modernization, and build relationships in which they are at least a partner, if not a dominant player.“ (Ferguson, 2003:13.) However, the 'missing link' of these approaches is related to the mediated nature of world music; or in other words, to the problematic assumption that there's a direct connection between the products available under the world music label and their social and cultural backgrounds. Hence, understanding world music production implies the analysis of images or illusions of places as these are constructed and attached to peoples or their cultural products.

Following this suggestion, one possible way of understanding the 'world music phenomena' is provided through its paradoxes. The field of

world music is able to provide illustrations of the refined techniques of cultural imperialism and colonialization; at the same time the identical cases can be interpreted as outcomes of 'democratizing' cultural flows collapsing distant points of the globe into equalized relationships of cultural exchange. On the one hand the development of 'world music' is based on the possibility of technological dissemination providing access to previously unknown, remote and socially exclusive musical styles; on the other 'world music' has underlying continuities with the long history of the colonial encounters, and therefore with the colonial conceptions of otherness (Stokes, 2004.:60.). Together with the dispersal of world music products we can witness a broader process of commodification, namely that of the liberal multiculturalist though. This stream of thought tends to conceive the facilitation or display of cultural diversity as being capable to resist 'in itself' the homogenizing forces of the state or other centralized political and economical units. However, a pro-diversity stance does not necessarily imply projects for change since the place of its articulation „is also a space which already seems all too easily articulated with the market.“ (Hutnyk, 2000: 36.) Accordingly, the problem of facilitating or displaying cultural diversity is not just about whether it is put into practice or not; it is rather about who produces it and in what circumstances.

Today the discourses on world music are produced and reproduced by an increasingly diverse set of experts (journalists, managers, publishers and also the performers and their audiences). 'World music' as such is precisely embodied in these discourses. As Simon During notes: „leisure markets require incessant discursive supplementation (commentary, criticism, celebration) because consumer preferences are unpredictable and supply constantly exceeds demand.“ (During, 1997: 821.) In this context world music might be an example of late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century aesthetic production characterized by the ongoing quest for a 'real

presence' or 'real voice' of the other – which after all depends on increasingly refined strategies of representation and discursive embodiments. Not surprisingly, instead of the cultural contexts to which they appear to be referring, these discourses are telling us more about the places where they were produced and about the people who are consuming them.

What is important to note here is that world music is far from being unique cultural phenomenon in terms of these contradictions. As Anna Tsing argues, conceptions of globalization as an omnipresent process of homogenization or interconnectedness are seductive, because they not only name the present but also predict its progress into certain futures. (Tsing, 2000.) Instead of 'global futurist dreams' she suggests concentrating on particular projects and trajectories that are involved in the making of „the

local as the stopping point of global circulation“. (ibid. 464.) World music is one of these contemporary projects that provides meaningful examples for the dialectical interaction between various places and the forces which are causing them to interconnect in frequently unforeseen ways.

### Place and detachment

As I mentioned above, the diversity of expressive forms implied by the notion of world music makes it impossible to detect common features of the cultural products being marketed within the category. However, the ways in which world music is mediated, and the strategies involved in the representation of musical and cultural otherness can still provide us ways to understand its distinctiveness. When one enters a



large-scale record store in a metropolitan center, it is typically the section for world music where albums are not categorized by styles or musical genres – such as rock, hip-hop or classical – instead they are typified by the principles of geographical locations, internalized and made available for consumption by these particular musical products. In other words, the discourses of world music signify a shift from conceiving music through styles and genres to cultures and localities (Brennan, 2001.), which acquire a high value as the resource bank of the consumers' imaginative practices.

However, at the same time, from the perspective of these very localities world music products are paradoxically marked by their detachment. Performers representing certain places, countries or regions often remain unknown in these areas, or, if they manage to maintain their reputation, it is often due to the fact that they have developed alternative repertoires for their different audiences back home and abroad. In her case study about the global success of Bulgarian 'narodna muzika' Buchanan provided a detailed understanding of how „traditional music became associated with popular culture“, implying that the performers „were viewed as pop stars abroad“, while their „concepts of musical tradition and authenticity were manipulated to meet the demands of music marketers and impresarios“. (Buchanan, 2006: 343-348.) This point can be expanded to other examples of success under the world music label, typically arising from the tension between the traits of cultural otherness or social marginality and the marketing strategies familiar from the mainstream production of popular culture.

One possible outcome of this tension is the development of dual musical markets where a split is reproduced between products available or popular in sending localities; and the productions globally mediated and consumed under the world music label as emblematic of the same localities. As I point out in the next section of this paper, the promotion of Clejani Gypsies under

the world music label was based on the aesthetization of marginality: a strategy that aims to find the 'remotest' for the sake of projecting the Western notions of 'otherness' and 'resistance' onto it. Moreover, after their inclusion in the market, various attempts had been made to overcome the paradox of a detachment, which in turn, preserved the aura and the representation of the group as 'locally rooted'. As I argue in the next section, this was only possible by the strategic use of the racist label in reference to Romania.

### **A village out of the map**

Although several musical studies had been done there before; Clejani, the village about 30 kilometers from Bucharest was discovered for the international public by the ethnomusicologist Speranța Rădulescu, who conducted researches and made field-recordings there from the early 1980s (Rădulescu, 1997.). At this time Communist cultural policies were aiming to create effective strategies for the 'purification' of Romanian folklore music. Guidelines had been defined concerning the content of public musical performances; and the making of 'polluted folklore' was officially banned – to a large extent identifying the Gypsy performers as the ones to blame for the act of 'cultural pollution'. Politically appropriate musical experts were also mobilized to express their opinion concerning the appropriate steps towards the making of pure, Romanian national music. For Rădulescu the playing and colorful musical world of the Clejani Gypsies – trained on numerous rural weddings and funerals – became interesting in opposition to the centrally planned national traditions of the Ceaușescu-regime. Opposed to the official folklore of Communism, Rădulescu discovered the values provided and maintained by the marginality and backwardness of the Clejani musicians. As she recalled in a retrospective essay: „The musicians of Clejani were visibly Gypsies: poor, impetuous, incapable of adopting the style

of the official popular music; reasons for which the Ministry of Culture considered them an intolerable outrage against the Romanian people.“ (Rădulescu, 1997: 12.) The definition of the Clejani Gypsies in opposition to state-promoted folklore of Romania is a core-element of the discourses that were later used for the Western promotion of the performers as aestheticized ‘outlaws of yore’.

Laurent Aubert, a Swiss researcher, arrived in Bucharest in 1986 to collect recordings for the Archive Internationale de Musique Populaire. These recordings were published in Switzerland 1988, while Aubert and Rădulescu – the latter even endangering her professional position in Romania – were organizing live performances for the group in Geneva and Paris. That was the album which caught the attention of two Belgian managers, and the well-documented story of Taraf de Haïdouks got started at this point.

Stephane Karo and Michael Winter ‘travelled through Europe’ in 1989 to arrive to Clejani during the last months of the Ceaușescu-regime. Although the village is approximately 30 kilometers away from the Romanian capital, it was not represented on any of the maps they knew. According to another version of the same story, the two managers didn’t even have maps since these were banned by Ceaușescu<sup>2</sup>. Whatever was the case, they found themselves in a strange Eastern time-zone, where even the smallest distance could require days to get through. Hence, the two managers went through challenges and experiences that later they made available for the predominantly Western enthusiasts of the group. Although in musical terms the repertoire of Clejani Gypsies can be easily localized as being tied to the traditions of the Wallachian region and the performers are predominantly singing in Romanian language (see: Beissinger, 2001.); the discourse on the band provides several examples of Orientalist distancing. The triangular connection made between culturally coded otherness, spatial distance and the temporal past remained a constant feature of the band’s media-profile.

„Their powerful music, unleashed on the Western ear, works like an Indo-European time machine, sparkling with flashes of recognition from Brahms to belly dancing..... ties a strand of horsehair to the bridge of his violin.“<sup>3</sup>

The image of Clejani as not being included on the maps was important in at least two ways concerning the development of the band’s profile. A place which was not signified by former practices of mapping could easily invoke an almost un-restricted scale of spatial and temporal difference. Moreover, the image of a place that was not on the map also helped to establish the authority of those who, in spite of everything, managed to discover it: hence the managers coming from Belgium appeared as the founding-fathers and ultimate initiators of a story which – according to a large part of the accounts – had almost no antecedents.

The first encounter and also the first journeys of the managers to the village – during which they selected the members of the nascent group and gave it a name– is an element in the discourses on the Taraf de Haïdouks that seems to be indispensable in decoding their music and performance. As opposed to the rather neutral name used before by Aubert and Rădulescu – „musicians from Clejani“ (Lăutari de Clejani) – the name Taraf de Haïdouks was apparently more convincing with regard to the audiences of world music because of its references to the Robin Hood-like „honorable outlaws“. However, the name was also a brand that later only those villagers who were discovered and supported by the managers could claim. Hence the Taraf de Haïdouks’ discovery formulates a narrative which serves the creation of Oriental mystique and also establishes power-relations between those who are discovering and those being discovered (Said, 1978; Todorova, . As another commentator noted:

„What Karo and Winter did brilliantly was maintain the everyday look of the musicians – they were not dressed up in folkloric costumes – and keep the loose group of about a dozen

musicians breaking down into smaller units so there was plenty of variety in the concerts and recordings.<sup>4</sup>

The particularities of the musicians' „everyday look“ were good match for the demand of the world music audience for otherness ‘in itself’. It was also the reason why the Japanese fashion designer Yohi Yamamoto was able to create another stage in the group's career by making extravagant pieces for the members, which could be seen on the cover of their third album and in several magazines.<sup>5</sup> So, the Clejani Gypsies and their music provided proper raw material in many ways. Karo and Winter could ‘put Romania on the map of world music’ through them, while Yamamoto had the opportunity to ‘dress up’ the performers. One more important celebrity in the process of making the Taraf was Johnny Depp who appeared together with the musicians in his 2000 film ‘The Man Who Cried’. Later they were invited to perform in the star's Hollywood club. In the summer of 2007, when the band had a concert in Bucharest after a long period of absence, the local radio stations announced the event as „a party like the one with Johnny Depp“. The attachment of these images to the Clejani Gypsies were all based on their supposed authenticity and local rootedness, but at the same time these were exactly the practices which expressed their detachment from the actual locality.

### Romania and the label of racism

In line with the importance of localities in the promotion of world music, the discourses around Taraf de Haïdouks always devoted special attention to the band's country of origin. In some cases the musicians are represented as participants of the migration wave from Romania to Western Europe.

„Emerging from the rubble of the Communist bloc and the unbroken traditions of a despised people, a leathery troupe of veteran

troubadours, Taraf de Haïdouks, has come West to seek its fortune.“<sup>6</sup>

The performers sometimes appear to be dangerous – the accounts often recall that after the concerts they tried to sell their instruments and tried to approach female members of their audience – but in the end this problematic appearance is always resolved through the image of „honorable brigands“. Moreover, the managers made strenuous efforts to render the appearance of Taraf comprehensible within the framework of anti-globalism or anti-capitalism which tends to mystify certain traits of otherness as obvious signs of resistance. As Carol Silverman notes, the managers often had a patronizing attitude toward the musicians who „had neither a role in creating their international image nor a desire to modify that image; they perceived themselves as powerless in this arena, dependent on non-Romani mentors and mediators.“ (Silverman, 2007: 351.) Ironically, attributing the message of resistance to certain acts of the performers was also part of this patronization. According to an article in the Telegraph, one of the serious problems with the band during a US-tour was that they did not want to cease smoking at any of the venues, ignoring the anti-smoking notices – sometimes even the police had to come in to find a solution. In these situations the Taraf's tour-manager answered as follows:

„When we arrive at the airport in Bucharest, the first big signs we see on the road to our village are for Marlboro, Kent and Winston. If you stop selling American cigarettes in Romania, we'll stop smoking in America.“<sup>7</sup>

Romania's role in the discourses around Taraf de Haïdouks is most often defined through the perceived contradiction between the promoted musical wealth of Romania and the relative disinterest towards the promoted bands in their own country. As I mentioned above, Speranța Rădulescu, more or less, conceived the Clejani musicians as being among the exceptions to the outcomes of Communist state-control of musical expression, or, to the official campaigns



against the ‘polluters’ of Romanian folklore. However, such details tend to lose their meanings in the large-scale discourses on world music. Here Romania is reifying an image of Eastern-Europe which might be also familiar from the social scientific approaches to the region in the 90s. This Eastern-Europe is characterized predominantly by reviving nationalisms and intensifying racial prejudices against minorities. With regard to this background, one of the major dilemmas of the discourse evolving around the Taraf de Haïdouks was the problem of why the band remained unknown and un-recognized in its own country while it enchanted the West. As the journalist of the Independent put it:

„That the restless abandon of Taraf’s ancient music thrives into the 21st Century is miraculous, given the conditions it survives on at home. They are a band only outside Romania. To most Romanians, they’re just a bunch of Gypsies, and for those outside the group, life remains as harsh as ever.“<sup>8</sup>

First, it is important to understand why such a dilemma becomes relevant at all within the discourse of world music. As I mentioned previously, one of the strategies which divides world music as a mode of cultural production from other fields of popular culture is that performers and their products are presented as being closely tied to culturally defined localities. The concept of their originality – beyond the musical content – is sealed through this connection. Within this framework, a group like the Taraf de Haïdouks has to be representative of Romania, Eastern-Europe or the Balkans: if there are discontinuities in this supposed line of representation, it is conceived as a problem located only in the sending country. This place is imagined as distinct and distant from the location and responsibility of those interested in the value of the music coming from there. The answer given for this dilemma in the discourse on Taraf de Haïdouks takes Romania’s high level of racism as its starting point. According to one of the chroniclers of Taraf,

„...the attitude to Gypsies and their music throughout Romanian society is more one of neglect. It is an attitude with racial undertones towards a minority, which is encouraged by government bodies with strong support from the Romanian public. (...) The effect of these attitudes is one of exclusion – and excluding a form of musical expression is very similar to what we find in countries where musical censorship is practiced.“<sup>9</sup>

After being introduced as a powerful explanatory model, racial disdain against Roma in Romania was used as the explanation of apparently market-related decisions: for example it was also appropriated as the reason why Taraf de Haïdouks did not give public concerts in their home country for a decade after their successful entry into the world music market.

In sum, most of the accounts on the Taraf are typically based on a particular strategy of discursive replacement. What is important to note here is that the group was not only ‘brought’ to the audiences of world music from another country. It was actually created within the framework of those audiences’ implied Orientalist/Balkanist fantasies.

The detachment of the music and the performers from their regional and linguistic context and their association with a generalized ‘Gypsy’ or ‘Indo-European’ character is meaningful only within this context. However, such mechanisms need to be veiled in a market where the value of products is closely tied to their representation as ‘locally rooted’ in distant geographical and cultural worlds. Replacing the emphasis from the Western management’s efforts in designing the band to the racism of Romanians served exactly these tactics. However, what remained unanswered here is whether the representation of the Taraf had anything to do with the ways in which people from the sending country – Roma or non-Roma; musicians or non-musicians – thought of themselves or the place where they live.

The reference to the Romanians' racism with regard to the stars of world music seems to be part of a broader discursive pattern based on an oppositional relation between the 'East' and the 'West'. Even if filled with cultural goods, the 'East' is represented here as incapable of appreciating its own values – hence incapable of appreciating itself.

As an outcome, it remains the cultural mission of the 'West' to recognize and validate 'cultures' from other parts of the world – to treat with them in their own right and hence to make them into part of its own cultural territory. This is legitimated by the discourse which takes

racism as the problem of the 'East' while the role of the 'West' is to repair the damage caused by it. Hence, the detachment and appropriation of cultural goods seem to be one necessarily outcome of this missionary project. The case of the Taraf de Haidouks might be an illustration of how this discourse operates, and, in the process, how it contributes to the maintenance of colonial exchange even in such contemporary global fields as world music – fields which are so often depicted by their proponents as bearing the prospects of 'fusion', 'border-crossing' and an interconnected world of flows.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See the web-site with album covers: [http://www.asphalt-tango.de/welcome\\_atr.html](http://www.asphalt-tango.de/welcome_atr.html)

<sup>2</sup> See: Cartwright, Garth: *Princes Amongst Men. Journeys with Gypsy Musicians*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2005, 189.

<sup>3</sup> See: Hooper, Joseph: Band of Gypsies. In *Civilization*, Apr/May 1999, Vol 6./2.

<sup>4</sup> See: Broughton, Simon: Taraf de Haidouks. Simon Broughton on Romania's hottest musical export. In *Songline*, June 2007: 46.

<sup>5</sup> See the cover of Taraf de Haidouks: *Band of the Gypsies*. Cramworld, 2001

<sup>6</sup> See: Hooper, Joseph: Band of Gypsies. In *Civilization*, Apr/May 1999, Vol 6./2.

<sup>7</sup> See: "They're the last great rock'n'roll band – but they don't play rock'n'roll. In *Telegraph*, 18/05/2002.

<sup>8</sup> See: Cumming, Tim: "Taraf de Haidouks: The world of the Gypsy music ensemble is a long way from Hollywood". In *The Independent*, 18/07/2007.

<sup>9</sup> Cartwright, Garth: "„A Little Bit Special“ Censorship and the Gypsy Musicians of Romania" Copenhagen: Freemuse, 2001, 5.

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