

LAURA IANCU &
MAGDOLNA KOVÁCS

Considering Insiders, Outsiders and In-between: Reflections on Fieldwork in Magyarfalu

Abstract

In this paper we present some problems and methods connected with Iancu's fieldwork. It is becoming more and more important to reveal the researchers' position to the researched community as their position can influence the results. In our paper, we discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider researcher. Making research on religion in Iancu's homeland, Magyarfalu/Arini¹, led the first author to find herself in a peculiar situation because the (general) anthropological research methods could not always be applied. The authors point out some of the experiences Iancu gathered during her research with examples. As an insider researcher Iancu had the possibility of participating in many different activities. Long-term fieldwork and knowing the local network helped in choosing the informants. Understanding the local dialect made a better understanding of the local culture. The insider position helps to get more background information both on religion and people's life connected to it. An insider, especially in connection with religious material, might also have more trust. However, trust, the authors reflect, maybe could or should be earned again and again in every different situation. A good knowledge of the local dialect and long-term fieldwork could get the position of the outsider researcher closer to the advantages of the insider's one.

1. Magyarfalu (Arini in Romanian) is a Hungarian (Csángó) village in East Romania.

1. Introduction

As an ethnographic researcher, I² have done research in several Moldavian Csángó villages but my most important site was my native village Magyarfalu. Because I have moved away from our village a long time ago, my job was to become a member of the village again. This was not always an easy task. The meetings, the talks and the data collection itself can be defined as a dialogue between two separate mentalities that share the same common past. I was not merely the researcher curious to hear about the community's life, faith, and experiences, but I was also an interviewee who had to share thoughts about her life outside the village and country (in Hungary), as well as about her faith and religion in general.

In anthropological research, the question of the *emic* and *etic* in (fieldwork) research has been discussed over the last 50 years. In the end of the 1980s, the discussions culminated in the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association and turned into a book edited by Thomas Headland, Kenneth Pike, and Marvin Harris (1990), *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*. In Chapter 1, Headland (1990) summarized the dialogue between the linguist Kenneth Pike and anthropologist Marvin Harris about the subject and he also gave a historical overview of the development of the concepts. *Emic* is associated or equated with insider (native) and *etic* with outsider (non-native) perspectives. The distinction is also expressed with other dichotomies such as subjective/objective (scientific), specific/universal, etc. Although Headland sees the problem of such a sharp juxtaposition himself, the title of the book, as one of the reviewers (Hickerson 1992) notices, just suggested that there is a problem to be addressed.

The dialogues about insider/outsider dichotomy have continued until now not only in anthropology but in all qualitative studies. The advantages of the insider are described in terms of better access, more trust from the native members but with possible home-blindness as the main disadvantage. In contrast, the outsider might not get as good access to native members or knowledge may be hidden from him/her

but the distance from the researched group might give more objectiveness. (For an overview of the topic, see e.g., in Dwyer & Buckle 2009; Eriksen 2006: 48, 54; Borsányi 1988: 57–58; Hoppál 1981: 23; Haller 2007: 142–143.)

However, the sharp juxtaposition seems to be turning into a compromise. For example, in qualitative research, Breen (2007) stays in neither position, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) seek for “The Space Between”. According to Dwyer & Buckle (2009: 61), a researcher may be closer either to the insider or the outsider position but she or he cannot be only in one of these positions. Borsányi (1988: 57–58) described the same as early as the 1980s: “the two [subjective/objective] viewpoints together make the facts that can be grasped from the inside be appreciated from the outside, too”. (See also Fél 1991: 5; Fél & Hofer 2010: 23–26.)

In this paper, we give examples, of what the native and non-native researchers can face while gathering religious material in Magyarfalu, based on the first author's experiences, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the two positions. We also would like to suggest some solutions on how the insider/outsider or the subjective/objective point of view can be brought closer to each other.

2. Participating and sticking out: long-term fieldwork

Data collection through a participating or direct contact and interaction approach is very common in anthropological research. The essence of the method, generally speaking, lies in getting to know the very detailed life of several social layers and their structures. The aim is often to distill general cultural concepts through a comparative analysis (Borsányi 1988: 53–59).

My aim with the research on Magyarfalu was to give a summary of the religion. Most of all, I was interested in faith, knowledge (traditions) and the system (culture) because I felt that behind all the details there was an entirely complete reality or world view. If one needs to capture the whole, the researcher must focus on the details, too. Clifford Geertz called this method a hermeneutic circle when the

2. In this article, the ‘I’ refers to Laura Iancu, the first author's ethnographic experiences conducting fieldwork in her own community. The second author, Magdolna Kovács, collaborated with Iancu in framing the article within the current literature.

researcher either looks at the whole or at the details. The researcher is able to gather information about the whole through the details and about the details through the whole as well. As such, the whole and the details complementarily explain each other. (Geertz 1994: 200–216.)

In the data collection during my recurring field research encompassing ten years I have resorted to the participating approach and to interviewing. The participating approach meant an active participation most of the time. I participated in liturgical and semi-liturgical events, as well as work processes such as building a house, gathering ripe fruit, hoeing, making hay, etc. During these times I assumed many roles: the role of an outsider, a woman, a family member, a relative, an intellectual, a researcher and a journalist, among others.

I was curious not only to see the villagers working and their ways of doing so, but to hear their thoughts and feelings during work. Although I was born in Magyarfalu and lived there in my childhood, this part of the culture was unknown to me, because I left the village at the age of 12 for school located in a different place, just at the time when the socializing and learning processes turn into conscious knowledge, and returned there only for school holidays. Later, living in Hungary, I mainly went to Magyarfalu for data collecting and for some family events. However, I have had continuous contacts in the village. In that sense, I feel I am much more insider than outsider but still – because I did not live in the village in my adulthood continuously – there are many aspects of the people's lives which remained unknown to me. Long-term stay and the participating method helped me to deepen my knowledge – as it also could help the outsider researcher.

When I visit Magyarfalu, I am going home. I was born here, my parents and two of my brothers live there. In the past fifteen years, no doubt, I only went home because I had to do some fieldwork there. Although I have a feeling that I am going home, my role has changed there since I started to collect ethnographic material. As a family member I am interested in what is happening in my family, participating in many events just as I did earlier but as an ethnographer, I don't take part in the daily chores/work of my family, as I used to do earlier. I mainly focus on my own tasks, on my field research. In the beginning, this attitude was really strange for my parents. They were happy to see me, however, they realized they did not gain anything with my

presence. We all know that life in farming villages mostly concentrates on keeping animals and agricultural work, and everybody has to participate in it, with the exception of the work of the local priest and teacher. On the same note, my job as a researcher was unknown as yet. In that sense, my work separated me from the common villagers' life and somehow put me slightly to the direction of the outsider position.

As far as I know, in Magyarfalu, both Hungarian or Romanian ethnographers were periodically present, but they only stayed in touch with a few families. The locals did not find out a lot about their intentions due to the fact that they were "strangers", and – what is more important – they stayed only for a little while.³ Long-term fieldwork occurred only in few cases in the past 2–3 years in Magyarfalu.

For me, doing long-term fieldwork in Magyarfalu is easier to arrange and not unusual because at the same time I am at home. However, at the beginning, my family and neighbors found it strange that I was staying for a long time, 4–5 months, not only 1–2 weeks as I used to before while, for example, being on holidays. But to satisfy their curiosity, usually it was enough to say "I had something to do at home". I did not mean to change my local status (Eriksen 2004: 42, 51; Fél 1991: 5; Komáromi 2009; Mátyus 2004: 369), or do anything that marked my being at home 'as a researcher'; I was at home in Magyarfalu, so it was not a question for me where to stay, when I did my fieldwork, of course, I stayed with my parents. A few times it happened to me that I had to stay and sleep at some relatives' house 3–4 km away, but this only happened occasionally, just because I was afraid to walk home alone with all the dogs running around freely on the streets. I don't know what would have happened if I had moved over to a relative or neighbors. I believe they all would have considered me "foolish" and talked about me all the time. In this case, the villagers would have 'studied' me and not vice versa. The mutual curiosity was always there, even though I stayed with my parents. I did not want to cause any such problems, because I did not return home to

3. Here, I'd like to add that, not much information reached me on the matter of the reception "stranger researchers" received, partly because, even though, their presence is or was unusual, it did not make the "news" in any way that led everybody to talk about them. Moreover, I didn't ask about such things, because these phenomena do not make up a major part of my research.

question the traditional behaviors of the inhabitants, but for a different reason.

3. Choosing the informants

As an insider, I know the village and its extended network of relatives. I could use this knowledge when choosing informants and combine my knowledge with the demand of research ethics, or the concept of objectivity of the ethnographer that I learned during my ethnographic studies. When choosing informants, I took into consideration the following three viewpoints: 1. the informants should be from every street or village-region; 2. from all major families or clans; and if possible, 3. from three age groups (young adults, middle-age and old-age). This way I could ensure that the collected data is reliable and represents the village well.

I usually met the women and older ladies in their homes, (but not only there), and the young men mostly in public spaces, like bars, wedding events, before or after mass or during bus rides into town etc. In the village everybody knows everybody and it is common to talk to each other on the street or at different events. Moreover, I know the unwritten ethical code of the village well. According to this code, and because I did not want to have any misunderstanding, I met men of my age (or men in general) in the company of their wife or other family members or in the above-mentioned public places. Meetings in public places were usually fruitful: public places were natural locations where people meet and where it is natural for others to join the discussion. Hence, during interviews, other might join in, who would also add useful points of clarity or additional information to the themes being discussed one-on-one, in a completely 'natural way' from the perspective of village interactions and gain some clarity on issues tied to themes that emerged in interviews with key informants at earlier occasions.

In my research – which focuses on the local religion of Magyarfalu – I meant to find out during these discussions whether people's religious faith or/and life has changed compared to their parents, in

what way it has changed, and if there was any disagreement resulting from this. (See Picture 1: religious symbols in a contemporary home).



Picture 1. Religious symbols in the interior of a home in Magyarfalu/Arini. Winter, 2007. Photo: Laura Iancu.

Due to the circumstances,⁴ unfortunately, I could not make (recorded) interviews with the local priest or teachers, but I talked with them several times when I was home. In terms of my choice of informants, I was able to gather the least information from the young adults, who only returned to Magyarfalu on major events, like Christmas and

4. In the *research of Csángós* (Hungarian group who lives in Moldavia in East-Romania) there is a remarkable difference about the origin and history, identity and language of Csángós, between Hungarian and Romanian theories. This situation makes the communication difficult, and complicates approaching scientific points of view. The local Roman Catholic Church causes additional complexity, since the Church is the most important integrating organization and institution in Moldavian Catholic villages – in other words, Csángó villages. All the priests and teachers are Romanian, with a few exceptions, and they represent the official or non-official Romanian views. On the other hand, I must remark, that in the local context, it was not 'proper' to involve the local intellectual layer in the research.

Easter. They were only at home for indeterminate periods of time, however they could be reached on social networks, like Facebook. Since the majority of these young adults had been living in Italy, Spain, Hungary, or in Romania's bigger towns (Bucharest, Braşov, Bacău) for the past ten-fifteen years, I think it would be best to examine their lifestyles and changes in those lifestyles in those surroundings. In the end, the selection of the informants was defined by the aim of the research. As far as possible, I talked to everyone about religion. I must underline, that my research focused on people's knowledge (Fél 1991: 5; Fél & Hofer 2010: 23–30), belief, and interpretation of religious phenomena. As such, the interviews and conversations with people were very important methods of collecting information. In order to find out more about people's ways of thinking and about their religious attitudes, I returned to those people who provided me with a lot of information.

There were cases, when the end of the conversation came about really quickly, after the interviewee had given me only yes-no answers or expressed disappointment because I had been prying into his/her private thoughts, as I asked them to speak about their most intimate possession, in other words about their faith. This task cannot be performed easily (not only in Magyarfalu), even by myself, who was much more insider than outsider in the village. It is characteristic in general, that a certain piece of information comes out in only a specific situation. Religion or faith is not necessarily knowledge – despite that fact we all may know about it; religious life is also a question of education and socialization. Believing in God and being familiar with the liturgy and church services (in many cases) are somehow different things. One is not a consequence of the other, at least not in all cases. For example, I met an old woman who could not really answer my questions about religion, though she confessed that she believes in God, in Saints, in afterlife, in resurrection etc. She also got confused when I asked her to say the prayer Our Father. Although she obviously had said it repeatedly at church, this unusual situation completely disoriented her. Because, in Magyarfalu, speaking with someone about religious thoughts, *praying* to someone not for communicating or being in touch with God etc., is a “strange”, an “artificial” situation. In the local context religion is *lifestyle* (not a *subject* to speak about),

faith is an inner thought, a spiritual *feeling* (not a *question* needing to be responded to), *praying* is a *dialog* between prayer and God (not a *text* needing to be uttered) etc. Each conversation was very enlightening for me; as a result, it was difficult to decide in what ways I might use the data, given my interest in writing for social science and literary studies.

4. Collecting ethnographic material in a multilingual community

When I traveled home to Magyarfalu, I always collected some (ethnographical) information. Even when I was around my family, I paid attention to their conversations especially if it was connected to religion. This does not mean that I purposefully lead each dialogue, nor that I participated in religious conversations only. During my fieldwork, participating in spontaneous discussions or being an active onlooker was an important information collection technique (Borsányi 1988: 53–59, 68).

I visited the informants without prior arrangements; however, many times the moment was not appropriate, so I had to return at a certain time proposed by them. A long-term stay made it possible to do so. The conversations recorded by dictaphone were usually taken in the courtyard or in the house of the interviewed. Every time, I had some little gifts, like chocolate for the kids. If there were no kids, I gave it to the hosts. The informants also always offered me something to drink, like brandy, water or wine, which is customary in Magyarfalu.

The language spoken in Magyarfalu is a local Hungarian dialect. The community is bilingual, so anyone who visits there, must speak both Romanian or Hungarian to be able to communicate with the inhabitants in all contexts. However, the Csángó dialect has its own special features in comparison to standard Hungarian. The dialect of Magyarfalu is close to the Székely/Secler, Transylvanian dialect (Kiss 2001: 307–308; Gálffy & Márton & Szabó T. 1981), so the researcher who speaks Hungarian is relatively in an easy situation here.

Still, Hungarian-speaking researchers might have some communication difficulties in interpretation of the local dialect in Csángó

communities. I am sure that both parties (the inhabitant and the researcher) need a little “training period” to be able to understand each other. Even if individual words are familiar to the researcher, the data collection may still run into linguistic obstacles: the locals’ speech is abundant with metaphors and a certain logical way of expression. I have not studied these linguistic phenomena deeply, I am only drawing consequences from the fact that I know both linguistic variants: the (standard) Hungarian language and also the local dialect, so I can grasp the very subtle, hidden differences between the two.

In the case of Romanian researchers, the situation is the same, but from a different perspective. The locals speak a little Romanian, however, if the researcher does not use simple words, it is highly possible that his questions will not come across, resulting in a range of answers that are not relevant. I have not dwelt upon this subject either, but I know the locals’ Romanian language knowledge, which I tried to measure during the Romanian language church service. I found out that, in many cases the inhabitants did not understand the meaning of the most important, frequent and very often repeated Romanian words that occur in the liturgy and in some well-known prayers, too.⁵

The peculiarity of religious discussions is that since the official religious church service is in Romanian, as are religious education classes, readings during the liturgy etc., the language code changes were very frequent, when or if we speak about thoughts connected with religiosity (Péntek 2002: 222; Sándor 1998: 1137; Tánzos 1995: 67). The answer to questions about religion is thought to be easier in the language people had studied these about. This of course is not a general widespread phenomena, and, we cannot talk about Magyarfalu in generalities from any perspective, even though we focus on only one subject, let’s say religion. For example, I also met many old people who expressed themselves, their thoughts and faith and ideas without inserting any Romanian words into their speech.

What are the consequences – regarding fieldwork – of the linguistic and identity peculiarities of Moldavian Hungarian culture? What kind of information can be told or transmitted, and in what way, by this specific Hungarian dialect?

5. For example: *tămăduitoare* – *gyógyító* (in Hungarian), ‘healing’.

Undoubtedly, the local dialect (of Magyarfalu) is an internally functional language that also incorporates local history. This dialect is not only a means of communication, it is a medium that contains experiences, preserves memories and helps to recall and organize them. Local people can understand each other by a few words. The dialect contains also “evident” information – not expressed by words but by tone etc. – that is difficult to understand by an external/stranger researcher. The object and the character of ethnographic research are determined mostly by the information that can be transmitted by the local dialect, including knowledge of the cultural practices. Let me illustrate my point by two examples in the following section. The first example is related to a Hungarian ethnographer and the other is based on experience with Romanian researchers.

5. The case of the outsider ethnographers

We are at the end of the 1990s. During the summer holiday a Hungarian ethnographer friend visited me in Magyarfalu, and asked me to take her around the village. She wanted to collect archaic folk prayers, so we visited primarily elderly people. We were in the house of an elderly woman when the following conversation took place:⁶

Hungarian ethnographer (HE): Good morning!

Informant (I): God bless you too!

HE: We would like to listen to some prayers, old prayers that you have learnt from the older generation, from your grandparents’ maybe.

I: Oh, I am very ill. My head would be torn apart if I have to recall them now!

HE: Then just tell me, do you turn your face to East when you pray?

A: No, I just pray to myself, silently.

HE: Don’t you turn toward the rising Sun when you pray in the morning?

I: It happens sometimes that I turn towards the Sun, but I don’t watch the Sun, I think of God.

6. I recall the story from my memory.

HE: Have you heard the prayer that starts like this: “Today is Holy Friday, Christ is going to suffer...”?

I: No, I have never heard of it.

HE: But you were taught how to pray in your childhood, weren't you?

I: Yes. My mother and my father and the chorister taught me to pray but we were very poor....

HE: You lived in poverty... You had a hard life? You had to share your bread, hadn't you?

I: Sometimes we ate, sometimes we didn't.

HE: Had you many brothers and sisters?

I: My mother gave birth to just sixteen. All of them died, I have buried them all. I am alone now.

HE: And how many children have you?

I: Me, I just have six... God didn't give me such a husband, who wanted to have more children.

The conversation was distracted by the word “poverty” which in Magyarfalú can express not only physical poverty but – as it is evident from the context – also spiritual poverty.

A few years later when I was a student of ethnography at the university, I heard that the mentioned woman was dying in bed at her home, so I decided to visit her. I knew that elderly ill people in our village preferred to have some dairy products to eat, so I asked my mother for some milk curds to give her. When I arrived at her house, the old woman was praying the Holy Rosary. “I don't want to disturb you!” – I said, and started to pray with her. After we finished the Rosary, the old woman continued praying, and if I remember well, she said about six archaic prayers.

This case teaches us many things. We would like to emphasize a few points. Firstly, the outsider ethnographer disregarded the natural local context of the prayer. For local people prayer is not a tradition like folklore data performed for a tape-recorder. For local people prayer is to create a sacred relationship with God. Not everybody would have a problem with saying a prayer out of the ordinary context, but for the above-mentioned elderly woman, it was a problem. She could not trust the ethnographer. Secondly, this distrust was increased by a sequence of misunderstandings caused by the peculiarities of the local dialect.

Thirdly, collecting religious material has to be made with extreme care. Certain religious materials are secret and open only or mainly for those who are “among us”, as already described in the fieldwork literature. (See, for example, Ruotsala 2001 about collecting material by native researcher among reindeer herders.) In this actual case it means that I, in contrast to the outsider ethnographer, was seen to have had the same religious upbringing, the same religious culture.

Further, research ethics⁷ – and also a common human ethic as well – demands that one respect not only a dying person but also every conversation partner even at the expense of the data collection.

The second example is a bit different and raises the role of a native mediator between the outsider ethnographer and native informants of the village. We are in 2007 in Magyarfalú. After the mass on Sunday, the priest told the people who had gathered in the church, that in a few days some (Romanian) researchers would arrive in the village from the institute of the episcopate in Iași/Jászvásár. They are going to investigate the history and traditions of the village. The priest informed the people from the altar that ten local women and men would be chosen, and when the researchers arrived, they would have to go to the parish and answer the researchers' questions.

The Romanian ethnographers did not speak the Csángó Hungarian dialect and the older villagers did not understand Romanian well. According to my information, the priest himself was present during this special “fieldwork”. He had to interpret for the people from Magyarfalú who had difficulties understanding the literary or urban Romanian language. The priest who was born in a Hungarian (Csángó) community in Moldavia and had served almost thirty years in Magyarfalú, knew the local dialect very well but most importantly he had a good understanding about the comprehension, mentality and way of thinking of the local people. Because of this, the priest played an important mediator role between the urban, élite, Romanian mother tongue researchers and the Hungarian mother tongue peasants and he made the fieldwork in reality possible. A good knowledge of the local dialect and a long-term stay might also make it possible for outsider researchers to get closer to the advantages of the insider position.

7. “To respect the well-being of humans and nonhuman primates” (Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association, AAA-Code 2009).

6. The insider researcher collecting religious material

At this point I would like to say a few words about my position, why is it different from the outsider researcher position. My experience is, that although the insider researcher does fieldwork in the present, their experiences are not only from the present but also steeped in the context, the historic background and dimensions, leading one to 'see' not only the partial but – in some way – also the whole (Geertz 1994: 200–216). Let me illustrate my statement with another fieldwork experience.

(The situation.) We are in 2007, on a hot summer day, late afternoon hours. I am in the courtyard of an elderly woman who has died. Vigil (mourning) is kept. I am participating in it. In the shade of the apple tree ten women in dark clothes, two teenage girls and me are sitting on a bench covered by a rag carpet. Women keeping the vigil are talking about the drought: "It is still not late to rain, the corn can cling if there is something to hold on to." "But we cannot tell God what to do" – says one of the mourners. Then the youngest of the women present (who was the youngest daughter of the deceased) turns to an older woman and asks her to carry the Crucifix, which is a one or two meter high wooden cross with Jesus Christ on it. It is the first in the procession of flags carried by the mourners during the burial ceremony. The woman answered that she could not take the task because of her serious foot illness. She would be happy just to be able walk up on the steep cemetery hill with her heavy body. The young woman accepted the answer with sympathy and offered some orange soda and sweet biscuits to the people present.

(The insider researcher.) Regarding this situation I remembered that a couple of years earlier, the same old woman was standing next to me also at a burial ceremony. Without asking anything, she told me spontaneously that the relatives of the deceased originally had asked her to carry the Crucifix but her husband had not allowed her to take the task and she cited her husband's words: "You are not that poor to wear the rags of that poor woman". According to the tradition, the one that carries the Crucifix during the burial ceremony, inherits the nice clothes of the deceased. Although I was curious to know about this



Picture 2. Farewell to the deceased. Magyarfalu/Arini, 1950s.
Photographer unknown.

story, in that situation – the conversation would be impolite because people had started to pray – not only my research ethics⁸ but also a common human ethic prevented me from asking questions. So, my ethical choice was not to pay too much attention to her words at this moment but to concentrate on the burial ceremony. (See Picture 2: Farewell to the deceased, from an earlier time.)

(The interview.) During my fieldwork in 2010 I tried correcting the inaccuracies and deficiencies of my earlier fieldwork. For that reason I wanted to meet with a local old man on a Sunday afternoon, but I did not find him at home. From my childhood memories I vaguely remembered that this man used to visit his wife's tomb on holidays if he had the time. People – especially the children of my generation – were laughing when they met him, but we were also afraid if we met him during dark hours. While I was standing in front of his house, I wondered why we had not talked about his former (or still existing)

8. About research ethics, see again AAA-Code 2009.



Picture 3. View of Magyarfalu/Arini from the cemetery hill. Autumn 2008.
Photo: Laura Iancu.

habit during the interviews. Following my intuition I walked to the cemetery. (See picture 3.)

The path took me through a pasture. At the beginning of this narrow and rough path that was full of holes caused by the rain, I met a man who lived at the one edge of the village. He was sitting on the grass relaxing. After the mass he met his godson who had just returned from Petrozsény/Petroșani, Transylvania. Celebrating his return he got a little intoxicated. The man was happy to see me, and started an endless conversation or more exactly: a monologue. The researcher's intervening questions that could change the course of the conversation, were never heard by him. We were just chatting and unexpectedly the following story was told. He had served in the military together with R., the husband of the above-mentioned woman who rejected carrying the Crucifix. He still considered R. as his good friend just like his own brother. They usually sat together in the church if possible to "listen to the mass". He continued his story with the following: "Well, R. did not

attend the mass today! He might have fallen (ill) or maybe he was very busy because he usually doesn't miss the mass. I wonder what happened?" Without asking further questions, he also told me that once the clothes presented to R. for carrying the Crucifix miraculously had disappeared. R. was ashamed in front of the relatives of the deceased because he should have worn those clothes sometimes in public. But R.'s real problem was that the deceased had "appeared" in his dream, and had taken away the clothes, saying that he was not worthy of the gift. It is not extreme to suppose that the rejection of carrying the cross by the woman was caused by the strange experience of her husband R. By these examples I want to emphasize that events of the present can only be understood if we discover their historical background – which are more accessible to an insider researcher.

7. About trust

One of the main advantages of the insider researcher is seen that she gets more trust from the group members than the outsiders. (For a review, see, for example Dwyer & Buckle 2009.) However, the connection is not always so direct.

It is not too easy to remember and talk about trust gained during fieldwork, whether I had to fight for it, or earn it. The locals all know me and my family, they have an opinion about us. Basically, in the village, there is an opinion about each family based on experiences or on customary prejudices. Nevertheless, these opinions are crucial things in personal relationships. People have concrete and direct viewpoints about the families, about each other. Someone can be "gossipy", others are "hateful" or "stealing" etc. When I appeared at the front of a gate of a certain family, the landlord hosted me as he would host any other member of my family. I must underline that I did not meet two people behaving exactly the same way, nor did the same situation happen two times. I had to find a particular way to connect with each person, and I had to create the specific circumstances for each encounter. I inquired from them about topics which I knew they were experts on, for instance, those who "bathe the dead" talked to me about the death

cult and, with them, we only marginally touched upon other religious topics.

The question of trust was raised for example when they asked me not to relate the negative opinions they shared about certain people to anyone else, and in particular to those who would be affected by this. In other words, they asked that I keep all information strictly confidential. I had to promise them, I would not pass any of it on. I was always reminded: “You’d better not tell it to anyone, this is only for you!” Quite interestingly, at the same time, the exact opposite had occurred, too. Some families, brothers or neighbors, who are in bad relation with each other, had expressed their dislike openly or had given me secret signs that I had to pass over to their “enemies”. Although rarely, such things did happen during fieldwork. It only happened once that an informant did not want to speak with me, neither with nor without a microphone. She calmed me down saying, she had always refused to talk to researchers, so she would not make an exception with me. The position of the insider did not help me in that case.

The interviewees were duly reminded that the information they had given, would be used for a research, and would be public shortly. Only those discussions were recorded, for which I had permission from the informants. I suppose, during these dialogues the informants were honest to the point that they knew all they were saying would reach the public ear. My opinion is that people have the right to say only what they want to say.

As part of a good research ethic, I always informed the people that I’m doing research and collecting data. However, in the dialect of Magyarfalú, words like “research”, “ethnography”, “anthropology”, and “fieldwork” are unknown terms. I find it interesting that only a few people asked me why I was doing research, why I needed all this information. Even if they asked, I saw the answer was almost irrelevant for them. There were some people who thought they knew what my research was all about, but it turned out later, that they were thinking about journalism and in many cases this brought about a sense of reticence and rejection. However, after having cleared the meanings of these conceptions and my aim, almost everyone was ready to help me, except for the one person I mentioned before. I’m not sure, did I get the trust in the beginning as an insider or after my aims became

clearer to the informants or did I earn it during the interviews due to my insider knowledge and the ethical choices I tried to make throughout the process. Somehow, I think that the trust has to be earned during the fieldwork over and over again.

8. Conclusions

Iancu has been conducting ethnographic research mostly in her home area, in Csángó villages, especially in the village where she was born, in Magyarfalú. In this paper, we discussed her position as an ethnographer, and how this position, which is mostly of the insider, influenced the fieldwork. The position, indeed, might never be completely either insider or outsider, and in the research field, the last years has sought for a compromise, for an ‘in-between’ position (Dwyer & Buckle 2006).

Born and living in Magyarfalú until the age of 12 and later returning there for longer (school) holidays and long-term research, Iancu is much more an insider than an outsider. However, after moving away from her home village, upon her return for long-term research she had to regain her insider place again. Moving from the position of the villager, family member, relative, etc. to the position of the ethnographer might put one a bit in the direction of the outsider in the eye of (some) the villagers. The ethnographer’s position put Iancu a bit in the outsider’s position even within her own family in the beginning because her new role was strange for them.

In our view *emic* and *etic* (Headland 1990), if it means the dichotomy of subjective/objective, goes hand in hand in research and does not need to be in conflict. The *emic* view can be accomplished with the ethnographer’s professional knowledge and objectiveness or vice versa. However, if we change these terms into insider/outsider, according to the discussion presented here on fieldwork experiences, the insider position has more advantages than the outsider’s.

Collecting religious research is not an easy task, neither for insiders nor for outsiders, as often described (Ruotsala 2001). However, as Iancu illustrated with her own fieldwork experiences, an insider can stay for long-term research in her own family, knowing the local

network, she can choose informants who represent the village reliably. Background information can also be accessed more easily. The insider researcher is not only familiarized with the present situation, but she also knows well all the local events and systems that frame the present (the local family relations, relatives, similar events in the past etc.). This circumstance enables a certain complex view through which the cultural system, its components, the cause and effect connections between the events may be seen at the same time. We illustrated this with the example of the older women who refused to carry the Crucifix.

The insider researcher usually has better access to the local dialect and customs, which might assure a greater trust in the informants. However, in our view, trust also has to be earned during the fieldwork again and again.

We contrasted the insider perspective with examples of research conducted by outsiders. The example of the Hungarian ethnographer showed how the interview failed because the ethnographer did not know the local dialect and culture sufficiently to interpret the misunderstanding centered on a single word. As we see, acquiring the local dialect and conducting long-term fieldwork can move the outsider closer to the position of the insider. With another example we showed that a local helping person, a mediator (in this case a priest who is an insider and knows the people well), could also make the fieldwork easier for outsiders – although in some cases the opposite may also happen, depending on the aims of the mediator.

In our view, the success of any research greatly depends on the personality of the researcher (for example, their ability to empathize, especially in religious research) as well as, certainly, on the professional skills of the researcher.

(Epilogue by the first author.) I am not sure if any of the events during my fieldwork can be considered a success or a failure. After having planned a strong emphasis on data collection via interviews, obviously, all the obstacles in conducting interviews as planned seemed like small failures, however, only for a short time. If I did not succeed with one person, I walked over to the next one, and, sometimes, I was so much better off in this way. I found everything that happened during my research interesting, even if “nothing happened”. It was very important to keep a journal, but I barely had time for it.

The unfortunate efforts – from the perspective of my ‘plans’ going awry, made me get to know some phenomena that my plans did not include. A few years later now, I think none of the events were a failure. The question is, how could I realize my plans? Actually, I haven’t really “realized” my plans, I lived my life in the village, while I devoted much attention to people’s religious life, I inquired about their knowledge of religion. I think, one of the main reasons why my fieldwork was not a situation full of problems is that people did not make a problem of it. In this way, we can see how the ethnographer’s research is always a collaborative effort.

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Summary in Magyarfalu (Csángó) dialect

Ebbe a z'írásomba mondanék valamiket azokról a nehezségekről melyekkel találkoztam mikor hond vótam s jártam gyüteni a falumba a z'emberekhez. Ingemet erőst intereszál a relidzsia, de mikor beszélgettem a z'emberekkel, akkor nem csak a z'Istenről, a szentekről, a hitről, a kredincáról beszélgettünk, hanem mindenféléről, met ingemet minden obicsej intereszál, ami a faluba van. Hamarább kicsit kifonákul jött nekem es, hogy én mikor hazamenek akkor nem menek a mezőre, nem segétem mámámat, hanem gyüteni járok, megjárom z'embereket, a z'öreg embereket es, kiket lehet senki nem jár lesz meg, meg kellett szokjam én es, s meg kellett szokja a világ es, hogy nekem ez a meszeriám. A faluba nem eppe tudják, mire való a stiinca, a csercsetárja, a z'embereknek ki kellett explikáljam, de úgy es, párka féltek, féltek, hogy felteszem a ziárba, kacagtatom őket a világ előtt, de aztá megszoktuk, immá tudják. Nem tudom, az igaz magyarok hogy értik meg a mük szónkat, erről es akarnék mondani egy beszédet, s aztán azt es elmondom, hogy micšináltak az oláh csercsetórok mikor eljöttek ide a faluba gyüteni.