

LAURA IANCU

## **Magyarfalu in the 1980s: Reflections on My Childhood in a Csángó Village**

### ***Abstract***

In my paper I deal with questions connected to bilingualism and identity in a minority–majority setting in Moldavia, Romania. Through my childhood memories of Magyarfalu/Arini, my aim is to show how the given minority–majority circumstances both forced and helped the Hungarian-speaking children to learn about Hungarian or Csángó identity. The derogatory use of the term Csángó by outsiders, both Romanians and Hungarians, had a major influence on the Csángó children, so that they could not accept their Csángó identity with pride. However, the adult peasant community expressed their identity through everyday practices and passed them to their children as well. In my paper I also show how the Roman Catholic identity of Csángós dominated over the national one.

### 1. Introduction

I was born in 1978 in Magyarfalu/Arini, Romania, in a family of 6 children of Hungarian nationality and Roman Catholic religion. Magyarfalu is situated in the southeast part of the Moldavian region, which is inhabited by a Hungarian speaking ethnic group. I lived here until the age of 12.

In my childhood, the language of the school and church was Romanian in Magyarfalu, and the language of our everyday life was

Hungarian. We could read and write in the former, but only speak in the latter. Later I moved to the Transylvanian region of Romania into a town with Hungarian speaking majority (Csikszereda/Miercurea Ciuc) to continue my schooling. These circumstances greatly influenced my and other children's identity in my village.

In my paper my goal is to answer the question of how the given circumstances influenced the children's identity building: how did they become conscious about Hungarian and Csángó identity, how the Roman catholic identity influenced the national or ethnic identity, and how the adult peasants expressed their identity for the children. While looking for answers to these questions, I'll try to formulate my answers based on my memories.

The structure of the paper is the following. Before recalling my remembrances, I give a short overview on two genres in Hungarian ethnology, on peasant autobiography and sociography because my work is tightly placed into this context. My article is linked to the latter from the point of view of genre and methodology as well. In the next part I describe the population and the life in general in Magyarfalu. Next, I discuss how the conflicts caused by speaking Hungarian influenced the Hungarian identity. In the next part I show how we were determined by other Hungarians to be Csángós and Csángó speaking. In the following two parts I show how the everyday practices and holidays influenced our identity. Then I shortly describe the changes in our village in the last twenty years. Finally, I make conclusions, and a short summary in my home dialect in the end of the paper. (See picture 1 of a decorated street for a religious celebration.)



Picture 1. Street decorated with traditional textiles in Magyarfalu/Arini - awaiting the bishop's arrival for a confirmation celebration. Summer 2005.

Photo: Laura Iancu.

## 2. Hungarian peasant autobiography and sociography

In Hungarian ethnography the research of peasant autobiographies is a separate field. Influenced by literacy, the genre appeared at the end of the 19th century in the form of poems,<sup>1</sup> then prose (Hoppál & Küllös 1972: 284). They have been printed since the 1930s continuously.<sup>2</sup> They were a response to outside influence and ethnographers'

1. The primacy of the poetic form is not a surprise. Even the peasant popular poetry of the 19th century was connected to the appearance of more elaborated structural and aesthetic forms of language (Hoppál & Küllös 1972: 285).

2. A considerable part of the folk/peasant autobiographies are in the Ethnology Archive of Museum of Ethnography (Budapest).

encouragements, sometimes written to participate in calls.<sup>3</sup> Their most striking peculiarity in Hungarian oral, communal and folk culture was their unique depiction of one's own fate. From the perspective of content and structure, they all comply with the rules of memoir or autobiography so well-known in literature. A critical difference between the two types is a stylistic and linguistic characteristic: the peasant autobiographies are composed according to the rules of colloquial speech. They came to be appreciated first by historians and agrarians, however, they contain a tremendous amount of irreplaceable information for Hungarian ethnography, too.<sup>4</sup>

The authors of the peasant autobiographies continued their peasant lifestyle, they did not become intellectuals or professional writers. Nevertheless, in Hungarian science we find a certain group of authors who are linked to the above mentioned phenomenon in several ways. They are sociographers, writers, publicists and sociologists, intellectuals who come from a peasant background and to whom the literature of sociography is linked.<sup>5</sup> It is very important to stress that sociographic literature is not closely related to ethnographical specialist literature, neither as a source, nor as a theoretical or sociological thesis.

The question of sociography is very diversified.<sup>6</sup> One of the most famous Hungarian sociographers, Péter Cseke, defines sociography in the following words: "even though sociography focuses on the exploration of objective real phenomena and processes, it emphasizes their sentimental, empathetic display, thus stepping across its own limits.

3. In this way, the autobiographies published in 1974 in a representative book were based on ethnographers' calls for participation (Hoppál & Küllös & Manga 1974).

4. The majority of authors write their personal, family stories "at the end of the life", looking back, starting with the childhood and in a chronological order. In these descriptions we find very important data connecting with the lifestyle (food culture, dress, farming, building operations, habits, holidays and weekdays, world view etc.) of the 19–20. Century Hungarian peasantry (Hoppál & Küllös 1972: 286; Küllös 1981: 186–187).

5. Writer Gyula Illyés for example was a sociographer like this. He wrote a book on the poor people of the Hungarian plains. His contemporary, the poet Mihály Babits writes about his sociography the following: "The Hungarian puszta may be known only by the child of the plains. But this knowledge may turn into conscious only if the child left the plains, rises above it (...) A poet was needed for this. The dry statistical or sociological data would leave us in darkness" (Babits 1978: 327–335).

6. For the early story of the Hungarian sociography and the methodological criticisms concerning the genre of the sociography see Némedi 1984.

It centres on the subjective and intuitive display of all connections between the phenomena of social reality" (Cseke 2002: 12; 2008: 5). Most social researchers and ethnographers criticize sociography because of its sentimentalism and subjectivity, its factual errors, and its lack of methodological foundation (Kósa 2002: 60–61).

Hungarian sociography as a genre developed during the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> Sociography as such – even though its cultivators were highly educated individuals of peasant origins<sup>8</sup> – did not integrate into either ethnography or sociology or literature.<sup>9</sup> It has been and remains the genre of social clashes (Cseke 2002: 18), no matter if it approached the subject from a literary, journalistic or scientific style (Cseke 2008: 36). Its topics have been extremely varied: the initial social peasant descriptions were complemented by the discussion of the relation of some of the problems of certain social layers, minorities or ethnicities.<sup>10</sup>

An author who brings to light a certain piece of knowledge that he feels he must publish is a sociographer. He notices connections between the processes of everyday life that would avoid the eyes of those living it. He is able to word his recognitions more sensitively than the sociologist and thus he "can project the human content and meaning of our sifting reality" (Cseke 2008: 36). Its effect on forming public and social opinion lies exactly in this. A methodological and practical principle in sociography states that like an insider ethnographer, the sociographer must also approach his newly explored facts as an outsider, objectively, however, his opinion is influenced by both the outer reality as well as the inner reality of his explored world "with which he completely identifies in order to get to know it" (Cseke 2002: 30). The sociographical methodology is defined as such, by both inner and outer opinions.

7. At the same time, some of the 20th century taboos about Hungarian society were written only after the 1989 transformation of regime.

8. For example: Gyula Illyés (1902–1983) is a peasant's, a shepherd family's child, and one of the most important poets of the Hungarian literature of 20th century; Erdei Ferenc (1910–1971) is a peasant's child, and a famous, influential jurist etc.

9. László Kósa examined the contact between the ethnography and the sociography literature (and the village-exploration movement) (Kósa 2002: 57–66).

10. The historicism of the genre is expressed in the titles of the publications as well. Some recurring concepts, keywords: "prison report book", "confines land", "underpasses people, a library's or a school's sociography etc.

We find peasant autobiographies (Forrai 1994) and sociographies (Beke 1988) among Moldavian Hungarians as well. Although I am Moldavian Hungarian, I have never written an autobiography nor a sociography, however, I have used my childhood memories indirectly in my ethnographic or literary works. The memory related below can be deemed as a piece of sociography, because the remembrances are looked upon from the eyes of an adult and ethnographer, too. I tried my best to choose events that can be evaluated from both the inside and outside. If I should place my work in the modern international field, it would be analytic autoethnography in the sense used by Anderson (2006); however, pieces of autoethnography what Anderson calls evocative or emotional autoethnography also can be found in my writing.

### 3. Population and life in Magyarfalú/Arini in the 1980s

I spent my childhood in Magyarfalú in the 1980s. What did Magyarfalú look like between the years 1980 and 1990? It would be hard to tell the exact number of the population of Magyarfalú, since the majority of men able to work (fathers and sons over the age of 16) were working in either one of the industrial cities of the country or on cooperative farms in South-Romania. Men working in the nearest cities (Bacău, Adjud, Oneşti etc.) were able to visit their families once or twice a month, but those working in farther parts of the country could only come home 3–4 times a year or even more rarely. The other, smaller part of men able to work were working in the neighbouring Dealu Morii Collective Farm, which handled the land of the village population as well. This collective farm was the workplace of our mothers and of those youngsters who finished the 10th grade and were over 16.

When the boys turned 18, they had to take compulsory military service in a barrack of a city. Siblings and parents visited the young soldiers on the day of their taking of oath, which took place 3–4 months after their enlistment. For the children – including me as well – this was the first occasion of sitting in a car and going to a city. Of course,

there were children who already had this opportunity while going to hospital, or some others who had visited cities while on school excursions. The contemporary educational policy prescribed that elementary school pupils had to go on school excursions once a year to the neighbouring cities in order to visit some World War monuments.

Places for learning Romanian were the military service for men, the ethnically mixed cooperative farms for women and obviously, school for children. The population of Magyarfalú had become bilingual since the 1960s. While Hungarian was only used orally, which means it wasn't used as a written language; the latter (the Romanian) was used orally and for reading and writing as well. Romanian was the language of literacy, high culture in general, and of civilization; nevertheless Romanian at this time was not equivalent to mother tongue. In the 1980s these two languages were equally evaluated, Hungarian meant the inner coherency of the community, while Romanian helped the individual to get along in the outer world.

On a spring, summer or autumn weekday a visitor walking along the village would have seen only empty streets. Adults were working; old people were taking care of their grandchildren while working on their household farms; and children were at school in the mornings and herding animals (in officially permitted numbers) in the afternoons. Those households where the grandmother had died, the older brothers and sisters were babysitting and taking care of the 3–5-month-old babies. Sundays and holidays were somewhat different, because it was not always compulsory to work on these days. Mothers only had to go to work (in the collective farm or other places) on every second or third Sunday. But almost every person from Magyarfalú got a day off for important religious holidays (like Christmas or Easter) or the day of the church-ale/kermess fair, so that they could go home to the village. The result of this was that on these days the population of the village grew so much that people simply could not fit either into the church or the pub. On some of these church-ale days there were so many local people present in the village that those events are still talked about with great awe. Apart from these holidays, one could see such big crowds only on weddings or funerals.

## 4. Language and identity

### 4.1. I am Hungarian

In the 1980s (our) grandparents were “traditional csángó people” who were putting their grandchildren to sleep with religious folk songs and fairy tales. My grandmother who was the maid of the cantor/chorister was a so called precantor – which meant a certain privilege in the village – only knew how to say *Bună ziua!* in Romanian, that is “Good day”. On the other hand, she spoke a Roma language, because she had Roma friends in the near Roma village, which is about a “two-mountain-distance” (about 15 km) from the village. Her Roma friends did not speak Romanian either, so somehow they had to learn each other’s language to a certain level to be able to communicate. So when the postman brought my grandmother her pension, she thanked him in Roma by saying *Boda proste!*

Though at school or at church we were allowed to speak only in Romanian, we always talked in Hungarian in the family or on the streets. The way I learned that we are Hungarians and that our language is Hungarian was from our teachers and the priest who forbade us to use Hungarian in public or official places (state offices, church). They said: *În școală este interzisă limba maghiară!* “The use of Hungarian is strictly forbidden at school!” Sadly I can’t remember whether my grandmother spoke about Hungary, about the Hungarian nation, when she put me on her lap or not. But I clearly remember that we got detention from our teachers for letting out Hungarian words during classes. I can remember the priest, who was always ordering us in Romanian (though he spoke Hungarian as well), no matter where we were (but mostly at the church): *Vorbește românește!* “Speak Romanian!” The priest used the same (aggressive) devices to discipline us as the teachers did: smacking in the face, pulling the ears, putting us to public shame etc. In the presence of the priest at church we knelt down and were only allowed to pray, sing, or listen to the mass in Romanian. But as my later research revealed, people were always praying in their own mother tongue, silently, with their own words, if no one could hear them – and it is still so nowadays as well (Iancu 2013). We also know that in the 1980s and 90s some old people were only able to

confess in Hungarian, which means they told the prayers in Latin and told their sins in Hungarian. The local priest allowed them to do so, actually, he couldn’t do anything else but accept it, because old people couldn’t speak Romanian.

I also clearly remember that my grandmother used to vanish for some days, but she always came back. We kept asking her, where was she, what was she doing. She always said: I was to confess. When we asked her: Where did you confess? She said: *At a Hungarian priest!* She never told us where the Hungarian priest lived. Finally, I also remember that my grandmother told us: *We have to cringe. We have to do what we are told to, because we are strangers here.*

Another platform to reveal us being Hungarians were sports competitions between villages and interschool competitions in certain subjects. We had traditional competitions between the Hungarian Magyarfalú and the Romanian Gajcsána/Găiceana. Romanian pupils won all content area competitions. People believed that the Romanian children couldn’t accept that a *bozgor* (which is a pejorative word for Hungarian) might win a Romanian competition. But the sports competitions were almost always won by us, children from Magyarfalú, which was also not popular with the Romanian children. Since every competition was held in Gajcsána, the organizers had to see us off to the end of the village, because the defeated Romanian pupils were shouting various negative remarks about our nationality. Otherwise I don’t know of any open or radical ethnic conflicts between the two villages, but there obviously was a hidden mutual disengagement from each other on a personal level. Therefore we can assume it was not us (Csángós) who declared who we are. But it was the others who told us who we are.

In my childhood, all inhabitants except two teacher couples were Hungarian speaking Hungarians in our village, Magyarfalú. Therefore signifying the identity of the people in the village was not reasonable: all of us knew who we are; it was self evident for us, a fact that did not need further discussion among us.

Expressing our ethnic difference in external contexts was not intentional; it was, rather unavoidable for two reasons. First, the Hungarian-speaking inhabitants could not speak the Romanian language or if they could, they spoke it with mistakes and with a “strange”

accent. This fact made the linguistic and ethnic background immediately visible when our people started to speak to Romanian speaking persons. The other telltale mark of difference was the behavior and the use of catholic symbols in front of religious buildings and objects in contrast to orthodox people, for example, the difference in making the sign of the cross. They were only small signs of the identity expressed on the surface, but still very revealing ones. In addition, wearing folk costumes, which at least before the Second World War was a regular practice in the area, also revealed immediately which ethnic group a certain person belongs to.

These patterns, settings and hierarchies were visible also for children. However, ethnic conflicts hardly occurred because the different communities lived side by side without tight connections: catholic communities lived an “inside life”, that is, outside contacts were made only with other catholic Csángó villages. These were the possibilities for them – and it was natural for them.

These circumstances actually strengthened the Hungarian identity of the people inasmuch as the appearance or the talk of the Hungarian Catholics identified them ethnically and religiously as other, as strange, from their own perspective as well as that of the majority society.

#### 4.2. I am Csángó

As I have mentioned before, I was brought up in Magyarfalu as being Hungarian. But in 1991 something important happened. Students starting the seventh grade could enter or follow education in Hungarian, in a Hungarian speaking school in Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc, for free. (Csíkszereda is located on the Western part of the Carpathian Mountains, in the east part of Transylvania in Romania, where the Hungarian *Székely* ‘Sekler’ minority forms the majority of the population – not as in our area where the majority are Romanian speaking people.) This program was directed by a Roman Catholic priest, Lajos György-Deák from Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc. He commissioned a lady from Magyarfalu, Ágnes Bogdán, to speak to the parents, and provide them as much information as needed about this program. My parents were thinking till the last moments whether to let me go away

or not. We arrived at the bus station in the very last moment, the engine of the bus, which had come to carry us to Szekler Land, had already been started. This way we started school in the Attila József Elementary School in Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc in the fall of 1991. There were many new things, many “firsts” for me there, such as the train, and the Hungarian alphabet. But something else was an even bigger surprise for me there. This was the very first time in my life that I heard the word *Csángó*; that was the first time when I heard that I, and all those thirty children who had come to study in Csíkszereda, we were all Csángós. Therefore this name was not given to us by the Romanians, we got it from the Transylvanian Hungarian Székely people. We accepted the Csángó name, just as we did with the Hungarian back in Magyarfalu. We had no capacities to “investigate” the issues of Csángó or Hungarian, or even Csángó-Hungarian. Who exactly are we? We had to work in Magyarfalu and we had to study in Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc, this was the only clear thought in our life. We looked with awe upon those researchers sitting at their tables trying to declare “who we are”. We admired the researchers visiting us; we were happy if they stroked our head or smiled at us.

We learned in Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc that we are Csángós, but somehow none of us felt ourselves like “I am a Csángó”. We, children from Magyarfalu said Csángó for those who came from Lábnyik/Vladnic, those from Lábnyik/Vladnic called Csángó the pupils from Diószén/Gioseni, pupils from Diószén/Gioseni called children from Lujzikalagor/Lujzi-Călugăra Csángó.

Why didn’t we know the word Csángó before and why did we consider it odd? Maybe it was because we did not have exact information about the history of our ethnic group. Or more precisely, we knew something about it but what we knew was not the official history but rather what we gleaned from hearsay. What our parents and grandparents told us did not appear in official schoolbooks but only in oral tradition, in the people’s memory. These memories did not contain an exact history of the Csángós. Our teachers, indeed, spoke about why we were Csángós and we were curious and attracted to the notion of our ‘Csángóness’; however, this caused us uneasiness about our identity. Now, rather than a feeling of inferiority we began to struggle with a sort of disability, since our Csángóness was described first of all by

our special dialect (archaic, unique pronunciations, and lots of Romanian loanwords) which made it different from the Székely dialect – old-fashioned sounding and out of date. However, our teachers’ true-hearted enthusiasm for our language and culture alleviated our uneasy feelings but did not solve the problem, it rather retarded and made more difficult the process of the crystallization of a self identity.<sup>11</sup>

For us, it was Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc where we first met Csángó dialects from Moldva/Moldavia that were different from ours. We were surprised to encounter these dialect differences. I remember what fun and arguments we had about certain words and beliefs. Since the number of students was growing with the years and pupils came from many villages, these jokes and arguments went on for years in the boarding school, which was called the “Csángó boarding school” in the city. For example in Diószén/Gioseni people called the egg *tsukmony* and the chicken *pisleny*, which are archaic, words, unknown for the majority of people in the Hungarian language. Because of this, in our eye, their “old-fashioned” language was shameful. We, children from Magyarfalu/Arini, were those who used the “right” words (egg: *tojás*, chicken: *csirke*) - words that are used in today’s Hungarian vernacular language. In our opinion, children (also their culture and language) from Diószén/Gioseni ended on the bottom of the hierarchy. Since we were in the Hungarian linguistic field, the winning teams were the ones whose language was closer to the language used in Csíkszereda/Miercurea Ciuc. We, the somewhat Székely-like dialect-speaking children from Magyarfalu were shining stars among the children, along the criteria mentioned above. But this honour didn’t reach beyond the boundaries of our ‘Csángó’ group. Outside our own group, it was quite the opposite; the most archaic dialects were considered the most interesting for the outer world or for the researchers. These language games made it clear to me that although we were all called Csángós, we didn’t share many things in common, or to be most precise: there were some differences as well. I had already

11. Up to this day, I cannot identify myself with the expression Csángó, in spite of the fact that based on the ethnographic and linguistic research I have read, I am able to understand the distinction that exists between the scientific definitions and everyday understandings of phenomena.

known the names of other Csángó villages because my parents, grandparents and neighbours were regular visitors of the church-ale days in other Catholic villages, and pilgrims came to our Saint Steven church day too. As a child I knew that I had (Hungarian and Catholic) relatives in Ploszkocény/Ploscuțeni and Szászcut/Sascut; that the pottery was sold by Gorzafalva/Grozești people; that most people came from Lábnyik/Vladnic to the church-ale day, and that our priest was of Hungarian origin, but I had no information about how many Hungarians lived in Moldva/Moldavia and where, or how the Catholics came to live in Moldva/Moldavia at all. But even as a ten-year-old child it was perfectly clear for me that Catholics were considered strangers in this land. And I also knew who the person in the village was, who could tell the history of the village; who could tell the nicest and best tales and legends, which we simply called “speeches”; who the person was who knew how God created the world and what happened to people when they die etc. An average person did not have such knowledge. An average person only knew who those people were who possessed this knowledge.

Many Moldavian Hungarian peasant communities were formed via migration from Transylvania, especially from *Székelyföld* ‘Seklerland’ and lived as ethnic and religious minorities in their new place. As a result, a type of ‘newcomer’ identity formed, a fact, which also affected the practice of minority rights. This condition led to two types of stances among the community members: internally consistent demands for minority rights, or in the face of opposition, a complete passivity.

The most important consequence of the fact that migrants to these communities did not move at the same time, from the same place or for the same reason, was that they did not create compact, united communities. People moving from Transylvania to Moldavia strengthened the Moldavian Csángó communities in number, however, they also strengthened the feeling expressed by local people in the following words: “we are Hungarians of all kinds here, in Moldavia”<sup>12</sup>. Among

12. The Hungarian “of all kinds” here does not mean in a racial or ethnic sense but in a cultural one, that is, the Hungarians arrived from different parts of Transylvania (Háromszék/Trei Scaune, Gyergyó/Gherogheni, Csik/Ciuc etc.) to Moldavia.

the Hungarians of all kinds, the common denominators were the Hungarian language and the Roman Catholic religion.

The circumstances described above could explain why the folklore tradition (especially the historic tales of origin) in some villages is rich while in others it is very poor. This heterogeneity of knowledge of history and sense of historical origins explains why the uncertainty and insecurity of both ethnic and national identity, as well as the fact that the Moldavian communities, which are quite long distance from each other, did not develop tighter connections. For such tighter connections, an intelligentsia of their own, which the peasant communities did not have, would have been necessary.

## 5. Among us

### 5.1. A day in the life of a child

What was the day of a 7–9 year old child like in the 1980s in Magyarfalú? There are four answers for this question depending on what season we choose. Let us choose an autumn day. Until we reached the last days of harvest, an autumn day looked like the following. My mother and grandmother woke us, older children at about 4 o'clock in the morning to work for 2 or 3 hours on our family land. My mother started work in the collective farm at 8 o'clock and so did school begin for me at 8 o'clock too. Sometimes we went home before school and work; sometimes we went straight from the field. In the longest break between classes I would rush home to feed my two younger brothers, give water to the animals, or just check on my old grandmother. At about noon or 1 o'clock school finished, I went home, changed my clothes, had lunch, checked on the animals, and drove the cattle to the pasture. Every village part had its own pasture; our street had it too. More than 10 children gathered there these afternoons; we were playing and watching the cattle. We knew a lot of games, were playing the flute, singing, dancing, gathering berries and other edible wild things, catching birds, chasing/scaring wild animals. We had a wonderful, carefree time. We had no watches, but read the time by the movement of the sun. And there was one rule: we had to herd the

cattle home by the sound of the evensong. My mother arrived home at about 6–7 o'clock from the collective farm, and sometimes we had to go to the field (or somewhere else) to carry something home with the cart. Moreover, I had to arrive home by the time my mother got home too. If mother didn't need my help, I usually helped my grandmother and my older sister at home. If I was alone at home I had to make dinner. When everyone arrived home we had dinner and I had to do my homework. If I needed a writing table, I turned over a little stool, put a fur coat and a pillow on it and sat on it. I pulled up another stool and used it as a table. I put my notebook on it and started to write my homework. If I had to copy from the book, I usually put the book on the floor. If I had to learn or memorize something, I did it before sleep as well. Before sleep the evening prayer was due, we said it alone, for ourselves, silently. We said the basic prayers of the Roman Catholic Church: Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, and Prayer to the Guardian Angel, the Ten Commandments of God, and the Five Commandments of the Church. If we didn't prepare for the next day's lessons or we forgot to say our prayers, we got punishment from our parents, especially our father. Sometimes we had to kneel with bare knees on corn or wheat seed, or walk bare foot around the house in winter. If the children didn't prepare for the classes, teachers wrote home, threatened the parents that they would dismiss children from school or write a note to the office. There were many children who left school because they had to take care of their younger brothers, or couldn't learn Romanian, or did not have the right abilities for school.

In telling a common day of my childhood I tried to picture the daily rhythm of a child and a community, the way of living. In this way of living the substance of the identity was not tied to the ethnicity or the religion itself, but tied to the established and accepted norms and practices which strengthened the cohesion of the community and gave the frame of the socialization and integration of the new generation. Inside the community, the criterion for the identity was whether the individual accepted and followed the norms of the community. From the perspective of the child, the ethnic and religious elements were self-evident parts of our identity because these practices were homogenous in our peasant community.

## 5.2. Weekdays and holidays

There was a rather strict, unified, traditional world in my childhood in Magyarfalú. Not only human life had its turning points but also the year had them. Greater religious holidays (Christmas, Easter, Churchale Day) meant that we got new clothes and shoes, which we wore with care, because our younger brothers and sisters inherited these clothes later, for weekdays. A religious holiday meant that we could eat food we couldn't eat on any other days of the year. We ate cakes 3 times a year, on religious holidays, or at weddings. We only had stuffed chicken or scones, or nutcakes during the carnival period, on Shrove Tuesday. If one of my brothers came home from the military service it was also possible to eat scones if he was very keen to eat them. Naturally, the choice of food was not only influenced by traditions but by the availability of materials, such as sugar or flour.

We held fasts before greater religious holidays, and these were kept very seriously. During Lent we never listened to the radio or any music. Therefore when the Roma brass band arrived on the main square of the village on Easter day, the whole village was dancing till night. There were at least 20 brass players and they played continuously, without any pause.

We, children, went to the “little mass” or “children’s mass” every Sunday. From spring to autumn there were old people and children at these masses. Adults were working, so usually they could only arrive at the evening mass. There was no “main mass” during the day, because the priest usually went to the fields too to spend the day with those working in the fields. After the little mass the priest taught catechism to the children, if there was some religious event coming and the children had to prepare themselves for the big day, such as first confession, One Communion, or Confirmation. (See Picture 2 for a Palm Sunday celebration.)

We learned catechism in Romanian; the priest read the text out loud and we repeated it. We didn't use any books or notebooks; we learned everything from hearing by heart. If my mother didn't work on a Sunday, we washed the clothes and cleaned the house, contrary to the religious rules, which prohibited working on holy days. During the week we had to do these chores in the evenings.



Picture 2. Blessing of pussy willows on Palm Sunday at the church. Spring 2008.  
Photo: Laura Iancu.

As I already mentioned, the peasant communities in Moldavia were heterogenous but the (Hungarian) language and the catholic religion were established facts. The heterogenous villages were homogenized by the Roman Catholic Bishopry and priests from Jászvásár/Iași. The catholic institutions and religious ideology strengthened the catholic identity. Moreover, the 'victory' of the catholic identity over the ethnic one was not only the result of the radical meddling of the church, but also can be understood in light of the centuries old situation that the terms 'catholic' and 'Hungarian'<sup>13</sup> were synonyms in Moldavia since the Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> Political and religious decisions in the 20th century fused the two synonyms (Hungarian and catholic) tightly together,

13. Similarly, the orthodox and Romanian were also synonyms.

14. In a register (*Pachetul 1078, Documente Catolice*) in the National Archive in Iași, the Roman catholic churches and priests are often mentioned as *ungur* 'Hungarian', such as *biserica ungurească, preotul ungar*. For further information see Gegő 1838: 57; Perca 2012: 14; Tóth I. 2006: 16.

with the ethnic part withering away and religious one becoming dominant. If you ask Moldavian Catholics about their ethnic identity, the answer of many of them is: catholic.

### 5.3. What remained from my world?

The world I have written about is over now. The political and social movements in 1989 changed the local culture and local society completely. Men have crossed the border, work abroad, some even on other continents and are sending money home to their family in Magyarfalú. Family visits have become very rare; some only visit home for greater family events like weddings or funerals. (See picture 3 from the 1950s people in traditional cloths.)

Parents don't have 6–10 children, but 1 or 2. The previously taken land which was officially returned after the political changes in 1989, is only enough to fulfill the needs of the family. It is not enough for trade. Since the future in the village is very unsecure, parents do their best to pay for a good education for their children, send them to high school or further education, which means that these children are not likely to come back to the village. In fact, they won't. Strict, aggressive punishments have vanished from school or church education and from family discipline as well. Everything is available at the markets or supermarkets, people can buy whatever and whenever they like. When I was a child one had to travel to the city to buy a pair of socks, now it is available every Sunday on the market in the village, where almost everything is available. In 1987 there was only one television set in the village, now there are many sets in a family, broadcasting postmodern culture and life style. There were only 2 telephones in Magyarfalú when I was a child. There was one at the parish and one so-called "public telephone" which was operated by a family. Now one person can have even more than one mobile phone, change them weekly if they like.

Contrary to or, better put, alongside the changes, it is inevitable that the mentality of the community, the human behavior, the instinctual reflexes, and spontaneous manifestations still convey traces of the world I was brought up in.



Picture 3. People in traditional festive clothes of Magyarfalú/Arini in the 1950s. Unknown photographer.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to find elements, episodes and events from my memory which I consider important in building my identity, these elements are: mono- and bilingualism, church and school, the influence of the Moldavian Romanians and the Transylvanian Hungarians, etc. I tried to illustrate with different examples how the national (Hungarian) and the ethnic (Csángó) identity was influenced by the outsiders'

judgments on Catholics. In other words, the influence the opinions of majority (Romanian) people living around Csángós, as well as the public opinions of Hungarians had on the identity building of the catholic communities.

In the final part of the paper by remembering and reflecting on the everyday life and the holidays of my childhood I tried to show how the everyday local practices, traditions and values helped to strengthen the internal coherence of the community and how these practices reflect the community's self-identity.

## References

- Babits, Mihály 1937: Puszták népek. – *Nyugat* 6: 409–411.
- Babits, Mihály 1978: Illyés Gyula versben és prózában. – Babits Mihály, *Esszék, tanulmányok II.* Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 327–335.
- Bartha, Ákos 2010: Szociográfia a Horthy-korszakban. – *Debreceni Disputa* 8/4: 54–58.
- Beke, György 1988: *Csángó passió.* Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó.
- Cseke, Péter 2002: Az írói szociográfia elmélete és gyakorlata. – Beke György (ed.), *Egy műfaj válsága? Tanácskozás az írói szociográfia múltjáról és jövőjéről.* Budapest: Magyar Napló. 17–41.
- Cseke, Péter 2008: *A magyar szociográfia erdélyi műhelyei.* Budapest: Magyar Napló.
- Forrai, Ibolya 1994: *Csángók a XX. században: Élettörténetek.* Budapest: Néprajzi Múzeum.
- Gegő, Elek 1838: *A moldvai magyar telepekről.* Buda.
- Hoppál, Mihály & Küllös, Imola & Manga, János 1974: „Emlékül hagyom az unokáknak, dédunokáknak, lássák, hogyan éltünk, s hogy az ő életük szebb legyen egyszer...”: *önéletrások.* Budapest: Gondolat.
- Hoppál, Mihály & Küllös, Imola 1972: Parasztönéletrajzok – paraszti írásbeliség. – *Ethnographia* 2–3: 284–292.
- Iancu, Laura 2012: „Csak név szerint mondhatók katolikusoknak.” Adalékok a moldvai magyarok 19. századi identitásának rekonstruálásához. – Olga Szalay (ed.): *Tükröződések. Ünnepi tanulmánykötet Domokos Mária népzene kutató-zene-történész tiszteletére.* Budapest: L'Harmattan – Könyvpont Kiadó. 313–335.

- Iancu, Laura 2013: „Elrendítem Istennek”. A fohász. – *Etno-lore.* Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Néprajztudományi Intézet. 235–260.
- Küllös, Imola 1981: Parasztönéletrajz. *Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon V.* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. 186–187.
- Kósa, László 2002: A néprajztudomány és a falukutatás. – Pölöskei Ferenc (ed.), *A falukutatás fénykora.* Budapest: Országos Pedagógiai Könyvtár és Múzeum. 57–66.
- Némédi, Dénes 1984: *Dokumentumok 1934–1940. Programok, módszerek, kritikák.* Budapest: Népművelési Intézet.
- Perca, Mihai 2012: *Rădăcini. Despre maghiarii din Moldova (ceangăii).* Săbăoani.
- Tánczos, Vilmos 1997: Hányan vannak a moldvai csángók? – *Magyar Kisebbség.* 1–2: 370–390.
- Tóth István György 2006: A katolikus egyház szerepe a moldvai csángók etnikai identitásának kialakulásában a 17. században. – Diószegi László (ed.): *A moldvai csángók.* Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány. 11–17.

## Summary in Magyarfalú (Csángó) dialect

Magyarfaluba születtem, ezerkilencszázhetvennyolcban. Hatan vajunk tesvérek, magyarok vajunk, katólikok. A falum Moldovába van, Romániának a keleti részibe, magyarok élnek itt. Én es itt éltem, tizenkét esztendő vótam, mikor aztá elmentem innét. Mikor én gyermek vótam csak a támplómba s a z' iskolába beszéltünk olául, egyébképpüleg mük magyarul beszélgettünk egyik a másik között, az ográdába es, a z' úton es, a faluba es. Csitilni csak olául tudtunk, magyar írást nem tudtunk. Ahogy jőne, két nyelvet tudtunk, de egyiket sem úgy ismertük hogy kellett lenne.

Ebbe a z' írásomba arról írnék, hogy milyen vót a faluba a z' élet, mikor én gyermek vótam, nyocvanba, azokba a z' esztendőbe. Elmondom, mikor leltem ki, hogy magyar vajak s mikor halltam meg azt a szót, hogy csángó, mikor nekem azt monták, hogy csángó vajak. S aztá még leírom azt es, hogy milyen vót a gyermeknek az élete nyocvanba, egy őszi napon, úgy, ahogy nekem eszembe jut.