

**R. Chris Davis**

**Rescue and Recovery:  
The Biopolitics and Ethnogenealogy  
of Moldavian Catholics in 1940s Romania\***

**Introduction**

This article outlines a methodological framework for re-examining the Moldavian Csángós<sup>1</sup> in the context of Romanian biopolitics and population policies during WWII. I intend to build upon existing scholarship<sup>2</sup> by examining the immediate impact of such discourse and policies on minority communities subject to Romanianization or expatriation – that is, by examining these phenomena from the bottom up. In this way, we can better gauge the impact of prevailing nationalist discourses and policies on Romania's ethnic and religious enclaves. The Csángós provide an important case study for several reasons: they were considered not only an ethno-linguistic minority (Hungarian) but also a religious minority (Roman Catholic); they were targeted for expatriation not only to Hungary but also, in 1945, to the Soviet Union; moreover, they had an active clerical intelligentsia with support from the Vatican; and yet their homeland had always been in Moldavia proper – they had lived for centuries in what few people today realize was a multi-ethnic Moldavia<sup>3</sup> and had played no active role in the modern Hungarian national movements.

Research in Romanian archives and a number of journals published in wartime Romania suggests that biopolitical discourse was not limited to government and intellectual circles; it also had direct and indirect impacts on Romania's minority communities, penetrating their political and even religious discourse. In an increasingly nationalist

---

\* Research used in this article was supported by a Fulbright Student Grant in Hungary (2006–2007) and an American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Dissertation Research Grant in Romania (2007–2008). I would like to thank Marius Turda and Eric Beckett Weaver for reading drafts of this article and offering their feedback. Any errors in the article are, of course, my own.

<sup>1</sup> I use the non-neutral Hungarian term *Csángó* for reasons of economy and convention, and acknowledge that to some it is pejorative. A more inclusive term for the community might be *Hungarian- and Romanian-speaking Roman Catholics of Moldavia*. Nevertheless, both the Hungarian *Csángó* and the Romanian *Ceangăi* were used in government, academic, and even confessional documents in Romania during the period under investigation. Throughout this paper, use of the word *Catholic* refers to *Roman Catholic*.

<sup>2</sup> On biopolitics, race, and eugenics in interwar Romania, see Turda 2007a, Turda 2007b, Bucur 2002. On the topic of Romanian population-exchange plans in the early 1940s, see Solonari 2007, Achim 2001, Achim 2005, Bolovan, I.–Bolovan, S. 2000.

<sup>3</sup> For a description of the ethnic and linguistic diversity in late medieval Moldavia, see Baker 1996, Spinei 1986.

environment, Romania's ethnic minorities were seen as incompatible with the homogenous nation-state. What then, was to be done with them? For Romania's ardent nation-builders the answer was unequivocal: either dispatch the dysgenic minority groups or else incorporate them into the national ethos and ultimately the national body.

Taking into account these discourses and policies in wartime Romania – and their effects on Romania's minority communities – we can arrive at a more holistic understanding of localized events such as those involving the Catholic communities in Moldavia. In this way, we re-examine the appropriation and instrumentalization of ethnicity and national identity and the representation of communal national self-consciousness.

The Csángós and other minority communities were engaged in what I describe as a *process of national induction*. The aim of this process is to demonstrate that the historical experience and identity of the minority is congruent with that of host nation, and furthermore to secure for a given minority a place within the homogenizing, unitary national state. Often this entails the historical deconstruction of the “ethnic other” and a recovery of those aspects that can be merged into the national metanarrative of the ethnic majority.<sup>4</sup> When this process of national recovery and historical-narrative reconstruction occurs under the pretense of scientific objectivity – e.g. the racial biology, philology, and historicism of early 1940s Romania and Hungary – it can produce a seemingly irrefutable epistemology of national belonging, one that can outlast the very evidence originally used to support it.

### Historical Context

The formation of Greater Romania, which in 1918 nearly doubled the size and population of the Old Kingdom, included large numbers of ethnic and religious minorities who had no desire to live under a Romanian national state, yet had no more desire to abandon their property and homelands. As a consequence of this territorial reconfiguration, many of the minority communities within Greater Romania became socially and politically displaced. For its part, the Romanian ethnic majority had to reconcile the presence of large swaths of ethnic others, most of whom had been ethnic majorities in their respective national homelands prior to joining Romania. Once inside territorial Romania, their ethnic, religious, or linguistic differences excluded them from the new, ideologically-informed conception of the Romanian national body and its national essence.

Romania sought to consolidate its expanded territory and to incorporate its citizenry into the political and ethnic nation, lest these large blocks of disaffected minorities be the undoing of its post-WWI gains. At this time, the prevailing solution to the minority problem was integration and assimilation,<sup>5</sup> rather than total “ethnic purification” (Achim

<sup>4</sup> For a broader discussion of this process and the region, see for example Wingfield 2006, King 2002.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the „cultural expansion project” and assimilation policies in interwar Romania, see Livezeanu 1995. For a broader examination of ethnographic reordering and nationalizing spaces across eastern Europe, see Brown 2004 and Snyder 2003.

2001: 596). Over the course of the interwar period, and in response to the above challenges, Romanian intellectual and scientific communities re-conceptualized the very nature and organization of the state.<sup>6</sup> These concepts had an overriding aim: the Romanianization or ethnic homogenization of the national state. To this end, demographers, sociologists, biologists, and anthropologists worked specifically to identify those people – and by extension, the territories they inhabited – who could be authenticated as Romanian, even if their linguistic, religious, or cultural attributes suggested otherwise. Consequently, the ethnic and national identities of some minority communities were appropriated to the dominant Romanian ones. Thus did the Csángós undergo a *process of induction* into the Romanian nation. Once their Romanian-ness could be demonstrated – biologically, anthropologically, linguistically – their historical narrative could be refashioned and their place within the Romanian nation secured.

Where the anthropological, sociological, and historical Romanian-ness of a minority community could not readily be inducted into the nation, another solution was proposed: population transfer. This was the means by which incompatible others could be removed from the nation whilst Romanians living outside territorial Romania could be introduced (or reintroduced). In this way the interwar concepts and goals of the homogenous ethnic state could be realized through policies that would physically reconfigure the nation along ethnic lines.

After Hungary's invasion of Yugoslavia in April 1941, a number of Hungarian intellectuals and some clergy – whose sympathies lay with Hungary – were keen on relocating the Hungarian-speaking Csángós to the Hungarian Bácska and Baranya (Hungarian-occupied Vojvodina).<sup>7</sup> Anticipating this, as early as the autumn of 1940, László Bárdossy – then Hungarian Ambassador to Romania, and later Prime Minister of Hungary from April 1941 to March 1942 – commissioned the ethnographer Peter Pal Domokos to help identify those Csángó families in predominately Hungarian-speaking villages who were suitable for repatriation to southern Hungary.<sup>8</sup> Domokos used the Romanian census data from 1930 alongside his own fieldwork and research in the 1930s to generate a number of studies and maps for the Hungarian repatriation scheme [*hazatelepítés* – “resettlement home”], formally undertaken by the Hungarian government's Foreign Magyars Repatriation Committee.<sup>9</sup> According to Hungarian archival documents, Domokos not only supported the resettlement of the Csángós and but was also instrumental in the formulation and implementation of these plans. In a letter to the Foreign Ministry written from Bucharest in December 1940, Domokos gives the following update on his work: “I have made a list of

<sup>6</sup> This gave rise to such notions as, among others, Iuliu Moldovan's *ethnic state* or *biopolitical state* and Nichifor Crainic's *ethnocratic state*. See works by Turda, Bucur, and Solonari listed in footnote 2.

<sup>7</sup> For an examination of the repatriation schemes initiated from Budapest, see Davis 2007, Vincze 2001, Vincze 2002, Sajti 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL) K28 ME, 163/271, Bukovinai magyarok támogatása – Magyarországra történő áttelepítésének ügyei. 1941–1944: 7. Memo from Pál Bella. Bucharest, 10 Dec. 1940. The Külföldi Magyarok Hazatelepítő Kormánybiztosság [Foreign Magyars Repatriation Committee] was created after a Bárdossy cabinet meeting, led by Miklós Bonczos, in the spring of 1941.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 9–16. Report by Peter Pal Domokos. Bucharest, 28. Nov. 1940.

the villages that could interest us from a Hungarian point of view...and I will continue as my next assignment to find people to create a movement to encourage [these Hungarian-speaking Csángós] to opt for Hungarian citizenship.”<sup>10</sup> To help facilitate this, Domokos requested he be allowed to retain as his “assistants” two unnamed priests already working in Moldavia.<sup>11</sup> Presumably, Domokos is referring to priests from the recently resettled Székely villages from Bukovina, priests who were subsequently reappointed as vicars to parishes in Moldavia (see Davis 2007: 168–171). These priests were later accused by the Romanian government of spreading Hungarian propaganda and working “in the service of Hungary” – one of whom was to stand trial for such activities before escaping to Hungary.<sup>12</sup> Domokos furthermore proposed exchanging the Greek Catholics of Bihar county for the Romanian Catholics in Moldavia, and indicated that he would ask Áron Márton to inquire with the Papal Nuncio about transferring these populations.<sup>13</sup>

By promoting the Csángó community’s historical, linguistic, and even racial links to the Magyars, Domokos and others sought to establish a Hungarian national belonging and to justify repatriation to a Hungarian homeland.<sup>14</sup> Confronted by the very real threat of deportation from their Romanian homeland, the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Moldavia undertook to retrace the *ethnogenealogy*<sup>15</sup> and reconstruct the historical narrative of their community in order to demonstrate conclusively their belonging within the Romanian nation. This effort was led by one man in particular, Iosif Petru Pal, who was the Superior of the Franciscan Order in Luizi-Călugăra–Bacău and one of the most influential members of the Roman-Catholic hierarchy in Moldavia.<sup>16</sup> This was also a signal to the Antonescu regime that the Csángós were not inimical to the Romanian nation and therefore should not be included in the repatriation schemes under discussion with the Hungarian Legation in Bucharest, underway since the cession of northern Transylvania in August 1940. It was also a message to the adjacent ethnic majority (Romanian Orthodox)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 19–20. Report by Péter Pál Domokos. Bucharest, 8. Dec. 1940.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Arhiva Națională București, Președinția Consiliului de Miniștri, Serviciul Special de Informații (hereafter ANPCM/SSI), f. 63/1942: 26. Report entitled “Propaganda iredentei ungare față de problema ‘ceangăilor’ din Moldova.” 18. Nov. 1942.

<sup>13</sup> MOL K28 ME, 163/271, Bukovinai magyarok támogatási: 19–20. See also MOL K28 ME, 162/270, Moldvai Csángók ügyei: 34–35.

<sup>14</sup> See Mikecs 1941, Mikecs 1943, Baumgartner 1940, Siculus 1942, Györffy 1942. Much of this literature found its way into Catholic Moldavia and became source of consternation for the Csángó priests and some local Romanian authorities, who regarded this as Hungarian propaganda. For a discussion on the impact of this, see Davis 2007: 168–169, Diaconescu 2005: 16–17. Credit should be given to Diaconescu for placing the perspective and motives of the Moldavian Catholic clergy in a clearer social-historical context, especially concerning the problem of ethnic origins.

<sup>15</sup> By *ethnogenealogy*, I mean the tracing of a group’s ethnic lineage to its presupposed or predominant ethnic origins, attempting to overturn an established ethnic identity and to recover a supposedly authentic one; alternatively, this retracing of ethnic genealogy can be used to authenticate an ethnic identity that appears dubious or is under assault. In either case, the process serves to validate an ethnic community’s inclusion into, or exclusion from, relevant categories, e.g. national belonging.

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion on Pal and state policy vis-à-vis the Moldavian Catholics in the 1940s, see Coșa 2001, Coșa 2004, Pozsony 2006: 21–22, 59–64.

and its municipal officials that although the community was entirely Roman Catholic and partly Hungarian speaking, they were neither *de jure* nor *de facto* Hungarian nationals. It is no coincidence that in both Hungary and Romania the most contentious works regarding the national identity of the Csángós emerged between 1940 and 1944.

In this context, the Catholic clergy in Moldavia sought to remove the guilt by association (ethno-linguistic, religious) to the Hungarian state. In addition, they sought to stymie low-level persecution such as verbal denigration in schools<sup>17</sup> and the withholding of nationality certificates (*certIFICATELE DE NAȚIONALITATE ROMÂNĂ*) by Romanian municipal officials, done on the pretense that Hungarian-speaking Catholics could not possibly be Romanian.<sup>18</sup> The securing of these nationality certificates was crucial. According to the commission that issued these on behalf of the Antonescu government, “the concept of the nation is synonymous with the collectivity of individuals of the same race, same blood, same traditions, same customs, same history, and the same conceptions of morals, etc. Being of Romanian nationality means being of ethnic Romanian origin. Nationality is not identical with citizenship.”<sup>19</sup>

Retracing the ethnogenealogy and historical narrative by the Csángó clerical intelligentsia was prompted not by a historical or scientific epiphany by Pal and others; nor was it the manifestation of an ultra nationalist or fascist movement, such as the Iron Guard. Regarding the broader population of Roman Catholics in the late 1930s, it is clear that the community did not support in any meaningful numbers the program and political party of Codreanu. In the 1937 parliamentary elections, his “All for the Fatherland” party had a dismal showing in counties containing the majority of Roman Catholics. Furious over the lack of Catholic support in these elections – especially considering the martyrdom of the Legionaries Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, who had “died defending the Catholic Church” in the Spanish Civil War – Codreanu instructed the Legionary organizations from Bacău and Roman to ban all Catholics from joining the movement for the next three years (letter is dated 14 Jan. 1938)<sup>20</sup>. There is no material evidence that the Roman Catholic hierarchy was aligned with the Iron Guard, with perhaps one notable exception: according to his personal file in Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (ACNSAS), the priest Ioan Mărtinaș<sup>21</sup>, mentioned herein, was imprisoned by Antonescu for being a

<sup>17</sup> See discussion and references in Diaconescu 2005: 9–20.

<sup>18</sup> ANPCM/SSI, f. 63/1942: 1–2. The report is from the Bacău section of the *Centrul Contrainformații*, the precursor of the DGSP (Securitate) that was established in 1948.

<sup>19</sup> ANPCM/Cabinet Civil Mihai Antonescu 1940–1944, dosar 420: 160.

<sup>20</sup> See: Codreanu 1981: 238. (I am grateful to Valentin Săndulescu for locating this document and discussing the issue with me.) Finally, no such link between the Roman Catholics and the Iron Guard is mentioned in any of the intelligence reports on the Csángós, reports that were compiled in a dossier within the Antonescu cabinet.

<sup>21</sup> Ion Mărtinaș (born Tamaș Mărtinaș Gabur) was the younger brother of Dumitru Mărtinaș, author of *Originea ceangăilor din Moldova* (Bucharest, 1985). Since its publication, the book has had an enormous impact on the debate over the ethnic origins of the Csángós. In any case, it is clear from the files below that Ion and Dumitru Mărtinaș wrote the manuscript together in the mid-1960s, though it underwent a number of revisions before a draft was completed in 1973 in Buzău, where Dumitru was a pensioner. However, the book was published only in 1985, after Dumitru’s death in 1979; it was, moreover, credited to Dumitru alone, presumably because Ion was a cleric and a convicted anti-communist.

“șef de sector” in the Legionary movement. Mărtinaș was interned in Târgu Jiu prison on 8 July 1941 but was soon released due to the intervention of Andrea Cassulo, the Apostolic Nuncio<sup>22</sup>. Mentioned in the Mărtinaș file, moreover, is Bishop Mihai Robu’s disappointed in the priest for bringing disgrace upon the Church<sup>23</sup>. Nevertheless, Mărtinaș returned to Iași where he continued to write and to publish. According to Securitate interviews with Mărtinaș in 1963, the priest confessed that his motivation for joining the movement in 1939 was to protect the Church and, by extension, his fellow Moldavian Catholics. Accordingly, by having a representative of the Catholic clergy within the Iron Guard, the Church might safeguard itself with the ruling – and by far the most violent – political force in the country: “When I agreed to support the Legionaries I carried out negotiations with Codreanu and I put conditions on this, not for my personal favor but for the advantage of the Church. I asked some favors for the Church – not for me. Codreanu realized that if we Catholic priests supported him, all the Catholics would support him. I had guarantees on his part that our word would be decisive when the issue of our Church was discussed. When I agreed to support the so-called politics of the Legionaries, I did it not because I wanted to be a minister [in the Legion] but to help the Church, and if I was punished for these politics then I suffered for a holy cause, and I have all the right to think about a divine reward. [...] The Legionary Movement was a dream, and they thought that this dream could become a reality but it remained a dream and is destined to remain a dream. We ourselves [Moldavian Catholics], we have our own way. We do not walk on their way, nor on other ways. It is because of this we are persecuted – because we have our own way.”<sup>24</sup>

From the episcopate and seminary in Iași, and in parishes across Moldavia, the Catholic hierarchy would have been all too familiar with the rhetoric and political violence of the Guard. In these circumstances, having Mărtinaș as an intermediary – whether he joined on his own initiative, and with or without the blessing of his superiors – was probably not imprudent in 1939–1940. In this way, the Church would not be seen as wholly uncommitted or ill-disposed to the Legionary State, should it prove lasting. In any case, most of the wartime articles and monographs dealing with the ethnic origins of the Csángós appeared *after* Antonescu crushed the Legionary movement in January 1941. Finally, no such link between the Roman Catholics and the Iron Guard is mentioned in any of the intelligence reports on the Csangos, reports that were compiled in a dossier within the Antonescu cabinet.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the retracing of the Csángós’ ethnogenealogy and the reconstruction of their historical narrative by the likes of Mărtinaș and Pal were reactions to the repatriation initiatives by Hungary and, to a lesser extent, the discrimination faced by the community in wartime Moldavia. This refashioning of Csángós’ ethnic origins was advanced primar-

<sup>22</sup> ACNSAS, Fond Personal, Ioan Mărtinaș, i141282/1: 50.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, i141282/2: 186.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, i141282/1: 51, 72–73.

<sup>25</sup> See ANPCM/SSI, f. 63/1942.



ily through the historiography of the period, particularly in Catholic journals and monographs but also in scientific literature. However, this was not merely a discursive contest over the perceived ethnicity, national identity, and history of the Csángós: at stake was the physical location, livelihood, and citizenship of tens of thousands of Moldavian Catholics, as well as the preservation of Roman Catholicism in eastern Orthodox lands.

### “Gangrene of the National Body”: An Ethnic Majority Perspective

A series of detailed government reports – most of them anonymous – between 1942 and 1943, compiled within the Antonescu cabinet, lend insight into the perspectives of the ethnic majority and the state vis-à-vis the Csángós. From the outside looking in, these reports assessed the problem of ethnic origins and the attitudes of the Moldavian Catholic population and their clergy. Understanding the contexts in which these reports were written is far more important than evaluating whether they were indicative of a broader ethnic-majority perspective: we should be less concerned with the verisimilitude of these perspectives and instead deal with the fact that they were perspectives, ones that moved up and down the chain of command and informed major policy decisions.<sup>26</sup> It should also be understood that Romanian elites and policy makers knew very little about this population, who were mentioned in only a handful of Romanian historical accounts and were generally presumed to be Hungarian.<sup>27</sup> In the minds Romanian intellectuals and policy makers, the Csángós represented a religious, ethnic, and linguistic anomaly in the very heart of the nation. Were the Csángós Romanian or Hungarian? For centuries the answer (or *answers*) to this question mattered little if at all. But by the 1930s and 40s – a period of modernization, national rejuvenation, then national crisis – the answer to this question had far-reaching implications. What, then, was to be done? Where was their place within “Romanian Romania”? If the Csángós were demonstrably Hungarian, could they still be Romanianized? Irrespective of their ethnic origins, did their staunch Catholicism pose an even greater danger to Romanian state and society?

Below I will examine four of these reports from the Antonescu cabinet. The first is by an agent in the *Centrul Contrainformații* [Center for Counter-information] in Bacău. The agent suggested that, based on the Hungarian language spoken within the community, the ethnic origin of the Csángós was presumably Hungarian. The author remarked, however, that if in fact the Csángós were not of Hungarian ethnic origin, then they should be

<sup>26</sup> As Irina Livezeanu noted about interwar discussions on the denationalization processes by and against the Szeklers, “it is not so much whether and to what extent ‘Szeklerization’ [of ethnic Romanians] happened, but that it was noticed, theorized, and ‘deconstructed’ by Romanians unwilling to simply accept a Szekler presence in eastern Transylvania.” Denationalization theories, such as those discussed by G. Popa-Lisseanu (see next section), formed the basis of educational policy in Greater Romania (see Livezeanu 1995: 139–140).

<sup>27</sup> See for example, Rosetti 1905 and Năstase 1936.

forced to abandon the Hungarian language since it was not, ergo, their original tongue.<sup>28</sup> The report drew parallels to the linguistic assimilation of others regarded as lost ethnic-Romanians, citing cases in Transylvania, Bessarabia, and the Timoc, where centuries of foreign domination had led to the „denationalization” of native Romanians.<sup>29</sup>

Another report commented on the attitude of the Csángó clergy, who were depicted as having “absolute spiritual mastery” over the population, preventing their assimilation into the local Romanian Orthodox population.<sup>30</sup> The report describes a form of “Catholic nationalism” instilled into the community by the clergy, breeding hostility against the local Orthodox population: “this is extremely dangerous and harmful to the interests of the Romanian State because the Catholic clergy holds the population under their domination, as an isolated community that is quasi-belligerent towards the natives.”<sup>31</sup> A third report depicted the Catholics in Moldavia as “a state within a state,” due to the clerical hegemony enabled by the lack of local (state) administration.<sup>32</sup> Though the clergy had worked, in part, to “de-Magyarize” the community, their overriding aim was to lock the community within a “Catholic enclosure...controlling it fully, and keeping it within the universal Catholic world.”<sup>33</sup>

Whether the Csángós or their clergy posed a genuine threat is, in retrospect, irrelevant: some amongst the ethnic majority – evidently in significant enough numbers to be referenced in these reports – perceived these Catholics as a threat to Romanian society and the nation. The question for the ethnic majority and the state was, essentially, whether the Moldavian Catholics could be Romanianized, regardless or in spite of their “true” ethnic origin. To those who believed it possible to Romanianize the community, the Csángós needed to be Romanianized as soon as possible in order “*to remove once and for all from the body of the nation this gangrene that is the Catholic population from Moldova* [emphasis added].”<sup>34</sup> Though some amongst the neighboring Orthodox population maintained the Csángós could indeed be Romanianized whilst preserving their Catholic religion, others believed the Csángós could never be Romanianized without first converting to Romanian Orthodoxy.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> ANPCM/SSI, *ibid.*: 12–20. Anonymous report entitled *Dare de seamă asupra minorității etnice din Moldova denumite Ciangăi* dated 17 Nov. 1942.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 13. It should be noted that most of these reports acknowledged the loyalty of the Csángó community to the Romanian state (e.g. wartime military service over the previous century). This acknowledgement only underscores the paradigmatic shift in conceptions of the Romanian nation by the ethnic majority, in that a community that had long resided within the nation and demonstrated no hostility to it was now subject to outright exclusion and even deportation.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 22. Anon., *Problema catolicilor din Moldova: Chestiunea originii etnice în preocuparea populației respective* dated 17 Nov. 1942.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Anon., 27. Page two of a three-page report entitled *Propaganda iredentei ungare față de problema “ceangăilor” din Moldova*. 18 Nov. 1942.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



Still others contended the ethnic origin of most Csángós was clearly Hungarian and that any claim otherwise “could not erase this from their minds” – such claims of Romanian ethnic origin be regarded as “hypocrisy” and unfounded.<sup>36</sup> From this point of view, the Csángós could never be Romanianized, nor should they: “On the contrary, they should be sent *en bloc* to Hungary. Only through this measure can the gangrene be removed from the body of the nation.”<sup>37</sup> In this context, the situation of the Csángós neatly exemplifies what Marius Turda describes as “the biologization of national belonging” (Turda 2007a: 427, 437–439). The nation is portrayed as a living, organic body susceptible to disease and atrophy – with the nation’s minorities its pathogens. In the same way, policy prescriptions for dealing with ethnic minorities were likened to medical prescriptions and treatments, necessary to ensure the health and survival of the nation. What is evident herein is that biopolitical discourse and the conceptualization of the nation in biological terms permeated not just the writings of intellectual and scientific elites, but also the intelligence reports and briefings by government operatives – and, as we shall see below, the letters, pamphlets, and journals of Catholic clerics.

### Re-constructing a National–Historical Narrative

Several Catholic journals in Moldavia advanced the thesis that Roman Catholics in the region were explicitly *Romanian* Catholics. The most important of these journals were *Almanahul Revistei Viața*, *Almanahul Revistei Populare Catolice* and *Lumina Creștinului*. The priests-cum-historians Ioan Mărtinaș and Iosif Petru Pal used these fora to promote their alternative historical narrative – which presupposed a Romanian ethnogenealogy in lieu of a Hungarian one – and to establish a timely body of historiography to complement their respective monographs. Amongst the first articles to appear was Pal’s *Catolicii din Moldova sunt români neaoși* [Catholics from Moldova are authentic Romanians] in 1941, which enumerated evidence in consideration of the Moldavian Catholics as “authentic” Romanians. He detailed a range sources dating from the foundation of the Catholic Episcopate of Milcov in thirteenth-century Moldavia – referencing papal bulls, census data, Propaganda Fide, missionary reports and codices – to contemporaneous works such as G. Popa-Lisseanu’s on the denationalization or Szeklerization of Transylvanian Romanians. Popa-Lisseanu theorized that the Szeklers were actually Romanians who had been Hungarianized over the centuries. Pal noted an anomaly in Popa-Lisseanu’s statistics concerning some Romanian villages in the Szeklerland (eastern Transylvania) in the mid-eighteenth-century, indicating that a large number of these villages had “disappeared.” Pal then linked the disappearance of these Romanian Transylvanians with a concomitant influx of Romanian Catholics into Moldavia – based on his reading of Church and other historical records – which bolstered the existing

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. The report was referring specifically to Iosif Petru Pal’s *Origina catolicilor din Moldova*, a work that attempted to demonstrate a purely Romanian ethnogenealogy (see following sections).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Catholic settlements there. Pal concluded that these immigrants were the Romanian Greek Catholics with “pure” Romanian names and Szeklerized/Catholicized Romanians from Transylvania, some of whose names and mother tongue appeared to be Hungarian. It was these Szeklerized Romanian Catholics who introduced a dialect of the Hungarian language and the Hungarian ethnonyms into the otherwise “authentic” Romanian community; the Moldavians referred to these Catholic newcomers as Hungarian only because they had been long dominated by the Szeklers. For Pal, the Hungarian elements amongst the Moldavian Catholics were superficial and inauthentic: rather, “the ethnology, ethnography and ethnicity of this population is authentic Romanian,” and therefore “all [Catholics] in Moldova are only *Romanian* Catholics” (Pal 1941: 60).

Between 1942 and 1943, the priest and historian Ioan Mărtinaș (see above) published a series of articles in *Lumina Creștinului*, under the rubric *Din istoria Bisericii catolice în Moldova* [From the History of the Catholic Church in Moldova]. These articles chronicled the establishment of Roman Catholicism in Moldavia and posited continuity between the autochthonous Romanized Getae, Dacian, and Tracian settlements and the Christianized Goths.<sup>38</sup> Mărtinaș believed that these were the pre-modern ancestors of the Moldavian Catholics. Bolstering this claim was a university professor in Bucharest, M. Gârnițeanu, who likewise took an interest in the ethnic origins of the Csángós and connected them to the Dacians. Gârnițeanu originally published his article, *Catolicii Ciangăi din Moldova sunt Daci* [Csángó Catholics from Moldova are Dacian], in a secular periodical, *Moldova*. Gârnițeanu traced the etymology of the Csángó ethnonym to the name of a Dacian tribe *Kaukoensi*, named after the type of earthen vase used to move water from local wells, a vase they were known to produce. The original Dacian word for this vase, *kaukos*, through Romanian became *cenac*, and this in turn became the ethnonym *Kenagaci* or *Cenagăi*. The Szeklers had it coming, too. Their ethnonym stemmed from the Latin *situla*, the term for a well bucket, which was transformed into Romanian *ciutură* and later corrupted into *sicula*, and still later into the attributed ethnonym *Săcui*. Essentially, Gârnițeanu conflated the history and ethnogenealogy of the Szeklers and Csángós, who were presumed to be the descendents of a particular tribe of redheaded Dacians described by ancient authors.

Several such articles that endorsed the Romanian ethnogenesis thesis of the Moldavian Catholics were reprinted in the Catholic journals during the war.<sup>39</sup> What is remarkable during the first half of the 1940s is this crossover of the sacred and profane: prominent secular journals and intelligentsia in both academia and government took up the cause of this obscure religious minority along the eastern slopes of the Carpathians; meanwhile,

<sup>38</sup> See under this rubric the articles entitled, *Întăia sămânță evanghelică* March 1942: 42–45; *Sub stăpânirea romană* Apr. 1942: 65–67; *Năvălirea Goților și creștinarea lor* June 1942: 126–130; *Erezii și prigoane în Biserica Goților* July–Aug. 1942: 163–167; *Biserica Goților în raport cu Românii* Nov.–Dec. 1942: 280–283; *Creștinarea Daciei Traiane* Feb. 1943: 48–55; and *Sfântul Niceta din Remesiana* Apr. 1943: 108–110.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Măreș 1943. Reprinted within an article under the same title by Ioan Mărtinaș, with his own commentary and analysis, in *Lumina Creștinului*. (1944) January. 26–29. See also book review by Z. S., “Die Abstammung Der Tschangos, sau Originea Ciangăilor; de Petru Râmneanțu,” in *Universal*, 11 Feb. 1944. Reprinted in *Lumina Creștinului* (1944): 74–75.

local, otherwise obscure Catholic journals reprinted, advertised, and cited the scientific work of a leading Romanian racial anthropologist and eugenicist (see below).

### A Dialectic of the Sacred and Profane

While Mărtinaș was engaged primarily with a general historiographical reconstruction — the piecing together of historical texts supporting claims that the Csángós belonged to the ethnic Romanian nation — Pal embarked on a markedly different approach, one based less on chronological-historical accounting and more on scientific methods. In doing so, Pal employed the work of Romanian biologist and eugenicist, Petru Râmneanțu. Râmneanțu had sought to establish a definitive Romanian racial identity of the Csángós based on blood type. Through serological work and the indexing of blood groups, Râmneanțu believed he could solve a number of historical dilemmas regarding the multi-ethnic composition of large parts of Romania (especially Transylvania) (Turda 2007a: 435). In 1943, Râmneanțu published an article entitled *Grupele de Sânge la Ciangăii din Moldova* [Blood Groups of the Csángós from Moldova], and in 1944 a monograph, *Die Abstammung der Tschangos*. In these two works — the only such works on the Csángós — Râmneanțu transferred the highly specialist and authoritative language of the burgeoning new sciences of eugenics and racial anthropology into the Csángó narrative. He claimed that, considering the history of the Csángós and the recent demographic evolution reflected in the census of 1941 — asserting the vast majority of Csángós chose “Romanian” as their ethnicity — the tendency of their ethnic consciousness was to declare themselves Romanian rather than Hungarian. The ethnic consciousness of the Csángós was, therefore, a natural consequence and manifestation of their biological reality.

It is evident that Pal and Râmneanțu had some level of contact. In a letter sent by Râmneanțu from the Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in Sibiu to Pal at his residence in Luizi-Călugăra-Bacău, Râmneanțu assured the priest that the results of the serological work on the Csángós (demonstrating their Romanian-ness) would soon be published, and that the problem of the *Romanian* Csángós would remain a subject of continual preoccupation at the institute.<sup>40</sup> With scientific confirmation of his thesis, Pal used the evidence established in Râmneanțu’s work in order to bolster and advance the cause of *Romanian* Roman-Catholics — specifically, that they rightfully belonged in the Romanian nation (however conceived) and to their Moldavian homeland. In any case, the conceptual frameworks and ultimate conclusions of the priest and eugenicist are contemporaneous, and it is clear that the work of each informed the other.

---

<sup>40</sup> Arhiva Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (ACNSAS)/Ministerul Afacerilor Interne, DGP, *Dosar relativ la Ceangăii*. The letter is dated 3 Nov. 1942, and reads in its entirety: „Prea Sfințite — Am primit scrisoarea Sfinției Voastre. Desigur că problema Ciangăilor-Români de acum înainte va fi și pentru noi un subiect de continua preocupare. De aceea va rugăm foarte mult să mai aveți răbdare până ce va apare și broșura noastră, care nu va întârzia mai mult decât 3–5 săptămâni. Structura serobiologică a Romanilor-Ciangăi confirma cele susținute de Sfinția Voastră. Al Prea Sfinției voastre — Dr. Petru Râmneanțu.”

### Pal's Coups de Grâce

By March 1945 the Red Army had occupied Romania and established a Soviet Supreme Command in Bucharest. As if the Csángó community had not been pressured from the west over the last four years, they now faced deportation to the Soviet Union<sup>41</sup> in the east under the pretenses that 1) they were Hungarian and 2) they had given quarter to German soldiers stuck behind enemy lines.<sup>42</sup> Yet again, Pal had to convince another political authority that the Csángós were ethnic Romanians who belonged in Moldavia.

In desperation, Pal wrote to Andrea Cassulo, the Apostolic Nuncio in Bucharest, asking him to appeal to both the Romanian government and the Vatican to intervene on behalf of the Moldavian Catholics: “Your Excellency, we try not only our romantic arguments with cold arguments, but with the warm blood, sacrificed from our Moldavian Catholic ancestors over seven centuries, as today from our soldiers, siblings of blood and arms with Orthodox Rumanians, and scattered for the freedom and progress of our beloved Rumanian Native land.”<sup>43</sup> Again, Pal is committed to representing the Moldavian Catholics as Romanian – Romanians by blood, nationality, and conviction who are distinguished only by their Roman Catholic (now *Romanian* Catholic) confession. In his appeal to Cassulo, Pal relays news from Soviet-occupied Moldavia of the Soviets’ intention to “deport to Russia our Catholic population under the pretense that they are Hungarian–Magyar.”<sup>44</sup> Pal further notes the help given by the Romanian authorities in Bacău and by various Romanian intellectuals, “who defended our Romanian origin and citizenship, which is in no way Magyar.” However, this support had not satisfied the Soviets in Bacău, and so the case was to be sent Bucharest for adjudication by the Soviet Supreme Command. Pal’s letter is significant, and so it is worth quoting at length: “We are of Rumanian origin. This truth has been denied by the Hungarian writers and some Rumanian writers...without solid arguments. But in recent years, thanks to findings of the *Rumanian Advanced School of Rome*, which has published four thick volumes with

---

<sup>41</sup> Evidence that the Csángós faced deportation to the Soviet Union in 1945 is taken directly from Pal’s letters to Andrea Cassulo, the Apostolic Nuncio in Bucharest, and to the Romanian Minister of Interior in Bucharest. While this needs to be corroborated by additional documentary sources, it is nevertheless the case that Pal and others *believed* this threat was both genuine and imminent (see below).

<sup>42</sup> Arhivele Naționale ale României, Direcția Județeană Bacău, Fond Parohiei Romano–Catolice, Luizi-Călugăra 1/1940: 72–74. The letter to Cassulo is in Italian and dated 18 Jan. 1945. “Ma se i russi al egassero altre pretenzioni contro i nostri cattolici, come quella di aver prestato ospitalita a qualche soldato tedeschi ramingo dietro la sconfitta subita dai tedeschi in Moldavia, la raggoina sana esige che fosse punita solo la persona rispettiva, che avesse commesso un simile fatto, ma non tutta la nostra popolazione cattolica con transportazioni in massa nelle regioni orientali della Russia. Questa sa rebbe una delle acuzazioni principali che essi mettono a carico dei nostri cattolici, benche io neppure un solo caso conosco di certo.” A version in Romanian of this letter was addressed and sent to the Romanian Minister of Interior two days later, *ibid.* 76; another letter expressing continued concern about deportation to Russia was sent by Pal to Cassulo on 10 Apr. 1945, *ibid.* 79.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* According to Pal, the Soviet Command in Bacău had communicated this news to the Romanian authorities in Bacău and Roman, who in turn informed Pal.

historical documents – *Diplomatarium Italicum* – and also my personal research in the Vatican archives, many documents have been found which prove our Rumanian origin. Based on these new historical documents, I have shed light in my book entitled *Originea Catholicilor din Moldova și Franciscanii păstorii lor de veacuri*. In this book I have proved our Rumanian origin clearly. [...] This book of mine has been elevated to the level of historical debate in the University of Iași...and the conclusion was that my thesis has been accepted with unanimity; the same conclusion was reached at the University of Bucharest and published in the historical journal, *Preocupări universitare* in 1943. The University of Cluj–Sibiu, through the *Comisiunea Istorică pentru Transilvania*, under the guidance of university professor Iuliu Moldovan, has confirmed the same truth, approving of the racial results of Prof. Dr. P. Râmneanțu, who was sent from the Cabinet of the Antonescu Government to the Catholic villages of Moldavia in order to assess my thesis.”

This sheds some light on a number of questions, namely why the Csángó villages were included in Râmneanțu’s serological and anthropological research in Moldavia. According to Pal’s account, Râmneanțu was commissioned by Antonescu himself in order to validate Pal’s claims about the ethnic origins of the Csángós. Of course, Râmneanțu’s mission was part of a broader agenda and system of research teams throughout Romania, coordinated by Iuliu Moldovan and the Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in Sibiu.<sup>45</sup> Pal is perhaps interpreting things to serve his argument. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake, I contend, to underestimate the significance of Pal or to dismiss him as a mere tool in the service of a broader Roman-Catholic or Romanian-nationalist agenda. Pal’s letters and his publications illustrate the penetration, absorption, and utilization of biopolitical discourse in the Catholic region of Moldavia. This was a discourse which emerged innocuously enough in the fields of social hygiene and demography but found its way into the lexicon of nationalist ideologies; it was later instrumentalized to articulate the goals of ethnic homogenization and to legitimize exclusion of those minority populations considered dysgenic to the nation. It should be noted, however, that though some of these ideas and discourses were indeed radical, even for the time, they were nevertheless a facet of the prevailing nationalist culture in wartime Romania (Turda 2007a: 436). Remarkably, Pal recognized and understood the implications of this discourse, assimilated to his own narrative of the Csángós, and exploited it to justify the community’s *inclusion* into the Romanian nation – thereby forestalling attempts to expatriate the community from Moldavia. In retrospect, he can rightly be viewed as the most consequential figure within this milieu.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Arhivele Naționale ale României, Direcția Județeană Cluj, Fond Institutul de Igienă și Sănătate Publica Cluj Cluj 1920–1966, 1069/710, dosar 98: 274, 291, 403. Beginning in September 1942, Râmneanțu traveled through Tecuci, Bacău, and Neamț counties to conduct serological and anthropological research on the populations there, particularly on school children and young men in Romania’s military preparatory organization, the *Premilitărie*. For a broader discussion of this agenda, see Turda 2007b: 370–373.

<sup>46</sup> In Romanian archival material on the Csángós during this period, the name Iosif Petru Pal is ubiquitous. His letters, published works, and his agenda and theses are discussed in nearly every major report or dossier on the Csángós compiled by the state, from the Antonescu cabinet to the Foreign and Interior Ministries.

### Conclusion

I have suggested elsewhere that, in the early 1940s, the motive and urgency for advancing the thesis of ethnic Romanian origins by the likes of Iosif Petru Pal and Ioan Mărtinaş was to resist attempts to expatriate the community from its homeland, first to Hungary and later to the Soviet Union. Again, we should look at the context not only of interwar and wartime Romania and the pressures of Carol II's and then Antonescu's regime on minority communities such as the Csángós; but also the incursions of the Hungarian government and its agents in the pursuit of its own resettlement schemes, in the attempt to encourage Hungarian-speaking Csángós to abandon their Moldavian homeland in order to colonize the Bácska and Baranya (territory that was, in any case, ceded back to Yugoslavia in 1944 following the war).

Biopolitical discourse and scientific language in the early 1940s Romania were instrumental in reconstructing the historical narrative of the Csángós. The science of racial biology, anthropology, and serology – as well as linguistics and philology – was employed in the pursuit of a unified theory of Csángó-Romanian ethnogenealogy. It informed the policy of the Antonescu regime vis-à-vis the Csángós, and was generative of future discourse that resurfaced during the period of national communism.<sup>47</sup> The use of scientific methods and discourse furthermore lent veracity to the claims on ethnic origins. This recovery of Romanian ethnic origins of the Csángós by scientific means (serology and racial biology) led one commentator in 1943 to assume the following: “Even if sometimes the data presented by the historians can be annulled by the serologists (especially when history is not impartial), the results of serology can never be refuted by historical argument – because serology researches the ever-present reality of a character that neither time nor facts nor anything can transform” (Mareş 1943: 104).

Again, all of this took place in the context of enormous pressure on minority communities, not only from within Romania but also from Hungary, which was engaged in its own struggle to achieve a homogenous, unitary state for ethnic Hungarians. Re-examining the plight of the Csángós in these contexts offers us a better understanding of why some communities were more willing to negotiate their collective identities and historical narratives. For many, this was an existential choice between, on the one hand, ethno-national and historiographic relocation within the national canons; and on the other, physical dislocation from their homeland and dismemberment from the national body.

---

<sup>47</sup> See Dumitru Mărtinaş, *Originea ceangăilor din Moldova* (Bucureşti, 1985) reprinted in English, *The Origins of the Csángós from Moldova* (Iaşi, 1999).



## Bibliography

- ACHIM, Viorel  
2001 The Romanian Population Exchange Project Elaborated by Sabin Manuilă in October 1941 *Annali/Jahrbuch* 27. 593–617.
- 2005 Romanian–German Collaboration in Ethnopolitics: The Case of Sabin Manuilă. In: HAAR, Ingo – FAHLBUSCH, Michael (eds.): *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing 1919–1945*. Berghahn Books, New York, 139–154.
- BAKER, Robin  
1996 Magyars, Mongols, Romanians and Saxons. *Balkan Studies* 37. (1) 63–76.
- BAUMGARTNER Alexander [BESENYŐ Sándor]  
1940 *Moldva, a magyarság nagy temetője*. Budapest
- BOLOVAN, Sorina – BOLOVAN, Ioan  
2000 Inițiative românești privind problema schimbului de populație în primii ani ai celui de al doilea război mondial (1931–1941). In: *România și relațiile internaționale în secolul XX*. Editura Clusium, Cluj, 90–116.
- BROWN, Kate  
2004 *A Biography of No Place*. Harvard
- BUCUR, Maria  
2002 *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh
- CODREANU, Corneliu Zelea  
1981 *Circulari și manifeste 1927–1938*. Colecția Europa, München
- COȘA, Anton  
2001 *Cleja. Monografie etnografică*. Editura SemnE, București
- 2004 Problema originii catolicilor din Moldova In: *Catolicii din Moldova în izvoarele Sfântului Scaun (secolele XVII–XVIII)*. Teză de Doctorat. Academia Română, Institutul de Istorie Nicolae Iorga, București, 14–64.
- DAVIS, Chris R.  
2007 Restocking the Ethnic Homeland: Ideological and Strategic Motives behind Hungary's 'Hazatelepítés' Schemes during WWII (and the Unintended Consequences). *Regio*. (10) 155–174.
- DIACONESCU, Marius  
2005 A moldvai katolikusok identitáskrizise a politika és a historiográfiai mítoszok között. In: KINDA István – POZSONY Ferenc (szerk.): *Adaptáció és modernizáció a moldvai csángó falvakban*. Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, Kolozsvár, 9–20.
- GÂRNIȚEANU, M.  
1944 Catolicii Ciangăi din Moldova sunt Daci. *Moldova*. január 26. [Újraközlve: *Lumina Creștinului* XXX. (2) 49–50.]
- GYÖRFFY István  
1942 A moldvai csángók. In: *Magyar nép, magyar föld*. Budapest, 441–472.

KING, Jeremy

2002 *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948*. Princeton University Press, Princeton

LIVEZEANU, Irina

1995 *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building, and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930*. Cornell University Press, London

MAREȘ, Crista

1943 Sunt Ciangăii români? *Preocupări Universitare*. (1) 104.

MIKECS László

1941 *Csángók*. Bolyai Akadémia, Budapest

1943 A Kárpátokon túli magyarság. In: *Magyarok és románok*. Budapest, 441–449.

NĂSTASE, Gh. I.

1936 *Ungurii din Moldova la 1646 după Codex Bandinus*. București

PAL, Iosif Petru

1941 Catolicii din Moldova sunt români neaoși. *Almanahul Revistei Populare Catolice*. 56–60.

POPA-LISSEANU, Gheorghe

1941 *Secuții și secuizarea românilor*. București

POZSONY Ferenc

2006 *The Hungarian Csángó of Moldova*. Corvinus Publishing, Buffalo–Toronto

RÂMNEANȚU, Petru

1943 Grupele de sânge la ceangăii din Moldova. *Buletin Eugenic și Biopolitic*. XIV. (1–2) 51–65.

1944 *Die Abstammung der Tschangos*. (Bibliotheca Rerum Transsilvaniae, II.) Centrul de Studii și Cercetări Privitoare la Transilvania, Sibiu

ROSETTI, Radu

1905 Despre unguri și episcopiile catolice din Moldova. *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*. Seria II. Tom. XXVII. 247–322.

SAJTI Enikő

2003 *Hungarians in the Voivodina 1918–1948*. New York, 250–297.

SICULUS (BESENYŐ Sándor)

1942 *A moldvai magyarok őstelepülése története és mai helyzete*. (A pécsi m. kir. Erzsébet-Tudományegyetem Kisebbségi Intézetének kiadványai, XIV.) Pécs–Budapest

SOLOMARI, Vladimir

2007 An Important New Document on the Romanian Policy of Ethnic Cleansing during World War II. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21. (2) 268–297.

SNYDER, Timothy

2003 *The Reconstruction of Nations*. Yale

SPINEI, Victor

1986 *Moldavia in the 11th–14th Centuries*. Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, București

TURDA, Marius

2007a The Nation as Object: Race, Blood, and Biopolitics in Interwar Romania. *Slavic Review* 66. (3) 413–441.

2007b From Craniology to Serology: Racial Anthropology in Interwar Hungary and Romania. *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 43. (4) 361–377.

VINCZE Gábor

2001 A bukovinai székelyek és kisebb moldvai Csángó-magyar csoportok áttelepedése Magyarországra (1940–1944). *Pro Minoritate*. (3) 141–187.

2002 An Overview of the Modern History of the Moldavian Csángó-Hungarians. In: DIÓSZEGI László (ed.): *Hungarian Csángós in Moldavia. Essays on the Past and Present of the Hungarian Csángós in Moldavia*. Teleki László Foundation–Pro Minoritate Foundation, Budapest, 51–82.

WINGFIELD, Nancy

2006 Introduction. In: WINGFIELD, Nancy (ed.): *Creating the Other: Ethnic Conflict in Nationalism in Habsburg Central Europe*. New York–Oxford

