FOLKLORE MUSIC ON ROMANIAN TV

FROM STATE SOCIALIST TELEVISION TO PRIVATE CHANNELS

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Abstract: This article explores specific televised folklore performances of muzică populară in Romania as 'media rituals.' I argue that this particular kind of folklore performance can be analysed as television genre. The article follows different articulations of this genre from its televised appearances on the public television channel in the last decades of the communist period to the post-1989 niche television stations specialised in folklore. The changes in the form of the genre, and the negotiations of value and authenticity that take place through the televised performances reveal the role of television in disseminating a social poetics of the nation state.

Keywords: Folklore, Authenticity, National identity, Genre, Romania

Since 1989, a large number of niche television stations, both local and national, dedicated to folklore music appeared on the Romanian audiovisual market. Television stations such as Etno, Favorit and Hora broadcast a standardized form of folklore music called *muzică populară*, which is characterized by a particular folk dress, formalized body posture and movements, and recurrent lyrical themes. The folklore music broadcast on these channels stirred up discussions about the disappearance of 'authentic folklore' after the fall of communism, with the performers of *muzică populară* being considered 'inauthentic.'

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in 2011 in Romania on 'authentic folklore' and *muzică populară* as a cultural category with a particular audience and distinctive channels of dissemination. In this article, I will look at *muzică populară* primarily as a television genre to illustrate the central role that television before and after 1989 has had in articulating 'folklore' as part of a social poetics of the nation state.[1]

According to Mittell,[2] what characterizes a television genre is not inscribed in the text (in this case, the televised music performance itself), but is shaped by the 'discursive clusters' around the text. Instead of looking into the text and interpreting its meanings, his suggestion is to look at the breadth of discursive enunciations and map out as many articulations of the genre as possible, in order to 'show more large-scale patterns of generic definitions, meanings and hierarchies.'[3]

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[1] Michae Herzfeld, *Cultural intimacy. Social Poetics in the Nation-State,* Routledge, 1997
[2] Jason Mittell, 'A cultural approach to television genre theory' in Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill, A. eds, The television studies reader, Psychology Press, 2004
[3] Idem 1, p. 174.

In the case of *muzică populară*, the character and the boundaries of this genre are hard to understand without looking into its historical development. This 'genealogy of discursive shifts and rearticulations'[4] of the genre of *muzică populară* brings an understanding of what the boundaries of 'folklore as patrimony' are, and what happens when they are breached, with folklore being reclaimed in different forms as part of different spaces of cultural production.[5] In Romania, folklore has been discussed through theories of national identity,[6] as a cultural expression that was taxonomised and used by the national elites in order to construct a sense of national belonging.[7] *Muzică populară*, however, represents a distinct category of 'folklore' – which is not part of the high culture sphere (like museums or folklore literature), but which is considered as popular culture.

In this paper, I discuss the role of television in defining 'folklore' through *muzică populară* as part of the main narrative of nationalist communism in pre-1989 Romania. I will illustrate how folklore performances were instrumentalized by Romanian television (TVR) in support of the state ideology and facilitated a ritualized mass participation. Furthermore, I will discuss how this genre evolved and was re-articulated by commercial niche channels after the fall of communism.

I use the notions of 'folklore' and 'authenticity' as claims of truth and sincerity,[8] rather than as notions that describe the content of a particular text (be that the music or the costumes of the folklore performers). While I accept that there is such a thing as a set of cultural patterns that Romanian communities from the countryside shared at one time in the past, I am more interested in how these forms that come from 'the past' are integrated into modern Romanian high culture or popular culture, under the terms of 'folklore' and 'authenticity.'

The fieldwork that this article is based on consisted mainly of participant observation and unstructured interviews. It was a multi-sited fieldwork, as I followed 'folklore' through the different spaces of cultural production, such as local and national museums and institutions that managed or researched 'folklore' (e.g. the Schools of Popular Art).[9] The television studios at Etno TV were a very important part of my research, with many of my informants identifying television as the place where 'folklore' was currently articulated. Here I conducted interviews with singers of different ages and from different parts of Romania. Apart from the singers, dancers and their choreographers, I also conducted informal interviews with the staff of Etno TV and other similar niche television stations. Most of them, presenters, directors, make-up artists, were part of an urban middle class, with some connections to the countryside, but who had no preference for *muzică populară*.

In my conversations with the performers, I have focused on how they place the 'folklore' they perform in relation to the audiences they address, or to the institutions that regulate and decide what counts as good, authentic 'folklore.' I have used discourse analysis in order to understand how the production of the genre as broadcast on television relates to the position it occupies in mass media, and its place in a hierarchy of cultural capital. I focus on the production of *muzică populară*, rather than its reception. My perspective on the meaning and value of *muzică populară* as a cultural item is not as an intrinsic and autonomous form, but one articulated by the social groups that produce and consume it, within the limits offered by the 'objective possibilities'[10] of the genre.

[4] Idem 1, p 175.

[5] See Pierre Bourdieu, *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*, Columbia University Press, 1993 .

[6] See Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions' In Eric Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds, *The invention of tradition* Cambridge University Press, 1983; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and nationalism*, Cornell University Press, 2008.

[7] See Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ilia Iliev and Slobodan Naumović, 'Introduction' in Mihăilescu V., I. *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies II. Berlin: Lit*, 1-18, 2008; Shona Kallestrup, *Art and design in Romania 1866-1927: local and international aspects of the search for national expression* (Vol. 684), East European Monographs, 2006; For the case of Bulgaria, see Deema Kaneff *Who owns the past?: the politics of time in a 'model' Bulgarian village*. Vol. 21. Berghahn Books, 2006.

[8] For a discussion of the notion of 'authenticity' in relation to material culture and history see Radolph Starn, 'Authenticity and historic preservation: towards an authentic history', *History of the Human Sciences*, *15*(1), 1-16, 2002.

[9] These were, in the past, part of Centers of Popular Creation, or Regional Houses of Creation. Established in the 1950s, they were instrumental in the organizaton of *Cîntarea României* festival. However, the activity of these institutions was very diverse during communism. In the 1990s these institutions became subordinated to the county councils. See, for example the **webpage** of such an institution in Baia Mare.

[10] Paul Willis, 'On Subculture and Homology' in Derek Scott, ed, *Music, Culture, and Society: A Reader*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

1. Folklore on Romanian Television in the 1980s: Between Mass Participation and Exclusive Performances

Muzică populară is the name most often used to designate what could broadly be termed 'Romanian traditional music.' Ethnomusicologists, however, insist that we need to distinguish it from the music of pre-modern or 'traditional' villages. *Muzică populară*, which I translate as 'folkloric music' is indeed a modern genre: the outcome of an intellectual interest in the music and artistic forms of the countryside that began in the early 20th century, which was then articulated by a particular history of mass engagement in artistic forms rooted in folklore, something which I will discuss further on in this article. Referring to the communist period in Romania, when *muzică populară* became a fully-fledged genre, Anca Giurchescu spoke about 'folklorism' to make the distinction between the genre sanctioned by the state, and unsanctioned music and dances evolving in parallel and embedded in social interactions in small village communities. This bureaucratization of folklore determined the marginalization of 'the uncontrollable, living tradition,' which was 'subject to pollution and disintegration.'[11] For the state, 'the real and authentic folklore should exist only in the artistic and crystalized forms as presented by professional and amateur ensembles.'[12] In the interwar period, the first folklore performers, such as Maria Tănase or Maria Lătărețu, were made popular through the mass media. However, the establishment of *muzică populară* as a full-fledged genre in the form in which it is broadcast on Romanian television today happened during the communist period. The two television programmes fully dedicated to folklore were: *Cîntarea României* (broadcast since 1976) and *Tezaur Folcloric* (broadcast since 1983).

Cîntarea României was a festival-like competition that took place in Romania between 1976 and 1989. It encompassed many forms of amateur art, of which folklore occupied a central place. Similar types of performances were rooted in the early cultural manifestations of communism. Mass participation in state orchestrated festivities in Eastern Europe and the USSR has been identified as a way to legitimize the communist rule,[13] but also as events where people circumvented the propagandistic purpose of the state in the later years of communism.[14] The early Soviet artists sought to debunk the boundaries between artist and spectators, and show that everyone could (and should) be at the centre of the artistic act.[15] This engagement with artistic participation took shape on the stages of Houses of Culture across the USSR, but by the 1930s, 'the masses' were no longer expected to be in charge of what was to be performed, but were considered to need artistic leaders to educate them.[16]

[11] Anca Giurchescu, "The power of dance and its social and political uses." *Yearbook for traditional music* (2001): 109-121, p 117.

[12] Idem, p. 11.

[13] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and catastrophe: the passing of mass utopia in East and West*. MIT press, 2002; Alexander Zakharov, 'Mass Celebrations in a Totalitarian System'. In Alla Efimova and Lev Manovich, eds, *Tekstura: Russian essays on visual culture*. University of Chicago Press, 1993; Christel Lane, *The rites of rulers: Ritual in industrial society-the Soviet case*, CUP Archive, 1981.

[14] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was forever, until it was no more: The last Soviet generation*. Princeton University Press, 2013.

[15] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: participatory art and the politics of spectatorship*. Verso Books, 2012.

[16] Idem, p. 15.

Cîntarea României, the closing ceremony of the 1977 edition.
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By the time of the first festival *Cîntarea României* in 1976, amateur cultural manifestations in Romania were strongly regulated by a network of institutions, such as Houses of Culture and Centres for Popular Creation. All the villages as well as every factory and institution in Romania had at least one amateur folklore ensemble that participated in the grand festivity. The establishment of the festival and the increased emphasis on folklore music can be explained by the gradual shift to national-communism under the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu,[17] but the impetus to participate and the interest in folklore were neither new, nor confined to the Romanian case.[18]

The introduction of the festival *Cîntarea României* was concurrent with the increased production and availability of television programmes.[19] Various editions and competition rounds of *Cîntarea României* took place throughout the entire year and were fully recorded. In addition, many other programmes documenting the behind the scenes preparations for the performance were broadcast, together with singing and dance performances focused on the ensembles of particular institutions, produced exclusively for television. Later on, all programmes related to folklore, which were broadcast by TVR at the time that the regional and national editions of the festival were taking place, were brought under the umbrella of *Cîntarea României.*[20]

The performers in the festival were never considered 'authors,' but 'interpreters,' folklore being considered a genre with a collective author: the folk.[21] The lyrics of the songs performed in the festival were suggestive of an idealized village that, by the 1970s, after decades of industrialization, no longer existed.[22] At the moment of their emergence, the songs and dances would have been linked to particular rituals and events confirming the pace of life in the small village communities: wedding songs that marked the ritual of passage, or songs sung during *șezătoare*,[23] all well documented in ethnographic publications on Romanian folklore music.[24] However, *muzică populară* was never evaluated as a full-fledged genre, but only mentioned in passing, with the expectation that it was the *same* kind of folklore. In fact, the jury of the festival ensured that the performance was indeed the same. The medium through which it was disseminated – television, or the stage – was not accounted for. The comparison could only be unjust for

[17] See Katherine Verdery, *National ideology under socialism: identity and cultural politics in Ceaușescu's Romania*. Vol. 7. Univ of California Press, 1995; Gail Kligman, *The politics of duplicity: Controlling reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania*. Univ of California Press, 1998.
[18] Deema Kaneff, *Who owns the past?: the politics of time in a 'model' Bulgarian village*. Vol. 21. Berghahn Books, 2006.
[19] Daniela Mustață, "Television in the Age of (Post) Communism: The Case of Romania." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 40.3 (2012): 131-140, p 137. The author's discussion of diversification and availability of television by 1974 is relevant in showing why it became the focal point of national politics.
[20] See *Cîntarea României* programme broadcast on TVR on 20.02.1988, or on 03.06.1978, for instance.
[21] Interview with informants from the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore.
[22] Mihăilescu, V. *Scutecele natiunii și hainele împăratului. Studii de antropologie publică*, Polirom, 2013.
[23] 'Sezatoare' is an informal gathering in Romanian villages where people come together to work, talk and sing.
[24] Tiberiu Alexandru, *Romanian folk music:[study]*. Musical Publishing House, 1980.

muzică populară, which appeared to be ambiguous: it was neither rooted in the life of the village, nor rooted in working class people's urban experiences.

The performances on stage and on television were not regulated by the small communities from which the dances and songs would have emerged. By having all the teams on the same stage, the artistic act was secularized and made a significant part of the ritual confirming the nation-state. As part of *Cîntarea României*, all the performances together, taxonomized into 'sections' and equal 'ethnofolkloric regions' formed a narrative of folklore and of the past,[25] elaborated in the context of the nation-state, where the 'specialists' had the role of establishing the criteria of a good performance. Abiding by the standards of song and dress was crucial for the success of the artist. The 'ethnofolkloric region' reproduced the model of the modern, bounded, centralized state.

Most of the folkloric stars that I interviewed have clear memories about the emotions they felt going on stage to perform for *Cîntarea României*. Their emotions were not caused by the prospect of facing the audience, but rather by the awe they felt at performing in front of 'the jury.' The folklore specialists were the main audience of the performance, and the 'interpreter' had to demonstrate a high standard and accuracy of dress, song and dance. Folklore was imbued with a standard of ethics and purity, visible in the demand that the dress that the performers wore was 'authentic', and the same applied for the song. In this way, nothing related to the performers' background of working in factories or living in modernized villages came through. Admittedly, a separate section was that of 'new life' songs, in which the lyrics evoked the happy life in communist Romania (usually featuring tractors and furnaces).[26] *Cîntarea României* staged a secularized, bureaucratized form of folklore, which, not unlike the state-centralized economy, placed more importance on the side of production, than it did on consumption.[27] Members of the jury remembered that, although *Cîntarea României* was designed as a competition, they were requested to distribute the prizes evenly, so that every 'region' won at least one prize. What is important, however, for the following discussion, is the way *Cîntarea României* as broadcast on television became a re-enactment of a state ritual, in Couldry's terms. [28]

Television operated by creating clearly bounded categories, through what Couldry theorized as 'media rituals.' Couldry's understanding of 'media rituals' is based on Durkheim's notion of ritual defined as a means to confirm the social relations in a society. Couldry's use of the concept of ritual resonates with Anderson's theory of national identity,[29] whereby the mass media is central to forging 'imagined communities.' And, indeed, scholarship that analyses music rooted in folklore in Eastern Europe has emphasised the way these performances endorse national identity. But rather than discussing the meaning of the media text, Couldry focuses on the capacity of the mass media to offer normative representations of reality. Media rituals are, therefore, 'formalized actions organized around key media-related categories and boundaries, whose performance frames, or suggests a connection with wider media-related values.'[30]

Making *Cîntarea României* into a ritual confirming the nation was made possible through television. *Cîntarea României* became a specific sort of media ritual, creating meaning not so much for the audience, but for the participants. Few of the people I interviewed remember sitting in front of their television sets for hours to watch the unfolding of *Cîntarea României*. By contrast, a lot more people took part in the event. The numbers for the participants in the festival reached millions with each edition. Mircea,[31] one of the cameramen for *Cîntarea României*, spoke about the complete change that a town would undergo every time the festival took place. The streets would swarm with folklore

[25] Idem, p. 18.

[26] See the recording *Cîntarea României* 215.096 from the archives of TVR, an example of a programme where people dressed in traditional costume recite patriotic poems with communist verses. After 1989 this kind of politicised folklore was to be considered the essence of the festival, although a much larger proportion of the performances did not address the 'new life' under communism and Ceauşescu. These politicised performances were selected and made specially for television, and this would explain their visibilty over the part filmed on the stage of the Houses of Culture, where the competition went on.

[27] Idem, p. 17.

[28] Nick Couldry, *Media rituals: A critical approach*, Routledge, 2012.

[29] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism.* verso, 2006.

[30] Idem, p. 29.

[31] Mircea Ştir has worked as a cameraman for TVR, filming for *Cîntarea României* throughout the 1970s and 1980s. I interviewed him in October 2011, as we were driving from the Favorit TV studio to Etno TV.

performers, everyone had to stand around for hours as performances were delayed, and toilets were hardly available in towns that were unprepared for such an invasion. There was no room for an audience in the halls, he recounted. Every member in the audience was, in their own turn, performing at some point in the festival. 'We would be filming from early morning until late into the night, and nobody was invited as an audience,' remembers Mircea. Television was, therefore, recognized as the grand stage for mass participation where the meaningful state ritual took place. The ritual engaged the population and the abstract state, embodied in the expertise of the folklore specialists, performed the role of the audience.

However, this was not the only way folklore was given meaning through television. In parallel to *Cîntarea României*, TVR broadcast a well-known show called ***Tezaur folcloric***[32] ('Folkloric Treasures'),[33] which 'made' the interpreters into stars by glamorizing them. 'They were the glory of their time', recounted Marioara Murărescu, presenter of the show, referring to the 'interpreters' that became famous through her show; 'and they are glorious today, too', she continued (see clip ***Tezaur Folcloric, Emisiune in memoriam Marioara Murărescu***[34]).

The presenter of *Tezaur folcloric* was aware of the role that the show had in the making of celebrity folk performers, and of the appeal they had with the audiences. The show was indeed popular, and a testimony for this is also its long life on television, lasting almost up until the moment when the presenter, Marioara Murărescu, died in 2014. But there is much more than the relationship with the audience that was relevant for *Tezaur Folcloric*. The expertise of the presenter was one crucial aspect. In the immediate period after her death, many of the folklore performers came on television to express their regrets for the 'mother' of folklore, recounting precise stories about how demanding the presenter was in terms of the 'authenticity' and high standards of folklore performances. Despite the glamour and appeal created around the folklore performers, there was a sense that the performers were part of something beyond the demands of the audience, and were somehow transcendent. Folklore was associated with a strong sense of ethics, placing it beyond the judgement of the audience.

During the last decades of communism, television in Romania was considered to have entered a state of decline. Following a period of expansion (which Mustață defines as the phase of 'the national medium'[35]), after the second half of the 1970s television came under a stricter control by the Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu. According to Mustață, the clear potential of television as a medium 'increased political claims over the broadcasting institution, which was to result in strict dictatorial control by the 1980s.'[36] The control of the party put an end to the broad range of programmes available by the end of the 1960s and throughout the 70s,[37] and replaced them with so called 'political programmes' containing little but eulogistic illustrations of the dictator and his wife.

In this context, *Cîntarea României* dominated the television schedules, even though the programme was not necessarily one to watch, but one to participate in. 'The masses' appeared on stage and on television, rather than consuming folklore through television, which reversed the purpose of the medium: 'the masses' were being watched by a small number of 'specialists,' rather than the other way around. The situation was different however, for *Tezaur Folcloric*. Looking back at those times in the 1980s, Murărescu was thought of as 'resistant' because she managed to keep the show running, even in those bleak moments in the history of television.[38] This may seem paradoxical, given the dominance of folklore performances in *Cîntarea României*, which illustrated the central role that folklore played in the state ideology. But in actual fact, *Tezaur Folcloric* brought a different take on folklore, more akin to how subjects were treated through the medium of television: it produced a glamorization of certain folklore performers, who were

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[32] TVR's official page for the broadcast Tezaur folcloric
[33] For a fine example of narrative that characterised *Tezaur Folcloric*, see the **official webpage**.
[34] *Tezaur Folcloric, Emisiune in memoriam Marioara Murărescu,* TVR 1.
[35] Daniela Mustață, "Television in the Age of (Post) Communism: The Case of Romania." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 40.3 (2012): 131-140.
[36] Idem, p135
[37] Mustata, 'Television in the Age of (Post) Communism'; See also Alexandru Matei, *O tribună captivantă. Televiziune, ideologie, societate în România socialistă (1965-1983),* Curtea Veche, 2013.
[38] This opinion was shared by the producers in Tezaur, and by Murarescu herself. Since the programme continued to stay on TV, while Cantarea Romaniei immediately vanished after 1989, it is clear that the two re-enactments of folklore were viewed differently.

singled out as retainers of the immaterial 'treasure,' made for audience consumption. It is also important that the latter placed more stress on 'authenticity', which, in this case, meant that propagandistic folklore about 'the new life' was not central to the show.

The two ways in which *muzică populară* was broadcast on television differ in the relationship between viewer and performer, proposing different perspectives about whom 'folklore' belongs to, and posing the question of authenticity differently. While *Cîntarea României* departed from the premises that folklore belongs to everyone – and, more than that, the citizens have a duty to learn about it and perform it, *Tezaur Folcloric* held 'folklore' as something rare, with 'authenticity' being located only in specific performances, usually the ones which evoked pre-modernity (see the opening credits and the romantic image of the woman on horse in **here**).

At the same time both programmes made folklore central to the national discourse, and made the question of 'authenticity' crucial. Matei defined TVR in its prime as 'elitist,' in that it made a point to educate the population, while entertaining it too. [39] This need to educate applied to folklore as well: it was not only aimed at entertaining the audience, but the viewer and the participant had a duty to learn about and safeguard its 'authenticity.' In this sense, *muzică populară* as it featured during the communist period became a television genre, specific to TVR, the state Romanian broadcaster. One important aspect of this genre - in close connection to the demands of 'authenticty' - was that it eluded the present. It may be evident by now that this characterized the folklore performances in *Tezaur Folcloric*. But it was also a feature of the folklore performers in *Cîntarea României*. The songs about the present were always about the glorious present, channelled towards propaganda for the communist party or, more often, for the leaders. Almost no aspects of the everyday present, as lived by the performer (or the audience) permeated the lyrics or the music of this genre. At no point did Romanian *muzică populară* come nearer to the folk revival in Britain or the US, where it came to be considered part of a working class culture, albeit rooted in traditional sounds.[40] As I will illustrate later on, this aspect was conserved in post-89 performances of folklore, even though the type of television production and consumption changed dramatically.

2. Niche Folklore. The Development of Muzică Populară in Post-Socialism

After decades of transmitting censored information and propaganda – in stark contrast with the everyday reality – the live transmission on TVR of the 1989 revolution made television central to the Romanian public space.[41] Upon the rise of cable television in the early 90s, the supremacy of TVR was challenged by private television stations. Among them, it was PRO TV that led the market, with its focus on individualism and commercial success.[42] Niche, thematic channels spread from the 2000s onwards. Far from being a Romanian phenomenon, this was the outcome of technological advancements[43] and European deregulations, which supported the idea that 'open markets would allow for a greater plurality of providers.'[44] Silviu Prigoană was one of the first businessmen in Romania to understand the potential of a niche audiovisual market.[45] The concept entailed a particular perspective on 'the audience': television no longer addressed 'the masses', not even a generic 'audience' (the term is used in marketing, implying the notion

[39] Alexandru Matei, *O tribună captivantă. Televiziune, ideologie, societate în România socialistă (1965-1983),* Curtea Veche, 2013.
[40] Albert Lloyd, *Folk song in England* (pp. 21-22). London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1967. And David Harker, 'On Industrial Folklsong' in Derek Scott, ed, *Music, Culture, and Society: A Reader*. Oxford University Press, 2000
[41] See *Videograms of a Revolution* 1992 directed by Ujica and Farocki. And Eva Kernbauer, Establishing Belief: Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica, Videograms of a Revolution. *Grey Room*, (41), 72-87, 2010. It is argued that the sensuous spectacle of the revolution, so central to local and global history, made television into the most important media in Romania.
[42] *Television across Europe: regulation, policy, and independence* / Open Society Institute, EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program; Network Media Program. New York: Open Society Institute, 2005. Vol 3
[43] Stylianos Papathanassopoulos *European Television in the Digital Age: Issues, Dyamnics and Realities*. OECD Publishing, 2001, p. 150-152.
[44] Petros Iosifidis, Janette Steemers, and Mark Wheeler, *European television industries*. Bfi Publishing, 2005, p. 55.
[45] **'Prigoana vrea 50 mil. euro pe Etno TV'** on 9 August 2007.

of consumption[46]), but it addressed a specific 'target audience' with specific tastes and a clear profile. Prigoană's first opened channel was the news channel Realitatea TV (2001). The other channels owned by him were Etno TV and Taraf TV and addressed a completely different audience.[47]

After 1989, *muzică populară* remained an important part of the private, general entertainment channels, such as National TV, Antena 1, TVRM and, of course, also the state broadcaster TVR. However, the diversification of the television market, together with the fact that a unified notion of 'folklore' was no longer central to the sense of national identity in the same way as it was in the last decades of communism,[48] led to changes in the genre of *muzică populară*.

For the remaining of this paper, I will focus on *muzică populară* as broadcast on Etno TV. Since 2011, the channel was managed by Prigoană's wife, Adriana Bahmuțeanu. She imprinted a particular sexualised image to the performance of *muzică populară*, if only through the presenter's outfits and the channel's image.[49] Etno TV opened in 2002, and for a while it broadcast using inadequate equipment from a studio the size of a flat. When I started my fieldwork, Etno TV and Taraf TV were bound together, in full expansion, and in the process relocating from a small studio in a flat to large, modern studios. Although it was operating as a niche channel, in 2011 Etno reached the 3rd highest rating for New Year's Eve programme,[50] competing with general entertainment channels. This success is telling for the popularity of the music, but also for the particular way in which we could define 'niche' in this case (this however, is not the object of this paper). To understand how the genre of *muzică populară* has changed, it is necessary to first look at its various articulations on different channels.

Etno TV and Taraf TV have been owned by the same media company. The two channels share the same management and to a large extent, the same staff behind the cameras and the same studio.

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[46] Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong *Principles of marketing*, Pearson Education, 2010.

[47] For this study I have not done research on the audience of Etno TV and Taraf TV. However, the manner in which Prigoana is discussed in mass media places him in opposition with 'the intellectuals', suggesting that, along with the the audiences for the TV channels he owns, he lacks cultural capital. See, for example, **this text**. Also, see the discussions on the forum of this **webpage**. Here, the idea that the audience of Etno is made up of people with higher education baffles the participants. It is suggested that Taraf TV is watched by less educated people. The level of education of the audience is less important for the article I am presenting. The attitudes and hierarchies of cultural capital are, for the argument that I make, more important. **Another article in the daily *Evenimentul Zilei*** does a brief tour of the niche markets that the channels address. Again, I do not comment on the criteria used in assessing or defining these categories, but what is important is their image as presented in the mass media. Interestingly, the article blames some of the failures on the ill application of the concept of 'target audience' in Romania, without looking at broader trends in Europe and elsewhere.

[48] The elimination of *Cîntarea României* signals this change in the definition and position of 'folklore' vis-à-vis national identity and the state. Another symptom of this change is the distinctive aesthetic of 'folklore' in the Peasant Museum, and the decentralization of institutions such as the Schools of Folkloric Art.

[49] This is visible if you look further down in the paper, from the outfit of the presenter. After Bahmuteau was fired, as a result of her break-up with Prigoană, the outlook became less sexualized, and the sexy presenter was fired too.

[50] Press articles such as **this** and **this** show that Etno is constantly the leader of music niche channels, competing with general entertainment TV stations.

Taraf TV studio. Members of a Moldovan dance ensemble resting between performances in the Etno TV studio for a special Easter programme. The two studios share the same large hall. Copyrights A. Urdea, 2011

Despite all these elements that bring the Etno and Taraf together, the music they broadcast is kept strictly separate. Taraf TV has been mainly focused on broadcasting *manele*, a type of performance that is glamorous, inclined to reflect the tastes and desires of the audience, made up largely of working class or lower-class urban Roma and Romanian young people.[51] Without going into a complex discussion of the *manele* genre, it is important to mention that it gained visibility during the 1990s and provoked controversy in the national debate[52] which eventually lead to the rejection of the genre from national television channels, despite its popularity. Schiop[53] argues that this music brought to the fore all the sins of the post-communist society: lust, desire for money, competition and fear of enemies.

Etno TV positioned its performances of folklore music not only in contrast with the *manele* performances on Taraf TV, but also with *muzică populară* as broadcast on the public station TVR. To the folklore performers, TVR maintained a high standard of 'accurate folklore.' 'TVR is still the top station, just like in the past', explained folklore performers Mariana and Ion.[54] 'When you go there as a performer, you can't wear just anything. […] It really has to be authentic.' 'Authenticity' is crucial in describing the folklore broadcast on TVR, and according to the folklore performers there is continuity between the programme *Tezaur Folcloric* from the 1980s and the way in which TVR broadcasts folklore

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[51] Adrian Șchiop, **'Cum au ingropat elitele romane manelele'**, *Criticatac* 25 January 2011 and his novel *Soldatii*, Polirom, Bucharest 2013; Margaret Bessinger, '*Muzica Orientala*: Identity and Popular Culture in Postcommunist Romania'. In Donna Buchanan, ed, *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image, and Regional Political Discourse*. Scarecrow Press, 2007.

[52] See Speranta Rădulescu, **Maneaua: Istorie, alcatuire, rosturi, intelesuri,** 30.03.2012; Margaret Bessinger, '*Muzica Orientala*: Identity and Popular Culture in Postcommunist Romania', in Donna Buchanan, ed, *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image, and Regional Political Discourse*. Scarecrow Press, 2007; Adrian Șchiop, **'Cum au ingropat elitele romane manelele'**, *Criticatac* 25 January 2011 and his novel *Soldatii*, Polirom, Bucharest 2013. For a brief discussion on the connotations of manele, see Ștefan Firica, **Homebound or homeless minds. Return migration in the 21st C**. *Romanian Literature*.

[53] Idem 50.

[54] During my fieldwork in TV studios I conducted interviews with various performers, some more famous than others. I have also interviewed various people working in television close to the phenomenon of folklore performance, as well as to folklore specialists. I choose to keep the identity of all my informants secret.

today. For the performers, it is not the audience who decides or cares about 'authenticity,' this is not a necessary quality in the relationship between performer and consumer, but it is something mediated by the educated specialist. In comparison with other TV stations, which tend to be more 'commercial' (as the performers characterize it) TVR has maintained its high standards that educate the performer and the viewer at once into what valuable folklore is.

Fig 3. **http://www.taraftv.ro**

Fig 4. **http://www.etno.ro/live.html**

The two web pages and TV channels look different, although they share the same studio and crew.

If *manele* has been considered a genre contaminated by ethnic associations, consumerism and unleashed capitalism, then *muzică populară* – at least in the form broadcast on TVR – was considered ethical and intrinsically good. It evoked an image of the bucolic Romanian village, untouched by modernity, where people cared about their parents and dreamt of kissing their loved one in a meadow. The *muzică populară* broadcast on TVR and in folkloric festivals organized by state institutions was considered to be light entertainment, which contained nothing offensive. The audience consisted of working-class people, or as suggested by Mihăilescu,[55] the population that moved from countryside to town with the industrialization of the 1950s and 1960s.[56]

According to the folklore stars,[57] Etno TV does not benefit from the 'purity' of the TVR standards. When dressing up to appear on Etno, the performers sometimes tended to break the rules of 'authenticity' in favour of glamour. 'Ours are stage costumes', explained Mariana.

Well, every star wants to stand out a little bit. We get our costumes from the villages, and often they are very old, we need to recondition them, but we also alter them, to fit our bodies and our tastes. And if you think about it, it's not so different to what it was like in village: when a girl prepared for a dance party (*hora*) on Sunday, she picked the shirt that would distinguish her, that would have a pattern like nobody else's.

 A certain level of competition is allowed and encouraged on Etno TV, as the stars make an effort to be considered not so much representatives of the villages and rural areas where their songs allegedly come from (as on TVR),

[55] Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Scutecele natiunii şi hainele împăratului*. *Studii de antropologie publică*, Polirom, 2013.
[56] It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the TV audience of *muzică populară, manele* or any other genre related or rooted in local traditional music. Broadly speaking, they address working class or lower middle class audiences. Both genres are excluded from higher spaces of cultural production, such as the museums, for instance. As mentioned, when music is part of social relations in small communities, such as weddings or other kind of festivities, the genres matter less, and music becomes a question of taste. In these circumstances, performers are able to play whatever the audience requests. But when broadcast on national television, genres become loaded with other values, and become a means to distinguish between class, ethnicity, etc. Performances in small communities tend to be inclusive and more democratic, but television, as I argue in my paper, operates by establishing boundaries.
[57] Based on interviews with folkloric stars, but also leaders of ensembles, occasionally invited to play on Etno. These performers were constantly telling me that the standards of Etno are low, that the presenters know little about 'folklore' and that all they do is for the rating.

but, indeed, modern-day performers. They are aware, however, that they are breaching the specialists' demands of authenticity. 'Etno TV asked me to come to work for them, as a specialist,' said museum costume curator M. Popescu. 'I said to them: I'll come work for you when you take those girls [i.e performers] off those high heels, when you strip all that glitz off their costumes and they wipe off their make-up.' The 'commercialization of folklore,' M. Popescu believes, has nothing to do with the 'authentic folklore' that one is occasionally able to see on TVR. The 'degradation' is blamed on the folklore stars themselves, who want to stand out, but also on the TV station that rather wants to please the audience more than educate people. Etno TV, therefore, positioned itself in between *manele* and the bureaucratised folklore on TVR, keeping the genre of *muzică populară* within certain boundaries, but also incorporating elements of glamour and consumerism in the performance.

This transgression of costume (and music) through the incorporation of modern day elements, such as new fabrics, make-up, high heels, is, to the folklore specialist, a transgression of 'good taste,' therefore the stars need always to be careful with not becoming a 'kitsch.' The issue of clothes becomes a question of morality – breeching 'authenticity' by embracing 'commercialism' – and the stars try to stay as much as they can in the middle space between 'creativity' and 'authenticity.' The type of songs performed on Etno TV also differ from those on TVR. On TVR, a performer proves their skills by singing the most important Romanian song,[58] called 'doina.'[59] On Etno TV, it is the party, upbeat song that prevails. Re-enactments of traditions, that include song and dance, which are often present on TVR, are missing from the repertoire of Etno TV. On Etno TV, on the other hand, individual stars who celebrate their birthday are often invited, this way providing the framework for party songs, such as *sârba* and *hora*.

To better illustrate the construction of the *muzică populară* genre on Etno TV in between the glamour of commercial television and the particular demands of authenticity that characterized the genre before 1989, I will focus next on the case-study of a festival organized by Etno TV on Easter day.

3. Folklore and Ritual: the Grand Etno Festivity

It was a Thursday afternoon, April 2012, four days before Easter Sunday, and a grand show was on in the largest performance hall in the centre of Bucharest. The foyer of Palace Hall was swarming with fans of *muzică populară*. For over a month, Etno TV had been advertising the grand performance they were putting on, where they were going to showcase nearly all of the great Romanian folklore stars. Cameras were going to film the whole event and broadcast it as part of the Etno TV Easter programme, at various times of the day, from the Saturday before Easter to the Wednesday after, when the celebration would officially end. Easter is the most important celebration for Orthodox Christians, and Etno TV, like all other television stations, makes the most of it.

The festival broadcast was not the only programme they had planned for the long Easter weekend. The studios had been swarming with people all week, as the crew recorded tens of hours of footage for a long edition of their programme *Bună seara, dragi români* ('Good Evening Dear Romanians'). On a normal day, this was the station's main evening programme, where a glamorous presenter would introduce three hours of folklore performances, alternating dance, music and celebrity gossip. To mark the Easter celebrations, Etno TV prepared not three hours, but a whole day of *Bună seara, dragi români*, continuously filmed over the course of a few days. Folkloric stars from all over Romania found accommodation in Bucharest for the week in order to get the benefit of appearing on both *Bună seara, dragi români* and on the stage of the Palace Hall in Bucharest.

A couple of hours before the Palace Hall performance was to begin, the employees of Etno TV were laying down the carpet that would take the stars of the show from the steps outside into the foyer and then onto the stage of the largest hall in the centre of the capital. As the shinny white and black limousines disgorged groups of folkloric stars dressed
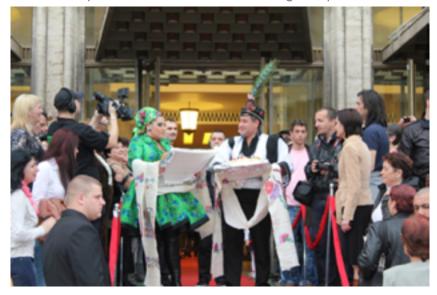
[58] Tiberiu Alexandru, *Romanian folk music: [study]*. Musical Publishing House, 1980. See the chapter on *Doina*, p 49.
[59] Inscribed as UNESCO intangible heritage in 2009.

up in folk attire, the flashes of the cameras unleashed upon them, bringing out details of the women's costumes: the high heels and extravagant make up, the glitter on their peasant blouses. Climbing a few steps on the red carpet, they would be officially greeted by two Etno TV programme hosts with the traditional Romanian round bread ('colac') which they were to tear a piece from and dip in the small mound of salt resting on top of the oversized loaf.

Two presenters from Etno TV, dressed up in Maramureș costume, receive the folklore celebrities at the entrance of the Palace Hall. Copyrights A. Urdea, 2011.

The backstage entrance was not at all far from the main entrance. Anyone curious enough to look around the corner would have been able to see the folklore stars as they went into the building in their street clothes, then emerged in groups, all dressed up in their folk attire, only to be picked up by the limousines, to be driven around the corner to the main entrance. The festival was a cross between *Cîntarea României* and the Oscars ceremony, all mixed with the Easter celebrations.

Folklore performers at the backstage entrance, waiting to be picked up by limousines. Copyrights A. Urdea, 2011

The large crowd of spectators in the Palace Hall almost matched the number of folklore performers backstage. All

the regions of Romania were to be represented on stage that evening in front of the audience. The show reminded many participants of the festival *Cîntarea României*, and they were very happy to finally be acknowledged again and be asked to take part in something as *grand* as they had in the past. It was impossible to accommodate all the performers' individual acts on the stage of the Palace Hall, even though the show went on well over six hours. On stage, they were coalesced into regional 'ethnofolkloric' groups and asked to perform 'region songs.' Once more, the music mattered less than the actual participation of as many 'interpreters' as possible; it was their impressive number that made the performance into an event, rather than the songs. This way, the performance in the Palace Hall equated Etno TV with the nation-state. Here, as in all media rituals, television acquired a central position in the social life of the nation.

The highlight in the Palace Hall performances was the orchestrated Easter Mass that took place at midnight. As in a church mass, the lights went dim and there was a long moment of silence followed by the rattling sound of the smoking censer. Soon the smell of incense in the dark was followed by the usual Easter Orthodox call: 'come and take light.' Someone lit candles, and the call of the priest and the smell and rattle of the censer on the grand stage transformed the setting. The priest was a well-known folklore music performer. Once this was over, he proceeded to sing a song from his region, Maramureş.[60] More than the metonymic representation of the nation, the spirituality of the nation was addressed too. Television demonstrated its power not only to de-territorialize, but to de-temporalize events. It mattered less that Easter time had not arrived yet for the performers and the audience. For that moment, everyone became an extra in the orchestration of the Easter night mass – which is not to say that the moment was not lived with intensity.

TV host presenter Roxana Vasniuc on the stage of the Palace Hall. Copyrights A. Urdea, 2011.

The festival organized by Etno TV brings out similarities with the 'state ritual' performed by *Cîntarea României*, but

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[60] This is an important region in the construction of national identity through museums and folklore expertise. See Hereşan and Iosif in ‚Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies II, Halle Studies' in the *Anthropology of Eurasia*, 2008.

also emphasizes the glamour that was part of the full-fledged TV programme. The 'state ritual' as performed by *Cîntarea României* was now supported by a church ritual, which illustrates the change in the national discourse, where the church plays a central role.[61] Although it may seem that the performers are there to fill in a place in a grand orchestrated state event, my ethnographic findings show that they have agency with regards to their television appearance. More than a relationship with their audience, the folklore stars longed for a past when their performance transcended the taste of the audience, and directly addressed the overarching structure of the state. 'All everyone cares about these days is money,' many of them complained. 'It's people who have money, not the ones who have talent that appear on TV,' is one of the most common things I heard during my fieldwork. It is an open secret that, apart from being well-established, famous folkloric stars, most performers are required by Etno TV to pay for their appearances on television. It is one of the reasons why the folklore stars think that no 'real interest' is put into promoting 'real values.' In other words, folkloric music is not as relevant anymore for the nation-state, so they feel reduced to the degrading level of having to promote themselves. However, paying for their appearances also makes them feel empowered: to some level, they consider the television station belongs to them.

The ambivalent reactions from the TV stars who emerged as performers during the last decades of communism is telling for the manifold implications of a niche channel that broadcasts folklore. Unlike *manele*, this genre is both popular, and accepted as part of a national narrative – through museums, academic practice (carried out for instance by the Institute of Folklore) and other television stations, including public television. On the one hand, *muzică populară* targets narrowly particular television consumers, making 'folklore' central to a particular market. This is seen as something that contravenes the role of 'folklore as patrimony,' which occupies a central position of what is considered the nation's culture. The performers, who support the television station by paying, prefer that some standards of the genre be maintained outside consumer demand; they demand that the genre be identified in terms of its 'authenticity', in the form that was required by *Cîntarea României* and *Tezaur Folcloric*. They like to be brought onto a red carpet, descending from a limousine, taking part, in that way, in a global language of wealth and success. But they also hold dear the memory of a time when their performance was part of something that transcended them or their audience and was intrinsically valuable and good. These ambivalent attitudes are embodied in the permanent negotiation of the costume, with the stars trying to fit somewhere in the middle between an 'authentic' and a 'stage' costume. Niche television has been able to accommodate both these attitudes.

How much does the 'commercialization' of television in Romania account for the changes in the genre of *muzică populară*? In the logic of the market, the genre would have had to suffer great changes from the communist period, such as the adoption of modern elements into the performance (e.g. wearing high heels). But *muzică populară* has not allowed 'consumerism' to permeate it too much. The genre considered most illustrative of a particular type of consumerism, *manele*, has been isolated from *muzică populară*, through a distinct niche channel. Only occasionally are themes associated specifically with everyday life in post-communism found in the lyrics of *muzică populară*, and the costumes continue to follow the requirements of authenticity, even though the producers on Etno TV do not exercise that kind of control over the folklore performers. When they do not, it does not go without being noticed or accounted for. More than in the past, I argue, the performers have greater control over their performance of folklore through the niche channel Etno TV. Festivals like the one organized by Etno bring them back to the centre of the national discourse. What they re-enact is not necessarily an idea of the relationship between the nation and peasantry or folklore, but a moment in time when their re-enactment was regarded, through TVR, as central to the nation. This does not make them 'nationalists,' but can be explained as *cultural intimacy,*[62] through the performance of *muzică populară* on television.

4. Conclusions

[61] Monica Heintz, 'Moral Education in Romania and the Republic of Moldova' and Laszlo Faszto 'Charismatic Christianity among the Roma in Romania in Religion' in Chris Hann, *Religion, Identity, Postsocialism*. The Halle Focus Group 2003-2010, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale 2010.
[62] Michae Herzfeld, *Cultural intimacy. Social Poetics in the Nation-State,* Routledge, 1997.

The emergence and transformation of *muzică populară* is interlinked with the evolution of television in Romania and in that sense, we can speak about it as a genre shaped by television. The music is performed in many other social spaces, but through television we see a particular articulation of the genre, from the last decades of communism to the period of niche television channels.

It is with *Cîntarea României*, broadcast on television from the mid 1970s until the demise of the communist state, that *muzică populară* becomes fixed as part of a state ritual, which demanded mass participation rather than spectatorship, and which directed the performance of a sanitized form of folklore. Television, therefore, becomes the medium through which the state ritual is enacted, with folklore at the centre of the national identity discourse. Broadcast in parallel, *Tezaur Folcloric* indeed engaged the audience as spectators, but exerted the same pressures of 'authenticity' on the performers. TVR emerges, therefore, as central to the state politics, enabling not only its dissemination, but also the bodily engagement with the state apparatus, and has been instrumental in forging a sort of body politics.

After 1989 the market for TV channels expanded rapidly, with *muzică populară* being broadcast through niche television stations. The ways in which the folklore stars regulate their performance, and the way they enact what they think of as 'valuable folklore' is telling for the different aspirations they think should be embodied and disseminated through national or niche television. Negotiations between the glamour of capitalism, and the mass participation similar to *Cîntarea României,* between stepping out or embodying 'tradition' through one's costume have characterized *muzică populară* as a genre in post-1989 Romania. These articulations of the genre speak about the changes in the Romanian audiovisual landscape; in particular, they partly incorporate and partly resist the purely commercial (not educational!) rationale behind the niche channel Etno TV.

The different ways in which folklore is broadcast on TVR and Etno TV in communism and post-communism are different articulations of the same genre. The different 'discursive clusters' around the text, in Mittell's terms, place the folklore performances – as well as the media themselves – in different spheres of cultural production.

B i o g r a p h y :

Alexandra Urdea is a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths, University of London**,** writing her PhD thesis on the meanings and uses of folk objects as they move through different spaces of cultural production. In her research, she focuses on Romanian artefacts that are part of the collection of the Horniman museum in London, and traces their biography through time and space, from the villages where they emerged, to the TV studios where the meaning around 'folklore' is now created. She holds a master's degree from University College London in South-East European Studies and has written her master's thesis on 'Romanian self-stigmatization as seen through advertising'. In 2007 she has worked as an assistant producer for Realitatea TV in Bucharest.