

Sailing the Waves of Assimilation: Identity Anchors of the Moldavian Csango

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to my parents, Enrique and Ibolya,
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ABSTRACT

The Moldavian Csango minority sparked passionate public discourses by nationalistic Hungarian and Romanian authors in the aftermath of World War I, complicating the search for legitimate sources on their history. Although much of their origins, language and demography remain uncertain to this date, there is widespread consensus that this is a Roman Catholic minority that speaks an archaic form of Hungarian, and has lived in the eastern Romanian region of Moldavia before the modern Romanian state emerged.

In this thesis I draw from Brubaker's cognitive approach to ethnicity to argue that the Csango survived past waves of ethnic and linguistic assimilation not by resistance, but by displaying malleability in their collective identity-construction, which is anchored by their Roman Catholic faith and their Csango dialect. This process is observable in the differences of ethnic and metalinguistic awareness in three generations of the southeastern Csango Moldavian village of Arini/Magyarfalu, the site where this research was carried out. Each Csango generation has managed to socially adapt to a different stage of their local social and political context, while maintaining the identity links with the previous one, by rethinking how they categorize themselves in relation to others.

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INTRODUCTION

Nationalism truly came to life in Europe in the aftermath of World War I: as the political map found itself redrawn, the affected countries became increasingly invested in compressing their richly diverse populations into mono-ethnic, mono-lingual entities. Chiefly meant as a defense mechanism, the nationalistic stance became a challenge to the collective identities of ethnic enclaves, many of which struggled to survive the recurring waves of assimilation. I believe that the minorities that successfully withstood the changes were those that retained strong links to their anchors of identity, while assuming flexibility in their categorization of other less vital aspects of their ethnolinguistic identity.

In recent decades there has been a worldwide surge in the appraisal of ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. Appeals for the preservation and enforcement of legal rights of minorities have become a constant on every conceivable stage, from national forums, to academic conferences, to social media. As host to nineteen national minorities varying in language, history, religion and lineage, Romania has found itself integrated in the discussion of European minorities. Due in great part to Hungary's hangover from 1921, when the country lost the territory of Transylvania to Romania as per the Treaty of Trianon, the overwhelming majority of academic and political discourse on Romania's minorities is focused on the Hungarians of Transylvania. From many angles, they embody an ideal case study of an extrinsic minority: as habitants of Hungary's former cultural center, their elaborate history has been documented in detail; their ethnic and linguistic consciousness has been retained at individual and collective

levels; the right to Transylvania's territory is still frequently challenged by the neighbor's right wing, and the local communities remain vocal of their collective interests as a minority. However, the popular Hungarians of Transylvania are not the only minority of Hungarian descent in Romania: centuries before Transylvania's legal transfer to Romania, the Csango minority had already settled in the eastern region of Moldavia.

The available historical records of the Csango are slim and scattered, as they have always lived beyond Hungary's borders. Although today's Csango have no social memory of their original bonds to Hungary, on a micro-level they have been identified as Hungarians by Romanians, and as archaic Hungarians by Hungarians; on a macro-level, they have undergone a tug-of-war of Hungarian and Romanian claims on their history and identity. The Csango case is relevant in the academic and social spheres, as they have retained their collective identity through recurring waves of overt linguistic and cultural assimilation without definitive knowledge of their roots, and until very recently, without the umbrella of institutions to protect and promote their cultural heritage. Instead, the Csango have remained a cohesive group by account of their peasant economy model, and to varying degrees by other social variables. Their secluded location in the eastern Carpathians and delayed urbanization has served them as a cocoon, slowing their assimilation into the Romanian majority, and preserving their noted linguistic archaisms. The Csango settlements were virtually untouched by industrialization until the collectivization of 1962; and even after that Csango villages have remained rural in character (Pozsonyi 225).

This thesis addresses the issue of ethnic and linguistic awareness of the minority in three chapters. The first is a literature review that aims to present and integrate the

multiple views on the history of the Csango from the most influential Hungarian and Romanian publications. It then proposes a cognitive-based theoretical framework which provides structure for the changing trends of Csango self-identity. The second chapter delineates the methodology of the study I carried out in Arini/Magyarfalu¹ in April 2011, introducing the local actors and institutions with greatest agency in Csango identity construction. The third chapter demonstrates an evolution of Csango identity construction across three generations living in the village, contextualizing the differences of their ethnic and linguistic awareness in Romania's changing social landscape.

¹ With the purpose of maintaining neutrality, I refer to all geographical places in a “Romanian name/Hungarian name” format throughout the thesis

CHAPTER 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Disagreements have sprouted on almost every studied aspect of the Moldavian Csangos, complicating the search for reliable information on their history, ethnicity, linguistics and demography. The task of assessing the legitimacy of the literature is shadowed by the need to recognize that the academic sphere is susceptible to nationalistic agendas, as can be seen in the contradictory arguments on Csango identity pushed forward by Hungarian (Vincze, Tanczos, Pozsony) and Romanian (Mărtinaș, Râmneanțu, Făcăoaru) authors alike. More recently scholars have shown awareness of this fact: “Hungarian and Romanian anthropologists proclaimed an ethos of objective, impartial scholarship, although in fact their scholarship was highly ideological, nationalistic and socially conservative” (Turda 2007:362). The academic debate on the Csango is mostly centered on the unsolved matter of their origins, each side claiming the Csango were assimilated by the other at different points in history (they are treated either as “Romanized” Hungarians or as “Magyarized” Romanians). It This thesis is not directly concerned with determining the falsifiability of any theory of origins, but it recognizes the effect of these publications in the identity construction of the present day Csango, as they are often pressed to believe one theory and use it as a parting point for their self-identity construction.

This chapter serves as a chronological overview of the most influential publications on the Csango minority, identifying the positions taken by Hungarian and Romanian authors, and by international organizations. The most influential of these arguments are contextualized in their historical and political backgrounds to provide a critical lens of the sources. A section is dedicated to current Csango statistics,

discussing the obstacles in estimating the Csango population, and the social and political implications of such a problem. The final section of the chapter will provide a theoretical framework based on a cognitive and linguistic approach to ethnicity, and will clarify the operational definitions of the anthropological and linguistic concepts that will be used throughout the analysis of my study.

1.1 Csango Origins – Hungarian Perspectives

The most widely accepted argument for the Hungarian claim on Csango origins is rooted in the etymology of their name, which has been linked to the Hungarian verb “elcsangal”, meaning “to roam” or “to drift away”, hinting at Csango migrations away from Hungarian-speaking lands (Tanczos 1997, Baker 1997). Although all Hungarian theories overlap on their main premises, the range in publications is due to disagreements concerning the identity of their Hungarian ancestors, the timeline of their migration, and speculation of the causes that triggered said migration. It is important to examine the variations among these origin theories, as even those claims that have been formally rejected still hold an apparent influence on the Csango’s beliefs on their history and identity.

In the early twentieth century, Hungarians made attempts to trace the Csango as far back as the conquest of the Carpathian basin by the Magyar tribes in the ninth century (Baker 661). It is believed that these efforts were ignited by the desire to find vestiges of “pure” Magyars in the onset of Hungary’s 1896 Millennium celebrations; however, these claims were soon discarded by archaeological research (Baker 661). Instead, most theories estimate the Csango’s date of arrival to Moldavia range between

the thirteenth and fifteenth century. One of the first authors on Csango origins, a priest from the late nineteenth century named Peter Zöld, proposed that the Csango were direct descendants of Szeklers, and migrated from the Kingdom of Hungary in the early fifteenth century (Baker 660). Later studies suggested that the Csangos originated in the thirteenth century, branching out into two theories: Auner argues that the Teutonic Knights had escorted the Csango to Moldavia between 1211 and 1225, while Domokos claims that the Csango arrived to the region in gradual migratory waves in 1225 after the Teutonic knights had been expelled from Hungarian territories (Baker 663). Domokos, a Transylvanian ethnographer and musicologist, is popularly considered an authority on Csango origins. He supported the view that the Csango are a strain of “pure” Magyars (Davis 2007) and collected Csango folksongs as an alternative manner of documentation of Csango culture and language (Domokos 2005).

Another cluster of Csango migration theories is centered on a later pivotal event of Hungarian history: the Mongol invasion of 1241. While most authors agree it is highly unlikely that any Hungarian ancestors of the Csango living in Moldavia would have survived the destruction of the period, support from this stance can also be found in Hungarian publications. Istvan Fodor, former director of the Hungarian National Museum, cites toponymic evidence to argue that small Hungarian settlements in Moldavia survived the Mongolian invasion by arriving in a continuous stream starting in the thirteenth century (in Baker, 1997). However, the lack of substantial evidence of Hungarian presence before the Mongolian invasion paired with skepticism of the survival abilities of the Csango in the face of an invasion undermine the hypothesis (Baker 1997).

Baker proposes a Csango theory of origins of his own: that after the Mongols retreated, the Csangos migrated eastward in order to defend what King Lajos and the Roman Catholic Church considered to be a power vacuum to the east of the Hungarian border, and to go in the search of better economic prospects (Baker 1997). Baker believes that the Transylvanian unrest of 1343 over imposed taxes, in conjunction with the regional spread of a plague in 1348 were added incentives for the ancestors of today's Moldavian Csangos to migrate east of the Carpathians.

Another popular theory which has been rejected by scholars (Domokos 1931, Gunda 1988 in Tanczos 2008) is that the Csangos are descendants of the Cumans (Munkacsi 1902 and Veress 1934 in Tanczos 2008). Instead, it is believed that the Csangos migrated from west to east at some point in the Middle Ages (Tanczos 2008).

1.2 Csango Assimilation – Hungarian Perspectives

The Hungarian literature attributes the ambiguous attitude with which the Csango regard their own identity to the overt efforts of the Romanian government to linguistically and ethnically assimilate the Csango population. Barszczewska (2007) identifies the period between 1860 and 1918 as the first critical period of ethnic assimilation in young Romania, during which nationalistic policies began.

Although the assimilation efforts of the Romanian government are widely documented, the aggressiveness with which their policies were enforced is likely to have been exaggerated by Hungarian authors, whose claims are not always supported by anecdotal evidence. Arguably the most influential Hungarian to make the case for the Moldavian Csangos as victims of Romanian assimilation is the historian Gabor Vincze,

current editor in chief of the Great Hungary History magazine [Nagy Magyarország Történelmi Magazin], and founder of the National Foundation for Conservative History Research [Nemzeti Konzervatív Történetkutató Alapítvány]. In a 2010 interview with the online Transylvanian portal “Erdélyi Ma”, Vincze admits experiencing difficulty in remaining neutral about Hungarian historical events, citing his perceived injustice of the Treaty of Trianon (“Nemzeti optika – interjú Vincze Gabor történésszel” 2010). In addition, he highlights the role of politics in defining the direction of Hungarian academia, acknowledging that had the conservative Fidesz party not been in power, he likely would not have been able to found the National Foundation for Conservative History Research (“Nemzeti optika – interjú Vincze Gabor történésszel” 2010).

His case for the aggressive Romanization of the Csango is built on the documentation and oral traditions of three assimilation waves: the spread of nationalism through religious services, the eradication of the Hungarian language through exclusively Romanian-imparted education, and the replacement of Hungarian toponymy through official institutions. He believes that these policies had the finality of replacing the Hungarian identity of the Csango with a Romanian one (2002).

The two attributes that have always distinguished the Csango from the Romanian majority are their Roman Catholic faith and their Csango dialect, and it was the latter that became the principal target of assimilatory practices. Romanian policy-makers recognized the importance of the Church to the Catholic minority, and based on this, devised a strategy to spread Romanian nationalism in the secluded villages: the ‘Romanization’ of the Romanian Catholic Church at local levels. In the rural –virtually un-stratified– Csango communities (Pozsony 2008), the authority of priests was –and

still is— revered, and their participation in propagating nationalistic discourse was a crucial component of the assimilation process (Barszczewska 2008, Pozsony 2008, Tanczos 2008). Vincze argues that the Romanian government was invested in bringing Romanian or foreign priests who would challenge the use of Hungarian language among their congregation, and encourage their followers to assume Romanian identities based on their unarguable Romanian nationality (2002). This process is illustrated in his narration of the case of Luizi-Calugara/Lujzikalagor, when a local priest responded to the community's resistance to a ban of the Hungarian language in church:

“The head priest, who was of Italian descent but had succumbed to the service of Romanian chauvinism, in May 1915 declared the following to the Hungarian congregation: “[...] in Romania the language of the people is Romanian and cannot be anything else. It would be an act of injustice against its own nation, [...] it would be shameful if a Romanian citizen would want to speak a foreign language, like Hungarian, in his own country. Now I ask the residents of Lujzi-Calugara [...] are they Hungarian, or are they Romanian? If they are Hungarian, let them go to Hungary [...], but if they are Romanian, as they truly are, then they should be ashamed that they do not know the language of their country””

(Vincze, 2002:55)

The priest's scolding is reflective of the belief that nationality is decisive in identity, a view encouraged by the Romanian government that still resonates in Csango villages. This approach to identity may be an explanation for the difficulties in estimating

the Csango population: when faced with the question “What are you?” many interpret the question to mean “Are you Romanian, or not?”, assuming that being ethnically Csango and nationally Romanian are mutually exclusive. In these situations, the census results indicate that nationality will almost always take precedence over ethnic identity.

Vincze points at the Roman Catholic Church’s complicity in assimilating the Csango minority through a another process: the enrollment of young Hungarian-speaking children to a seminary in the Iasi/Jaszvasar episcopate, where, he argues, priests enforced the Romanian language and cultivated Romanian identities, with the goal of reforming the children as “fanatic Romanian priests”, who would ensure propagation of the nationalistic mission (2002). Therefore, the Romanian Catholic Church served as a tool of assimilation on both the spreading of nationalistic sentiment and in the oppression of the Csango dialect in the public sphere.

Elementary schools were another vessel for the Romanian assimilation of children. Vincze states that the Romanian government established elementary schools in the all Csango villages with the goal of enforcing a Romanian identity in its students (2002). To do so, it employed Orthodox Romanian teachers who taught history from a Romanian perspective and prohibited the use of “Hungarian” among the Csango-speaking students in the classroom (Barszczewskia 2008). The Romanian state was able to send teachers to these remote villages with financial incentives, offering them higher salaries for their work in Romania’s multilingual regions (Livezeanu 1995). Vincze reports that the children were physically punished for speaking Csango and that this contributed to the reluctance of parents to send their children to school, resulting in an approximate of 60% of illiteracy in Csango villages during the interwar period (2002).

According to my own ethnographic research, the severity of the punishments for speaking Hungarian has been distorted to make them seem much more brutal than they were in reality. Moreover, the wealthier families were able to sidestep confrontations with Romanian teachers by paying a fine for the previously negotiated, prolonged absence of their children (Barszczewska 2008). The long-term negative effects of low schooling and literacy levels are observable in the state of poverty of Csango villages, which their inhabitants are so sorely aware and critical of. However, Barszczewska (2008) has suggested that the preservation of Csango identity may be partially due to the illiteracy of the Csango peasants during the interwar period, as it would have reinforced the importance of oral traditions while retaining low level contact with the Romanians living in proximity.

The third main vessel for Romanian assimilation was in the practice of official public administration, which included the Romanization of Csango family names by re-writing according to Romanian phonology or by replacing them altogether for “Romanian-sounding” names (Vincze 2002). Vincze believes that the Csango were unfazed by such a policy and accepted their Romanian names, using them specifically for official purposes, while retaining their Csango name as their true family names (Vincze 2002). The practice of having two names seems to have faded out, as I almost exclusively encountered Romanian names during my fieldwork.

Some authors (Szepe 1999) have speculated that without the structural support of cultural institutions in Moldavia, the Csango will have difficulty in avoiding full assimilation to Romanian culture. The Csango community of Arini/Magyarfalu has already become proactive in this aspect, working with the Association of Csango-

Hungarians in Moldavia to build a school dedicated to the instruction of the Hungarian language.

1.3 Csango Origins – Romanian Perspectives

Anthropological discourse in Romania was ignited by nationalistic interests after the creation of Greater Romania in 1918, when scholars recognized the role of the discipline in discussing national identity (Turda 2007). Their perspective on Csango origins came at a later time than the Hungarian theories, thus establishing the beginnings on the debate on Csango identity.

The Romanian approach to the Csango issue is led by Dumitru Mărtinaş, a Csango professor of Romanian language and literature, who was convinced that the true origin of the Csango was Romanian. In his most influential work, “The Origins of the Csangos”, Mărtinaş (1999) does not combat the evidence put forward by Hungarian author; instead, he challenges the interpretation of such evidence. For example, he acknowledges that the name of the Csango is of Hungarian origin, but argues that in that language it means “mixed, impure and degenerate”, thereby affirming that they were unwelcome outsiders to Hungarians (Mărtinaş 1999:63). Although he accepts that Romanians and Hungarians alike perceive the Csango to be of Hungarian nationality, he defiantly denies any possibility of the minority being of Hungarian descent, simply stating that the Csango are a people of unknown origin who were forcibly assimilated by Hungarians (Mărtinaş 1999). He cites linguistic data as evidence for such a stance, arguing that Csango is not a language or dialect of its own, but a mispronunciation of

Hungarian, therefore establishing the non-Hungarian nature of their origin (Mărtinaş 1999).

Some Romanian authors (Brăţinau, Iorga) coincide with Hungarians in the theory of Cuman descent of the Csango, arguing that they mixed with Hungarians in Transylvania before the end of the fourteenth century (Baker 1997). However, this view has been formally rejected, as it is unlikely that the settlements would have survived the Mongol invasion.

In the 1930s and 1940s, during the boom of racial-based anthropology, the Romanian eugenicist and racial anthropologist Petru Râmneanţu argued that the Csango tendency to ethnically categorize themselves as Romanians was a manifestation of consciousness of their true biological origins, and he set out to perform serological methods on the Csango population (Turda 2007). Despite all the uncertainties of Csango history and origins, Râmneanţu believed that a biological approach would surpass any misleading information, or evidence from other ethnic factors (language, culture, religion, customs), stating: “blood is the real, perhaps the unique, source which remained untouched by the vicissitudes of time” (Râmneanţu 1935:40 in Turda 2007:370). Turda believes that the results of Râmneanţu’s investigation are more reflective of his nationalism than of minority origins: Szeklers were concluded to be Magyarized Romanians, while the Csangos were affirmed to be racially Romanians (2007). Baker (1997) too believes Râmneanţu’s study to have been extreme, although the work found supporters from believers of the Cuman descent theory of Csango origins.

Unsurprisingly, Hungarian authors (Tanczos 2008, Vincze 2002) disagree with the Romanian stance that the Csango were originally Romanian, accusing their theory to be ideologically-motivated and falsely justifying the assimilation policies of Romanization period that the Csango underwent.

1.4 Csango Assimilation – Romanian Perspectives

Mărtinaş (1999) argues that it was only after the First World War that the Csango entered nationalistic debates, and that until then the Romanian authorities had been indifferent to what they perceived was a Hungarian issue. Later on, when Hungarians authors began to raise claims of Romanian assimilation, Romanian authors matched them with assimilation accusations of their own. After establishing the Romanian origin of the Csango, their only viable explanation for the minority's Hungarian character is the claim of a previous linguistic and religion assimilation enforced by Transylvanian authorities. Mărtinaş (1999) attributes the Roman Catholic faith of the Moldavian Csango to propaganda by the Transylvanian state meant to fulfill denationalizing goals of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. In his work, Mărtinaş alludes to the Csango as a group lacking agency, that decided to meet religiously assimilation without resistance after having experienced the “trouble and pain” caused by the policies that deprived them from their Orthodox faith (1999). He then attributes the dominance of their Hungarian (meaning Csango) language to the Hungarian priests' involvement “in spreading the sad policy of de-nationalization”, accusing them of being more occupied with the task of cultivating Hungarian consciousness than with their religious duties (Mărtinaş 1999:175). In this theory, the ‘Magyarization’ process of the Csango by the

Austrian-Hungarian authorities was disrupted by their migration to Moldavia, and Mărtinaş denied that since there has been a “de-Magyarization” or Romanian assimilation of the minority; he simply states that the Csango retained their Romanian ethnic awareness and decided on their own to behave accordingly to those values (Mărtinaş 1999).

However, the Romanian authorities do hold evidence of the attempts of the Hungarian Bardossy government in the 1940s to reconstruct Hungary along ethnic principles, by expropriating foreign-owned land in the south of the country and then handing to the Szekelys of Bukovina and the Moldavian Csango (Davis 2007). In the ‘Hazatelepites’ agenda, as it became known, Hungarian priests became instruments and cultivators of Hungarian consciousness, reaching the most remote Csango villages in Moldavia (Davis 2007). A report from the Romanian secret service in 1942 describes the situation as a spread of ‘irredentist propaganda’ and as intrusion of Romania’s internal affairs, resulting in heightened tensions between Romania and Hungary (Davis 2007:170). Eventually, Romania arrested a Hungarian priest who was involved with the propaganda of ‘hazatelepites’ in Csango villages; it was the same priest, Kalman Nemeth, who had encouraged the Hungarian government to hire the ethnographer Domokos to plan the re-settlement schemes (Davis 2007)

1.5 International Perspective

The literature on Csango topics has been dominated by Hungarian and Romanian authorship, and only recently has the international spotlight brought attention to the state of the minority. In 2001 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of

Europe released its Recommendation 1521 on the “Csango minority and culture in Romania” to promote ethnographic and linguistic research on the minority, as well as financial investment in the villages. The Council of Europe is an advocate for the protection of minority languages, and accordingly it appealed for the introduction of religious services in Csango, of education in Csango, the official recognition of all Csango associations, and for funds to be dedicated to channels that will allow the minority to actively express their identity, for example through local media such as publications and local radio. In addition, the Council of Europe provides an unexplained estimate of 60,000 to 70,000 Csango speakers, and addresses the need for better statistical data on the minority. The document defines the Csango as “a non-homogeneous group of Roman Catholic people” who speak an early form of Hungarian, and characterizes them as “a relic from the Middle ages”, preferring to give a basic definition to the group and sidestepping the origin debate. However, the Explanatory Memorandum of the Recommendation expands on the historical background of the Csango, rejecting the theories of Cuman ancestry and Romanian origins on basis of the destruction of the Mongolian invasion, and the unlikelihood of Romanians choosing to behave as non-Romanians in their context, respectively. In any case, the focus of the Council of Europe is on the preservation and revival of the minority, highlighting the importance of preventing the notion that Csango values are associated with poverty and isolation – a view I frequently came across during my research.

Politically correct as the Recommendation 1521 may be, it cannot be assumed that the Csango would welcome the changes it proposes. During my fieldwork I did not encounter one person in Arini/Magyarfalu who believes that the local congregation

would benefit from religious services in the Csango dialect; the general consensus was that the Romanian language is more accessible to everyone in the religious context. Similarly, it is common knowledge in the village that not all parents are supportive of a Hungarian or Csango education, believing those efforts would hinder the performance of their children in the Romanian elementary school. For the population of Arini/Magyarfalu, it seems that economic revival is a much urgent priority, as the village continuously sees its younger generation migrating for work and leaving the older generation behind.

Another external institution whose voice carries even deeper in the Csango minority is the Roman Catholic Church. Currently, the only available information on their official website is a selection of quotes from the Recommendation by the Council of Europe, including sections that emphasize the right to religious services in Csango. Although the Vatican's public stance is neutral, in the past it collaborated with the Romanian government's assimilation policies by echoing nationalistic discourse in their local churches and relocating Hungarian priests away from the Moldavian region. Barszczewska (2008) argues that the Vatican complied with the wishes of the Romanian government in an effort to maintain their presence in the country: "any move which would not have fit into the Romanian politics would have weakened the position of the Catholic Church in Romania" (Barszczewska 2008:66). Thus, Italian Franciscans and Polish Jesuits were sent to the region, priests who already found it more convenient to speak Romanian to what they believed was their already bilingual congregation (Barszczewska 2008).

1.6 Statistic (In)visibility

The issue of Csango ethnic awareness is merged together with the Romanian government's stance on ethnolinguistic minorities in the country's official statistics. The Institutul National de Statistica (INSSE) is responsible for the census produced every ten years, dating back to 1859 and most recently published in 2002. A current comparison at both national and local levels of the data in three of the census categories, ethnic structure, mother tongue and religion, illustrates the difficulty in estimating the Csango population.

The ethnic category of the census is composed of 26 ethnicities, plus 'other' and 'undeclared'. In 2002, out of a total of 21,698,181 Romanians, 19,409,400 declared themselves ethnically Romanian (89.5%); 1,434,377 as ethnically Hungarian (6.6%); 1,370 as Csango (0.006%), and 13,653 as being of "other" ethnicity (0.1%). In this category, I will not consider an overlap between the Hungarian and Csango categories, as my informants drew a distinction between themselves and the Hungarians of Transylvania, who, in their eyes, belong under the same category as Hungary's Hungarians. However, during my fieldwork the results for the Csango ethnicity category were also challenged by the habitants of Arini/Magyarfalu, who believe their village alone houses an approximate 1,500 Csangos. The data of this category may be reflective of confusion on the natural overlap between nationality and ethnicity: many informants were quick to establish themselves firstly as Romanian citizens, and only thereafter as Csango, as though membership to the latter contradicted membership to the former. There may also be a perceived negative connotation to the term "ethnicity",

as some of my informants highlighted that they are “Romanian and not an ethnicity... people like the Gypsies are an ethnicity, but not us. We are just different from Romanians in religion and language”. Unless the person collecting data for the census were to explain the conceptual differences between nationality and ethnicity, it is plausible that many Csangos would instinctively respond with ‘Romanian’ to the question of ethnicity.

The census provides an ethnic category for Csango; however, the Csango dialect is not recognized in the native language category, which is composed of 25 languages, plus ‘other’ and ‘undeclared’. Here, 19,741,346 declared Romanian to be their mother tongue (91%); 1,447,544 declared Hungarian (6.7%); 11,348 declared having ‘other’ mother tongue (0.1%), and 5,345 chose not to declare their mother tongue (0.001%). It would be nearly impossible to estimate the number of Csangos from these numbers, as most of Romania’s Hungarian speakers are in Transylvania. Additionally, the majority of the study’s informants believed that the Csango dialect is not “real Hungarian” and preferred to call it “Csango” or “Hungarian-Csango”. Only the eldest informants of the study consistently referred to their language as “Hungarian” and confirmed that they identified themselves as Hungarian speakers in the last census. The younger Csango generations have compelling reasons to declare Romanian as their mother tongue rather than ‘other’, even if they do not learn it until they begin primary education: although they learn Csango as children, they assess their fluency as varied since there is no standardized, official form of Csango. Although there are marked differences of speech between the Csango of Arini/Magyarfalu, they all agree that they all have the

same working knowledge of Romanian, and affirm that Romanian is the language they are sure everyone can fully understand.

The religion category is composed of 16 religions, plus 'other', 'no religion', 'atheist' and 'undeclared'. Romania is an Orthodox country by majority, with 18,806,428 declaring an Orthodox faith (86.7%); followed by 1,028,401 Roman Catholics (4.7%). Although it is expected that the majority of these Roman Catholics reside in Transylvanian cities and towns, it is also expected that all Csangos would declare themselves Roman Catholics, as every person I talked to in Arini identified the Catholic faith as the main differentiator between themselves and other Romanians.

The census also published statistics specific to the Gaiceana commune, the administrative tier for three Romanian villages –Hutu, Popesti and Gaiceana– and the Csango village of Arini/Magyarfalú. From a total of 3,070 commune inhabitants, 3,057 declared themselves ethnically Romanian (99.5%), 4 declared themselves ethnically Hungarian (0.1%), 5 declared themselves Csango (0.1%), and none were recorded as 'undeclared'. It is likely that the four ethnic Hungarians represent the Hungarian language teachers residing in Arini/Magyarfalú. Once again, although the figure for Romanians could be accurate in terms of nationality, it does not reflect the ethnic composition of the commune. This argument is backed by the statistics on the religion category, in which 1,657 declared following the Orthodox faith (53.9%) and 1,410 declared following the Roman Catholic faith (45.9%). I did not visit the commune's three Romanian villages; however, my informants stated that these are strongly Orthodox, which further distinguishes Arini/Magyarfalú as the only Roman Catholic village in the area. Therefore, it seems plausible to estimate the population of Csangos in

Arini/Magyarfalu as approximating 1,410, a figure that for the village alone already surpasses the census' count of 1,370 in the whole of the country. The interpretation on Csango statistics based on the religious category is well supported in the village. An 85-year-old informant said she considered it unnecessary to have a Csango category, as membership to the Roman Catholic Church is sufficient as an indicator. When asked about the complication of other Catholic, non-Csango Romanians in the country, she quickly dismissed the idea, repeating with emphasis that the Csango are Catholic and Romanians are Orthodox.

The complications in estimating the Csango population remain: in 1997 Robin Baker interpreted the same census data and concluded that there are less than 16,000 Moldavian Csangos; while Benda calculated a population ranging from 80,000 to 100,000 (Baker 1997). In 2001, the Council of Europe published an expected figure between 60,000 and 70,000 Csango, mentioning that previous figures have reached the extreme unlikelihood of 250,000 Csango.

The difficulties in determining the Csango population have been at the center of Hungarian claims of Romania's attempt to "statistically eliminate" the Csangos as a strategy to promote their Romanian assimilation and cultivate nationalistic feelings in the population (Vincze 2002).

The issue of available statistical information is critical to all minorities, as they serve as official records of recognized ethnicity, language and religion, which in turn serve as mechanisms of identity. Statistic visibility is a tool for the acquisition of social and political power, and without it, a community cannot make appeals for aid (financial or otherwise) for cultural preservation. In its Recommendation 1521 (2001), the Council

of Europe called for Romania to make amendments to ensure that the Csango would be correctly registered at the next official census.

It is plausible that in the case of the Csango, the blurred figures may have delayed advances in research for their preservation; however, as demonstrated by the examination of the previous census, the blame is also shared by the struggles of Csango self-identity. There seems to be a noticeable generational gap between the older Csangos who believe in a stronger ethnic and linguistic bond to Hungary and the younger Csangos who are reluctant to describe themselves, or even their dialect, as 'Hungarian'. In addition, there is wide confusion about the meaning entailed in officially coming forward as ethnic Csangos: while the 'Romanian' label represents a transparent identity with clear rights and obligations, many Csangos have difficulty in articulating what a Csango is, and whether or not it is beneficial to be categorized as Csango. The concepts of nationality and ethnicity thus become blurred, leaving citizenship as the only steady anchor of public identity. As a result, many believe it to be 'easier' to assume Romanian identities in the official sphere, rather than attempt to establish themselves as Csango in order to enjoy the same rights.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This section establishes the theories and concepts most relevant to my ethnic and linguistic analysis of Csango identity: ethnicity as cognition, diglossia, and metalinguistic awareness.

As demonstrated so far, the racial approach to ethnicity has been convenient in fuelling the Hungarian and Romanian nationalistic agendas. Race was "instrumentalized" to transcend "social, religious and even territorial divisions, so that

national problems became problems for the entire ethnic nation than a particular class or rank” (Davis 2007:161). However, the simplicity the racial approach has failed to grasp the complexity and evolution of identity construction of the Csango minority. Public discourse has so far assumed that the Csango ‘feel’ either Hungarian or Romanian based on their debated origins, pushing aside the influence of social context in molding ethnic identity across time. Although the Csango are technically not an example of what Rabinowitz has termed “trapped minority” (2001:65), which refers to a politically powerless minority spread across states, they are often found in the same predicament: pressed by the expectations of public discourse to choose an previously assigned identity between their past “mother nation” and their current “host”. The Csango are aware of these categorizations imposed onto them from outside their villages (by Hungarians and Romanians, at macro and micro levels alike), but it is their own ethnic and linguistic categorization of themselves and of others that reveals what factors are crucial to their identity construction. The flexibility of their own categorization process has allowed them to negotiate their identity through waves of assimilation and nationalistic public discourse as their social landscape changes.

With the emergence of constructivist approaches to ethnicity, there has been an increased focus on its subjectivist aspects –perceptions, self-identification processes— over the previously promoted objectivist aspects –race, nationality (Brubaker 2004). My analysis of Csango self-identity draws from the theory of ethnicity as cognition put authored by Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov in 2004, which functions on the premise that “ethnicity is fundamentally not a thing in the world, but a perspective on the world (Brubaker et. al 2004:32). This definition liberates the Csango

from the rigid constraints of racial-based anthropology, and of their difficulties in articulating their current ethnic status: the Csango readily accept that, in addition to having different religion and language, they also have developed their own perspectives on their social surroundings and history which are different from that of the Romanian majority. Under this approach to ethnicity, they are unquestionably able to ethnically self-identify as Csango, and not Romanian.

The take on ethnicity from a cognitive angle is based on the work of Fredrik Barth, a Norwegian anthropologist who argues that ethnicity is not solely founded on shared traits and culture, but on the shared “practices of classification and categorization, including both self-classification and the classification of (and by) others (Brubaker et al. 2004:32). The cognitive approach to ethnicity is applicable to two categorization processes that influence identity formation: first, the official categorizations imposed by the state and any other powerful institutions at a macro-level; and second, the daily categorization activities by ordinary people at a micro-level (Brubaker et al., 2004). So far, public discourse has focused on the former, assuming that the categorization of the Csango at a macro level –decided by external authors– is the only legitimate one, and that it determines everyday identity formation. However, the practice of categorization at a micro level is what has allowed the Csango to maintain their own identity separate from that of the Romanian majority, despite the heavy attempts at their ethnic assimilation. The imposed classification Romanians by schools and churches did influence the Csango collective identity, but their way of categorizing social situations has remained distinct at the core, as they draw clear distinctions among the categories of Hungarians, Hungarians of Transylvania, Romanians and

themselves on ethnic, linguistic, cultural and political levels. Brubaker et al. believe that this cognitive perspective is supportive and revitalizing of the circumstantialist approach to ethnicity, which incorporates social and historical context as an important variable in the changing nature of ethnicity (2004).

The Csango categorization of social and linguistic events at a micro level is well reflected on their practice of diglossia, another concept relevant to the study of their identity formation. The lack of a standardized, written form of Csango in conjunction with the aftermath of the Romanian linguistic assimilation policies have resulted in the co-existence of the Romanian language and Csango dialect in the villages. Originally coined by Ferguson in 1959 and developed by Fishman in 1967, the concept of diglossia explains how such a linguistic co-existence is formed within a speech community without merging or language replacement – the latter of which was Romania's hope. In diglossia, a 'high' language, which is used in religion and education, is used in the public sphere, while the 'low' language remains in use in the private sphere of the home (Fishman 1967). Diglossia is very closely associated to matters of linguistic prestige, which may hold great influence over the 'collective self-esteem' of a minority, as is the case of the Moldavian Csango.

The Csango practice of diglossia and code-switching has developed their sense of metalinguistic awareness, a concept referring to the explicit consciousness of language that allows the speaker to view it as a process, and to estimate the state of his or her knowledge of that language (Kerper 2010). The Csango are an ethnolinguistic minority; consequently, metalinguistic awareness has been a critical factor in identity

formation, as members of the minority seem to have different expectations on the minimum degree of Csango fluency which is necessary to develop a Csango identity.

The theoretical framework of this thesis, then, differs from that of previous ethnographic studies on the Csango minority in its cognitive approach to ethnicity, emphasizing identity construction as a process that is rooted in the particular perspectives and categorization practices of a people, which are in turn produced through mutual exchanges in the social context.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

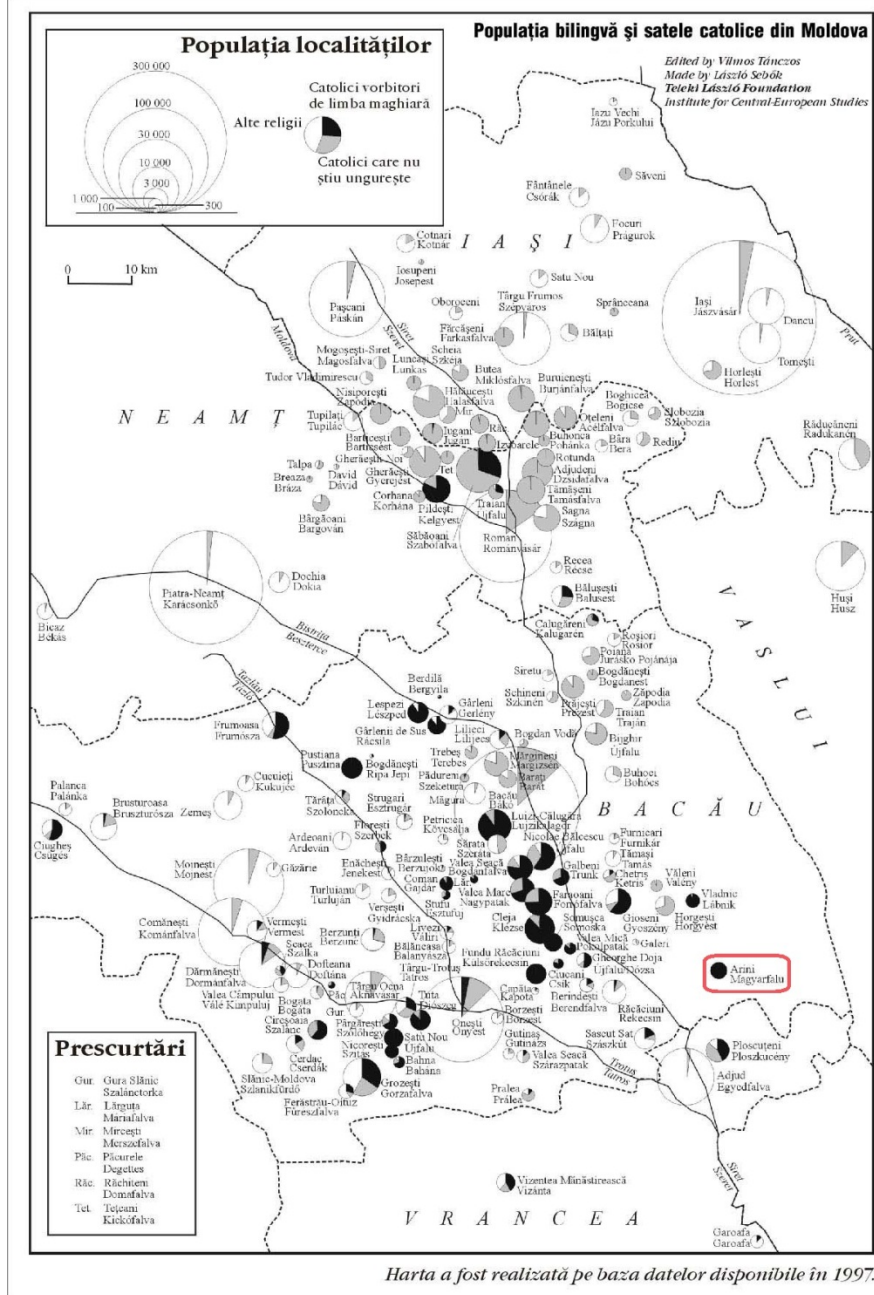
2.1 Introduction to Csango land

The Csangos differ from the Hungarians of Transylvania, including the Szeklers, in their dialect, customs and traditions, historical migration patterns and location. The Csangos arrived in Moldavia, a province comprised by the eastern Romanian counties of Bacău, Botoșani, Iasi, Neamț, Vaslui and Vrancea, starting in the Middle Ages and peaking in an emigration wave in the late 18th century (Tanczos 2008). It is thought that the linguistically non-homogeneous group settled into a continuum of villages that became disrupted overtime by wars and assimilation policies, yielding today's concentration of Csango villages in the north of Roman/Romanvasar, and the south of Bacău/Bako (Tanczos 2008). In addition to this division, those researchers who defend the position that the Csangos are descendants of Szeklers who 'roamed away', as the etymology of their name is argued to suggest, also make a distinction between the Csangos who settled in the southern Moldavian counties in the Middle Ages, and those who did between the 17th and 19th centuries, dividing the latter into three geographical

groups: those settled along the Siret/Szeret river, the Tazlau/Tazlo river, and the Trotus/Tatros river (Tanczos 2008).

Under this categorization of the Csango, my fieldsite, Arini/Magyarfalu, is considered part of the southern, Székelyised Csangos settled along the Siret/Szeret river. Currently here are twenty-three additional villages also grouped within the same category, and 85 Csango villages in total (Tanczos 2008).

Figure 1: Religious-Linguistic Map of Csango Land in 1997



Source: <http://www.csangok.ro/hartaceangai%20nagy.jpg> [Arini/Magyarfalva in red]

My informants in Arini/Magyarfalva believe that the Csango villages form a chain of speech communities from North to South, each with slightly different phonological and

lexical variations. They identify the Catholic religion as the single most important link between these villages, and the Csango dialects as a close second, as these seem to be increasing their Romanian borrowings. The map in Figure 1 illustrates the remote location of these Csango villages, and provides visual information on size village, dominant religion (Catholic or other) and language spoken (Hungarian or other). Arini/Magyarfalu, in the southeastern corner of Csango land, is emphasized in red.

2.2 Introduction to Arini/Magyarfalu

My analysis is restricted to the southern, Székelyised Csango village of Arini/Magyarfalu. My informants believe the original name to be Magyarfalu, but report that before and during the Communist period, the Romanians living in the surrounding villages simply referred to it as “Ungur” because they ethnically categorized its inhabitants as Hungarians. The name was reportedly exchanged for the official Romanian name ‘Arini’ after the fall of the regime. The informants believe that currently all village residents refer to the place as Magyarfalu, as long as they are not conversing with non-Csango. During several of my interviews it was mentioned repeatedly and proudly that Arini/Magyarfalu is the easternmost Csango village, and the easternmost place from Hungary where a Hungarian language form can still be widely heard. It is geographically surrounded by Romanian villages, the closest Csango village being Vladnic/Labnik to the north.

Arini/Magyarfalu is a rural, small-sized village (see section on statistics above), and the majority of its inhabitants, including all ages and both genders, are dedicated to agricultural work. Every family in the village owns a parcel of land, where they usually

grow fruit trees, grapes, and corn; in addition, most families own farm animals for work and food. The types of available dishes are in seasonal rotation: poultry is consumed in the spring; lamb in the summer; beef in the fall and pork in the winter months. The closest shopping center is in the southern Romanian city of Adjud; therefore, families have had to remain dedicated to self-sufficiency and prefer hard work to convenience. All members of a family are involved in agricultural activities, and there seem to be fine –not rigid— lines of gender roles: in addition of raising the family and working on the crops in the field, women tie the grape vines to sticks so they grapes in the spring months, enter the forest to pick berries, mushrooms, and green leafs, collect eggs from the household's hens, and prepare the family meals. Men usually find work in nearby Romanian cities, and in a recent trend, they temporarily migrate for work to foreign countries in western and central Europe or northern Africa, from where they send home most of their earnings. Upon their return to Arini, the men work on the land, take responsibility for the slaughter of the farm animals, and the never-ending task of repairing their homes and vehicles.

As one of my informants described, construction in Arini/Magyarfalu has developed in outward branches that delineate the hills of the landscape. The meeting point of these branches is the center of the village, where the local Catholic Church –the tallest building in the village— is located. The priest, one of the few Romanians inhabiting the village, lives in a large, relatively modern house annexed to the church. Other significant sites of the village are the Romanian elementary school, the Hungarian House (which houses folkloric events and celebrations), and the Hungarian school (financed by the

Association of Csango-Hungarians in Moldavia). The closest police station is in a neighboring Romanian village, as is the closest medical attention clinic.

In addition to official Romanian institutions and organizations such as the Association of Csango-Hungarians in Moldavia, the people of Arini/Magyarfalu seem to widely regard certain actors as having strong influence in the affairs of the village. The first is the village priest, a role filled by a rotation of Romanian priests, of whom the most recent has been living in Arini/Magyarfalu for two years. All my informants identified their Catholic faith as the most important Csango identity feature and the link that unites all Csango populations; therefore, they have deep respect for the priest as a figure of power and authority. My informants describe him as a tolerant man who allows for a Hungarian priest to give the occasional mass in Hungarian during the “village days” held in the summer months; however, he is said to keep his distance from the villagers and does not interact with them regularly outside of Church activities. He has shown no interest in the Csango dialect or in learning Hungarian words, and as such, people are mindful not to annoy him by speaking Hungarian in his presence. I forgot this unspoken rule while photographing him with young children after a first communion event, and I noticed his expression briefly wince at my counts in Hungarian.

Another influential character in the village is 73 year old Luca, who is widely regarded as the elder in the village with the most accurate knowledge on Csango history and identity; I was frequently referred to her by my informants whenever I attempted to use the snowballing interview technique. Her anecdotes and personal opinions on Csango identity and history are reproductions of knowledge produced by

Hungarian nationalist discourse, but are considered conclusive by the young-adult Csango generation of Arini/Magyarfalu

Annetta is the woman who first began teaching Hungarian classes in her home before the Association of Csango-Hungarians in Moldavia was able to support the initiative with funds to buy a house and bring Hungarian teachers; she was criticized for her educational endeavors in 2003 by a Romanian newspaper. Although she no longer teaches, she is strongly critical of the curriculum of the Hungarian school and has remained involved from the periphery. Her son remains in contact in Hungary, organizing online resources on folkloric Csango events.

Peter, the youngest resident to have great influence in everyday-activities in the village, works for the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania [Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség, in Hungarian], a political body representing the Hungarian ethnic minorities in Romania, including the Moldavian Csango population. He is also the main local contact for the Association of Csango-Hungarians in Moldavia, and manages the activities of the folkloric singing group. Despite his young age, he is widely regarded as one of the authority figures in the village, and is involved in all major collective decisions.

2.3 Methodology

I collected the relevant data for this study through the use of exploratory and semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. The interviews and participant observation supplemented each other in the methodology to address both local attitudes and self-reflections of the Csango issue, as well as observations on

language use and local customs. The questions asked during these interviews revolved around the themes of self-awareness in terms of ethnicity, nationality, language and religion, and sought to explore the attitudes and collective knowledge in regard to Csango identity construction and maintenance in the village. Over the course of 16 days, I videotaped 14 individual interviews, averaging an hour in length, in addition to two hour-long focus groups and six exploratory interviews (see Appendix A). I also documented events in photographs and short clips: a funeral, rehearsals for folkloric performances, and other daily events.

The sample of the study covers both genders and three generations of Csangos in Arini/Magyarfalu; however, due to their short number and slight gender imbalance, they should not be treated as representative of the population. The twelve female interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 85, and ages of the nine male interviewees ranged from 8 to 65. One focus group was made only with males (ages 20, 24, 35 and 41), while a second was made with two females (ages 33 and 38) and a male (age 38). Children, with the exception of an 8-year-old boy, were excluded from interviews due to accessibility and language issues (young children speak Romanian almost exclusively, although they seem to understand Csango and Hungarian to varying degrees). However, I had regular interaction with them through participant observation, both at the Hungarian language school and during visits to their homes. I received access to the majority of my informants with the aid of my hostess, who invited me along in her visits to the homes of her friends and acquaintances. She also helped me secure interviews with elders who villagers seemed to widely regard as the 'experts' on the history of the village and Csango identity. In addition, I met two of my informants by randomly

approaching them in church after evening mass. All of the interviews were conducted in Hungarian, and for the most part took place in the informants' homes to ensure minimal disruptions.

2.4 Identity Negotiation

The sensitivities surrounding the labeling and categorization of the Csango dialect were immediately reflected in the negotiation of my purpose and identity upon my arrival in the fieldsite. Despite introducing myself as Mexican by nationality and ethnicity, locals classified my Hungarian dialect as “proper”, “real” and “grammatically correct”, therefore identifying me as Hungarian. This logic is reflective of their categorization of ethnolinguistic groups, and is also a reflection on how they make distinctions between Csangos, Hungarians in Transylvania, and Hungarians in Hungary. However, the Hungarian categorization proved problematic to my ethnographic efforts: conversation partners would display frustration and embarrassment whenever I failed to understand colloquialisms—one potential informant politely declined to be interviewed because he felt “ashamed to speak” in his language—, and a few people expressed suspicion regarding my purpose in the village (“were you sent here by reporters?”).

These concerns came to rest after insisting that I identify myself as Mexican, that Hungarian is not my native language, and that my study is driven by academic (not journalistic) goals. This was a conversation to be had before each interview session, along with my formal request for consent. My informants became more relaxed about their speech, more forgiving of my misunderstandings, and also seemed to automatically justify to themselves my questions about their self-identity and cultural practices. My curiosity was reciprocated: at the end of each interview there was usually

a reversal in roles. Neutrally positioning myself as Mexican opened the channels of communication; however, it had an unexpected drawback. A few of my informants and conversation partners began to express embarrassment at the poverty of the village, drawing comparisons with the images of televised Mexican soap operas, which showcase Mexico as a place of luxury. They wanted to know if there is poverty in Mexico, what daily life is like in Mexican villages, how those villages compare to theirs in terms of self-sufficiency (“What kind of animals do they farm?” “What crops do they harvest at this time of the year?”), and some went as far as to question my economic situation. Ultimately, I had to accept that it is nearly impossible to assume a neutral identity during research fieldwork.

CHAPTER 3 LANGUAGE AND RELIGION: THE TANGLED ANCHORS

“The Csango are Csango because they are Catholic and speak Csango: if you are Catholic then you are Csango, and that means you speak Csango; Romanians are Romanians because they are Orthodox, and Orthodox people speak Romanian only –they don’t know any Csango”

Luca, 73

Each fieldwork session began with the question: “who are the Csango?”, and every answer, across age and gender lines, included emphasis on the words “religion” and “language”, with a noticeable absence of mention of history and traditions. The majority of my informants seemed doubtful about the best way to incorporate the words “Hungarian” and “Romanian” into their descriptions. When asked directly about their origins, I mostly received vague answers about their history being a blur, and echoes of the Hungarian perspectives of their identity. The influential Csango characters mentioned in the ‘Methodology’ section above answered differently, with a resolute attitude and demonstrating a clear view on what they believe to be the truth about the Csango. However, the knowledge that they disperse in the village is a direct reproduction of Hungarian theories on the Csango, sometimes virtually matched word-by-word.

Although it is evident from the available literature and ethnographic studies that religion and language are the two anchors that sustain Csango identity through assimilation periods, there are two social patterns that prevent homogeneity in identity construction and ethnolinguistic awareness. The first is the production and diffusion of Csango identity and historical knowledge: the most influential characters of the village

learn different theories on the matter, and reproduce them as legitimate theories that mark the beliefs of their fellow residents. These theories are orally reproduced over and over, until nobody remembers where the ideas originally came from, resulting in the acceptance of such theories as “common knowledge”. The second is the generation-based variation in ethnic and linguistic awareness, reflected in the changing attitudes towards the minority status of the Csango, as well as in the trends of categorization of the Csango and non-Csango (including other ethnic Hungarians and Romanians). Every Csango generation has had to renegotiate its collective identity in a changing social landscape that is different from the one faced by the previous generation. The common threads of religion and language remain unchanged in these malleable identities, but anything else that may be considered a factor in identity construction is dependent of its social context. The assimilatory waves faced by each generation have been different, and surviving them maintaining Csango identity demands adaptability in the conceptualization of what it means to be Csango.

As a result of these patterns, in addition to the several other gray aspects of the minority, a noticeable trend has emerged in the individual and collective identity consciousness of the Csango: where the older generations speak more of the importance of preserving Csango language and culture, younger generations are more concerned with the low socioeconomic status of the Csango, and have begun to make associations between having a Csango identity (including being a Csango speaker), and having less opportunities to thrive in the Romanian economy.

The results of the ethnography are here analyzed in three separate sections that reflect the attitudes towards Csango identity from three generations. Each section

makes reference to issues of metalinguistic awareness, opinions on identity construction, and provides a historical and economic context relevant to each generation.

3.1 Identity Construction in the Eldest Generation

“Anywhere we went, the Romanians would point us out to scold us for speaking Hungarian. They were always yelling “Unguri, Unguri, Unguri!””

Ticska, 85

The eldest generation of residents of Arini/Magyarfalu provides a perspective on Csango identity that is strikingly different from the most recent ones. Two of the four informants who fit this category are widely regarded as the local experts on Csango history and traditions, and their take on Csango origins is firmly cemented in Hungarian public discourse. All four informants, ranging in age from 63 to 85, consistently referred to themselves as Hungarians, to the village as being Hungarian, and to their own language as Hungarian, but also made note that interchangeability between the terms ‘Hungarian’ and ‘Catholic’ is entirely acceptable when referring to their minority.

Their ethnic categorization of themselves as Hungarian (as opposed to Csango or Csango-Hungarian) is reflective of their experiences with Romanians, who saw no real distinction between the Moldavian Csango and the Hungarians of Transylvania. It is possible that this black-and-white categorization has allowed their self-identity to steer clear of questions of Romanian loyalty, simply regarding Romania as the state managing the land that they have always owned and worked. This view is despite the fact that is one of the Csango generations that experienced at first-hand the appeals for Romanian consciousness from local priests. Ticska narrates: “Our priest used to be

annoyed at us, and tell us that we should not call ourselves Hungarians. When he saw us speaking Hungarian he used to turn around and grumble to himself “Unguri... Unguri...”. At least he wasn’t as bad as the police, because they would interrupt our conversations and repeatedly ask “What are you saying?”. They didn’t like understanding only part of what we spoke”.

The elder generation of Arini/Magyarfalu believes that it is important that the collective ethnolinguistic identity of the village be maintained (and thus supports the educational efforts of the Hungarian language school), but also accepts assimilation as a natural process that has evolved with the political and economic context of the country. They are fluent in Romanian and perceive the advantages of a bilingual Csango youth, so long as the current practice of diglossia stays in place.

Despite their support of Hungarian discourse, the four elders have internalized their experiences with Romanian assimilation policies differently than Hungarian theories would have expected. While they all identify priests and teachers as agents of ethnic and linguistic assimilation, they do not believe that their actions were oppressive in character or coordinated by the Romanian state. Rather, they believe that most Romanians had neutral stances on the Csango issue, and that it was only natural that they would eventually insist that all Romanian citizens speak a uniform language.

The Ceausescu period is remembered differently by the Arini/Magyarfalu elders. Pavel narrates stories of the poverty of the time, and how despite the hard work of the residents, the village seemed to linger in a permanent state of deficiencies. He smiles when he recalls the borders with Hungary being open again after the fall of

Communism, and notes that the lifestyle of the Csango in the village has significantly improved since.

Contrastingly, Luca declared: “Ceaurescu was fair. He was just. He was not interested in what languages a person spoke, or what descendants they had: if that person worked, he paid them. Back then people were dedicated to their lands, even I went out to the fields and the forest every day, even with two babies; nowadays, people do not have a workplace, and agriculture does not pay enough. It was a rough time back then, but I also know that it was a fair life”. These sentiments are echoed by Kata, who concluded: “Back then we had no money but there was enough to eat; these days there is money to be made but not everyone eats”. Therefore, the elders comprehend the need of the following Csango generations to adapt to Romanian society as a method of survival. They only hope that in the process they will not lose their roots, and the awareness of who they are.

3.2 Identity Construction in the Middle Generation

“Our language is neither Hungarian nor Romanian... just like us”

Florin, 41

The middle generation of Arini/Magyarfalu retained identity links with the previous one through the use of Csango language in the private spheres and by preserving their Catholic religious practices. They are performers of Csango folklore, but they practice it for the purposes of a hobby, and perform mostly for the entertainment of Hungarian fans of Csango folklore. This is a generation that draws an us/them distinction between the Csango (or alternatively Csango-Hungarians) and Hungarians. In contrast to their

parents' generation, they do not have a uniform claim on ethnicity; rather, popular opinion seems to be split into three camps: one which advocates for the recognition of Csango language and culture, and supports the efforts of the Hungarian language school; a second that feels ambiguous about what it entails to be Csango, and a third that feels it is undesirable, even harmful, to make efforts to counter the effects of past Romanian assimilation. Despite the fact that these incongruences can be interpreted as an indicator of decay in Csango collective identity, the cognitive approach to ethnicity shows that while the evaluation of the importance of ethnicity has changed, the categorization of the self and of others has remained stable in this adult generation. Csango identity has not disappeared; it has simply evolved through categorization practices as a consequence of the context in which these adults were socialized, which was the nationwide restructuring of Romania.

The perspective of the first camp is best represented by Annetta, the woman who identifies herself as the pioneer of Hungarian language classes in the village. She believes that education is the most effective strategy to ensure the survival of Csango identity and customs, and that teaching Csango children the Hungarian language would have a balancing effect with the Romanian language assimilation policies of the past. In April 2003 she found her efforts heavily criticized in a Romanian newspaper 'Desteptarea', which gathered the opposing views of the local elementary school director, Traian Gatu, and the village's priest, Petru Beta. The former stated to the newspaper: "we addressed the issue to the police station and to the village hall. Competent authorities have been announced. We are neither pro or against, but we want our children to first learn the Romanian language", while the latter was of the

opinion that Romanian is overall a more advantageous language to speak, “as jobs in Hungary can be found for those who know Romanian too” (Desteptarea 2003). Annetta continued her efforts despite the opposition, and today the majority –but not all- of the village children take weekly after-school Hungarian classes.

The second camp is accommodating of the majority of my informants who belong to the middle generation of the village. When asked directly about Csango identity, their answers roll back and forth between arguments of the role of citizenship and nationality in identity formation, and the cultural and linguistic aspects that distinguish the Csango from the surrounding Romanian population. As articulated in the quote of this section, they characterize their language in terms of what it is not: neither Hungarian nor Romanian, and like to define themselves in similar terms, as not being either here or there. They are proud of their Catholic faith, of the oral traditions that have been handed down to them; on the other hand, they were educated by Romanians, and most of them currently work with Romanians. Therefore, they prefer to claim having ‘neutral’ stance on their identity. However, despite their claims of setting aside questions of ethnicity, the way in which they position themselves vis-à-vis the Romanian and Hungarian populations reveal that beyond their ambiguous articulations of Csango identity, they hold the same grasp on the concept as do other Csango from the same generation. They know they are Csango and do not hide it, but they do not know what to make of it.

The third camp on Csango identity on the surface claims to take on what could be described an “anti-Csango” stance. Even so, and perhaps in spite of themselves, they are in undeniable parallel with the rest of the Csango in terms of world perspective, which Brubaker argues to be the main determinant of ethnicity. Their reasons for

repelling the Csango label are not without logic. This camp of my informants is comprised by young adults who have travelled and worked outside of Arini/Magyarfalu, and even outside Romania's borders. They have been exposed to other lifestyles and have paid attention to the socioeconomic levels of other groups. Upon their return to the poverty-stricken Csango villages, they quickly draw associations between being Csango (or even just a member of a minority) and having less money, less opportunities, less recognition. As the camp internalizes this belief of the correlation between Csango identity and low prestige, the reaction of rejecting the Csango label seems logical. This is why many of the parents in the village refuse to send their children to the Hungarian language school, why they believe that being Romanian is more advantageous to being part of a national minority, and why they identify themselves as Romanian in the official census. As Balint summarized it: "I can't officially prove that I am Csango, anyway".

In addition, this generation has already gone through a Romanian education, and as parents they worry that teaching the Csango dialect to their children will hinder their performance in the Romanian school. As such, they have modified the practice of diglossia, so that now Romanian is spoken in public places as well as in the presence of their children, and Csango is spoken only among adults. This practice has the potential of entirely eliminating the Csango dialect, but the parents believe that the children will soon catch up with the Csango dialect, and it is more important to give them a head start with Romanian.

3.3 Identity Construction in the Youngest Generation

"My friends know about the Csango, but I just tell them I'm Romanian because it's simpler. It's not that important because the Csango are Romanian"

The youngest of my informants, ranging in age from 8 to 24, are fast to reveal their identity struggles and issues of metalinguistic awareness. They identify their Catholic faith and Csango dialect as the crucial elements of their identity, proving that the categorization of Csango ethnicity has remained steady throughout all generations. They speak both Romanian and Csango, but are apologetic of their “improper” grammar and vocabulary, assuming that the Csango dialect is a run-down version of “true” Hungarian. As a consequence, the children prefer to speak Romanian during their playtime, and the other teenagers admit to also being more comfortable speaking Romanian. Tatiana and Monica confided in me that sometimes they wish their parents had taught them more of the Csango dialect, but then decide that it is better that they know Romanian because it has allowed them to do better in school. Monica recalled the story of one of her Csango classmates in university whose parents sent him to a Hungarian elementary school thinking in an effort to teach him the language, but later suffered greatly in a Romanian school. Those of my informants who are in their 20s have discovered the advantage of categorizing themselves flexibly according to their social context. Liviu affirmed: “if I am talking to you or another Csango, I’ll speak Csango and refer to myself as Csango, and refer to this village as Magyarfalu. But if I’m with my Romanian friends I won’t do it... not because I’m embarrassed, but because I already know that I am Csango and they know I’m from Arini, so I don’t really feel the need to constantly remind everyone”.

As their socialization with Romanian youth increases, the Csango youth begins to question the meaning of a Csango identity and how it relates to Romanian

citizenship. This type of internal assimilation was unknown to the previous generations, which lived almost entirely secluded and had minimal contact with the Romanian majority. The degree to which the newfound openness of the minority will affect Csango identity remains to be seen.

Alipuria Phinney proposed a model of ethnic identity development of three stages that is relevant to the ethnic identity formation of Csango youth. The stages are: unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity exploration, and achieved ethnic identity (Allen and Aber 2006). It is arguable that Csango children never truly pass an “unexamined ethnic identity” period, as they internalize from early on the attitudes of their parents toward Csango language and culture (either as being positive or negative); otherwise, the anecdotal evidence of the Csango youth in Arini/Magyarfalu seems to be supportive of this progression in ethnic identity development.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has provided an overview on the literature on the Moldavian Csango minority as an arena for the nationalistic agendas of both Hungarians and Romanians. The Council of Europe has remarked on the lack of consistent, reliable information, despite the wide availability of material that presents itself as academic. These nationalistic discourses have been made available to the Csango minority, who have absorbed and reproduced many of these theories on their origins as common knowledge.

Previous scholarship on the Moldavian Csango and other minorities in Eastern Europe has been based on racial and biological considerations, imposing rigid definitions on the concept of ethnicity. However, the Csango case supports the cognitive approach to ethnicity, which conceptualizes ethnicity as a common perspective on the world based on the categorization of the self and others. As waves of assimilation have swept the Moldavian region, social changes have been imposed on the Csango; they have remained anchored in their identity by their religion and language, and despite changing attitudes towards the meaning of being Csango, all generations have collectively maintained a common perspective on the world, categorizing themselves as intrinsically different from Romanians and other Hungarian ethnic groups. The group cohesion provided by this stance has allowed the minority to remain malleable to changing social contexts, and is the key to their survival in the future. The Moldavian Csango show that identity, just like ethnicity and language, remains a fluid construct.

APPENDIX A

List of informants – names have been changed:

| Name | Age | Gender | Additional information | Interview Type |
|-------------|------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Ronny | 8 | M | | Informal |
| Monica | 19 | F | | Walking |
| Liviu | 20 | M | | Focus group 1 |
| Valentin | 24 | M | | Focus group 1 |
| Tatiana | 24 | F | | Informal |
| Peter | 26 | M | Political representative | Informal |
| Lily | 33 | F | | Focus group 2 |
| Liliana | 34 | F | Folkloric performer | Semi-structured |
| Iedu | 35 | M | | Focus group 1 |
| Narciza | 36 | F | Catholic nun | Semi-structured |
| Balint | 38 | M | | Focus group 2 |
| Bibi | 39 | F | Folkloric performer | Informal; focus group 2 |
| Anetta | 40 | F | Hungarian language schoolteacher | Semi-structured |
| Abel | 40 | M | | Informal |
| Florin | 41 | M | | Informal; focus group 2 |
| Gina | 50 | F | | Informal |
| Annetta | 55 | F | | Semi-structured |
| Aniko | 57 | F | | Semi-structured |
| Mari | 63 | F | “Csango expert” | Semi-structured |
| Pavel | 65 | M | | Semi-structured |
| Luca | 73 | F | “Csango expert” | Semi-structured |
| Ticska | 85 | F | | Semi-structured |

APPENDIX B

Generation-based photographs of the Csango

(A) The oldest generation:



Ticska reminiscing about Csango traditions in her youth [pictured left in the book]



Mari: "We are Csango because we are Catholic"



Annetta narrating the tumultuous start of the Hungarian language classes

(B) The middle generation:



Csango nuns working in Bucharest

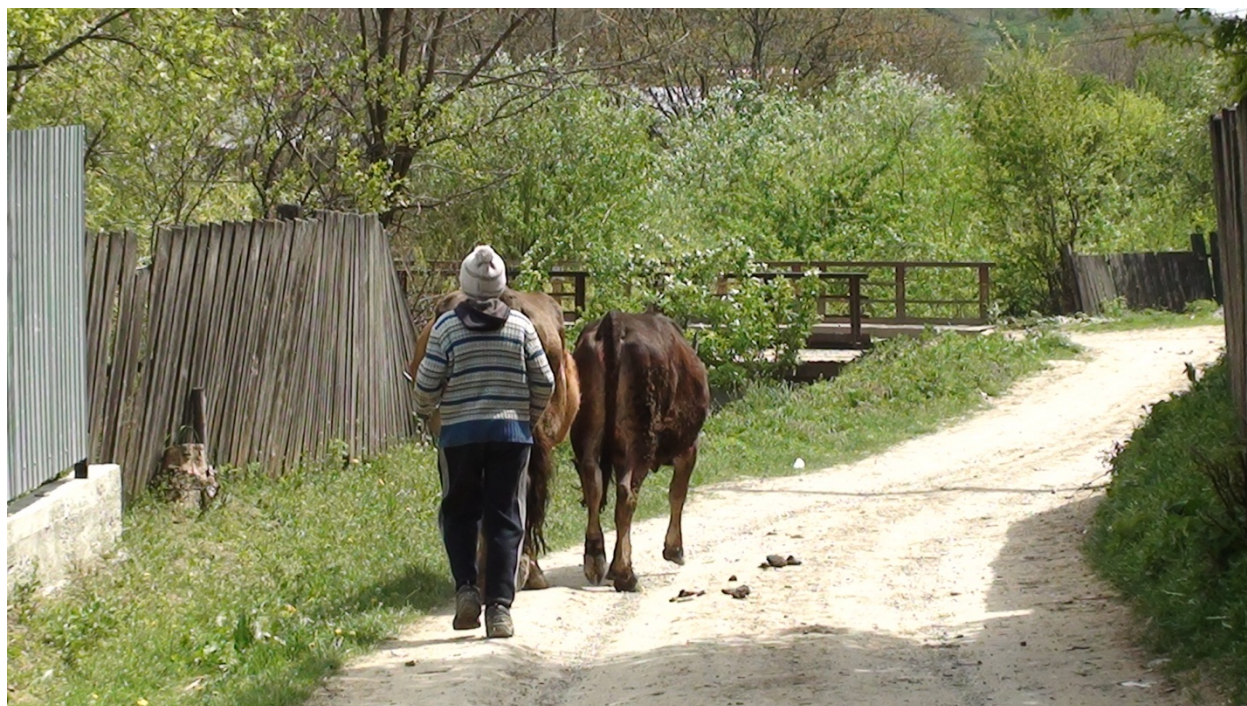


Csango identity changes, but it does not fade

(C) The youngest generation:



School-aged children playing in the Hungarian school after their language class



In addition to their studies, children participate in agricultural activities

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