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Lăutari playing music at a Romani wedding on the outskirts of Bucharest, approx. 1927-1928.
Photo by Iosif Berman (1890-1941). Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, inventory no. B-5604.

Lăutari playing music music at a Romani wedding on the outskirts of Bucharest, approx. 1927-1928.
Photo by Iosif Berman (1890-1941). Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, inventory no. B-5605.

"*Lãutar* Space": Marriage, Weddings, and Identity among Romani Musicians in Romania

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ABSTRACT

This article treats, through the lens of marriage and nuptial practices, how *lăutari* (professional male Romani musicians who perform at Romanian weddings) and their families self-identify as *Romanianized* Roma. *Lăutari* assume hybrid forms of identity, drawing on both traditional Romani and mainstream Romanian culture as they perpetually create and recreate their own composite sense of "*lăutar* space." *Lăutari,* like many Roma, preserve basic norms of traditional matrimony, and weddings provide an arena in which they express emblems of Romani culture. Yet *lăutari* also invoke their "elite" status vis-à-vis "other Gypsies" by refuting what they view as "backward" marital praxes. Moreover, they both appropriate certain Romanian nuptial traditions as well as sustain a basic distrust of Romanians as non-Roma. While *lăutar* culture has evolved significantly over the twentieth century, younger family members are carving out their own shifting forms of "*lăutar* space" in unprecedented ways, often fueled by educational opportunities. This article examines how *lăutar* identity is nurtured through a dynamic merging of Romani and Romanian cultures and how marriage and wedding practices inform these intersections.

KEYWORDS

Lăutari [Romani musicians], identity, marriage, weddings, hybridity, process.

Lăutari (sg. *lăutar*) are professional male Romani musicians. They self-ascribe as a distinct community in ethnic as well as occupational terms: Romani performers who have long monopolized traditional music-making, especially for Romanian society. *Lăutari* were originally slaves in the Romanian Principalities: along with other Roma who migrated north, they were systematically subjugated by the state, church, and nobility starting in the late fourteenth century (Achim 1998). As male musicians, *lăutari* were settled house slaves (*ţigani de vatră*) who performed for upper-class Romanians and formed a select rank among the enslaved (Beissinger 1991). Following the full abolition of slavery in 1864, *lăutari* continued to pursue music-making for public consumption, a niche that still exists today. They have cornered the market on traditional music-making in southern Romania for generations, earning most of their livelihood performing at Romanian weddings (Beissinger 2005; 2016). *Lăutari* are indispensable musicians and "guardians of tradition" at nuptials for Romanians.

Lăutari perpetuate their occupational skills through the male kinship line. Sons begin to learn the art of music-making as young boys within the home, often assuming professional standing by the time they are in their late teens. Playing instruments is a gendered activity reserved

for men, while singing can be pursued by both male and female family members; some *lăutar* wives sing with their husbands' ensembles. "*Lăutar*" as a term incorporates ethnicity, gender, and vocation (Beissinger 2001). Strictly speaking, *lăutari* are Romani men who make music as their occupation. But another dimension is also critical to understanding *lăutari*: *lăutar* family members. They are primarily the wives and daughters of *lăutari*, who identify with the distinct culture of music-making perpetuated by the husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers in their midst. Among *lăutari,* families provide the gendered milieu in which music performance as a calling is perpetuated from father to son; wives and mothers are expected to enable their husbands' and sons' careers.

1) All quotes are from conversations (between 1998 and 2019) with *lăutari* and their family members in Romanian, which I have translated into English.

Most Roma in Romania recognize the fundamental role of marriage as constitutive of personhood, a conviction that permeates and reinforces *lăutar* culture as well. At the same time, *lăutari* reject various aspects of traditional Romani wedlock, viewing them as "uncivilized" and "old-fashioned," while they appropriate certain features of Romanian matrimony. *Lăutari* occupy a complex, intermediary position in society. They self-ascribe not only as superior to "other," "traditional" Roma but also as quasi-assimilated Romanians—due largely, I argue, to their proximity to majority society through music-making, especially at weddings. Indeed, *lăutari* proudly self-identify as "the most Romanianized (cei mai românizați) of all Roma."[1] These distinctions are reflected in their understanding of marriage and celebrations of it. I explore, in this article, how Romani and Romanian marriage and wedding practices intersect among *lăutari* and their family members and how this informs their self-identification as both "Romani" and "Romanian." Based on ethnographic fieldwork, I examine how marriage furnishes a case in point for considering the role that *lăutari* and their family members assign themselves as *Romanianized* Roma. My discussion focuses on *lăutari* who came of age in the communist period as well as their "millennial" sons and daughters, who likewise self-ascribe as Romanianized but often in contemporary ways that depart from those of their parents.[2] Millennials in *lăutar* families now have educational opportunities that earlier generations did not. Accordingly, some of them are evolving in their views of marriage and family and making changes in their lives that involve increased contact with mainstream Romanian society. The concept of hybridity in identity-formation, including the notion of a "third space" in-between other discrete categories (Bhabha 1994), provides a useful framework for understanding the image that *lăutari* construct of themselves in society. It is primarily traditional Romani and mainstream Romanian communities that define the "symbolic boundaries" (Hall 1996: 3) within which *lăutari* create and perpetuate a composite "third space," what I term "*lăutar* space." *Lăutari* regularly interact with Romanians through performance in ways that many other Roma, whose worlds are less integrated into majority society, do not. It is these Roma whom *lăutari* view as "traditional" (such as depicted in Achim 1998; Engebrigtsen 2007; Tesăr 2012, 2018; and Berta 2019). As musicians, *lăutari* represent and enjoy a "plurality of identities" (Tremlett 2009). As I have repeatedly observed, *lăutari* never cease proclaiming and upholding their distinctly multifarious identity, one that overlaps in diverse ways with both (high-status) Romanians as well as (lower-status) Roma. As Stuart Hall maintains, identification is "a construction, a process never completed—always 'in process'… [It] is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency" (1996: 2-3). Hybrid identity as "*lăutar* space" is open-ended, constantly evolving, perpetually ambiguous. Being *lăutari* is not a static condition but rather an ongoing "journey" of belonging and becoming.

2) Millennials were born roughly between 1981 and 1996.

I explore this "journey" through the experiences of several generations of *lăutari* and their families who simultaneously embrace as well as reject both Romani and Romanian cultural influences in their lives. My sample consists of twenty *lăutari* and their families, many of whom I have known for over two decades, as well as a secondary group consisting of other *lăutari* with whom I have had more sporadic contact over the years. I have attended numerous weddings and other events at which *lăutari* perform in south-central Romania and have conversed at length with them and their families in their homes.[3]

I begin, in the following pages, with a brief discussion of *lăutari* as *Romanianized* Roma and then examine *lăutar* marriage and weddings through the lens of "traditional" Romani as well as "mainstream" Romanian nuptial practices. I argue that *lăutari* (and *lăutar* family members) inhabit and express hybrid identities of "*lăutar* space"—crafted as a result, in large part, of the niche that they occupy as Romani musicians hired at Romanian weddings. I explore how "*lăutar* space" is a dynamic arena where ethnic and cultural "identities" intersect and where musicians and their families are continually changing, updating, and redefining their lives and expectations. My focus is on how marriage norms and customs performed by *lăutari* draw from both Romani and Romanian ethnic and cultural experience, creating a "third space" that is uniquely *lăutar*.

Lãutari as *Romanianized* Roma

Lăutar relations with both Roma and Romanians are complicated: *lăutar* identity is a constant negotiation between Romani and Romanian "spaces." Depending on context, *lăutari* exploit but also eschew various ethnic and cultural emblems that either benefit or hinder their quest for status, recognition, economic security, and a sense of belonging. *Lăutari* and their families express and nurture deep, organic ties to Romani culture. Life for them is experienced through the joy of sharing, abundance (especially of food), and hospitality (Stewart 1997; Olivera 2016; Berta 2019); presentism or living for the moment (Stewart 1997; Gay y Blasco 1999; Day et al. 1999); and the power of music (Stoichiţă 2008; Bonini Baraldi 2013). But *lăutari* also self-identify as an elite within Romani society, sometimes voicing distance from "other Gypsies" whom they view as old-fashioned and whose cultural markers are vastly different from their own.[4] Indeed, self-ascribed "civilized" Roma not infrequently elevate themselves in their discourse above other subgroups (Gay y Blasco 1999; Olivera 2016; Grill 2016). *Lăutari* and their family members often belittle other Roma (such as Spoitori ["Tinkers"], Ursari ["Bear-tamers"], and Căldărari ["Coppersmiths"]), not to mention "other backward Romani ethnic groups," as an accordionist recently lumped them together for me.

This sense of distinction among *lăutari* is often coupled with their avowed affinity to Romanian culture, quasi-assimilation, and self-professed *Romanianized* Romani status. "Romanianized," a term used among *lăutari* and other Roma, refers to perceived similarities to Romanians (see also Racleş, in this special issue, on R*omanianized* Roma). *Lăutari* frequently express kinship with majority society, declaring that they are "just like Romanians" when it is a question of being "civilized." This is articulated in terms of cultural behavior such as speaking Romanian as opposed to Romani, dressing "like Romanians" instead of traditional Roma; and/or rejecting "outmoded" marital traditions undertaken by "others" in the Romani community (Szeman 2018). Due to their profession, *lăutari* have mingled with Romanian society for centuries and have been vital to their celebrations and entertainment. Familiarity

3) I have spent periods in the field virtually every year since 1998 among *lăutar* families in Bucharest and surrounding towns and villages. I wish to express my gratitude to all of them (whose names will remain anonymous) for so graciously sharing their lives with me. I also thank the International Research and Exchanges Board and the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research for their support of my fieldwork.

4) I use the term "Gypsy" when my interlocutors do, but otherwise employ "Roma" and its derivatives.

with Romanian society provides them a source of cultural capital. Yet *lăutari,* like most other Roma, also see Romanians as their quintessential "other." It is axiomatic that Roma acknowledge a deep division between themselves and non-Roma (*Gadže*) (Hancock 1991). What Michael Stewart calls deep "disregard and … disdain for the non-Gypsy way" (1997: 13) widely informs Romani views. Roma (*lăutari* included) not infrequently consider non-Roma parsimonious and unsympathetic (Stewart 1997; Engebrigtsen 2007; Scheffel 2010). *Lăutari* virtually always complain, after performing at Romanian weddings, that they have been underpaid. And with other transactions, they typically feel that non-Roma lack generosity and never deliver "enough" (Stewart 1997). Furthermore, *lăutari* point out that Romanians are "cold" and "unfeeling" when it comes to making music. *Lăutari* perpetually juxtapose this with their own "exclusive, innate" talent and musical abilities as "Gypsies," a dimension of *lăutar* identity that they market and exploit as a useful prop for their profession (van de Port 1999; Silverman 2012).

Marriage

Marriage as the primary means among Roma to achieve personal fulfillment and realize the traditional role expected of them has long been recognized (Sutherland 1975; Miller 1975; Liégeois 1987; Okely 1996; Gay y Blasco 1999; Kovai 2011). For many Roma in Romania, endogamy, patrilocality, family and offspring, early-age and arranged marriage, and permanent alliances form the pillars of matrimony (Grigore 2001; Engebrigtsen 2007; Voicu and Popescu 2007; Tesăr 2012, 2018; Berta 2019). Wedlock, which for most Roma is not viewed separately from family (having children), is an expected and inevitable social process. Indeed, in "traditional Romani families, the scope of marriage is the continuity of the *neam* [subgroup]" (Grigore et al. 2005: 66). Marriage is regarded as a permanent relationship, not only for the couple but also for the families involved. It comprises the central social structure within Romani life. *Lăutari* subscribe to this world view; it is fundamental to their ethos. A rural *lăutar* recently told me, when his daughter was already in her early thirties and still unwed (and, he thought, might never marry and have a family), that unless she got married in the near future, "Nothing will make any sense to me anymore!"

How *lăutari* understand wedlock corresponds in large part to praxes among traditional Roma. *Lăutari* embrace in-group marriage, virilocality, children as constitutive of family, co-parent-in-law bonds, and the stigma of divorce. At the same time, contemporary *lăutari* proudly reject particular Romani nuptial practices (early-age and arranged marriage as well as marital alliances), thereby aligning themselves with Romanian society. The amalgam of norms that *lăutari* observe furnishes a telling reflection of how they self-identify as a distinctive, hybrid community and construct "*lăutar* space." Moreover, certain patterns are also shifting as some millennials intermarry, refuse to dwell in parental households, and are wedding—and having children—significantly later than previous generations.

Fundamental to questions of who marries whom, endogamy among Roma has long been perpetuated as a mechanism for in-group maintenance and cohesion. *Lăutari* virtually all have Romani wives. Among their daughters and granddaughters, however, interethnic relationships are starting to become more common. An elderly rural *lăutar* recounted how, as a young man, he had been in love with a Romanian woman. His parents forbade his marrying her, and so he broke off the relationship, wedding a Romani woman instead. Almost two decades ago, his son (also a *lăutar*) and daughter-in-law

expressed that they would insist, when the time came, that their children (then thirteen and seventeen) marry Roma. This had been imposed on their parents and them, they told me, and they intended to impose it on their own children. Today their daughter (aged 36), who has university and post-graduate degrees, recently married a Romanian, reflecting the extent to which change is occurring. By contrast, their *lăutar* son (now 33) has been married for seven years to the daughter of a *lăutar*. Indeed, marrying within the subgroup is a norm among many Romani communities in Romania (Grigore 2001; Engebrigtsen 2007; Olivera 2012; Tesăr 2018; Berta 2019). Most *lăutari* assert that not only endogamous marriages but also unions between members of *lăutar* families—that is, "endogamy 'within the trade'"—ensure "continuity within the musician profession" (Könczei 2012: 167). Moreover, such marriages produce the ideal environment for music-making since *lăutar*-family wives "understand best" the challenges of the life that *lăutari* lead (Kompár-Romer 2017). Fifteen years ago, an urban *lăutar* couple told me that they hoped their children (then eight and twelve) would wed spouses from *lăutar* families. Their son (a *lăutar* now in his early twenties) has. In a pattern that resembles the aforementioned sister-and-*lăutar*-brother pair, his older sister, however, who has a university degree, is still single (and is not likely to wed a *lăutar*).

When *lăutari* do not marry *lăutar* daughters, they prefer, as do many other Roma, "marriages to those of comparable status," a form of "intra-ethnic status segmentation" (Acedo 2016: 75, 71). A rural cimbalom-player recounted how he did not "find" a suitable bride from a *lăutar* family, so he married the daughter of a *Fierar* (Blacksmith). He specifically told me that Blacksmiths are "almost as 'civilized' as *lăutari*."[5] An urban accordionist (married to the daughter of a *lăutar*) summed it up with "It's okay if a *lăutar* takes a wife whose parents aren't *lăutari*, as long as she's from a family of civilized people, that is, Romanianized Gypsies."

One of the most decisive factors in whether and whom millennial daughters of *lăutari* choose to marry is post-secondary education (see Beissinger 2018). Those who seek degrees beyond high school are more likely to date and marry men who are not *lăutari* or Roma but rather men who share their own experience as educated professionals; most of these men are Romanian. One *lăutar* daughter grew up in a village but attended the University of Bucharest (earning several degrees). She only dated Romanians, who comprised the vast majority of men in her academic and professional circles. She waited until her thirties to settle down and recently married a Romanian whom she met at her work place. They live in a large, modern house in a Bucharest suburb that differs immensely from the rural milieu in which she grew up. If asked ten years ago, her parents would have preferred that she wed a Rom, but by now they are just glad that she is "finally" married and well-situated. Her education and career—both enormous achievements—have contributed to her upward mobility. But so has her finding a Romanian husband. Her mother and father are at peace with the fact that she has an interethnic marriage since she is thriving both personally and professionally. Moreover, although she now lives a "Romanian life," she also maintains close ties with her parents. While her hybrid ethnic identity is no doubt complicated (especially since she and her husband now have a baby), her loyalty to her *lăutar* family is strong. She is working out her own personal "*lăutar* space."

In this and other interethnic unions, wives often assimilate to the ethnic and cultural identity of their husbands, not vice versa, suggesting the influential role that gender also plays in this process. Another variant of a mixed marriage involves a village *lăutar* who found love (in the 1980s) with a Romanian who "became" Romani. "She's just like a Gypsy woman!" I have

5) Blacksmiths are considered by other Roma high on the Romani social ladder (Guy 2001; Scheffel 2010).

been told by *lăutari* and their wives who know the couple. She sings in her husband's ensemble, further "evidence" of her identity as a *lăutar* wife. The couple's two daughters, who were raised in a Romani household, have also married Roma. Gender and ethnicity both clearly play significant roles in the complex criss-crossing of identity factors among *lăutari*.

Although millennial *lăutari* sons generally maintain a strong connection to the family tradition of professional music-making and typically combine this with finding brides who are Romani, often from within the *lăutar* pool, an unprecedented freedom of choice in terms of marriage partners is emerging among millennial *lăutar* daughters (see also articles by Racleş and Kovai in this issue). *Lăutar* boys are socialized to commit to the occupation of their fathers and grandfathers. They find security in perpetuating the tradition that has been "handed down" to them (and passing it on to their sons) by marrying women who understand this way of life, preferably from *lăutar* (or other "elite" Romani) families. By contrast, through "free choice" and the opportunities that education offers them, some young women from *lăutar* families are carving out new forms of "*lăutar* space" by marrying Romanians. The tangible by-products of post-secondary education and intermarriage for them are upward mobility and shifting class identification. To what degree *lăutar* identity will inform their futures and those of their children is debatable. Middle-aged *lăutar* parents whose daughters have married (or likely will marry) outside the group express that while endogamy still remains their ideal, they cannot dictate their children's lives in today's world. They are extremely proud of their successful daughters. And so, they accept that the upward mobility that daughters are choosing goes hand-in-hand with a certain "freedom of choice," increasingly including Romanian spouses.

Patrilocality is a mainstay of traditional Romani life in Romania (Engebrigtsen 2007; Tesăr 2018; Berta 2019). It profoundly affects marriage, family, and gender dynamics, reinforcing kin-based households and male dominance as well as the predilection for male offspring (Voicu and Popescu 2007; Bitu and Morteanu 2010; Tesăr 2012). *Lăutar* homes are "ideally" distinguished by virilocality which is relatively common among rural and urban families. There has traditionally been a slight degree of preference for sons due, in part, to the need for musicians in the family. Sons are encouraged at a young age to play instruments (learning from their fathers) and adopt a *lăutar* lifestyle. Traditionally performing in family ensembles and living with or near parents was—and still is for some—crucial for their occupation. It provides an exemplary "*lăutar* space" for "safeguarding" the profession of family music-making. *Lăutari* often take for granted their sons' living with or close to them. By contrast, a daughter's ties to her parents in *lăutar* (and other Romani) homes are effectively transitory since she will predictably get married and become a member of her husband's family (Tesăr 2012; Beissinger 2018), an explanation, in part, for why interethnic marriage among *lăutar* family members is most frequent between daughters and Romanian men.

In traditional *lăutar* homes, the only or youngest son remains permanently with his parents, and during the communist period, this was commonplace. But rejection of patrilocal residence also informs "*lăutar* space" among millennials. A rural accordionist who got married in the 1980s had lived (with his bride) for several years in his parents' home until his younger brother, also a *lăutar*, brought his own bride to live permanently in the parental household. When I first met the accordionist, his wife, and two children, they were living in their own home (just down the road from his parents), and their only son, then eleven, was learning to play the accordion with his father. The family occupied the first floor of

Lătari playing music for a Romanian dance (*hora*). Unidentified photographer, approx. 1910.
Ethnological Archive of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, glass plate negative, inventory no. CS-0194.

the house, which had been built ten years earlier. The second story, which was then unfinished, would house their son when he got married, along with his own anticipated family. The son, now a practicing *lăutar*, is married and has a child, but the second floor of his parents' village house remains unfurnished. He and his wife refuse to live there, preferring to dwell in Bucharest. This has generated significant tension in the family, causing his parents anguish and challenging their understanding of the traditional terms of marriage. The son's denial of virilocal residence illustrates a partial denunciation of his parents' way of life. Yet he is still perpetuating his *lăutar* identity: like his father, he is a professional musician, and he has married a *lăutar*'s daughter. Moreover, he loyally continues to perform with the family ensemble in the village, commuting there regularly to join them when there are jobs. How this hybrid identity has materialized hinges on the son's education. He attended a music high school in Bucharest when he was a teenager and then the conservatory, later earning a master's degree. His upward mobility has secured him lucrative career opportunities (including teaching music in a school in Bucharest that caters to Romanian students), resulting in his partial identification with a non-Romani class of urban, educated musicians. In short, he has created his own complex "formula" for "*lăutar* space" based on rejecting some Romani cultural traditions (virilocality) and embracing others (endogamy), as well as appropriating certain aspects of urbane Romanian society.

Children are an expected and cherished consequence of Romani marital unions and are at the center of family life (Grigore et al. 2005; Tesăr 2018; Berta 2019). Accordingly, *lăutari* assume that soon after marriage couples will have children—but not "too many." Among *lăutari* in my fieldwork, the

average number of children per family is 2.5 (fewer than in other Romani but more than in Romanian households).[6] Half of the *lăutar* couples I know have had only two children by choice, including couples during the communist period when birth control and abortion were illegal.[7] This preference is motivated by a desire to provide children with good living conditions, something *lăutari* pride themselves on, pointing out that other Roma usually have more children and thus less to offer them. *Lăutari* view their smaller families as superior to the larger families of other Roma and similar to Romanian families.

The imperative of children and the permanence of marriage among Roma go hand-in-hand. Marriage is viewed as a lifelong commitment, particularly when there are children, and divorce is fairly uncommon (Grigore et al. 2005).[8] If it happens, it typically occurs among newly-weds before they have a family (Engebrigtsen 2007). Alternatively, a couple's inability to have offspring may be grounds for dissolving a marriage (Berta 2019). Moreover, adultery happens, to be sure, but rarely results in a couple's breaking up. Indeed, children are the primary disincentive to divorce. If there are children in a *lăutar* family, divorce is highly unlikely.[9]

Mutual, enduring ties between co-parents-in-law (cuscri) also contribute among Roma and *lăutari* to the stability of a marriage (Grigore 2001; Engebrigtsen 2007; Tesăr 2018). For traditional Roma, a marital alliance between the co-fathers-in-law reinforces the couple's nuptial bond (Berta 2019). *Lăutari* do not undertake such alliances, viewing them as "backward," but they respect relationships established between co-parents-in-law. "*Lăutar* space" within the context of the family, then, is constructed and secured as couples regulate family size for the welfare of their children, eschew divorce, and nurture bonds between co-parents-in-law.

Early-age and arranged marriages are typical among traditional Roma. Neither is sanctioned by the state in Romania, the minimum age at which one can legally marry being eighteen (Bitu and Morteanu 2010). Romani girls marry, on average, at age seventeen (Surdu and Surdu 2006) although arranged wedlock often happens earlier (Grigore 2001; Engebrigtsen 2007; Bitu and Morteanu 2010; Berta 2019). *Lăutari* and members of their families denounce child- and early-marriage as "primitive" "Gypsy" traditions, claiming that neither has ever been a part of the *lăutar* experience. The wife of a rural *lăutar* recollected how an Ursar ("Bear-tamer") couple had recently stopped on the road to chat and relay "happy news": their twelve-year-old son had just married a fourteen-year-old girl from a "good family." In recounting this to me, the *lăutar* wife expressed strong disapproval. *Lăutari* implicitly champion "free choice" in mate selection, the inverse of arranged marriage, and insist that they "marry for love."

During the communist period, women in *lăutar* families married, for the most part, in their late teens. But among millennial *lăutar* female family members, matrimony is happening a few years later. Women who marry in their early twenties may or may not finish high school and generally follow traditional trajectories, soon becoming mothers. There are also women from *lăutar* households who are getting married in their mid-to-late twenties and even thirties (more like contemporary Romanian women[10]), most of them having pursued post-secondary and, in some cases, graduate degrees. For them, education provides a clear "escape route" from marrying "too" early (Székelyi et al. 2003). Today's young *lăutar*-family wives typically have children somewhat later than their mothers did, and some significantly later. One *lăutar* daughter (who has several university degrees and recently married a Romanian) has had her first child at 36, an age at which some traditional Romani women are already grandmothers.

6) The average number of children per Romani family in Romania is 3.19 (Cace et al. 2002: 12) and per Romanian family, 1.21 (Mihai and Butiu 2012).

7) *Lăutar* wives have told me that their most common birth control is abortion

8) In some cases, the birth of a son confirms the permanence of marriage (Tesăr 2018).

9) One daughter of a *lăutar* separated from her husband when their only child was a teenager, but many years later, the couple has still not gotten divorced.

10) The average age at (first) marriage for women in Romania is 26.7 (Misachi 2017).

Before the 1989 Revolution, *lăutari* were typically in their early-to-mid-twenties when they got married. But while today's *lăutari* marry somewhat later than both previous generations and other male Roma, they still become husbands considerably earlier than Romanian men.[11] Like their fathers, many *lăutari* do not finish high school since they are socialized early on to adopt a career path as musicians and assume they do not need secondary-school diplomas. These men typically marry in their early-to-mid-twenties. Few *lăutari* pursue higher education, but when they do, they, like women, invariably marry somewhat later. Two rural millennial *lăutari* are the first men in their families to earn post-high-school degrees (and now live in Bucharest). One was married at 26, while his *lăutar* father was 22 (and his grandfather, twenty). Another is still single at 32, while his *lăutar* father and grandfather married at 24 and twenty respectively.

Taken as a whole, these marriage patterns mirror the evolving, hybrid nature of "*lăutar* space." Romani marital norms furnish a general frame within which *lăutar* nuptial practices function although the contours of these norms are increasingly shifting. While *lăutari* generally advocate endogamy, especially "within the trade," intermarriage is beginning to effect the erosion of ethnic and class boundaries. Patrilocality is also an ideal but is starting to break down as *lăutari* adjust to 21st century conditions. Offspring is anticipated, but small families are preferred, and children contribute, along with strong in-law relations, to the permanence of marital unions. Some Romani praxes are rejected, however, as "outmoded" and "uncivilized," while *lăutar* understandings of matrimony are linked to those of the Romanians with whom they cohabit. These rejected praxes include early-age and arranged marriages as well as marital alliances. Finally, among millennials, the advent of educational opportunities has caused profound changes, creating new "*lăutar* spaces" in between tradition and innovation where blended identities are cultivated. Through a selective confluence of factors, *lăutari* create a space, within marriage conventions, that is uniquely their own.

11) Men's average age at (first) marriage in Romania is 30.2 (Misachi 2017).

Weddings

The weddings of *lăutari* and their family members likewise represent a convergence of Romani and Romanian traditions, vividly illustrating how they create and sustain their composite character as *Romanianized* Roma, occupying distinct "*lăutar* spaces." Romani marriages are "legal (registered before the marital status delegate) or of concubinage" (Bitu and Morteanu 2010: 32). Although *lăutar* couples sometimes elope and/or live together at the beginning of committed relationships, most of them intend eventually to celebrate formal nuptials. For most Roma, as for *lăutari,* weddings are celebrated with excessive commensality, pure joy of the moment, and cherished in-group social song and dance genres. At the same time, contemporary *lăutari* refute certain traditional Romani wedding conventions: formalized wooing, bride price, dowries, and rituals that confirm the bride's virginity. Moreover, reflecting their self-aware *Romanianized* identity, *lăutari* embrace various Romanian traditions: state- and church-sanctioned (Orthodox Christian) wedlock, as well as Romanian customs and dress. Some of the millennial *lăutar*-family sons and daughters are likewise making choices for their nuptials that distance them from traditions that their parents uphold. In the pages ahead I treat elopement, pre-wedding, wedding-day, and post-wedding practices.

Romani couples sometimes elope. They do so if families cannot afford a wedding or do not approve of the union, if grooms

cannot pay the bride price, or to evade arranged marriages (Grigore et al. 2005; Engebrigtsen 2007; Matras 2015). Some *lăutari* couples also elope, although it is somewhat disparaged. In one case, a 25-year-old rural *lăutar* from a relatively poor family escaped with his eighteen-year-old "bride" to his aunt's home in another village. This solution was chosen to avoid the cost of a wedding. The couple stayed there for a week and then returned to the *lăutar*'s parents' home, where they still live as a "married couple" with their two children. They intend to have a "real" wedding someday, but twenty years have passed since they eloped, and plans are still on hold. Another *lăutar* elopement was in Bucharest in the 1990s. The *lăutar* "groom" was in his early twenties, while the daughter of a *lăutar,* with whom he took flight, was sixteen. Her mother deemed her too young to marry, so the couple eloped. The "bride" made a dramatic escape jumping from the balcony of the family apartment block to join her "groom." After eloping, the couple was considered married and several years later held a large, festive wedding. They are now grandparents; their son is a fine young accordionist, and their *lăutar*-family daughter-in-law recently gave birth to a little girl. Eloping and then celebrating a "legitimate" wedding is a quintessential example, once again, of "*lăutar* space": merging traditional and mainstream ways to wed in a distinctly meaningful *lăutar* way.

Among traditional Roma, formal wedding invitations are not issued before the wedding since it is understood that the in-group community is welcome and will attend (Grigore 2001; Engebrigtsen 2007). At *lăutar* nuptials, as well, family and close friends know in advance and are expected to join the festivities. When I have been invited to *lăutar* weddings, I too have simply been told in person the dates—a contrast to the more formal invitations typical among Romanians.

Most of the pre-wedding-day events that traditional Roma observe are refuted by *lăutari* as "backward." *Lăutari* repeatedly stress the differences between themselves and "other Gypsies" in connection with wooing, bride price, and dowries. They eschew the traditional process whereby the parents of the potential couple confer, decide upon marriage partners, and orchestrate the wedding and marriage alliance (Grigore 2001). At the same time, some "wooing" conventions are undertaken by *lăutari* when they decide to be wed. These represent a set of traditions drawn from both Romani and Romanian practices, thus forming a "third" *lăutar* way. The comments of a rural accordionist explain how *lăutari* go about wooing:

> The two sets of parents-in-law meet and talk about the couple and about when the wedding will take place. But the [groom's] parents don't ask for the bride in marriage; the groom asks the bride to marry him. I was with my parents at [my bride-to-be's] parents', but *I* asked [her] to marry me, and my brother did the same.

What he describes represents a blending of customs: future co-parents-in-law are clearly involved, but couples marry for love and take the initiative themselves to get married.

Bride price, as part of these arrangements, is also disparaged by *lăutari* as well as by Romanians, who consider it "uncivilized" (Engebrigtsen 2007). "Purchasing" brides, I have been informed by *lăutari*, was never a part of their culture. They tell me "*Lăutari* don't buy brides; that's what other nations of Gypsies do; we're not like them—we're like everybody else" or "*Lăutari* aren't like Ursari ('Bear-tamers') and Spoitori ('Tinkers'); we *lăutari* are like Romanians—that is, we are more refined." They distance themselves from "other Gypsies," thereby identifying with Romanians. In addition, traditional Romani brides contribute a dowry (zestre) to the groom's home consisting of domestic items, clothing, and articles of value: gold

or cash (Grigore 2001; Grigore et al. 2005; Tesăr 2016; Berta 2019). *Lăutari* relate that "their" brides of yesteryear assembled dowries, but that "they were not elaborate." One remarked that the dowry of his mother (in 1959) was furniture, and that his own wife and brother's wife (at their weddings in the 1980s) also brought furniture to the home of his parents when they moved in. In contemporaneous Romanian village marriages, dowries likewise included furniture and textiles (Kligman 1988). But in 21st-century Romania, *lăutari* inform me, dowries are passé. One told me, "Now, *lăutari* rarely have dowries. But other Gypsies do." A rural *lăutar* wife, underscoring the contrast between *lăutari* and the practices of "other Roma" who engage in early-age marriage and the "outmoded" customs that go with it, recounted how she had encountered a 25-year-old Spoitor ("Tinker") woman who had told her that she needed money to pay bride price and dowries for her sons' and daughters' upcoming weddings. The *lăutar* wife was judgmental and critical, dissociating herself from this young Spoitor mother and what she represented. Rejection for such pre-wedding traditions underscores how *lăutari* concretely see themselves "unlike" many other Roma and by extension "just like" Romanians.

The festivities of the wedding day in south-central Romania typically last about 24 hours. For *lăutari*, this period of celebration underscores the hybrid character of *lăutar* nuptials—and identity—as they undertake events that are both Romani and Romanian but, as I argue, above all "*lăutar*." *Lăutari* schedule their own weddings on weekdays or Sundays in order to be available to perform at Romanian weddings (which usually take place on Saturdays) should they be hired. In other words, *lăutar* weddings take place on days when Romanian weddings do not. Moreover, *lăutar* weddings conspicuously display Romani identity, especially through music, celebration, and food. But Romanian wedding culture is also evident in both traditional and religious ways: *lăutar*-family brides and grooms wear Western wedding attire and embrace longstanding Romanian customs, and the religious ceremony takes place in church.

Music is key to Romani weddings. This is especially true for *lăutari*, who insist on music almost continually. Throughout the wedding day, *lăutari* perform, and members of the wedding party dance. Sometimes, particularly at urban weddings, this means setting up amplifiers and making music on sidewalks right outside apartment blocks. Tables laden with food and drink are assembled outdoors, and the musicians perform at extremely high volumes as guests dance and passersby watch. This bold display of celebration in public, regardless of the time of day, is typical to *lăutar* weddings and represents a type of joyous transcendence of the moment. At one *lăutar* wedding in Piteşti, this took place at 4:00 a.m. outside the apartment block until neighbors called the police, who arrived to break up the party.

Traditional Romani brides are typically clothed in colorful, flowery skirts and special blouses, while grooms wear suits (Engebrigtsen 2007; Berta 2019). By contrast, like contemporary Romanians, *lăutar* brides don white gowns and veils, and grooms wear formal suits, often tuxedoes. "Getting the bride ready" on her wedding day includes one of the most important rituals in Romania, the performance of "Cântecul miresei" (The Bride's Song). At south-central Romanian weddings, it is sung to the bride by *lăutari* twice: in the morning, after she has put on her gown, as her godmother and other female kin arrange her hair and veil, and then again near the end of the banquet. Romanian renditions of "Cântecul miresei" express the separation of the bride from her family and are filled with flower imagery as a metaphor for the maiden who leaves her past behind (Kligman 1988; Beissinger 2020). It typically elicits the bride's tears as

she ponders the meaning of her "departure" and the important step she is taking to become a married woman.

Performances of "Cântecul miresei" at *lăutar* weddings are often quite different, with musical interpretation and words that are especially expressive. Most *lăutar*-family brides find this ritual song deeply moving. One wept poignantly as a *lăutar* (a close friend of her own *lăutar* family) sang a personal, emotional "Cântecul miresei" in their Bucharest home. In this rendition, the bride's separation and flower trope were missing, replaced by verses that expressed the pride and joy of her parents that their daughter, depicted instead as an angel (*înger*), was becoming a wife and, by extension, a mother. Urban *lăutar* performances of this ritual song are distinctive and voice the fundamental significance of traditional Romani marriage: the perpetuation of the family and ongoing generations. In other words, *lăutari* appropriate the classic Romanian genre at their weddings but compose their "own" lyrics that reflect Romani cultural meaning. "Cântecul miresei" is a quintessential metaphor for "*lăutar* space": it merges Romanian song form and Romani lyric content in a uniquely expressive *lăutar* moment.

A recent *lăutar* wedding illustrates how one millennial couple, eager to be "mainstream" and "modern," redefined their nuptials, eschewing "old-fashioned" traditions that they did not find meaningful. The village *lăutar* groom, who was educated in Bucharest, and his bride, the daughter of an urban *lăutar*, categorically refused to have their wedding in the village ("too rustic"), thereby rejecting many of the practices so dear to the groom's *lăutar* parents who had wanted it to take place there. Among some traditional Roma, the bride's family bears the cost of the wedding (Tesăr 2018), whereas at *lăutar* (and Romanian) weddings, the groom and his family foot the bill. On the wedding day, the groom's parents hosted a huge outdoor feast for their own family and friends in their village courtyard where well-known *lăutari* provided the music. The groom underwent the traditional "shaving of the bridegroom" (*bărbieritul ginerelui*) by his godfather or best man: a Romanian custom marking the groom's coming of age that *lăutari* have adopted. As the groom is "shaved," *lăutari* render ritual songs that express his entry into adulthood. It was, for this *lăutar* groom, the only ritual that he was willing to undergo in the village. Later the family headed to the godparents' and bride's parents' flats in Bucharest, where huge spreads awaited the guests. At the bride's parents' home, "Cântecul miresei" was also performed by *lăutari*. The bride, intent on her "untraditional" wedding, however, seemed to experience this iconic moment in a notably perfunctory way: unmoved, she seemed anxious to "get it over with." A white limousine (now in fashion at both *lăutar* and Romanian weddings) then took the couple and their godparents to the church for the ceremony.

Traditional Roma in Romania "marry without any interference from the state or the church" (Engebrigtsen 2007: 78). Such weddings incorporate elaborate rituals and a celebratory repast but no religious service (Berta 2019). By contrast, *lăutari*, who (like Romanians) are by and large Romanian Orthodox, aspire to both church- and state-sanctioned marriages. Their weddings include church ceremonies attended by family and close friends and take place before the evening banquet. Godparents play critical roles in Romanian nuptials (Kligman 1988) and function in *lăutar* weddings as well. They are crucial during the church ceremony and supersede the couple's parents there.

The feast that brings people together to celebrate the marriage of husband and wife is the culmination of Romanian and *lăutar* weddings and begins in the evening, after the church ceremony. For *lăutar* couples, it also combines Romani and Romanian effects. In south-central Romania, banquets

(eating, drinking, and dancing) last all night and are extremely pricey. Even though gift-giving (daruri), which is cash, serves as a means to recoup some of the costs, the banquet is an event of great expense for which families plan for years. Some *lăutar* couples live together at the beginning of long-term relationships or obtain marriage certificates and then save money for a "proper" wedding. One daughter of a *lăutar* and her groom waited for ten years to amass the resources for their long-anticipated nuptials. Some *lăutar* couples—who wait to hold their weddings until they have saved sufficient money but in the meantime have started a family—combine their church ceremony with their baby's baptism (botez). This is a practical way to cut costs since baptism celebrations (the second most common event at which *lăutari* are hired) are also exorbitant events. Such combined wedding-baptisms are not uncommon among Romanians as well.

Status at *lăutar* weddings is explicitly mirrored not only in where the event is held but the quality and quantity of the food served and which musicians perform. It too reflects both Romani and Romanian influences. The *lăutar* banquets that I have attended took place in urban restaurants (most of them large and upscale) where Romanian managers, cooks, and servers are in charge. They were huge spectacles of conspicuous consumption. Yet not one of the *lăutari* in my fieldwork has any wealth to speak of (all of them constantly bemoan their lack of income). One *lăutar,* who indulged in a lavish wedding to the daughter of a *lăutar* in the 1990s, told me, "When I got married, I didn't even have an accordion! I was poor and had sick parents." More recent millennial *lăutar* nuptials that I have attended—where *lăutar* sons have married daughters from *lăutar* families—were also extravagant. Yet the parents of the grooms can barely eke out a living, always lamenting that they do not get hired frequently enough to support their families.

Lăutar wedding banquets, marked by unabashed abundance and celebration, are informed by the proverbial timelessness and "commitment to the present moment" (Day et al. 1999: 2) accorded to Roma. Yet the banquet reflects Romanian culture as well. Multiple courses that follow an identical "Romanian wedding menu blueprint" comprise the lengthy meals at restaurants although sometimes a favorite "Gypsy" dish is also served at *lăutar* banquets. So many courses are served, in fact, and the plates are so heaped with food that guests usually leave much uneaten. At a recent *lăutar* wedding, I remarked upon how much of the fare was discarded, asking the *lăutar* father of the groom why these courses could not be downsized, thus reducing both cost and waste. He looked at me incredulously, saying "We have to serve this much food—if we don't, people will laugh!" A perception of plenty is key to the reputation of the groom's family. Spending enormous sums of money on banquets provides public testimonial to *lăutar* standing.

Lăutari are sometimes hired to perform at traditional Romani nuptials. But they also let me know, in judgmental pronouncements, that there are plenty of "Gypsies who just hold their weddings in a field, where their own musicians [not *lăutari*] sing Gypsy songs." Some of the disdain expressed by *lăutari* for "(non-lăutar) Gypsy singers" is acerbic. I have also witnessed *lăutari* just as brazenly denigrate (and mockingly imitate) Romanians who perform at weddings. *Lăutari* can be dismissive and arrogant as they assert and defend their own professional space as neither "Gypsy" nor "Romanian" but rather *lăutar.* While at most wedding banquets music is a requisite component, for *lăutari*, whose professional lives revolve around music-making, it is of supreme importance. *Lăutari* do not perform at their own children's weddings since they prefer to relax and enjoy themselves. But they make sure to engage *lăutari* of great stature for family weddings, not only to ensure superb music but also to reflect their own status.

Music at *lăutar* weddings is the most

telling emblem of both Romani and *lăutar* culture. Music invokes culture and ethnicity; it "conjures racial meaning" (Radano and Bohlman 2000: 1). The music in south-central Romania that *lăutari* play at their own (and other Romani) banquets differs significantly from the music that they perform at Romanian banquets—something that *lăutari* are quick to point out. The hora mare (large hora) and sârba—both circle dances—are icons of "national" culture that *lăutari* regularly perform at Romanian banquets. At their own banquets, however, the social song and dance repertoire is virtually all Romani: *muzică lăutărească* (*lăutar* music) and *manele* (Balkan ethnopop) (Beissinger 2007; Beissinger et al. 2016). *Muzica lăutărească,* "urban music performed by [*lăutari*] at their own celebrations" (Giurchescu and Rădulescu 2016: 14), is the music most beloved by *lăutari*. It includes *hore lăutăreşti/tigăneşti* (*lăutar*/Gypsy horas) that are danced individually and *cântece de ascultare* (songs to listen to): expressive songs performed when guests are eating. Manele, a Balkan "Oriental" ethnopop song-dance genre that in Romania is associated with Romani culture, are danced solo, resembling the čoček/kyuchek style of South Slavic Roma (Silverman 2012). These in-group urban genres were virtually unknown by Romanians throughout most of the twentieth century. After 1989, as restrictions in society were rapidly lifted, however, *manele* and *lăutar* horas also became popular among Romanians. By now some of this novelty has worn off, and *muzica uşoară* (pop music) is increasingly performed at Romanian weddings.

A conversation that I was privy to between a *lăutar* couple, whose daughter would soon be marrying a Romanian, underscores the cultural identity that music represents at *lăutar* weddings. The *lăutar* parents expressed their apprehensions regarding the music at the future banquet. The groom, who does not particularly like Romani music, may not employ *lăutari*, which would mean that no Romani genres would be performed. This prospect is causing the bride's parents concern. For them, Romani music is a "mandatory" part of the nuptial event, and its absence at their own daughter's wedding would be painful. And yet, since grooms are in charge of their own weddings in Romania, the parents of the bride have little say. The angst over the possible lack of *lăutar* music at this wedding is perhaps a metaphor for the tension the parents feel about the interethnic marriage their daughter is embarking upon. The groom's decision, however, may well be the last word, symbolically representing the *lăutar* daughter's assimilating to her groom's "culture" and her "becoming Romanian."

The godparents at both Romanian and *lăutar* weddings occupy an important place at the banquet. They prominently sit at the head table with the couple, while the co-parents-in-law are seated elsewhere. *Lăutari* often seek prestigious godparents, even if this sometimes simply means being Romanian. An urban *lăutar* daughter and her groom chose Romanian neighbors to be their godparents when they got married, despite the fact that they were not particularly close. And the "modern" *lăutar* couple who did not want their wedding in the village where the groom's parents lived replaced the groom's rural childhood godparents by a young Romanian couple in Bucharest. Many *lăutar* couples deliberately invite Romanians, emblems of distinction, to be their ritual kin, carving out—in this "interethnic" way—their own "space."

Post-wedding events include the ritual validation of the bride's virginity (*rachiu*[12]), a critical, culminating moment for traditional Roma (Grigore 2001; Tesăr 2012). After the bride's honor is publicly confirmed, additional commensality marks the bride's reception into her new family (Grigore 2001). Contemporary *lăutari* do not undergo *rachiu*. But the younger couples of yesteryear, however, did. A rural *lăutar* told me that his mother (who was wed in 1959 in her teens) and grandmother

12) *Rachiu* literally means "brandy," and in this context it refers to the (alcoholic) beverage that the two wedding parties consume together to celebrate the virginity of the young bride, thus becoming a synecdoche for the whole ritual.

had to demonstrate their virginity through *rachiu*. His bride (whom he married in 1982) did not, although she has told me that she was a virgin on her wedding night. She has also mentioned that Romani, including *lăutar*-family, brides are still expected to be "pure" when they marry. This matter is complicated, however, by the fact that *lăutar* couples rarely marry in their teens anymore. Moreover, they typically live together before their actual wedding, whereas traditional early-age Romani couples do not. In any case, it is clear from my conversations with *lăutari* and their family members that they consider the public showing of virginity "old-fashioned." An urban *lăutar* expressed impatience when I asked him about *rachiu*, declaring that "of course *lăutari* don't do that!" although "other Romani ethnic groups" do. He and his wife lived together starting in the early 1990s, had two children, and then, after saving enough money, had a "real" wedding in the late 1990s (that their children attended). So, the "virginity test" on their wedding night was a moot point. He also proudly told me that neither his own mother nor his mother-in-law (who married in the 1960s and 1970s respectively) underwent *rachiu* at their urban *lăutar* weddings.

The event that brings closure to the marriage celebration among *lăutari* is perhaps a remnant of the meal among traditional Roma marking the bride's virginity and entry into the groom's family. Once the all-night wedding banquet is over and everyone has rested during the day, the family and close friends gather again that evening for the last nuptial feast. In the city, this takes place at restaurants, and in the village, it is often held at private homes. In one *lăutar* family, the groom's parents, having hosted a gathering the day before at their village home (prior to the ceremony and banquet in Bucharest), put out a festive spread once more in their courtyard, where well-known *lăutari* again performed. While the bride and her family had not attended the previous day, on this day they did as she, a new daughter-in-law, publicly joined her husband's family. *Rachiu* is, admittedly, rejected by contemporary *lăutari* as a remnant of the past. But a post-wedding repast, complete with *lăutari* performing, formally welcomes the daughter-in-law—having figuratively "passed" the "purity" test—into the family. The meal signals that she is "honorable." This was purely symbolic since the couple had been legally married for over a year when the wedding took place. The celebration, with much food and music, represented one last "*lăutar* moment": a ritual of the past that has been redefined for contemporary newlyweds.

Lăutar weddings are quintessential displays of "*lăutar* space." They are composite productions of identity. Elopement as well as pre-wedding, wedding-day, and post-wedding events all mirror the blending of Romani and Romanian effects that *lăutari* embrace in their unique position as Romani musicians who perform at Romanian nuptials. Wooing, bride price, dowries, and *rachiu* are robustly repudiated by *lăutari* as relics of a "Gypsy" world that they do not relate to. Thus, they see themselves more like Romanians. Yet vestiges of the role of co-parents-in-law and the symbolic honor of the bride in Romani tradition remain in their consciousness. The wedding day among *lăutari* produces an amalgam par excellence of customs and practices. Attire, godparents, separation songs and rituals for both bride and groom, the church service, and restaurant are statements of Romanian affiliation. Intersecting with these symbols are the Romani ideologies of presentism and abundance that *lăutari* simultaneously embrace: the proverbial "permanent, timeless present" (Day et al. 1999: 2) and the "huge quantities of food," "way beyond what [can] be eaten" (Stewart 1997: 187). Most of all, *lăutar* music, performed virtually non-stop, resonates most deeply among *lăutari* at their own weddings. As for how *lăutari* are adjusting to the future, already during the last century, they were progressively casting off norms and

rituals of traditional Romani matrimony as they deemed them passé. And now, as the first decades of the 21st century unfold, millennial *lăutari* and their family members continue to revise wedding practices as they seek to become more "mainstream" and less traditional. They are influenced especially by education and ever greater familiarity with Romanian society.

Conclusion

I have argued, in the preceding pages, that *lăutari* and their families generate a composite identity that draws from both Romani and Romanian cultural reservoirs to form a distinctive "*lăutar* space" and that their marriage and wedding practices provide a telling reflection of this constructed, complex process. *Lăutari* function at the intersection of Romani and non-Romani society. Similar to various other Roma who are also performers in multicultural communities, they are "not constrained by one ethnic identity" (Tremlett 2009: 162). Much like the Romani actors in the Moscow "Teatr Romen" whom Alaina Lemon describes as "Russified," *lăutari* are likewise "proud of being Romani, and especially of being… performer[s]" yet "also self-consciously" what *lăutari* call *Romanianized* (2000: 212). Closer to home, as Stewart observes, Romani musicians in neighboring Hungary "used their Gypsiness when it suited them, but denied it when it did not," demonstrating "the possibility of some form of mediation with *gaźo* culture" (1997: 93). Russian, Hungarian, and Romanian Romani performers all find meaning and fulfillment through weaving their identities back and forth between the "powerful" non-Romani and the "empowering" Romani influences in their midst. Through these maneuvers they find an agreeable, useful, and relevant "third space" within which to be the artists they need to be in order to support their families. As performers, this works for them—but it is notably messy, complicated, and even contradictory at times. For south-central Romanian Romani musicians, "*lăutar* space" is rooted in a profound acknowledgement of Romani cultural identity yet a defiant sense of superiority over "other Gypsies." *Lăutari* constantly insist upon what they see as dramatic contrasts between themselves and traditional Roma. This is deeply engrained in their outlook. Moreover, while *lăutari* recognize a considerable cultural divide between themselves and the dominant, privileged, and "unsympathetic" in society, they repeatedly maintain that they are "just like Romanians," affirming their intimacy with them.

I have also charted how, unlike some more autonomous Roma, *lăutari*—while at home in their "third space"—have never been inert or immobilized by traditional constraints. *Lăutari* and their family members exhibit what Paul Gilroy terms "unfinished identities" (1993: 1). This is illustrated in the ongoing changes that *lăutari* and their families have made, not only as they have adapted socially and culturally over the course of the twentieth century but perhaps more vividly as some millennials among them have expressed a new sense of purpose and unprecedented ways to make choices. Millennial members of *lăutar* families are increasingly carving out their own shifting forms of "*lăutar* space," often enabled by educational opportunities. For women, in particular, it is through education that ethnic- and gender-based scripts embedded in *lăutar* culture can be subverted.

The identities that *lăutari* and their families in contemporary south-central Romania adopt and perpetuate are informed by their intermediary position between Romani and Romanian society. *Lăutari* assume fluid, composite forms of identity, drawing from multiple communities as they perpetually create and recreate their own multifarious sense of self and pursue

ways to sustain their niche as indispensable traditional musicians. This journey "of identity" is distinctively articulated and represented in the matrimonial convictions, norms, and practices of *lăutari* and the members of their families. "*Lăutar* space" is a complex, hybrid, ever-mutating "third space" where *lăutari*—exquisite, resourceful, confident, and resilient performers of traditional music—and their families seek belonging. Yet *lăutar* identity "is never a proper fit, a totality" (Hall 1996:3) but always in a state of becoming. "*Lăutar* space" is formed through a dynamic intersection of cultures; it is perpetually evolving and finding meaning.

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