

Article

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Whose Minority? The Resistant Identity of the Moldavian Csangos

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Abstract: The article is based on my fieldwork in 2002 in a village in Eastern Romania with a multi-confessional population made up mostly of Roman Catholics/Csangos and Orthodox Christians. The core premise of the analysis is that the collective identity manifested here transcends ethnic and confessional divides. The field data about the village's cross-cultural life fall into the following categories: the oral history of the village, the performing of rituals, and the local history of modernization. These topics inform a single collective identity that is grounded in an expressive culture (Fredrik Barth) and as such requires critical reflection on the cultural complexity of collective identities as the Csangos, which have been formed within multiple and overlapping social and historical contexts. The subject is the different temporalities that emerge during political modernization. In conclusion, in the Csangos' case, the constructivist concept of ethnicity should be revisited and complemented with an acknowledgment of Csangos' benign self-identification, which sheds light on their discrete or hidden identity.

Keywords: Csangos, Romania, hidden minority, interculturality, expressive culture

Introduction

This article is based on the fieldwork I carried out in the village of Frumoasa in Eastern Romania.¹ This village's population is multi-confessional and multi-ethnic.

¹ By "Eastern Romania" I mean Romania's part of the historical region of the Moldova province. The other part stretches over the Prut River to the east and constitutes the Republic of Moldova. The project took place in February–June 2002 and included four months of ethnographical fieldwork and about 40 qualitative interviews, all conducted in Romanian, in two Csango settlements, Oituz and Frumoasa, Bacău county, and archival research as well.

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In addition to the Roman Catholics/Csangos and Orthodox Christians there are small groups of Neo-Protestant believers. The most recent census (2011) conducted in Frumoasa characterizes its ethnic composition as made up of Romanians and Roma.²

This article focuses on a “shared/expressive culture” that facilitates the crossing of ethnic and confessional boundaries (Cf. Simon 2012, 174).³ More broadly this topic includes the current state of the Csango communities. Since this field research was conducted in 2002, Romania’s political, economic, and social contexts have changed due to its accession into the European Union (Tudor 2017). Nonetheless, I contend that Csango identity, regardless of the recent changes in Romania, must be framed within a “hidden minorities” category (Petrović, Promitzer, and Sikimić 2004; Promitzer 2004, 2009). This category does not align very well with the Western concept of nation, the model for political modernization for all the countries of Southeastern Europe. However, this does not mean that the Csango population should not be recognized as a minority and therefore be subject to “good governance” from the Romanian state. For example, the banning or discouragement of the teaching of the Hungarian language in places with an obvious interest in such instruction shows current “bad governance” and illustrates how the Csangos should be considered a minority.⁴ I argue here for an approach that would strengthen Csango identity, an orientation that would be appropriate to their collective *intercultural* identity.

The matter of Csango ethnic identity triggers allegations from various political and social actors. Attitudes are radical, and they leave little room for neutral research and analysis. I wholly reject the perspectives that claim either that the Csangos are “Hungarianized” Romanians who have lost their Romanian identity or that, conversely, that they are Hungarian ethnics who became “Romanians” (Davis 2019). My contention is that these perspectives, if rigorously followed, cause us to lose sight of the Csangos’ distinct identity: both views argue for the Csangos’

² I have taken this information from the office of the Balcani commune, the administrative unit to which Frumoasa belongs.

³ Boglárka Simon carried out her master’s thesis on the basis of ethnological fieldwork in Frumoasa, conducted shortly after my own field research. Though her focus was the language shift and bilingualism among Csangos, our perspectives overlap: “the (Csangos’) linguistic references of ethnic delimitation [...] oscillate between the poles of a twofold delimitation and a twofold identification, and its main essence is constituted by the recognition of this *interculturality*” (Simon 2012, 174).

⁴ Gabriel Andreescu, one of the most militant supporters of human rights in Romania, enumerates the abusive encroachments of the Romanian government upon the actions of the pro-Hungarian Association for Hungarian Csangos from Moldova, regarding the teaching of Hungarian in Csango villages (Andreescu 2005). This status quo remains unchanged (Lajos 2015). Still, the strong reactions of the Romanian authorities, on both the central and local levels, served only to radicalize the Csangos’ demands and to induce tensions within their communities.

assimilation, either as “Romanians” or as “Hungarians”. This article aims to place the issue of Csango identity on a “third path”.

The article unfolds as follows. After the introductory section, a theoretical discussion will delineate concepts such as nation, ethnicity, culture, and their interdependencies, followed by a brief historical sketch of the Csangos population as well as a description of the locality of my fieldwork. Ethnographic research data will then be contextualized with regard to the article’s hypotheses. On the basis of the field data, I then argue for the aptness of the “hidden minority” concept in understanding the Csangos, and at the essay’s end will offer relevant conclusions.

A core distinction underlying my analysis here needs to be highlighted. Regarding a changing sense of ethnicity/nationality, the (national) state policies that, through state institutions, press for change or for the choosing of certain collective identities are here distinguished from the emergence of a collective identity within a framework free from political manipulation. The latter implies far more complex motivations than those derived from political obligations but also are bounded by fewer constraints. Setting aside the upper layers of political identity, I will emphasize the everyday frames of cross-cultural life.⁵

The Conceptual Frame

At the beginning of 2000, given the prospect of Romanian integration into the European Union, a group of civic activists from Romania proposed the granting of a “national minority” status to the Moldavian Csangos, based on legislation on national minorities in Romania (Salat 2008) and the argument that the “human rights perspective, due to which this community, unless not numerous, must be granted constitutional rights by the state” (Andreescu 2005, 52). The spoken language, the Csango dialect, was an issue. On the one hand, knowledge of this dialect today is rudimentary and unevenly spread among Roman Catholics. On the other, attempts to transform vernacular Csango into Hungarian had failed. One project involved the tutelage of a Hungarian-speaking elite among Csangos who would be trained in Budapest and then return home to teach Hungarian language and culture. Klára Sándor, who was enlisted in this project, has soberly and thoughtfully analyzed the deficiencies of these endeavors (Sándor 2000, 2012). Furthermore, this kind of project enhances the perennial sense of the Csangos’

⁵ The collective identity shared among Csangos excludes neither local institutions nor associative links (Csortan 2004; Stan and Weber 1997). In Frumoasa the people are unanimously grateful to the local leaders such as the former school director, who is Orthodox, and the Catholic priest, as well as to the associations they lead.

“hybrid identity”, situating them at the awkward crossroads of ethnic and national identity (Bodó, Fazakas, and Heltai 2017; Peti 2017).

In fact, these attempts seek to harmonize the Csangos with Will Kymlicka’s “liberal multiculturalism”, mainly via the concept of a homogenous, clearly defined culture (Andreescu 2002). “Liberal multiculturalism”, however, makes certain questionable assumptions: that minorities accept a self-government model based on an “alternative societal culture” (Kymlicka 1995; Salat 2001) to which the individual’s personal development is linked—and if this kind of culture is absent, self-development and personal autonomy are simply not possible (Kymlicka 1995; Salat 2001).

Liberal multiculturalism, however, is only one variant within the broader perspective that, together with conservative, pluralistic, commercial, corporate, and critical or “revolutionary” approaches, focuses on “the central problem in culturally complex societies, namely, how to reconcile diversity with social solidarity” (Eriksen 2010, 178). This variant of multiculturalism, then, is based on an instrumentalist or constructivist concept of the nation, in which an ethnicity is only and at best a historical episode in a population’s larger story, and culture a homogeneous continuum within a territory bounded by state institutions (Brubaker 2019; Eriksen 2010; Gellner 1983; Kymlicka 1995).

The discussion on multiculturalism’s role in preserving ethnic and cultural identities refers to the different ways of conceptualizing the nation, ethnicity, and culture. Without addressing the immense bibliography dedicated to the idea of nation, I note the classical distinction between the instrumentalist/constructivist and the primordialist perspective (Brubaker 2015; Conversi 1995; Greenfeld 2006; Smith 1991, 2006). Instrumentalist premises involve the assimilation of ethnicity, the homogenization of culture, and the imagination of the nation (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983), whereas the primordialist perspective highlights the persistence of complex forms of ethnicity and cultures that in modern states include the historical past (Connor 1994; Geertz 1963; Smith 1986). In this latter vein, Andreas Wimmer foregrounds “that the politicisation of ethnicity and nationhood constitutes a basic characteristic of, or the functional prerequisite for, modern society” (Wimmer 2004, 52). Multiculturalism, even in its liberal form, is all but elided in the distinction between constructivism and primordialism. Rogers Brubaker, for example, a “Gellnerian” in terms of the concept of nationhood, reserves for liberal multiculturalism a solely heuristic role, relativizing the civic-ethnic distinction (Brubaker 2004, 144), whereas for Michael Billig, adopting as well a constructivist perspective, the multicultural narrative, however generous it may seem with regard to differing ethnic and political identities, serves to reinforce barriers between groups within a given nation and between the nation and the rest of the world (Billig 1995).

To clarify the place and role occupied by diffuse minorities such as the Moldavian Csangos within national states we can look to much more fruitful discussions addressing the relationship between ethnicity and nation, as well as those related to ethnicity itself as a concept. A first and fundamental difference, as Thomas H. Eriksen keenly emphasizes, lies in the self-assertion of a nation via an existing state; ethnicities, for their part, do not require a state and its accompanying political power, and indeed are often annihilated due to the exercise of such power (Eriksen 2010). The concentration of political power through the modern state's institutions and the social homogenization occurring within a nation can often lead to the withering away of ethnic groups. Conversely, the moderate exertion of political power within "polyethnic" states maintains living links with places, histories, imagined futures, and mutual relations among the various ethnic groups within that state (Barth 1998; Smith 2006).

The relationship between ethnicity and nation also depends on the conceptualization of ethnicities or, in Rogers Brubaker's terms, "ethnicity as cognition" (Brubaker 2004, 86). There are four ways to analyze the nation's relationship to ethnicity in this regard. Two are aligned with constructivist approaches toward the nation, understanding ethnicity either from the perspective of rational choice theories as an advantageous means of access to resources and social position or, alternately, as a necessary evil, however obsolescent given the presence of political modernization programs. The other two analytical orientations foreground the primordialist perspective on the nation: here ethnicity is either a given foundation upon which a nation must build or a phenomenon with an unavoidable relation to political power, including through the politicization of ethnicity (Wimmer 2004). This classification embodies nothing less than the evolution of ethnicity as a concept, starting with Fredrik Barth's classical definition, in which the relations between ethnic groups and the demarcation of cultural boundaries took center stage (Barth 1998), up through the approaches of the 1980s and 1990s, which brought "stuff culture" into the framework of ethnicity, whereby ethnicity provides not only markers distinguishing one group from others but also symbols and benchmarks that help construct an ethnic group's identity (Cohen 2019; Eriksen 2013).

Disputes surrounding the concept of ethnicity and its relationship with the nation have led to a revision of the distinction between constructivism and primordialism regarding theories of the nation. In constructivist approaches the notion of a banal, quotidian, yet perennial ethnicity was accepted. So if authors such as Daniele Conversi or Andreas Wimmer have developed a transactionalist concept of the nation derived from Barth's concept of ethnicity, other authors have drawn out the implications of Michael Billig's remarkable idea of "banal

nationalism” that encompasses the diffuse ethnicity of “ethnicity without groups” (Billig 1995; Brubaker 2004; Hutchinson 2006; Polese et al. 2018).

This latter perspective, through the analytical interplay of its premises, allows the building of more flexible perspectives (Brubaker 2015; Rex 1996). Adherents can revisit the constructivist concept of ethnicity and add to it a “positive” or “benign” conception of ethnicity. The anthropologist Christian Giordano identifies these assumptions in the concept of liberal multiculturalism that has been proposed for the Csangos’ case, while noting that this concept should encompass the outcomes of various field research studies on ethnicity (Giordano 2006). The “reification” of culture should thus be replaced by “cultural complexity” (Wicker 1997), with culture regarded “as something changing, in process and relation, something the individuals and collectivities produce due to the permanent interactions, exchanges, negotiations, tensions and, last but not least, traumatic conflicts” (Giordano 2006, 22).

These considerations lie at the heart of the debate regarding ethnicity and the concept of culture (Giordano 2006). A landmark book on this topic is Fredrik Barth’s edited volume from 1969 (Cohen 2000; Eriksen and Jakoubek 2019; Wimmer 2008). The concept of ethnicity derives from a perspective on culture that holds that the incentives for belonging to an ethnic group are simple and clear (Wimmer 2004). The sense of ethnic belonging is governed by clear-cut boundaries separating the various ethnicities. Other scholars have challenged this view, arguing that cultural anthropology likely employs a “shared (concept of) culture” and that everyday social interactions matter (Verdery 1994; Wimmer 2013, 36). Barth responded to these arguments by stating that ethnicity based on clearly defined boundaries does not entail a reconsideration of the classical concept of shared culture. Barth nonetheless refined his arguments and agreed that either some sort of “postmodern” cultural continuum or a more “expressive culture” should be conceptualized (Barth 1994, 17). Here Barth has redefined the relationship between ethnicity and culture as a procedural balance setting the delimitation of boundaries between ethnic groups in equilibrium with edification vis-à-vis the ethnic identities of these groups (Cohen 2019; Eriksen 2010). In the elaboration of ethnicity, “cultural stuff” matters, because it provides symbols that attract and excite members of a group when they question their identity (Cohen 2013).

Nonetheless, against this “cultural stuff” and “everyday ethnicity”, the national model in Southeastern Europe, aiming to impose formal institutions and an “official” culture, obliged individuals to choose a certain identity (Giordano 2006, 18–9; Verdery 1994, 35–9). Nationalism is a “politics of mereness”, as Michael Herzfeld inspiringly writes when addressing the case of Greece. In this sense, on the one hand the nation tends toward the annihilation of all minorities (Herzfeld 1997). On the other, this model leads in fact to the radicalization of ethnicity: “the

logic of tolerance, which comes under such names as ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘cultural diversity’, may heighten the sense of otherness and arrogate the egalitarian prerequisites of democracy to the majority group” (Herzfeld 1997, 83, 166–7). In examining the Csangos’ case I aim to reverse this perspective and to bring to the fore an ethnicity without groups, as Rogers Brubaker has stirringly put it, which requires a sort of banal or informal nationalism.

The Csangos in a Historical Frame and in Frumoasa

The word *csángó* (Hungarian)/*ceangău* (Romanian) is used to define the vast majority of Roman Catholics from Eastern Romania. Although this term is employed in highly polemical ways, I will nonetheless use it throughout the article.⁶ I consider people from the settlements around Bacău and Roman towns where the Catholics do not speak the Csango dialect—and do not even remember it being spoken in the past—also to be Csangos. In this regard I hold that the vast majority of the Roman Catholic population living in Eastern Romania today can trace their presence there to a process of uninterrupted migration from Eastern Transylvania. There is, therefore, at least one reason to consider the Roman Catholic people from Eastern Romania as a separate group, a population that is quite different, on the one hand, from the region’s Orthodox majority but also, on the other hand, from Eastern Transylvania’s Hungarian majority.⁷ According to the 2011 census, the Roman Catholic population in Eastern Romania numbers 240,000 individuals, only a small percentage of residents in this region of Romania.

The matter of the language or languages spoken by Csangos fuels nationalistic and radical discourses alike. The area from which the Csangos came—Eastern Transylvania—and the language most Csangos speak—Romanian—are cited in the service of opposing interpretations. Romanian authors (Mărtinaş 1985) claim Csangos to be Romanians who lost their ethnic identity and became Hungarian speakers but then, via their migration to Eastern Romania, succeeded in recovering their previous identity. Hungarian scholars, for their part, assert that Csangos are simply Hungarians who settled in Eastern Romania and became “Romanianised” (Stan and Weber 1997; Tanczos 2001). While

⁶ According to the data of the 2011 census, the overwhelming majority of Csangos declared themselves to be ethnically Romanian. The *csángó/ceangău* term is found in Transylvania and Bukovina (von Klimstein 2006), in Dobroudja as well, and in a village near Constanța (personal information; during the interwar period they were colonized there by the Romanian state).

⁷ Chris R. Davis emphasizes this double subordination (Romanian *and* Hungarian), in ascribing their collective Csangos ethnicity; he argues that the concept of “subculture” is more accurate with regard to their identity (Davis 2019).

conducting fieldwork, I have indeed heard Csangos who spoke an archaic form of Hungarian that had absorbed many Romanian words. Moreover, they were not reluctant to tell me, an ethnic Romanian, that this is indeed their mother tongue. According to the most optimistic evaluation this dialect is spoken, with varying degrees of proficiency, by one quarter of the Csango population (Tánczos 2001). In absolute terms the number of speakers of this dialect dropped to 48,000 after 2000 (Tánczos 2012, 2018).

Still, this sort of scholarly discussion does not account for the Csangos' own views. Scholars engaging in debates about Csango ethnicity redefine the historical and social conditions that framed their appearance in Eastern Romania. These conditions became highly relevant in the middle of the nineteenth century, when deep social and economic changes occurred in both the Habsburg Empire, to which Eastern Transylvania then belonged, and the Moldova Principality.⁸ In Eastern Transylvania, for instance, agrarian reform as well as the systemization of the rural landscape changed the social status of formerly dependent peasants, along with replacing the common law regarding land use with the modern French code. The effects on identity and ethnicity were even more profound. An excellent work by Sabin Opreanu about the Szeklerland notes that regulation of the Eastern Transylvanian mountain pastures had forced the herd breeders, mainly shepherds of Romanian ethnicity, to move out of the mountain valleys into the villages, made up mostly of Hungarians who were granted greater rights over the land. Thus there Romanians became marginalized and, little by little, lost their ethnic identity (Opreanu 1928).⁹

Economic forces effected this process of assimilation, with political, institutional, and state constraints playing but a minor role. At its core in fact was the transformation of the traditional identity of the local people, either Hungarian or Romanian, into a single modern political community, which took shape in line

8 The rapid increase of Catholics in Eastern Romania occurred in this period (Tánczos 2001). It is true indeed that the migratory movement began earlier, in the 1760s, after the Szeklers' opposition to enlistment in the Habsburg boundary regiments was crushed. For this uninterrupted movement of Catholics, cf. Văcaru (2010).

9 Opreanu's book is based on the doctoral dissertation in human geography he completed at the University of Paris. The chapters dealing with the 1850s Habsburg reforms in the Szeklers region are excellent. Yet there are sections in his book with racial classifications based on biological determinism (Opreanu 1928). In this regard, it has to be borne in mind that Opreanu was attracted to and ascribed to the bio-political nationalism fashionable at that time in Romania (Turda 2007, 2016). The foes of this issue are analyzed under the heading "inscribing the *Csangos*" (Cotoi 2013). In the same vein, Chris R. Davis argues that these racial assumptions were "unintended consequences" of the Hungarian state's plans to move the Csangos in Hungary in the context of interwar attempts to appropriate the Csangos by both the Hungarian and Romanian historiographies (Davis 2007, 2014).

with the national model. The Csangos found themselves in the same situation in Eastern Romania, which was then Moldova Principality. Unlike with Romanians from Eastern Transylvania, however, the issue of the Csangos was taken up by the Roman Catholic Church, which for centuries had exerted considerable influence in Moldova Principality. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the Church persuaded the political authorities to confer rights on Csangos, engaging in advocacy that became more insistent and manipulative during the nineteenth century (Chelaru 2005, 2008; Varga 2010). The Church had one definite interest: to protect its believers and increase their numbers, regardless of their ethnicity. But it was the Csangos who benefited most from the Church's protection. Furthermore, after the federal union of Moldova and Wallachia in 1859, the election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as prince in both provinces, and the transition in 1861 to a single government in Bucharest, a series of social and administrative reforms were instituted (Hitchins 2014). The agrarian reform of 1864 transformed the former landlords' leaseholders, including Moldavian Csangos, into small landowners. Moreover, as will be seen in the next section, Cuza's name comes up often in discussions with locals, Catholics and Orthodox alike, in Frumoasa.

In the interwar period, generally speaking, Csangos did not possess a collective visibility related specifically to their ethnicity, although in the 1930s around 40% of them spoke the Csango dialect (Tánczos 2002). In the early years of World War II there was, however, a failed effort to displace them from Moldova to Hungary as a group (Davis 2007). And in the socialist period Csangos were associated with a discrete ethnicity. There were a few attempts to teach Hungarian in the 1950s, which came to little despite having the sanction of the Bucharest government (Gábor 2002). Csangos, though, retained their specific identity. Industrialization in the 1960s, however, led to a steep upturn in mobility and an increase in social interactions that exerted an effect on traditional cultural practices. The vertiginous rise, for example, of "mixed marriages" between Catholic and Orthodox partners (Șerban 2004) spearheaded, as I will point out below in the case of Frumoasa, the boosting of cultural exchanges between the two groups.

A Village Where the Csangos Live

Frumoasa is a village with a population of about 3900. More than half of its residents are Roman Catholic/Csango, i.e. 2100. The rest are Orthodox Christians, including a Roma minority whose mother tongue is Romani but speak Romanian and possess a rudimentary knowledge of Hungarian. The village spans the Tazlău River. Its old center (*vatra*) stretches directly up to the right bank, toward the mountains along the small valleys of the Bigger Frumoasa and Little Frumoasa

rivers that are tributaries of the Tazlău. On the one hand, the Tazlău River does not serve as a symbolic landmark for the village because local people moved to its left bank relatively recently. On the other hand, although there is no clear boundary separating the village's upper and lower sides, there are older places such as those referred to as "pottery makers", where the population is mostly Orthodox, or the Mouth/Back of the Little Frumoasa Valley. These parts of the village were the earliest to be inhabited. The locations of the rest of the houses, the most numerous in the village, are indicated via non-descript terms such as "the village downward". Sometimes residents speak about parts of the village as being "on Tazlău" or "over the river".

The above information reveals much about daily cross-cultural life in the village. The shape of the human landscape bears marks of the social and political reforms carried out during the modernization period. The most effective of these measures was the land reform of 1864, which allowed villagers to move out of the older parts of the village and over the Tazlău. Religious affiliation played no role in determining where the villagers moved; mixed neighborhoods emerged. Cross-cultural practices—bilingualism, mixed marriages, common attendance at religious events—manifested themselves and were strengthened.

Field data illustrating cross-cultural life in the village were gathered according to the following categories: 1. oral history of the village's formation, with an emphasis on the origins of Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians; 2. performance of rituals, either *rites de passage* (birth, wedding, and death) or collective activities (pilgrimages, Patron feasts, All Saints' Day); 3. history of the village's modernization within the context of modernization carried out by the Romanian state from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards.

I do not invoke here the thorough theoretical literature related to oral and local history, but I should mention works of authors as Eric Hobsbawm and Homi Bhabha, which shed light on how common people "narrate their nation" (Bhabha 1994; Hobsbawm 1992). Extending the idea of banal/everyday/informal nationalism referred to in the section above, these categories of local culture show that the ideas of nation and national belonging have meanings here that differ from those of the "great" narratives propagated and developed by central political elites, and they reveal that local intercultural identities feed largely on these kinds of stories.

Cultural Complexity and Benign Ethnicity

The topic of local history reveals much about the cross-cultural complexity in Frumoasa. Far from being irrelevant to issues of identity and belonging, the

analysis of local history in this village reveals that its residents share a body of symbols and references and a common register of emotional significance.

The origin of the two larger groups in the village is not in doubt. All of the informants in my fieldwork stated that the Roman Catholics had come there from over the Carpathians,¹⁰ whereas the Orthodox Christians are natives. However, they recognize that over the mountains there are Orthodox Christians who speak Hungarian and who also crossed the mountains into Eastern Moldova.¹¹ Several Roman Catholics know the exact origin of the migration that accounts for their being in Frumoasa: Ciceu, today a small town in Eastern Transylvania. These villagers recall the details of the *Madéfalva* (Hungarian)/*Siculeni* (Romanian) battle from the beginning of the 1760s, in which the Szeklers were defeated by the Habsburg army.¹² In addition to this war, they mentioned catastrophic events such as famine and drought, as well as the migration. All these events are vivid in local memory. The ethnonym of Csango, for example, even if avoided by Catholics and Orthodox alike,¹³ is explained precisely through the prism of this traumatic past:

God forbid, a fire or something like this, the bells are ringing. I mean, there's an alarm, really. But, it would be said that at that time when they came to catch people for forced labor [*corvée*, S.Ş.], they would cry in Hungarian to '*csangotnok*', to ring the bell like hearing the bang (at church)¹⁴ [...] When the dead bell is ringing it's a rhythmic form. But when it's sounded for the alarm, it doesn't shoot rhythmically, the sound doesn't bind [...] And it is said that when those who hit the people entered those villages, the bell was ringing in this non-rhythmic form, and from there the name 'csango' comes. (N. M., male, Catholic, interview March 2002)

The original group of Roman Catholics increased due to a constant stream of individuals leaving Eastern Transylvania (though migration also occurred in the opposite direction; the Orthodox Christians in the village crossed over the

10 The people retained a "territorial" sense of place. For instance, L. D., male, Orthodox, used the term "Hungary" to refer to territories of Eastern Transylvania (interview conducted in February 2002).

11 V. Ţ., male, Orthodox, former teacher and director in the local school, provided the most complete version of this massive migration. It had taken place at the beginning of the 1710s, when the last great invasion of the Tartars reached the region. All the Frumoasa dwellers took refuge over the mountains in a village with a homonymous name. They stayed there for a couple of years after the Tartars were defeated and came back only due to the promises of the local landlord, who insisted they return. He leased them collective property, an arrangement that lasted until the 1864 land reform (interview conducted in February 2002).

12 The conflict was about the Szeklers' opposition to enrollment in the Habsburg boundary regiments/*Militärgrenze*, which was crushed.

13 In Frumoasa, as well as in Oituz, the other village of my fieldwork, the most frequent denominations for Csangos are *catolici*/Catholics, *unguri*/Hungarians, and *catolnici*/Catholnics, this latter with a supplementary "n" inserted into the word for Catholic.

14 *csengo*—sound, *csengő*—bell, Hungarian.

mountains, too, the people say). These details are consistent with other stories that, while related less frequently, nevertheless make a meaningful contribution to village history. These tales do not deny the Csangos' migration but state that this part of Eastern Romania is "one ancient Hungarian and Catholic land" (I. B., male, Catholic, interview March 2002).

Confessional belonging appears to account for the starkest contrast between Catholics and Orthodox Christians. The differences are truly rooted in the churches' power and authority over the social life of each confessional group. In addition, because the respective calendars of official feasts do not overlap and the religious spaces in the village (church buildings, cemeteries that are located near to churches) are separate, the people have scant opportunities to participate in collective rituals. For instance, pilgrimages are made only to the cemeteries, since there are no crossroads in the village. Still, under special circumstances such as a drought or a caterpillar invasion, the entire village, headed by Catholic and Orthodox priests, embarks on a pilgrimage to the Tazlău (N. M., male, Catholic, and C. I., male, Orthodox, interviews March 2002).

However, a sort of public space, secular but uncontested, has been established according to local tradition. This occurred largely because of the "politicization" of interpersonal relations from the interwar period onwards. During the interwar years "mass politicization", which was everywhere the first step in turning "common people" into citizens (Hobsbawm 1992; Schöpflin 1993; Weber 1976), brought the Catholics and the Orthodox onto the same side in Frumoasa. Sufficient Catholics, for example, enlisted in that era's most radical nationalist movement, the Legionary Movement. Moreover, a Catholic home provided the movement with its local seat or (in its own terminology) "nest". Such support can be explained by the villagers' perception that this extremist movement was on the side of the poor and oppressed, a commitment transcending any interethnic or interfaith division (N. M., male, Catholic, interview March 2002). This perception that local politics represented a means to express solidarity against government policy continued after World War II. The image of the Orthodox mayor Istrate, who managed in the face of the central government both to avoid both land collectivization in Frumoasa and to order the surrender of land for the construction of a new Catholic church, is positive among Catholics and Orthodox alike (I. M., male, Catholic, interview March 2002).

On the level of everyday life, even the change to the "Sunday dance" after World War II is telling. In the interwar period there were two spaces dedicated to this dance, one for each of the two confessional groups. Consequently, mixed marriages were scarce, and the social control exercised by churches and relatives powerful (Șerban 2004). Still, just after the end of the war the people decided to unify the two dances. There were pragmatic reasons for doing so, such as

defraying the cost of renting pubs and hiring Roma musicians from the village or securing permission from the Jewish entrepreneur who offered the pub to the Catholics for dancing. The Communist authorities also encouraged the unification, either by sending “students” to sing at the dances or by lending support to build a House of Culture.

In addition, other observances challenge the control of the churches. The people perform informal rituals in little collectivities, like neighborhoods or relatives’ circles. Most of these events are rites of passage: birth/baptism, wedding/marriage, death/funeral service. This development is a recent phenomenon. The increase in mixed marriages and the change in the rules relating to the choice of marriage godparents have brought the Orthodox Christians and the Catholics closer. Formerly powerful interdictions on the part of either church or family have lost their authority. In addition, this shift can be chalked up to a “rational choice” being made. As it is expected that a marriage will bring financial benefits, the main “guests”, the godparents, are chosen according to their capacity to bring more people to the wedding. Their influence will again be sought in the future whenever the new couple needs help in difficult situations. Either the godparents themselves or their associates are obliged to help the newlyweds. Certain other circumstances favor “rational choice” in the wedding decisions. An invitation to attend a wedding is based on rather limited criteria: friendship, proximity, former kin-relations (this latter group is called both by Orthodox Christians and Catholics *cumetrie*, meaning a sort of extended kinship). C. I., Orthodox, tells how he came to be *cumătru*, with N. M., a Catholic from Frumoasa, whom he had befriended as fellow commuters to work in the 1960s:

We got married the same day ... We got married, we baptized them ... they baptized us ... We were friends ... We had come to the *hora* [Sunday dance, S.Ș.], and we agreed to get married on the same day, and to the one who will be baptized to baptize one another ... We baptized their grandchildren as they didn’t have children. They baptized our children. Their grandchildren told us they had no neighbours at their wedding and Romanians came to make it a big wedding ... Here’s a niece ... It was 13 March this year at her wedding. Catholics, Orthodox, they didn’t differ at the wedding ... Look how many families she has.

The way weddings unfold is also similar for both denominations, which facilitates common participation. One interesting case is that of the Orthodox S.H., born in 1936 in the village, whose skills in conducting wedding parties has led him to be called to officiate at Catholics’ marriages. He had learned the Csango dialect easily from his Csango neighbors and can sing in it. His father knew the Csango dialect, as does his own son. Still, he is aware that this dialect differs from standard Hungarian:

I knew Hungarian, as a child ... we played with them, we wondered about each other, what's this, what's that in Hungarian, but not to perfection. I worked at Miercurea Ciuc.¹⁵ That's where they changed everything. Here he calls it *hajdogaro*, there he calls it *hajdozalomasnlo*¹⁶ at 'the station' ... here he calls it *zairoplano*,¹⁷ there he calls it *repulgep*¹⁸ [...]. They have also learned (Romanian) completely from us.

Funeral services also bring together individuals from both denominations. The criteria for participation are once again defined by the neighborhood and the aforementioned *cumetrie*. Some Catholics even deeply appreciate the symbols and feasts of Orthodox funerals. In fact, the Catholics adopted Orthodox symbols and artifacts that revolve around funerals. They ignore the priest's ban on giving *pomana*/alms, a core symbol in remembering the dead in Orthodox belief,¹⁹ and participate in Orthodox funerals. Sometimes this results in tangible "benefits". M.D., a Catholic woman born in 1935, spent almost 20 years working in southern Romania, in settlements without a Catholic church. However, she attended services at the Orthodox churches without being bothered by anyone. Coming back to Frumoasa, she once participated in the funeral of an Orthodox individual, a distant relative, and received one of the 24 "bridges" that are placed on the road between the deceased's house and the cemetery.²⁰ She kept it as a mark of respect for her dead relative. More broadly she believes that the Orthodox have fundamentally the same God as Catholics:

On the Day of the Dead they (Catholics) cook a little food for the dead ... This is going home ... At the cemetery, no. Only for the Orthodox ... Now for Catholics when someone dies, for forty days, every Sunday, you go to the cemetery, you pray and give alms. Now, before it was not ... Sir, we are praying to the One above, we do not have two.

Still, the topic that bridges the differences between the Catholics and Orthodox most dramatically and builds a common subjectivity is the memory of modernizing times. The memory of modernization policy dates from the 1864 land reform. Alexandru Ioan Cuza, then the ruler of the Romanian Principalities, occupies a central place in the local "picture" of how this reform was carried out. The people

¹⁵ This is a town in Eastern Transylvania, the capital of Harghita county. In Harghita 85% of its population is made up of ethnic Hungarians, the highest percentage in Romania.

¹⁶ *az állomásnál*—Hungarian.

¹⁷ *aeroplan*—Romanian (airplane).

¹⁸ *repülőgép*—Hungarian.

¹⁹ The word comes from Slavic and means "to remember". To give *pomana*/alms primarily involves inviting close relatives, friends, and neighbors to a ritual meal after the burial of a dead person. This takes place either immediately after or, periodically, up to 10 years after the burial.

²⁰ These "bridges" are pieces of linen and their use corresponds to the belief that the soul of the deceased has to pass 24 frontiers/"customs" stations in the journey to heaven.

clearly know that the Roma settlement on the village outskirts can be ascribed to Cuza. The Roma had previously been serfs at the Tazlău monastery and, because they were “hand workers” (*pălmași*), they received small parcels of land. In comparison, other people, Catholics and Orthodox Christians alike, were relatively well-off, meaning they had cattle to work the land, and thus, in accordance with the reform laws, they received more land. The Catholics were even more advantaged, as they had more “pairs of oxen” (this was the main criterion for awarding land to the peasants), whereas the Orthodox Christians were obliged to supplement their income by the making of pottery. This social stratification still lingers in local memory and is linked with “Cuza’s reform”. This reform exerted an even more complex impact on the spatial reconfiguration of the village. The people received land in the “field” across the Tazlău River, and they built their houses there. Thus the village center changed. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the new locations spread regardless of denominational affiliation. Melting-pot neighborhoods were born. Mixed marriages increased and languages intermingled.

The topic of land reform is remembered in various ways when people talk about their cross-cultural life. Special laws stipulated that former soldiers who had served in the Romanian army in the World Wars should receive land. “Forced” cohabitation ensued once again. For instance, the Orthodox Christians received land in the Valley of Little Frumoasa River, an area previously populated only by Catholics; one newly settled village, Vadul Tazlăului, 5 km from Frumoasa, was established on the fields where villagers from Frumoasa had had seasonal housing, living there during the summer harvesting. Local oral histories revolve around a few other topics, but these subjects are not dwelled upon as much and lack the emotional intensity directed toward the land issues. The informants addressed matters such as the interwar political elections, the deportation of Jews at the end of the World War II, or the Communist regime’s attempts to establish collective farms.

The ethnographic route taken in this section shows that the Csangos’ collective identity, without being fully informed by “cultural complexity”, is based on an expressive culture. Following Fredrik Barth, this culture is “expressive” in at least two ways. First, individuals move beyond the symbolic boundaries of their own ethnicity, as we find in the rich intercultural interactions of the Csangos. Second, the rituals of this expressive culture constitute the sites of collectively chosen kindred identities, as I have tried to suggest in my discussion of funeral rites. Groups build ethnical boundaries—and this is the core issue to keep in mind—in relation to the intimate and “familiar” rather than to some “strange” otherness, and the foundation upon which an individual changes ethnicity is the interplay of ascription and self-ascription (Barth 1994, 13).

The Csangos as “Hidden Minority”

In his masters’ work completed in 1996, James A. Kapaló argues that the concept of “national minority” cannot be applied to the Csangos, and, drawing inspiration from Anthony D. Smith (1986), opts to characterize them via the concept of “local ethnies” instead. Assessing the arguments for defining Csango identity as either Romanian or Hungarian, Kapaló rejects both points of view (Kapaló 1996). Referring to Barth’s theory of ethnic boundaries (Barth 1998, original 1969), he states that the Csangos possess a distinct and separate culture with which to define themselves. Nonetheless, their way they define their identity is not through the assertion of a unified, definite set of traits, but rather via the assertion of what their identity is *not*, set in contrast with the identity markers of the other groups among whom they live. This self-identification schema suggests that Csangos consider their ethnicity to be a form of social stigmatization, very much as Lapons do in Norway. In this latter respect, Kapaló quotes tellingly from Harald Eidheim’s (1998) article on Lapon identity in Barth’s edited volume *Ethnic Boundaries* (Barth 1998). The Csangos’ negative commitment to their own identity is the main impediment to the global adoption (i.e., outside the local context) of Csango identity thus defined. In addition, traditional solidarities still hold, strengthened by an “unbelievable affection” for the Catholic Church.

Kapaló’s arguments are excellent insofar as he suggests extending the approach to other cultural minorities whose sense of ethnicity still awaits research. In the last paragraph of his thesis he states:

A term to define such minority groups as the Moldavian *Csángós*, the Arvanites, Vlachs or Slav Macedonians of Greece, all of which have an ‘ethnic’ and or ‘linguistic’ component yet lack a ‘national’ one, could be sought, one which would allow them the autonomy of expression of identity, free from the predatory nationalism of the nation states in which they find themselves (Kapaló 1996).

One concept that can broaden Kapaló’s conclusions is that of “hidden minority”. With regard to the Csangos, Ferenc Csörtan explores this perspective in an article published in a volume about cultural minorities from Southeastern Europe (Csörtan 2004). The theoretical frame is not based on the Csangos’ case alone. Christian Promitzer, whose article opens the volume and sets out its theoretical perspective, extracts the concept of “hidden minority” from the legacy of fragmented modernization affecting Southeastern European nations.²¹ He explains that the existence of hidden minorities is due to certain enduring traces of this legacy: the “silent”

21 Gale Stokes finely highlights the unequal pace of modernization with regard to the social segments in interwar Romania. This phenomenon spawned deep frustration among cultural elites,

marginalization of these minorities, their resistance rooted not in open defiance but in their preservation of local traditions, and their ambiguous refusal to openly manifest a single clear identity, choosing instead a multifaceted identity set in contrast with those of other ethnicities (Promitzer 2004, 2009).

Other scholars concur that the modernization of the Southeast European nations gave rise to these minorities. They claim, for instance, that such modernization was driven in these countries by a desire to emulate Western Europe, instead of concentrating on addressing the issues of their own rural societies and keeping faith with their “rusticity” (Creed and Ching 1997). In this sense, the power of modern institutions did not penetrate the fundamental layers of society.

A lack of institutions, practices, and reflections pertaining to the nation-state in a modern, Western sense is linked not only, in Southeast European countries, with the matter of groups with hidden minorities. The core player in such countries’ modernization was the state, but it was invariably a weak or “captured” state (van Meurs and Mungiu-Pippidi 2010). This caused the colonization of political institutions and power nodes aggregated in the country’s capital by networks representing interest groups or by non-homogenous elites, whose differences were either regional or manifested different political competences. No less important was the influence of the international balance of power. In many cases, decisions strictly related to domestic policy have been determined by pressure or interference on behalf of certain “big powers” (Jowitt 1978). Thus, modernization programs were transformed into “modern façade[s]” (Jowitt 1978). The decoupling of modernizing policies from the real conditions of the country, which in some societies were largely made up of “citizens-peasants” (Mungiu-Pippidi 2010), caused the persistence of certain identities grounded in traditional solidarities.

The people sharing a “hidden” minority identity have exceeded the boundaries of the ethnicities “consecrated” by national modernization, at least in Southeastern Europe, for over a century. In this sense, these hidden minorities might be seen as the most elaborated model of resistance to this kind of national modernization. Furthermore, such communities have persisted by reinforcing their “rusticity”. “Small is beautiful”, writes Christian Promitzer regarding the concept of hidden minorities (Promitzer 2009). Csangos embody this characterization perfectly.

Conclusions

In aiming to accurately understand Csango identity, it must be said that the concept of multiculturalism promises much but delivers little. In this regard at least two conclusions can be made. First, the intercultural content of Csango collective identity is noteworthy. To fully understand its importance requires

foregrounding aspects that encourage and preserve such models as manifestations of “expressive culture”. Limiting the collective identity of Csangos to the spoken language amputates Csango social life, so to speak, from the much richer context of everyday culture. And, conversely, an emphasis on intercultural context, both locally and in daily life, would be more beneficial than the drawing of borders for the preservation of collective identities.

Second, the cultural expressivity of Csango identity sheds light on how intricate the modernization of Romania, and by extension other states in Southeastern Europe, actually is. The model of the homogeneous political nation, adopted by all regional states after the collapse of the two great empires that had for centuries dominated this part of Europe, the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, represents a static concept of culture. However, a critical reflection on the cultural expressivity of collective identities such as the Csangos’, formed in multiple and overlapping social and historical contexts, suggests something about the development process itself as it has transpired in Southeastern Europe. Therefore, the subject concerns not some linear, gradual process involving the accommodation of political institutions and regimes but rather an analysis of modernization proceeding at differing scales.

The concept of a “hidden minority” may enable the Csangos to adopt alternative ways of preserving their cohesion and to defend against assimilation. Above, I have sought to argue that this culture represents something shared, complex, and intimate—rather than something freestanding, homogenous, and clear-cut in its boundaries.

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Appendix: List of Interviews

I. C., Catholic priest, born 1940.

V. Ț., male, Orthodox, born 1939, former director of the local school.

I. M., male, Catholic, born 1922, forest worker.

whose great expectations were not matched by the modest social and economic opportunities that emerged (Stokes 1991).

- N. M., male, Catholic, born 1925, taylor and landworker.
M. M., female, Catholic, born 1926, housewife.
S. H., male, Orthodox, born 1923, forestworker.
L. D., male, Orthodox, born 1927, landworker.
C. I., male, Orthodox, born 1925, carpenter.
E. I., female, Orthodox, born 1933, housewife.
Ș. M., male, Catholic, born 1923, landworker.
E. M., female, Catholic, born 1926, landworker.
N. C., male, Orthodox, born 1916, worker.
A. C., female, Orthodox, born 1923, housewife.
I. B., male, Catholic, born 1934, worker.
G. B., male, Catholic, born 1927, worker.
M. D., female, Catholic, born 1935, worker.

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Bionote

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