

# Culture, Language and Globalization among the Moldavian Csángós Today



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## **An Imaginary and an Alternative: A Critical Approach to Modernizing Moldavian Csángó Local Societies**

### ***Abstract***

It is widely known that the comprehension of the scholarly findings in an ethnographic field is significantly defined by the actual discourse of the discipline. In my paper, I attempt to show the interrelatedness of the scholarly discourse on the Moldavian Csángós, the researcher's preliminary presumptions encoded in the academic discourse, the social studies' stereotyping of the Csángós and the results of a fieldwork study.

Two fundamental readings of modernizing Hungarian local peasant societies, including the Csángó ones, are dominant in both Hungarian social sciences and the public view: one, considering modernization as culture loss, and the other, holding the image of a successfully resisting culture. Nevertheless, a third possibility seems to be valid to approach the issue of modernization; one that emphasizes various types of cultural resilience and adaptation, while not denying the possibility of developing modernization skills and flexible responses to macro-level changes.

In my paper, I wish to argue that there is reason for this alternative reading of peasantry capable of adapting. I wish to support my statement with examples demonstrating resilience and adaptation derived from the life of an elderly woman (born in 1947) from a Moldavian Csángó settlement, Lujzikalagor/Luizi-Călugăra in Bacău, Romania. I base my findings primarily on the experiences of my ethnological fieldwork in Lujzikalagor from 2005.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2005, I had the opportunity to spend almost a year in a Moldavian Csángó village called Lujzikalagor/Luizi-Călugăra conducting ethnographic stationary fieldwork. At the same time I was employed by the Association of Csángó-Hungarians in Moldavia as a teacher of Hungarian for a school year, outside the state school curriculum. Taking the role of a teacher was a deliberate decision, serving the purpose of making my stay in the village meaningful and sensible for the locals. On the other hand, this choice determined a specific role in the local setting, with all its advantages and disadvantages. I intend to elaborate on this topic in my other paper in this volume on teaching Hungarian in a Moldavian Csángó settlement. Initially, the topics of my research were modernization, global processes of transition, migration and the change of local living conditions.<sup>1</sup>

My orientation to fieldwork changed as the woman who provided me accommodation, let's call her Klára, proved to be an excellent example of a "key-informant". She was reliable and considerate, capable of viewing events happening around her in their context, forming a reflective attitude towards her situation, while distancing herself from her life and personal feelings. I realized that living together with a Moldavian Csángó woman provided a unique opportunity to observe

at length Klára's narratives and her Self-representations and Reality-representations presented through these narratives, together with the socioculturally determined everyday life of local Moldavian Csángós.<sup>2</sup> This way I not only managed to gain an insight into the dialectic interplay between the surrounding world and the narrated Self, but could compare those representations of the narratives' "reality" which refer to the present with the immediate events and their individual perception. Thus, besides participant observation – being a data collection method used while doing fieldwork especially in ethnology, cultural anthropology and sociology – I applied the narrative biographical method in my research. In the present case, stationary fieldwork refers to active participation – one of the types of participant observation in addition to 1. non-participation, 2. moderate, and 3. complete participation (see details in Dewalt, K. M. & Dewalt, B. R. & Wayland 1998: 262–264, or Bernard 2006: 342–386).

As a consequence of my use of narrative biography, I focused my investigation on one of the central issues in ethnographic research; namely, the clash between traditional and modern systems of values in a peasant society in the process of modernization. More specifically, I started to explore the conflict between 20th century (forced socialist and post-socialist) modernization and the local Moldavian Csángó society, the latter having multiple cultural and language ties and continuing to display some archaic features even today (see for example Diószegi (ed.) 2002; Pozsony 2006a; Peti & Tánčzos (eds) 2012). Thus, my research work aimed to analyze and interpret the cultural and social processes that have promoted the application of modernization strategies to the status of legitimate practice in Moldavian Csángó society.

Supporting an alternative interpretation of modernizing traditional societies, first I provide an example of a modernizing narrative from Klára's life – the case of building a bathroom – and then I outline a critical reading of the modernizing local Hungarian peasant societies. In the discussion I explore how the researcher's preliminary pre-suppositions are revealed and were encoded in the academic discourse

1. This study has been prepared with the generous help of the MTA-DE Ethnology Research Group, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. This article was written as part of my postdoctoral research project based on my PhD research. First I took part in a Csángó Seminar in Jyväskylä March 2012, then I spent three months at the University of Helsinki, Finland in 2012–2013, in the frame of a project directed by Professor of European Ethnology Hanna Snellman with a title of "Modernization Strategies and Traditional Ties: Symbolic Borderline Cases of Social Transition in a Csángó Community Located in Moldavia" funded by the Academy of Finland (decision number 259291). The work was a continuation of my PhD project having the same title (see the theses in English <[http://ganymedes.lib.unideb.hu:8080/dea/bitstream/2437/103477/6/Lajos%20Veronika%20tezisfuzet\\_angol-t.pdf](http://ganymedes.lib.unideb.hu:8080/dea/bitstream/2437/103477/6/Lajos%20Veronika%20tezisfuzet_angol-t.pdf)>) supervised by Professor Róbert Keményfi at the Department of Ethnology, University of Debrecen, Hungary. Hereby I would like to render thanks to Professor Hanna Snellman and her colleagues at the department for their kind and encouraging cooperation, and express my appreciation to researcher Petteri Laihonon, PhD for being the person who introduced me to his Finnish colleague and encouraged me to collaborate with distinguished Finnish researchers. I also wish to thank Magdolna Kovács and Juliet Langman for their kind suggestions on how to improve the text.

2. The woman, her husband and her children are aware of the fact that I was doing research in Lujzikalagor and gave me permission to use the collected materials. The filed materials are in the author's possession.

and the social studies' stereotypical view on the Moldavian Csángós, mainly formed by Hungarian scholars and widely shared by the Hungarian public, but occasionally appearing in Western European contexts as well.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. A Csángó woman of Lujzikalagor: whose perspective and why?

Klára, that's the imaginary name of a real woman from Lujzikalagor, was born in 1947 and was brought up (and socialized) in a kind of traditional context within the local life-world. Her mother, born in 1919 and her father, born in 1910, both from the same village, got married in 1936. She has two brothers and two sisters. Her schooling did not exceed more than four years. She was eighteen years old when she got married to the son of her father's best friend who died in the Second World War. Her husband worked in the food industry for 30 years (1967–1997). Klára gave birth to eight children between 1966 and 1979, of whom one died as a new-born.

Unlike her younger siblings, Klára belongs to an age-group whose life follows the quasi-traditional model in Lujzikalagor. At the same time, through her closest family members, first her siblings, then her children, she gained experience of the changes in urban life-style in Romanian as well as foreign cities. Her position in a unique generational boundary-situation enables her to emerge as the central figure of the research. Klára shares the following characteristics typical of her generation: according to local traditions, she got married before she turned 20; her husband started to work in one of the factories of Bákó/Bacău, while she lived her life as a mother of seven children and worked in the local farmers' collective in the 1970s and 80s during the socialist period. Her younger siblings moved to the nearby Bacău with their families, except for one, who settled in Brassó/Braşov, because of her husband. Presently none of Klára's seven children live in the village, nor in Romania, as, together with many of their contemporaries

3. For the latter see for example the Recommendation 1521 (2001) on Csángó minority culture in Romania by the Council of Europe – <<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/tat01/EREC1521.htm>> or Isohookana-Asunmaa 2012.

they migrated to the West for better employment options at the end of the 1990s. Her eldest son was an exception because he escaped to Germany right after the fall of the socialist regime (1989). She visited him in 1995 for the first time and she had been abroad five times by the end of 2007. Klára's whole life is characterized by resilience, by her adaptation to the structurally transforming Moldavian sociocultural reality, in order to "make her way in life" – as she puts it.

The radical transformation of the traditional Moldavian Csángó culture took more or less a lifetime, gradually taking place from the 1920s and 30s. Klára's knowledge of the Moldavian Csángó life combines the "traditional" set of knowledge having been valid for a long time and the newer, the ever actual, the unprecedented or newly discovered elements of the local culture, those slightly or strikingly different from the traditional or inherited ones. Therefore, her narrative implies the cultural and social factors characteristic of the past, the previous socio-historical periods, as well as findings reflecting particular features perceptible today and characteristic of modern life.

The complexity of the sociocultural lifeworld in Lujzikalagor is reflected through Klára's everyday actions and social relations. As a social actor determined by the family system of relations, she becomes, depending on the situation, an active, strenuous, or passive, observant member of the local society and hence, a creator of Moldavian Csángó culture.

This paper follows the tradition of Csángó research that focuses on the personality of individuals (See some recent examples in folk poetry: Faragó 2003; Kallós 2003, 2005, and in religious visions: Kóka 2006; Pozsony 2006b: 223–229; Pócs 2006: 230–251.) However, it does so with the important exception that the individual personality of Klára is not featured only at the level of data collection, but her personal narrative also determines the perspective of the analysis of the local Moldavian Csángó society (see examples of this kind of approach in African studies, for instance: Shostak 1983; Crapanzano 1985).

Theoretically, we assume that the way of thinking and the worldview of any individual is fundamentally determined by their own sociocultural relations. On the basis of this anthropological premise (cf. Geertz 1973), Klára is present in her own Moldavian sociocultural

locality, as someone comprehending and interpreting her existence. It is exactly from this premise that the research sets out to examine the version of social and cultural reality according to which Klára interprets her own culture and the conflict situations of social transition that she encounters – in this paper the example picked out of her life experiences is the building of a bathroom in 2006–2008. The reconstruction of a given “stage” in the life story serves as a means for comprehending and consequently analyzing the dynamics of adaptation used during the course of the life path.

A woman’s personal perspective as a ground for analysis grasps the local sociocultural reality and its transition in her everyday actions and the interpretation of her narratives. In our case the practice of an emic interpretation of the Moldavian Csángó lifeworld is the implementation of the individual’s perspective, through the tool of personal narratives. This approach analyzes adaptation through the individual’s relation to the changing sociocultural circumstances as reflected in her narratives. The analysis of the transforming interpretation of changing sociocultural practices confirms the presence of the ability of culturally encoded adaptation and resilience while exposing the way this adaptation operates, and the local inventory of its operation.

However, slightly deviating from the traditional approach in Csángó investigations, my research exploring the transformation of the sociocultural system of the Moldavian Csángós did not adopt the perspective that regards the Csángós as a people living in a minority status, oppressed and silenced throughout history. The reason for that is that such a consideration was not shared by Klára; ‘minority’ is not part of her personal self-identity. Furthermore, this approach should be avoided as it could facilitate the unfortunate forming of a hierarchical relationship between the “mute” Klára and the “enlightened” researcher, where the “researcher talks *for* the speechless researched”.<sup>4</sup>

In the next section we aim to present an interpretation of cultural adaptation, a mode of cultural resilience through the analysis of concepts and practices of purity under the influence of modernization and transnational flows.

4. Since the 1980s the relationship between the researcher and the researched has changed as a result of the critical turn in anthropology: it transformed the way anthropologists tended to treat members of the local society: “from an object to be known to a subject who can control” (van Willigen & Kedia 2005: 349).

### 3. Cultural adaptation: modernization, purity and the body

It is a cliché that in Romania modernization, and especially the forced modernization of Socialism brought about processes that radically transformed the local peasant societies during the 20th century, including that of the Moldavian Csángós, which was regarded archaic all over Europe.<sup>5</sup> In their everyday life, inhabitants of the Moldavian Csángó local societies have faced macro-social changes of increasing intensity, experienced as the locally perceptible variety of modernization and globalization processes.

I use an example taken from the Moldavian Csángó woman’s life to reveal the interplay between modernization and the Csángó peasant society through a classical manifestation of modernization changes, the acquisition of modern technical equipment. It is an attempt to interpret the value-concepts attached to the modern, mechanized household, and the discrepancy between acquiring and applying the said equipment.

It is a well-known phenomenon that when members of a particular traditional society, under the influence of modernization, equip their households with a wide variety of technical instruments, the locals either rarely or hardly ever use them, or employ them for something quite different from their original intended function. For example, they do not wash their clothes in the washing machine but only keep various objects on top of it after it has been installed; they ask the help of a neighbour to use the DVD player properly on rare occasions of use, etc. In Moldavia the case of the bathroom is similar, when it was introduced due to the new social images of the body and to the altered ideas of cleanliness in interior design. It is worth noting though that the local customs of taking physical care of the body have not followed the modern practices applied in a bathroom.

5. From the 1960s especially Csángó men from villages nearby Bákó started to undertake jobs in factories in and surrounding the city. See for example Benedek H. 1997: 197; Pozsony 2003: 149, 2006: 209–210, 2008: 229. In the 1990s work-related migration to Hungary was significant. See for example Adler & Lomnitz & González 2007: 67–88.

The dual concept of the body outlined by Mary Douglas (1995: 8–11), a British representative of symbolic anthropology, makes a distinction between the social experience of the body and the experiences gained by perceiving the body as a physical entity. The social experience of the body influences the perception of the body as a physical entity, also influencing the ways of considering the body to be clean, the face and the hair groomed, or the kind of actions that are considered necessary to be taken to have the physical body cleaned. There is an interaction between the physical and the social perception of the body, the different aspects mutually intensifying each other, therefore the alteration of the social perception of the body results in changes in experiencing the physical body.

The notion of purity refers both to the sacred and the secular infection, dirtiness (see Douglas: 1966). Therefore, purity can be described basically by two pairs of concepts: pure–impure and clean–dirty.<sup>6</sup> The former refers to the symbolic, ritual cleanness while the latter refers to the physical dirt and its removal.<sup>7</sup>

Klára, the elderly Csángó woman, had the bathroom built in her house in the spring of 2008 in accordance with the style accepted in the ‘city.’ However, she did not change her customs concerning the practices of achieving cleanliness and body hygiene. In the case of Klára the social experience of the body has not yet overwritten the traditional practices of keeping the body clean. Following her earlier routine, she continued to wash herself once a week or so and used the toilet outside (less and less during the winter) instead of the flushing closet in the house.

6. The realization of the habit of living together with one’s love without getting married is a question of what the concepts of pure and impure mean nowadays in Moldavian Csángó villages and in the world outside. I will not introduce this issue now, but for further discussion on the topic see Lajos 2010: 176–188.

7. In the tradition of Moldavian Csángó research, the notion of purity is used in multiple contexts. It can refer either to the idyllic, archaic and untouched nature of the Csángó culture; or to the state of the local Hungarian dialect, the Csángó being mixed and impure (often named to *corcitură*, *korcsitúra* ‘hybrid’ as opposed to the standard Hungarian). The third meaning of purity implies the lack of articulate borders between politics, social science research and the church. See this in details Lajos 2012: 176–193.



Picture 1. Status symbol or wealthy family home? Lujzikalagor/Luizi-Călugăra. September, 2012. Photo: Veronika Lajos.

On the basis of this phenomenon, also noticeable elsewhere in the village of Lujzikalagor, a question arises: what can be the reason for the widespread building of bathrooms employing the latest design even if the owners-to-be have to borrow money to build them? Can the point at issue be that the aging parents living in the village build the bathroom for their adult children, who work abroad and are used to the urban circumstances? Or does the bathroom simply function as a symbol of status today?<sup>8</sup> (See Picture 1 of a modern house.)

If we place the phenomenon of building bathrooms in the context of body-purity-modernization, while omitting the use of their original function, the query can be put as follows: how does the approach of a dual concept of the body take a cultural action with the spiritual-physical concept of purity, in the time of conflicts between the Moldavian Csángó culture and the challenges presented by contemporary

8. In another Csángó village, in Magyarfalu/Arini for example to buy a car, have the water-pipes laid in and to build the house of stone are all considered to be purchases of high prestige and successful investments. See Mohácsék & Vitos 2005: 214–225.

modernization? How can cultural resilience be apprehended in this example?

Beyond the interactions of the physical and the social images of the body, the cultural categories of perceiving the body are related to the concept of the society, thus in Moldavia, a formerly peripheral or rather unknown image of the human body was created in parallel to the form of a human being realized by the modernization processes. The concept formed along the ideas of Marcel Mauss (2000: 423–446), that the body is basically characterized by the lack of its “natural” state, moves socially-acquired forms of knowledge to the front in the field of bodily activities. According to that, in the time of sociocultural shifts, alternative approaches, newly formed expectations for the physical and social perception of the body may be acquired through “socially transmitted learning processes”. In Moldavia, the concept of body cleanliness, the meaning of clean/unclean have broadened in content during the sociocultural transformations of today and new, formerly unknown practices of washing and grooming have appeared.

In the summer of 2006, the adult children of Klára came together and bought her an automatic washing machine and installed it in their parents’ house. Yet Klára did not even touch the appliance for a long time, she simply disliked it. She was often heard saying: “We do not have that much laundry. And I prefer washing by hand, it’s faster...” (In the original language: “Nincs nekünk sok [szennyesünk]. S jobb szeretem kézzel, gyorsan megvan...”). Her daughters from Italy kept asking her on the telephone whether she had started to use the new appliance or she continued using her hands or the old machine. One morning Klára made the decision and asked for assistance to learn how to use the new washing machine. After a few times, she could use it by herself and later she learned to choose from a range of different programmes as well. She quickly adapted and after three weeks she could confidently use all the facilities of the machine. This case not only refers to the influence of mechanized technology, but shows that modern expectations pertaining to personal hygiene and the cleaning of clothes have found a relatively quick way into the formerly existing social construction of the clean environment. It also shows that the benefits arising from the use of technical equipment superseded the earlier forms of washing to a large extent.

Unlike the washing machine, which was presented to her, Klára prepared for the construction of the *baie* (it is the Romanian word for bathroom) for months: “Why, we should build a shower bath” (in the original language: “Bár építsünk egy morzsa *dušt* [tusolót]”). She planned the ideal positioning of the bathroom within the traditionally sectioned Moldavian peasant-house, which had been enlarged after the political shift in 1989. As a first step, in the summer of 2006 they constructed the concrete sewer pit in the courtyard as the village did not have a sewage system. Klára bought a bathtub after a year, in 2007. That is because in the nearby Bákó she could not find the one she wanted, a kind of sitting tub her children working in Italy had shown her. Eventually, the bathroom was built in the part of the house that was formerly used as an entrance hall. The purchases and the building costs took all of Klára and her husband’s saved money, all of her children’s contributions, and she had to borrow money from a wealthier brother in the city to pay the workers. “We could build that small *baie*! Well, if God would help us! I have to see my brother, he would give me *para* (‘money’)! I will do, and repay him as I have to. See? I could do that! Him (pointing to her husband), he does not care, not at all. If there’s no money, then that’s it! But this (ie. the bathroom) is so important for us, so we’ll do it.” (In the original language: “Meg tudnám csánni azt a morzsa *bájét*! Lám, ha Jóisten megsegítne! El kell végezzem az öcsémvel, ad ő *parát*! Pénzet. Csak úgy csánok, s aztán adom vissza rendre nekije. Lám! Lám, mit tudok csinálni! Ő [utal Klára a férjére] nem törődik, semmi módúlag. Há nincs *para*, nincs pénz, s akkor nincs, s akkó ennyi!... Ez nagyon szükség nekünk, azt megcsánjuk.”) In her family it is not the husband with the attribution of authority, but she herself is the one who embodies innovativeness, she is the one who shows aptitude towards the instruments of modernization, towards novelties. It is Klára who dares to take the risk of possible failure, who dares to try new things, and who is consistent in urging the acquisition of modern “necessities”.

After the bathroom was finally ready, furnished and equipped in the summer 2008, and they moved the washing machine in there from the kitchen, Klára started to visit the flushing closet more and more frequently, especially during the night and in the winter time. By having the *baie* built in the house, the Csángó woman and her husband did

not start to take a shower every day, although she urged and invited her urban visitors, the researcher included, to use the bathroom as it was supposed to be used in an urban setting due to the internalized modern social image of the body.

One often recalled story Klára tells is about her youngest daughter, who lives in Turin, Italy, who continuously asks about the progress of the bathroom, the appliances and fixtures, the style and quality of objects and decoration. According to the narrative, the same question is asked during each telephone conversation: “Did you make the *baie* as everybody else in the village does?” (In the original context she used both Hungarian and Romanian: “Úgy csánták kendtek a *bájét*, mind a világ?”; “Ați făcut ca lumea?”)

Another narrative connected to the bathroom centres around her youngest daughter. She married an Italian man in the autumn of 2007 and visited the village with her fiancé for the first time in August, 2006. Not only the fact that the young couple had been living together in Turin before marriage got Klára’s attention – although she is a faithful Catholic it would be rather easy to state that it was simply a sinful act in her eyes but the phenomenon of cohabitation of the Csángó youth in cities without being married is far more complex in the context of modernization (see for example Lajos 2011) – but she wondered at the division of labour between them: both man and woman did the housework at home, doing the washing-up or cleaning the house. Transnational processes have not only transformed the nature of the lives of Klára’s children living abroad but they have affected their experiences, values, and way of thinking and, moreover, their expectations of how their parents’ household should look, what should be in the house when they return home for a holiday.

Rephrasing the question about the making of the bathroom it can be read as whether the aging parents built the *baie* according to the “urban” requirements of bathroom-building, which is the custom in Lujzikalagor now, so as not to bring shame on themselves by having a bathroom not according to the latest fashion and social expectations. In other words: did they meet the requirements of demonstrating progress through their objects and household commodities, regardless of the difficulties of raising the necessary finances, or, “to their shame”, were they to fail in the local competition for social status and prestige?

In Lujzikalagor, the building of bathrooms is related to the changes in water use, the meaning of purity and the relation to the body, linked to modern ideas. Building the *baie* gradually spread around in the village as the social image of the body has changed, while the new concept of purity, having been extended to the everyday cleaning process of the ‘naked’ body has also appeared among the accepted values of the local society, side by side with the traditional one. The regular use of the washing-machine and the emergence of the need to have a bathroom built in the house indicate that Klára started to appreciate new meanings of the notion of cleanliness either in reference to clothes or the body itself and integrated them into her value system.

The shift between the social and the physical image of the body, the quicker reactions of the former to the modern paradigmatic challenges and global flows, produced the experimental fact that the presence of modern objects, appliances or rooms considered to be necessary, and their proper use in practice are not correlated to each other. This has also modified the concept and meaning of body hygiene. As a matter of fact, the shift of meaning between the two body concepts confronts the traditional values and modernization, or rather the values conveyed by the modern set of appliances, allowing an overview of the relation between the altered rural living conditions and the new cultural strategies. Due to transnational flows urban facilities, practices and ways of life, generally following the Western-European standards, appeared in the village meanwhile inhabitants of Lujzikalagor were capable of solving conflicts and problems by practices of cultural resilience. The solution to the conflict is found along symbolic actions like the building of bathrooms and in adjusting the possibility of cleaning the whole naked body of a person every single day in contrast to the widely accepted practices of body hygiene related to bathing once a week.

So, by building the *baie* according to the local expectations, Klára and her family symbolically joined the cultural, social and economic shift-process of modernization, while they also recognized and accepted the alteration of the social image of the body, and accepted the modern concept of the cleanliness of the body, and accordingly, the requirement of the daily cleaning of the whole body. On the other hand, it did not pertain to the change in the physical experience of the



body; it did not depend on whether they used the bathroom according to its intended purpose, or did not use it at all.

#### 4. An alternative perspective on modernizing Csángó societies

There are several approaches towards modernization.<sup>9</sup> Here, we shall consider it as a process that is not an external, all-embracing, destructive, and consumptive imperative but rather the total of sociocultural interactions between the peasant way of life and the contemporary cultural, social, and economic impulses (Fejős 1998: 14). Modernization covers a complex system of economic, social, political, and cultural changes, which has confronted the value system, customs, and adaptation models available in the traditional peasant way of life. Peasant societies, be they either the peasantry of the Carpathian Basin, or the farming communities of Africa, or elsewhere, react differently to the paradigmatic challenges of modernization. The diverse cultural responses embody different strategies of adaptation that change by the active participation of group-members according to the given peasant environment and the local characteristics of modernization influences.

In a critical approach to the modernizing local Hungarian peasant societies, it is worth examining how the modernizing traditional Hungarian peasant society is being constructed in scholarly and public discourses and what social and cultural implications are associated with it. While introducing two conventional narratives of modernization I intend to argue for the validity of a third approach that regards the so-called peasantry, including the Moldavian Csángós, as a social group capable of adapting itself to modernization processes while maintaining a traditional orientation to particular aspects of life – such as in the above-mentioned case when Klára found it necessary to build the bathroom (*baie*) in accordance with the new (modern) social image

9. Here I do not intend to elaborate on the different approaches to modernization, but only to give a definition of the concept used in this paper. About the latest ideas on modernization see the concept of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000:1–29, Eisenstadt (ed.) 2002) and its critique, that of the varieties of modernity (Smidt 2006: 77–97).

of the body (changing content of cleanliness), while maintaining the old (traditional) practice of cleaning the body using the shower rather infrequently, usually no more than once a week.

In the previous section we have elaborated on an actual Moldavian Csángó example, the bathroom and the related social practices and meanings, and encountered neither endangering effects of social change nor refusal to respond to modernizing challenges, but rather resilience and adaptation. In the following I discuss the classical Hungarian interpretations referring to the modernizing peasant societies while a third possible interpretation arises.

The identification of the Hungarian peasantry with the socio-culturally different Other of the same society led to the attribution of the characteristics of “exotic” and “idyllic” to the academically and publicly accepted image of the peasantry. The same happened in Western Europe, for example in Germany (see the work of Kaschuba (1999/2004) or Bausinger (1990)). As a result, it is still a commonly accepted view in both the academic and the public sphere that the sociocultural practice of traditional Hungarian peasant societies is traditionally and quasi-conventionally conservative, self-segregating and introverted. Based on this approach, having recognized that ‘ethnographies are hierarchical arrangements of discourses’ and have institutionalized ways, altering in time, of describing the others (Clifford 1986: 10, 17), two options prevail in analyzing modernization’s effects on peasant societies. One interpretation is that of the “disintegration of the traditional peasant culture” (Fejős 1998: 13); the other is that of the successfully resisting peasant world.

According to the first narrative, or one may say a hardly self-reflexive writing strategy,<sup>10</sup> that of the endangered society, the cultural, social and economic processes affecting local peasant societies, the transformation of the classic peasant lifestyle is a negative change, during which the traditional practice and the accumulated “peasant knowledge” decompose to a considerable extent. The

10. In the middle of the 1980s cultural anthropologists started paying attention to the ethnographic writing strategies, the poetics and politics of ethnographic discourses and the ways, as well as the means of describing the others (the emblematic example of this reflexive, critical turn is the book entitled *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus 1986)).

anti-modernization approach regards the modernization of peasant societies as loss, as a culture loss, thus rendering the social historical periods of the peasantry's sociocultural world into a hierarchical relationship, which associates the concept of idyllic to the traditional peasant lifestyle. This idealistic view was shaped in the time of Romanticism in Hungary during the 19th century, constantly reproduced and continuously validated by Hungarian ethnology in the 20th century (see examples in the basic handbooks of Hungarian ethnology such as *A magyarság néprajza* I–IV. 1933–1937 or Balassa & Ortutay 1979). Furthermore, this approach cannot accept that the interactions between the traditional world and modernization, as well as the resolution of conflict-situations, may bring about new values. Moreover, the “deprivation” reading of modernization associates values to both traditional peasant societies and modern ones, thus creating a hierarchical positioning in their relationship. It also simplifies the complex system of communal and individual adaptation patterns responding to modernizing impulses, describing them as a one-sided, one-way process.

Besides the view of “modernization interpreted as loss”, there is the other approach that depicts the relationship between peasant society and modernization in the framework of heroic fighting, of immobility preserved, as successful resistance. To paraphrase Habermas (1993: 153–154), the concept of “modern” deprived of its historical bearings was the product of 19th century Romanticism, as an abstract opposition to traditions, the whole history itself. “Modern” is a historically changing concept. Before the 19th century the modern denoted to the correspondence to antiquity, referred to the outcome of transition between the old and the new. However, the shift in its interpretation tossed the traditional into the state of static, frozen traditions, while it associated the effect of the modern, the new with the capability of change and dynamic adaptation. It attached values to both, and created the concept of infinite progress, identifying modernization with evolution, with changing towards the positive.

Both approaches regard the modernizing peasant culture as a closed, “pure”, homogeneous, timeless entity, the complex system of which is either dissolved by grand-scale cultural, economic, and social transformations, or left untouched by them. The first version revives

the concept of a lost peasant tradition, “in its final hour”, while the second depicts an isolated peasant tradition, steadfastly clinging to its traditional ways. Both interpretations illustrate a falsely recorded, idealized image of the classic peasant society.

There seems to be a third alternative to 20th century modernization challenges. This approach does not deny the possibility of developing modernization skills and flexible reactions to macro-level changes in genuine peasant societies of archaic structure. On the contrary, it aims to present the various types of cultural adaptation by investigating the actual practices in local communities in this process of adaptation. Emphasis on the way of adaptation highlights the fact that while local peasant societies are mostly reluctant to change at first, still they are very much capable of adapting to modern challenges. This approach presupposes cultural practices and techniques to be at work that can moderate or solve the conflicts created by modernization impulses and radical cultural otherness, while at the same time, it does not attach value judgements and qualification labels to the new practices, which develop as a consequence of adaptation. The narrative of the peasant tradition that is capable of displaying economic flexibility and culturally encoded adaptation contributes to the process of “taking away the magical features” attributed to these classical peasant societies by reviewing and overriding the romantic, idealized, and erroneously petrified stereotypes associated with their sociocultural practices.

This narrative of the peasant society that has displayed a great degree of affinity to adapt when facing the challenges of modernization is not totally unfamiliar in Hungarian ethnology.<sup>11</sup> However, this

11. Some examples of this research are the following: 1. In the 1970s the narrative of an adaptive peasant tradition appeared in Hungarian ethnology for the first time, see for example Bodrogi (ed.) 1978; Szemerényi (ed.) 1980; Niedermüller (ed.) 1982. 2. Two decades later in the 1990s traditionalism became a popular approach once again in Hungarian ethnology, however, scholarly interest also turned towards the interactions between modernization, the traditional ways of life and the present situation of rural settlements (Fejős 2003: 14.). See research connected to cultural resilience in the field of Csángó studies for example Tánczos 1996; Kotics 1999; Korunk 2003/9; Kinda & Pozsony (eds) 2005; Erdélyi Társadalom 2007/2; Ilyés & Peti & Pozsony (eds) 2008, religion and modernization, for example: Kinda 2010; Peti 2008, 2012.

narrative appears to question the presence of certain abstract qualities (conservative, self-segregative, introverted) associated with genuine peasant societies of archaic structure. Instead of citing examples, let us have a brief overview of these traits that are regarded as valid by both the approach of culture loss and that of successful resistance.

Both the narratives of the endangered and those of the resistant peasant culture consider the conservative, self-segregative, and introverted features to be applicable to Hungarian peasant societies. At the general level, these cover several assumptions that I will briefly outline in the following section.

## 5. Distinctive features of an idealized rural world

The first characteristic of the idealized traditional peasant lifestyle I wish to describe relates to the image of the farming “homo conservativus”. The conservative nature attributed to genuine peasant societies of archaic structure postulates the preservation of the currently operating social system and relations together with the already existing cultural system. Furthermore, it implies a conscious opposing of experimentation with the admission of “the modern” and a reservation towards all practices that may not directly fit into the system of local traditions or into the framework of the interpretation of the world determined by historical processes and individual experience. (See Picture 2.)

Further assumptions: the current world is the “best of all possible worlds”; everyday actions are controlled and guided by the urge to preserve; the notion of timelessness of customs; reverence towards authority; a conservative sense of time – the concept of the ethnographical present tense; the static and fixed image of peasant society; a religious worldview.

The second genuine feature that the narrative of culture loss and successful resistance associates with modernizing peasant societies is the aspect of an introverted and isolated society. This aspect assumes that the traditional world of the peasants is the natural and social domain of inherently reticent and introverted people. In this view, peasants and farmers deliberately refuse to seek external contacts and they



Picture 2: Roadside cross with parabolic antenna. Lujzikalagor/Luizi-Călugăra, September, 2012. Photo: Veronika Lajos.

live their quotidian life guided by the desire to be isolated. As a consequence of this isolation, they are also uncorrupted and immaculate. In this image, the quality of being introverted is equally valid for all the fields of society, culture and economy. This means that it represents a distinct and impermeable demarcation line between the peasant society and the social reality outside the village boundaries, so space and culture are bound to each other.

According to the third assumption (consciously sustained segregation) the genuine peasant societies of archaic structure separate themselves from their environment by deliberately implementing a range of self-segregating practices. This identifies the population of local societies as the victims of economic, political, and cultural changes or as the passive recipients of the impacts of transformations. In this context, the implementation of sociocultural separation is a consciously applied cultural pattern of behaviour that functions as a routine cultural practice in the life of the local society. The idea of purposeful isolation however does not seem to be relevant only in a geographical sense but also covers the general way of thinking,

as well as the ordinary practices of the local existence. Still a further degree of consciousness is presupposed within the establishment and maintenance of spatial and cultural boundaries, while isolation is regarded to be a culturally encoded approach in the micro-world. Further presumptions include the concept of the unified quality of the micro-world.

According to the findings of my research, the above stereotypes are not valid, or can only be valid in some really restricted sense. In my paper, the narrative of the affirmative adaptation practice of the Hungarian peasant societies, including that of the Moldavian Csángó as well, has been modelled by the life story of a Moldavian Csángó woman in her 60s, Klára. The analysis of her life-world (see Schutz & Luckmann 1973) in Lujzikalagor presents in context the interactions of modernization and the Csángó peasant routine, the value conflicts thereof and their solutions, as well as the adaptation strategies that are experienced as far from being forced. Examples taken from Klára's world have formed the basis for the analyses that shed light on the way adaptation and resilience work or culturally encoded ability and knowledge operate. Events from her life highlight the operation of such cultural practices and techniques, which testify to a large-scale adaptation capability in resolving conflicts of modernizing impulses.

## 6. Conflicts, border-situations, resilience and adaptability

As can be seen from the above, cultural resilience and adaptation to sociocultural changes are without difficulties in everyday life; understandably, conflicts arise from symbolic and physically perceptible border-situations, and transition periods. It is needless to say that adaptation processes are dynamic and still permeated by sociocultural clashes. These are observable not only in disagreements between generations within the family, but even on the level of personality, in individual self-contradictions.

Nevertheless, it would not be too far-fetched to say that Klára, the woman in her sixties, from Lujzikalagor has regularly applied cultural practices and techniques during her life that have demonstrated

great adaptation skills in resolving clashes caused by modernization impulses, while maintaining a resilience characterized by mainly affirmative praxes and, of course, inevitable conflicts with one's own established practice and convictions as well as that of other generations. In my paper I argued that even in the Moldavian sociocultural environment one can observe an aptitude for modernization manifested in a great number of practices of mostly affirmative nature. Through the case of the bathroom in a Moldavian Csángó rural society, I intended to interpret the reasons why people in modernizing societies tend to refrain from the use of their modern equipment or rooms, while also considering them necessary to possess by applying the concept of purity and the dual notion of the body in the context of social modernization. I have chosen this particular example to show that the bathroom does not simply function as a symbol of status in the Csángó local societies of today, instead, it is the discontinuity between the social image of the body (modernization of socio-cultural knowledge) and praxis (traditional treatment of the body) that makes it self-evident to have the bathroom built as a necessity, and to use it occasionally. I also hope to have demonstrated how the complex peasant knowledge can serve as a cultural kit when facing modernization challenges. In a sense, the approach of the peasant tradition capable of cultural adaptation and resilience "takes away the magical features" of the Moldavian Csángó culture and re-interprets the romantic, falsely recorded, idealized particularities of the peasant world.

So the above example, the building of the bathroom, the transformation of the concept of cleanliness aimed to demonstrate that the resolution of value-conflicts arising from the interplay between modernization and the everyday life of Moldavian Csángó peasants actualizes adaptation strategies that are far from being experienced as forced ones. Also, I wished to draw attention to those ethnographic presuppositions encoded in the Moldavian Csángó discourse, which do or may permeate the Moldavian Csángó field of research to a great extent, and which heavily affect the perception of the events observable in the field, and thus the process of attributing meaning to them.

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