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Popular Music and Social Marginality during Severe Economic Change
Evidence from Post-communist Romania[*]

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During the last couple of decades, Romania witnessed deep economic, social and cultural transformations. Their scope, intensity and speed plunged Romanian society into an unprecedented process of change, more impressive perhaps than the post-war communism or the slow and painful modernization conducted by the intellectual and political elites during the 19th century[1]. As it was expected in the early 1990's, political institutions and the economy would change more rapidly than citizens' culture, would it be the political culture[2]. Focusing mainly on the political culture, the early transition literature largely neglected other cultural elements, as group or class identities. Though it finally acknowledged in the mid-1990s the importance of cultural processes in defining nationhood and stateness[3], the transition literature seems to still overlook numerous cultural phenomena that accompany deep economic and social change in Romania. Now that transition is over, at least its main components that are democratization and marketization, the thorough study of its social consequences unveils surprising findings related to social stratification, gentrification, marginalization or status inconsistency[4]. This misperception could be related, as emphasized in this article, by ideologically driven perspectives, since neo-liberalism was quickly taken after 1989 for the only game in town. Yet neo-liberalism does not limit to the market mechanisms and work ethics, but deeply influences more general norms, values and behaviors.

The aim of this article is to focus on the development of new dominant social values as quick enrichment and large scale consumerism, under the impact of neo-liberal ideology and the constraints of harsh social stratification. The perspective we adopt here is based on the cultural production of marginal groups under the pressure of market economy, downward mobility, increasing uncertainty and poverty, emphasizing that the discourse on transition is not the monopoly of experts,

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[1] Keith HITCHINS, *Rumania 1866-1947*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994.

[2] Ralf DAHRENDORF, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, Crown, New York, 1990.

[3] Taras KUZIO, "Transition in Post-communist States: Triple or Quadruple", *Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2001, pp. 168-177.

[4] Dumitru SANDU, "Status Inconsistency as Predictor of Public Action Attitudes in Romania", *Current Sociology*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2004, pp. 989-1020; Norbert PETROVICI, "Excluderea muncitorilor din centrul Clujului. Gentrificare într-un oraș central-european", *Sociologie Românească*, vol. V, no. 3, 2007, pp. 42-70; Bogdan GHEORGHIȚĂ, Sabina-Adina LUCA, "Societatea românească între polarizare și stratificare. O perspectivă după nouăsprezece ani de postcomunism", *Sociologie Românească*, vol. VIII, no. 1, 2010, pp. 93-107.

academics or politicians. Since the language employed by various publics different from experts, academics or politicians, underlines Sandu, "is more implicit than explicit and is loaded with symbols, images and metaphor"[1], we use here a series of very popular songs in Romania called "manele" in order to deeper understand social change. This popular music provides the opportunity to scrutinize the discursive interactions occurring inside marginal groups and to avoid limiting the analysis to the official discourse on Romania's modernization, liberalization and Europeanization. Whereas enjoyed especially by young people, "manele" offers valuable insights into their values and norms, fears and expectations, since they are confronted to increasing social and economic challenges.

POPULAR MUSIC, YOUNG PEOPLE AND SOCIAL DISCOURSE

Why focusing on popular music? As an essential social product, popular culture (and especially popular music) offers compelling insights into the social world we live in. Unlike the so-called high culture, popular culture based on experiences and views of the common folk may more accurately unravel the very fabric of the social world. Popular music is a social sign because it creates an effect in the perceiver that is not only aesthetic, but socially meaningful. Moreover, popular music is a sign because it appeals to the emotions of a generation, particularly a young generation[2]. Thus popular music carries out cultural images and symbols that surround the music and generate a particular narrative[3]. It can act as any other vehicle carrying images and symbols in order to.

Popular music may also serve as vehicle for frustration, anger and protest against established values and norms[4], since music is probably the most suitable way for young people to express not only their identity[5], but their political knowledge and orientations, in indirect or more direct manners[6]. It is acknowledged today that young people are social forces that count. Though young people compose a generation that has a wide variety of cultural, educational, political and ethnical backgrounds, they seem to form a distinct subculture since they display different sets of attitudes that their predecessors[7]. Because of acute changes in childhood conditions in post-modern

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[1] *Ibidem*, p. 989.

[2] Jonathan MATUSITZ, "Semiotics of Music: Analysis of Cui Jian's 'Nothing to My Name', the Anthem for the Chinese Youths in the Post-Cultural Revolution Era", *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2010, pp. 156-175.

[3] Jon STRATTON, "Beyond Art: Postmodernism and the Case of Popular Music", *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1989, pp. 31-57.

[4] Theodor ADORNO, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, Seabury, New York, 1980.

[5] Christine E. GRIFFIN, "The Trouble with Class: Researching Youth, Class and Culture beyond the 'Birmingham School'", *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2011, pp. 245-259.

[6] Ambrose LEUNG, Cheryl KIER, "Music Preferences and Civic Activism of Young People", *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2008, pp. 445-460; Catherine BAKER, "Popular Music and Political Change in Post-Tudman Croatia: 'It's All the Same, Only He's not Here?'", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 62, no. 10, 2010, pp. 1741-1759.

[7] Pippa NORRIS, Stefan WALGRAVE, Peter VAN AELST, "Who Demonstrates: Anti-State Rebels, or Conventional Participants? or Everyone?", *Comparative Politics*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2005, pp. 251-275.

societies, even young children are to be taken into account[1]. They are the newest citizens and in a couple of decades will form the bulk of the citizens, thus their social and political values and orientations are critical for the future.

In East European settings, young people now face new challenges in the context of marketization, democratization and increased labor migration[2]. During the transition period, young people have been most affected by social shock in terms of resources[3]. Moreover, young people avoid political participation because of lack of motivation. The general low trust in the political system turns political participation into a useless action for those who have no hope to influence political institutions and politicians. These institutions are generally seen as rigged against ordinary citizens and run by corrupt and irresponsible officials. Thus young people feel politically powerless and disregard public issues[4]. Additionally, they reject any kind of mobilization that reminds them about the previous communist forced political mobilization[5]. Even young people who desire to get involved in more significant political action don't always have the right connections for successful political activity. Often seen in Eastern Europe as vehicles for personal welfare[6], parties in power are not accessible to everyone. Post-communist parties benefit, as other inchoate institutions, of a wide range of former social (in fact, personal) networks that are specific to atomized societies which make more formal civil society organizations unattractive for many people[7]. The persistence of personal networks is a response to the organizational failure and to the corruption of formal organizations. Networks that individuals can invoke in response are anti-modern: forms of informal, diffuse social cooperation; begging or cajoling public officials; using connections to 'bend' rules or paying bribes that break rules[8]. The uneasy access to public offices only adds to the general powerless feeling

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[1] Therese O'TOOLE, "Engaging with Young People's Conceptions of the Political", *Children's Geographies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2003, pp. 71-90; Jan W. VAN DETH, Simone ABENDSCHÖN, Meike VOLLMAR, "Children and Politics: An Empirical Reassessment of Early Political Socialization", *Political Psychology*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2011, pp. 147-173.

[2] Martin BALDWIN-EDWARDS, "Navigating between Scylla and Charybdis: Migration Policies for a Romania within the European Union", *South-European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2007, pp. 5-35; Jeffrey W. HAHN, Igor LOGVINENKO, "Generational Differences in Russian Attitudes towards Democracy and the Economy", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 8, 2008, pp. 1345-1369; Catherine WALKER, "Space, Kinship Networks and Youth Transition in Provincial Russia: Negotiating Urban-Rural and Inter-Regional Migration", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2010, pp. 647-669; Anne WHITE, "Young People and Migration from Contemporary Poland", *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2010, pp. 565-580.

[3] Ivan T. BEREND, "Social Shock in Transforming Central and Eastern Europe", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2007, pp. 269-280.

[4] Dragoș DRAGOMAN, "Trust, Reciprocity and Volunteerism: Explaining Low Political Activism in Post-communist Romania", *Sociologie Românească*, vol. VII, no. 4, 2009, pp. 107-123.

[5] Ase B. GRØDELAND, "'Red Mobs', 'Yuppies', 'Lamb Heads' and Others: Contacts, Informal Networks and Politics in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2007, pp. 217-252.

[6] Andrew ROBERTS, "Hyperaccountability: Economic Voting in Central and Eastern Europe", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2008, pp. 533-546.

[7] James L. GIBSON, "Social Networks, Civil Society, and the Prospects for Consolidating Russia's Democratic Transition", in Gabriel BĂDESCU, Eric M. USLANER (eds.), *Social Capital and the Transition to Democracy*, Routledge, New York, 2003, pp. 61-80.

[8] Richard ROSE, "Getting Things Done in an Anti-Modern Society: Social Capital Networks in Russia", World Bank Social Capital Initiative Working Paper No. 6 (1998). http://siteresources.

and the distrustful social environment. This is why we decided to use popular music to unravel young people's political values and orientations in a period marked by severe economic crises and profound social change.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Data

The data of our research is drawn from a series of widely popular songs that are considered to accurately express citizens' social and political knowledge and orientations. These songs, called "manele" in Romania (singular: "manea"), are widespread cultural items, especially among young people, since the beginning of the post-communist transition in 1990. Though there are also classical "manele", in fact Turkish derived genre of dance music performed as early as the 18th century by Romani musicians in pre-modern Romania, the modern "manele" are a mixture of Romani music with Turkish, Greek and even Indian elements, combined using modern (especially electronic) instruments and beats. In fact, the mixture of music genres and the eclectic beats makes "manele" to be related to other music styles in the Balkans, like Bulgarian "chalga", Greek modern "laiko", Turkish "arabesque" and to a lesser extent to Serbian "turbo-folk". This mixture makes manele relatively hard to clearly define, yet there can be seen as a mixture of complex local Romani and oriental Balkan, Turkish and Arabic influences over a pop tune.

Despite the fact that "manele" are common cultural items today among people of various age categories, they seem to be most enjoyed by young people in Romania. Back in 2006, a survey requested by the National Audio-Visual Council, the regulating body for audio-visual media in Romania, unraveled that almost a third of youngsters between 11 and 14 years of age and more than a fifth of those between 15 and 18 years old mostly enjoyed manele[1], yet these figures could be more important since "manele" are socially labeled as bad-taste and pseudo-music by the established intellectuals and therefore not easy to publically assume as cultural consumption behavior. By sociological observation instead, one can notice that younger generations use to listen to them in various daily contexts, on a Sunday barbecue or while driving their cars. It is not unusual to hear "manele" in buses or in railway stations, in taxis or in restaurants. They are actually so popular among young people that media entrepreneurs in Romania, acknowledging their market potential, now offer not only numerous special internet web sites, but radio stations (Taraf FM) and even TV channels (Taraf TV, Mynele TV).

Though "manele" are often labeled by intellectuals as pseudo-music, bad taste or pure kitsch, they are to be seen more as valuable vehicle for the expression of a specific counterculture. In fact, "manele" may express underground identity concerns, as well as social or more personal themes as justice, equality, corruption, power and domination, fate and predestination. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (also known as CDA), we will unravel those social concerns embedded in the discourse expressed

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worldbank.org/INTSOCIALCAPITAL/Resources/Social-Capital-Initiative-Working-Paper-Series/SCI-WPS-06.pdf (accessed 01.11.2007).

[1] http://arhiva.cna.ro/paginaindex/int_cna.pdf (accessed 15.03.2012).

by "manele" in its effort to define in-group and out-group, to label social actors and to justify those labels, as well as to express the involvement of the speaker, his social status and his values. This is also the case of rap music, who managed to largely increase the popularity of African-American youth styles among young people from various parts of the world as to become one of the most esteemed youth culture on the globe[1]. As vehicle for symbols and images, rap music has helped in defining black identity in the context of modernity[2]. But this is the case of hip-hop, as well. Its rapid expansion into new social spaces forced social scientists to pay serious attention to the question of how specific youth audiences bring different reading formations and meanings to the culture[3]. We think that "manele" in Romania work in the same way, by expressing identity concerns and by defining social groups and values through discursive interactions.

Since music is an essential vehicle for various cultural images and symbols, we could have emphasized here other signs carried out by "manele", i.e. video-clip images and scenography. Due to the great complexity of such analysis, we mainly stick to the lyrics, keeping the visual analysis for a future scrutiny. Including images and visual symbols into analysis would have required a separate corpus of data and a totally different methodology. It is true, of course, that "manele" composers and players have managed to create a distinct image on the local music scene with their own fashion style, mainly composed of cheap, flashy jewellery and imitating luxury clothing brands, with singers driving expensive luxury cars and surrounded by series of young ladies in mini-skirts or in swimming suites. Lyrics are new features for "manele", since classical "manele" were played on classical instruments by a live band and had no text. On the contrary, modern "manele" singers strongly emphasize their lyrics as an expression of their status, values and social orientations. Those features thus form the bulk of our data.

Data Source

The "manele" corpus used by our research was selected by using "manele" top charts on internet[4]. From a couple of thousands of "manele" featuring in those charts based on the popularity of the songs, we selected "manele" according to several tag words pertaining to issues under scrutiny, as money and possessions, social success and failure, misleading friends and the mean world, domination and marginality. We decided to combine the two selection criteria and to balance popularity with the frequency of our research themes. Except love and romance issues, the expression of social marginality and the values and behaviors triggered by the new dominant liberal ideology are the most common "manele" topics. Acknowledging that CDA is

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[1] Timothy HAVENS, "Subtitling Rap: Appropriating The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air for Youthful Identity Formation in Kuwait", *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 63, no. 1, 2001, pp. 57-72.

[2] Paul GILROY, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1993.

[3] Alexander RILEY, "The Rebirth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Hip-Hop: A Cultural Sociology of Gangsta Rap Music", *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2005, pp. 297-311.

[4] The charts were selected from the following websites: www.topmanele.net, www.topmanelenoi.com, www.best-manele.com, www.versurimulte.ro/versuri-manele/, http://versurimanele.com/.

qualitative analysis and not (quantitative) content analysis, the selection of the material made here is taken as accurate for unveiling the discourse strategy of constructing in-groups and out-groups, the way social actors are positively or negatively labeled or the process of justification of positive or negative attribution by the in-group and the out-group.

Methodology

The methodological framework we use derives from the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA, as mentioned above). On the one hand, CDA has imposed lately as a successful tool of critical study[1]. Since *Language and Social Control*, the seminal book of Fowler and his co-workers[2], CDA has successfully demonstrated that the discourse is always in relationship with elements of various social processes, power and ideology[3]. On the other hand, by combining linguistics and socially embedded approaches within the analysis of discourse, CDA transcends the pure linguistic dimension and incorporates sociological, political, historical and psychological dimensions when analyzing specific discursive phenomena[4]. It thus mediates between the social and the linguistics in order to accomplish and surpass the efforts and interests of both earlier social philosophers of language (Foucault) and critical analysts associated with the Frankfurt school (Adorno, Habermas and Marcuse). By incorporating multidisciplinary approaches, CDA now offers a better perspective for critically analyzing complex social issues as identity, power, inequality and fairness, as shown in this article.

POPULAR MUSIC AND SOCIAL MARGINALITY:
A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The themes expressed by popular music, as source material, are critically analyzed. We are interested here in both conceptual and relational analysis of discursive elements and will limit our analysis to the discourse-historical approach of the CDA, since we intend to understand discourse as a text in context and to unveil the meaning given by young people to essential social concepts pertaining to social marginality, but also to shed light on the relationship between various dominant social norms as quick

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[1] Michael BILLIG, "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Rhetoric of Critique", in George WEISS, Ruth WODAK (eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003, pp. 35-46; Michael BILLIG, *The Hidden Roots of Critical Psychology*, Sage, London, 2008.

[2] Robert FOWLER, Bob HODGE, Günter KRESS, Tony TREW, *Language and Social Control*, Routledge, London, 1979.

[3] Norman FAIRCLOUGH, *Discourse and Social Change*, Polity Press, Cambridge UK, 1992; IDEM, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Longman, London, 1995; Teun A. VAN DIJK, *Elite Discourse and Racism*, Sage, London, 1993; IDEM, "Ideology and discourse analysis", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2006, pp. 115-140; Ruth WODAK, "Pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis: A Cross-disciplinary Inquiry", *Pragmatics and Cognition*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2007, pp. 203-225.

[4] Ruth WODAK, Michael MEYER (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage, London, 2001.

enrichment and conspicuous consumption. For deeper understanding the complex social issues at stake pertaining to marginalization, social trust and cooperation, we will focus on CDA strategies of nomination (the construction on in-groups and out-groups by cultural consumption), predication (the way social actors are positively or negatively labeled by various social instances), argumentation (justification of positive or negative attribution by the in-group and the out-group), perspectivation or discourse representation (by expressing the involvement of the speaker) and intensification (by modifying/intensifying the force of discriminatory utterances against culturally defined marginal people)[1]. Wherever possible, those strategies are accompanied by the most relevant "manele" texts that vividly exemplify the discourse (see the notes at the bottom of respective pages).

The Strategy of Nomination:
Us and Them, the Self and the Other

Identity is impossible without difference. Classes, religious, ethnic and other cultural groups in modern societies are constantly defined through differentiation processes[2]. Though "manele" singers and their public do not form a classical sociological group more or less homogeneous, "manele" consumption could be seen more as a differentiation process in terms of marginalization. In this vein, their discourse is to be taken as expression of identity concerns in a region undergoing profound social stratification processes[3]. Listening to "manele" may thus work as a social marker, by largely defining an opposition between the dominant and the marginal, the Established and the Outsider[4]. In fact, "manele" composers and singers have successfully managed to create a distinct image on the local music scene with their own fashion style, despite the growing cultural and social criticism. Although "manele" are often labeled as pseudo-music, bad-taste and pure kitsch by the established intellectuals, the social and cultural values carried by this kind of vivid music tell a different story, in opposition to the official discourse on Romania's neo-liberal modernization and marketization. And this strategy of nomination is more important today that it ever was, in a social context marked by deep economic crisis, harsh social competition, severe failure, deprivation and marginalization.

The strategy of nomination relies, in the case of marginal people depicted by "manele", on their exemplary social success. In a society embedded in deep economic transformations, heading towards full marketization and open social competition, social success is roughly defined by money. Despite the fact that free competition for

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[1] *Ibidem*.

[2] Anthony P. COHEN, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Routledge, London, 1985; Ernst GELLNER, *Culture, Identity and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 1987; Niklas LUHMANN, *Theories of Distinction: Redescribing the Descriptions of Modernity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 2002.

[3] György ENYEDI, *Social Change and Urban Restructuring in Central Europe*, Akademiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1998; Michael HELLER, "The Tragedy of Anticommons: Property in the Transition from Marx to Markets", *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 111, no. 3, 1998, pp. 621-688.

[4] Norbert ELIAS, John L. SCOTSON, *The Established and the Outsider: A Sociological Inquiry into Community Problems*, Sage, London, 1994.

economic resources is a general rule in post-communist Romania, the market pressure is more visible in the case of social marginal people in that they tend more often to show-off their social achievements. In this vein, "manele" depict social success by especially emphasizing money. It can be money alone, where the "manele" singer is symbolically shown in the video-clips by expensing large sums of money (by throwing them in the air or over generously paying the instrument players). Yet money may be featured by valuable possessions as new and expensive cars driven by "manele"'s singer, as well as by imitating luxury clothing brands of good looking young ladies who accompany him[1]. In this respect, "manele" are similar to Serbian and Croatian "turbofolk", where its banality, consumerism and sexualized aesthetics are criticized from academic and cultural standpoints[2]. Though "turbofolk" is criticized as an aesthetic said to reproduce dominant social values as quick enrichment, conspicuous consumption, masculinity realized through violence, and femininity realized through sexual availability, underlines Baker[3], it carries cultural inclusions and exclusions that maintain group identities.

All the well-known stereotypes about money can be found here: they strengthen in one's social conflicts, they can buy a privileged social status, they offer power and pleasure[4]. The preference for cash money instead of banking accounts is especially underlined by "manele" singers, as one cannot make proof of the money he owns by the only way of bank receipts, but by the cash money itself[5]. This social success emphasized by money and other luxury possessions is the most profound logic of economic transition and crisis in post-communist societies. When it cannot be shown off by cash money and luxury items, it still can be imagined through conspicuous consumption.

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[1] "I have a glamourous car, a glamourous car/Which attracts so many chicks/ While I count from one to three/I drag who I want to./One, two, three, I have the coolest girls/Three, four, five, the most sexy chicks/Five, six, seven, one per night/Eight, nine, ten, I have no rival./ My friends envy me because they are not so lucky/They don't have my talent and my money/ And neither do they have my chicks." (Babi Minune and Nek – "I have a glamourous car").

[2] Catherine BAKER, "The Concept of Turbofolk in Croatia: Inclusion/Exclusion in the Construction of National Music Identity", in C. BAKER, C.J. GERRY, B. MADAJ, L. MELISH, J. NAHODILOVA (eds.), *Nation in Formation: Inclusion and Exclusion in Central and Eastern Europe*, SSEES Publications, London, 2007.

[3] *Ibidem*.

[4] "Money can't buy hapiness/Yet is good to have money./When you have pockets of money you are someone/You can face your enemies./Money make you achieve success/By their power, money can rise you up or get you down./With no money, you have no reputation/ You are despised by those who have money./Money can offer you pleasure and power/With no money, you are nobody." (Denisa – "Money, money").

[5] "It's obvious who is really someone/He has money in his pockets./He doesn't claim, he makes us the proof/That he owns piles of money./I have cash, I have money/To show off to my enemies./I have cash, I have thousands/Not just numbers on the papers./It's not enough to have money in your bank account/Who would believe you?/Show them all the money/ Prove that you really own them." (Babi Minune – "Life's hard").

”Cool Guys” and Social Enemies: Predicating the Difference

The process of differentiation is accompanied by norms and values. Since the construction of in-groups and out-groups relies on valuable characteristics, the most common strategy of predication is attaching positive values to the self and negative values to the other. In a way, the differentiation and the overemphasis on valuable characteristics is necessary for social purposes, as we unveil below in the discussion pertaining to strategies of argumentation. In the predication process, manele's singer generally portrays himself as 'cooler', cleverer, richer, more hard working and better fit to overpass life's difficulties[1]. The difference is thus predicated by comparing ”manele”'s ”hero” to its social rivals, who generally envy him for his social success[2]. His success is due to its skills in producing easy money, which is overemphasized by the predication process. This makes him well-known in his province[3] and in the whole Romania, alerting even the criminal gangs and the world powers[4]. In fact, the differentiation takes place exactly against one's enemies. Their envy acts as a powerful incentive[5]. It makes one keep going on his way, to largely defeat his enemies and finally to get accommodated with this way of life. This emphasis on social success is essential for marginal people, who argue against distant powerful social forces. Being ”cool” is not only an individual self-esteem motivation and a differentiation mechanism, it is a socially valuable asset when confronted to a ”mean and pervert world”. This ”mean world” is, as underlined below, a collective, harmful, remote and powerful enemy that overwhelms single individuals, no matter their efforts to conduct in a proper manner. It finally works like a contrasting Other, in a permanent interaction between the Established and the Outsider[6].

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[1] ”Get up, you cool guys, cool guys, cool guys/Get down, you stupid guys, stupid guys, stupid guys./Oh God, how pervert is the world/They could take your life for some money/How dangerous is the world/They could harm and deprive you of your daily bread.” (Nicolae Guță and Roxana, the ”Princess of Transylvania” – ”Get up, you cool guys”).

[2] ”I'm a world value and I have a good time./From cool guys you ask for respect/You have to prove that you are smart./From cool guys you ask for respect/You earn your money from the internet./Everybody wonders how I get to have the money/The Arab Mob and the Americans./I own millions in my bank accounts/While my enemies are starving/I withdraw the interest from my current accounts/And use the whole life to count the money./He is general Amar/He knows how to make money/He's the master of Oltenia and of whole Romania./Who is, who, who, who?/He is general Amar/At the end of the week the manele singers gather/And they praise his fame.” (Nicolae Guță, Alex, Zaku and Juke – ”I'm a world value”).

[3] Many of the perpetrators of those internet frauds proved indeed to be living in Oltenia, a southern province of Romania.

[4] In fact, the American government investigated through the FBI many internet frauds perpetrated by Romanian citizens during the last decade.

[5] ”My enemies die of envy, they are green with envy because my heart is strong/Because I am cleverer/All my life I done anything I wanted to/Anything I wanted was a gift from God./I never cryed my eyes out when loosing something/Yet I struggled three times harder/When they were satisfied that I have fallen down/I made them cry when I rose up.” (Florin Peşte – ”Long live my enemies”).

[6] Norbert ELIAS, John L. SCOTSON, *The Established and the Outsider*…cit.

The Argumentation of Valuable Characteristics: Confronting the "Mean World"

The process of differentiation by the means of positive characteristics is socially justified. Marginal people depicted by "manele" are not simply cleverer, "cooler", richer, socially successful. They are so because they are driven by the differentiation mechanisms. They are better fit to overpass life's difficulties because they are forced to when confronted to the "mean world". This is no more related to visible enemies, as it was the case when predicating the difference. This is about remote social forces that tend to overwhelm marginal individuals. Whose forces are conceived as an impersonal social environment largely defined by hatred[1], a general environment labeled as a "mean world", where no one can be trusted and where marginal single individuals feel powerless[2]. Whereas visible enemies work as a booster for social competition, as shown before, with individuals strongly motivated to overpass and defeat their covetous enemies, the "mean world" is full of uncertainty. In this gloomy world, even close friends and allies may turn into bitter enemies, where the constant suspicion about close friends who attempt to coax, seduce and dupe[3]. Covetous, ungrateful and misleading friends thus add new significance to the "mean world", helping to intensify the powerless and hopeless feeling, as underlined below.

Social Forces, Personal Grief: The Perspectivation of Manele's Hero

The perspective given by "manele" is always personal. There is no story about groups or even other individuals, but about oneself. "Manele" narrate one's personal experience in an exemplary manner. This rough personalization only adds to the intensity of the discourse, as underlined in this article. In fact, the self making the assessments on the social context is generally portrayed as a hero. He struggles, suffers, curses, hopes and finally overcomes enemy social forces. When predicating the difference, "manele"'s hero portrays himself as "cooler", cleverer, richer, more hard working and better fit to overpass life's difficulties. When confronting the

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[1] "People lean like a tree during stormy weather/Sadness sometimes accumulates/Even when one finally achieves to be happy/Everybody hates him./Why people argue and look angrily to each other/Oh God, they argue brother with brother/All one can see around him is hatred because of money/Many guys have become arrogant and now hate each other." (Mario Buzoianu – "Hatred, hatred").

[2] "Each time I behaved well/evil cursed me/Because of others, with the most beloved fellow I quarrelled./How mean is the world/I cannot carry the burden no more/They done so much harm to me, they pushed me to quarrel with my brother./What a mean, pervert and hostile world/They don't leave you alone/Anywhere I go, they follow and gossip about me./By enemies' fault, I suffer from my brothers' hatred." (Alex din Sălaj – "What a mean, pervert and hostile world").

[3] "I'll always be aware of flattering fellows/they certainly are the most pervert/Those who only give you good reason to trust/they will disappoint you the most./Thus is good in life to have bullets/To have financial bullets/That they know your value./The flattering fellows are the most dangerous, the most dangerous/Those who please you are the most pervert, the most pervert." (Petrică Cercel – "Financial bullets").

"mean world", he combines more personal grief with larger social concerns in a gloomy view of the social context. The climax is reached when the hero confronts its enemies, depicted not as individuals embedded in well set, clear contexts and relationships, but as negative social forces who have to be annihilated[1]. The constant fight against enemies and social uncertainty affect social tolerance and solidarity, trust and commitment. Therefore the main social reward is enemies' social decay, a social condition where they cannot enjoy anymore their money and luxury cars, when they are abandoned by everybody, sold out and literally starving[2]. The very personalization of the discourse pertaining to unfriendly social forces is a key to understand the impact of perspectivation on discourse's intensification.

The "Mean, Pervert and Hostile World": The Intensification of the Discourse

The gloomy view of the world expressed by "manele", labeled as pervert and hostile, run by powerful distant social forces rigged against ordinary people, is intensified by the "hero"'s discourse. The intensification produced by "manele" can work like the much criticized television propensity for crime, war, disease and other plagues that makes TV viewers reasonably think that the real world is terribly cruel[3]. Finally, this is a "mean world" because people don't trust each other and are looking out primarily for themselves[4]. The intensification produced by "manele" discourse only adds to a general distrustful environment. As unveiled by comparative surveys, Romanian citizens are generally more distrustful, apathetic and disengaged that their Western counterparts[5]. They seem to inherit from the previous communist regime and still rely on the close range of strong social ties. Whereas the cause of the strong ties experienced during communist times is to be found in the tight ideological and secret police control set up by the totalitarian regime[6], the cause of the current close range of strong ties, generally set up with friends and relatives, is to be found in the very social uncertainty. It largely disables the spread of heterogeneous values among

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[1] "Yesterday I had an idea, a great idea/To dig some ten war trenches/To put my enemies inside, my enemies inside/They caused me so much trouble, so much trouble./I dig trenches for you, my enemies/If I get angry, I even call for three mechanical diggers./I can put my enemies to dig, to work hard/In the end, I just finish with a shovel and get rid of them." (Nicolae Guță and Mr. Juve – "I dig war trenches").

[2] "I have a smart idea/To get the revenge over my enemies/To make them suffer by the words I say/To realize that they have no value./Now my enemies are down, they are really down/They don't have cars anymore, neither they have money/Now they starve, my enemies/Once cool guys, they now are in a mess." (Vali G. – "My enemies are really down").

[3] Eric M. USLANER, "Social Capital, Television, and the 'Mean World'. Trust, Optimism, and Civic Participation", *Political Psychology*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1998, pp. 441-467.

[4] Robert D. PUTNAM, "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America", *PS: Political Science and Politics*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1995, pp. 664-683.

[5] Gabriel BĂDESCU, "Social Trust and Democratization in the Post-Communist Societies", in Gabriel BĂDESCU, Eric M. USLANER (eds.), *Social Capital and the Transition to Democracy*, Routledge, London, 2003, pp. 120-139.

[6] Beate VÖLKER, Henk FLAP, "Weak Ties as a Liability: the Case of East Germany", *Rationality and Society*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2001, pp. 397-428.

different groups and thus makes impossible "bridging" those groups by mobilizing resources[1]. In the same time, the distrustful culture that "manele" texts express and help consolidate may even turn against in-group resources, since trust, commitment and reciprocity may prove elusive in this "mean, pervert and hostile world", where even close friends happen to be misleading and ungrateful. As intensified by the discourse, social uncertainty paves the way to specific defensive reactions as pervasive corruption, free-riding and social intolerance[2].

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the official discourse on Romania's modernization and Europeanization, "manele" express serious concerns regarding social equality and solidarity, power and domination. Despite the fact that "manele" continue to be seen by the established intellectuals as pseudo-music and bad-taste, specific to undereducated young people from the peri-urban areas, they are taken here for an essential vehicle for various cultural images and symbols that unveil the very fabric of the social world. As an accurate expression of a marginal culture, "manele" largely emphasize mechanisms of social differentiation, based on material dominant values, status and prestige, echoing the undergoing broader social stratification processes during the capitalist consolidation in Romania. The analysis undergone here underlines the very mechanisms of social differentiation, which are the strategy of nomination (us and them, the self and the other), the predication of the difference, and the argumentation of valuable characteristics that support the difference.

As long as the market pressure is more visible in the case of social marginals, it is natural that they tend more often to show-off their social achievements. Therefore, as status marker, social success is at the heart of the imagery set up by "manele". Largely emphasized by sums of money, luxury vehicles and clothing brands, marginal people's social success echoes the general success, in the new framework of free market expansion in the whole region. The values that carry, as banality, consumerism and sexualized aesthetics[3], although criticized from cultural standpoints, can be seen as a marginal response to socially widespread consumerism, quick enrichment and hedonism that develop in a profoundly individualistic social logic.

In the same time, the differentiation process is exacerbated by the intensification of marginal people's discourse, in the logic of the perspectivation of the hero. Combining personal and social grief, the "manele" discourse depicts the social environment as a very problematic one, dominated by distant powerful social forces rigged against ordinary people. Labeled by "manele" as a "mean world", dominated by profound distrust and uncertainty, the social context overwhelms marginal individuals. Though generally taken for granted in Romania, taken for an economic transition liability, neo-liberalism and full marketization have a serious impact on the least fit for the

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[1] Robert D. PUTNAM, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 2000.
[2] Dragoș DRAGOMAN, "Equality, Trust, and Tolerance: How Sense of Equality Affects Social Tolerance in Romania", *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, vol. VI, no. 2, 2006, pp. 449-466.
[3] Catherine BAKER, "The Concept of Turbofolk in Croatia…cit.".

new social competition. When confronted to market forces, marginal people look for alternative ways. When looking for social opportunities, marginal people would rather favor bribes and personal connections. Bending rules, cajoling officials and looking primarily for oneself only adds to the widespread free-riding and pervasive corruption. In a context marked by harsh social competition and severe economic failure, defensive reactions may trigger a vicious circle of distrust and uncertainty, largely reducing the range of social interactions and the level of social tolerance. The warning launched by the analysis of "manele" texts is that the distrustful culture that "manele" express can be largely consolidated by the erosion of in-group resources. On the long run, social values as trust, commitment and reciprocity may prove elusive in this "mean, pervert and hostile world", where even close friends happen to be misleading and ungrateful.

Finally, the general belief in the virtues of full marketization, combined with the gloomy view of a "mean world" where people don't trust each other and are looking out primarily for themselves, may explain the recent severe economic change. On the ideological and practical bases of neo-liberalism, Romania witnessed severe economic and social transformations. Not only dramatic cuts in public spending affected revenues, wages and pensions, but they damaged the social solidarity system itself by affecting the social condition of children, elderly and disabled people. By politically confirming that single individuals are powerless when confronting the distant social forces of market, neo-liberal elites seriously undermined solidarity mechanisms and consolidated the social feeling that individuals have first to look out primarily for themselves.

The analysis of "manele" as the accurate expression of marginalization during severe economic deprivation sheds light on the necessity for new mechanisms capable to bring in social equity, equality and tolerance and to fight corruption, impunity, free-riding, social domination and violence, those common elements so vividly depicted by this new music genre that spawned during the last decades of profound social and economic change in Romania.