

**Ferenc Pozsony**

## **Village Social Structure at the Moldavian Csángós**

Hungarian ethnographers and linguists have, in the last 150 years, revealed the Hungarian-language literary and physical folk culture, so rich in archaic elements, of the Csángó, being slowly assimilated in their language and culture. Alongside these extensive studies, the examination of the social structure of the Moldavian villages was long overdue. Researchers only began to pay attention to the relationships between individuals and their groups beginning in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the new developments in sociology (Szent-Iványi 1991: 83). The socio-ethnic interpretation, under the influence of social anthropology, brings us closer to understanding and analyzing why the Csángós gave such typical responses to the lesser or greater events and challenges of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this chapter, I primarily seek to uncover the prospects and pitfalls of an emerging civil society among the Moldavian Hungarian communities, a topic already gently broached at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the poet Mihály Csokonai Vitéz.<sup>1</sup> [The poet speculates on the extent of the territories of the Hungarian Crown and whether the Csángó might be considered fellow citizens – *Ed.*]

### **Hypothetical Framework**

The starting point for the analysis of Moldavian Csángó society is the 1983 work by Ferdinand Tönnies *Közösség és társadalom* [Community and Society], in which he sets down the hypothetical and conceptual frameworks. The German scientist isolates two fundamental forms of interpersonal relationships in his work, which is still valid today. He defined as *Gemeinschaft* (community) that group of people who are bound by tight personal and natural bonds, which were established through internal, organic means (Tönnies 1983: 15–56). Beside the traditional terminology of community, typically applied to groups and villages, Tönnies introduces the concept of *Gesellschaft* (society), which primarily he applied to town dwellers and more modern societies. Society is formed by the free association of legally unencumbered persons, whose members have a contractual relationship dominated by independent trade ties, whose institutions are man-made and

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<sup>1</sup> “Vajha Moldvának is kies parlagjai,  
A’ Meddig terjednek a’ Pontus habjai,  
Magyar Koronánknak árnyékába menne,  
S a’ Tsángó Magyar is Polgártársunk lenne!!!”  
(Csokonai Vitéz Mihály: Marosvásárhelyi Gondolatok, 1798)

organized in nature (Tönnies 1983: 57–116). In his book, Tönnies defined modernization as that process during which the social ties that depend on reciprocity are gradually suppressed, to be more and more replaced on an interpersonal level by individualism and a personal career. In the society that emerges as a result of modernization, market forces – formalized barter – are dominant, which is interlinked with the gradually emerging process of role differentiation and segmentation (Tönnies 1983: 76–79).

According to Hungarian sociologists, there is an intermediate stage between the beginning of the disintegration of traditional society and its radical modernization, the period of an emerging civil society (Benda 1991: 169–176). The fundamental and rapid transformation of human relationships was already noted in the era between the wars, as unavoidable results of urbanization and industrialization. It became evident at the time that as a result of the emergence of a civil society, the micro-environment of the rural population will also gradually change; the process will inexorably lead to a member of a community becoming an individual, a citizen. Thus, he quickly becomes distanced from the value system of the previous community, one based on local and family ties, his life work no longer measured against strict norms but planned as an independent person, decided by his own decisions. His place in society is no longer decided by his inherited family status but defined and denoted by his personal accomplishment.

The theory used by sociologists in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not based on institutions but human centric, revealed the invisible bonds and nodes between people. Based on these, Mark Granovetter identified strong and weak bonds (Granovetter 1995). While in the traditional rural setting, strong bonds dominate, in modern societies, the role of casual bonds is more significant (Csata–Kiss–Sólyom 2001: 38).

According to the most recent social anthropological research, modernization is seen to be a process which is closely intertwined with globalization and Americanization. As a result of the large scale social and local mobility, the dissolution of rural communities is hastened, the micro-environment undergoes rapid change, families disintegrate and the roles and relationships of the sexes and the generations fundamentally change. At the same time, due to the rapid change in lifestyle and culture, individual and group alienation and uncertainty grows (Fejős 1998).

### **Internal Partitions and Institutions of a Village**

Due to unique historical, economic and political circumstances, Moldavian villages retained relatively archaic, pre-industrial social structures all the way to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Halász 1998). While the more concentrated urban Hungarian communities gradually disappeared, the rural Roman Catholic population was able to continuously regenerate itself, in spite of all difficulties. Hence, today, the rural community represents the most significant strata of Csángó-Hungarian society at the local level.

In the past, a significant portion of Moldavia's Hungarians lived in *free* villages, the later settlers moving to lands and villages owned by the boyars. Although there are few

written records in existence, researchers believe that the order of the free (*răzeși / részes*) villages (e.g. – Cleja, Șomușca, Fărăoani, Luizi-Călugăra, etc.) emerged because of the practice of common landholding and communal values. The people of a village usually held in common the settlement's grazing lands and untilled fields. New fields, gained through the clearing of forests, were commonly distributed by the drawing of random lots. The self-government of the Moldavian Hungarian villages was never formalized in writing as it was primarily left to the care of the community's common memory, traditions and judicial practice (Kós–Szentimrei–Nagy 1981: 21–22).

The village council was the most important institution in a Csángó community, right up to the end of WWII. These were usually convened in early spring, before the beginning of the agricultural cycle. Usually, only married men took part but widows who lead a household or a farm were also invited. The gathering assembled in the yard of the parish hall and they elected, first the community's cowherd, then the guards (*jitari*) for each of the gates leading into the community, and finally, the shepherds (*gardieri*). Then, they settled on each of their annual pay. While all the families usually paid the cowherd with money, corn and food stuff, the gatekeepers and shepherds were, by custom, entitled to the crop on the 3–3.5 meter strip at the bottom of the fields, or were given a tithe-like donation from the harvest of corn, potatoes, hemp, etc (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 199). Any conflicts that arose between the shepherds were usually settled by the oldest.

The village elders, wearing their hair long in the back and a beard, played a prominent position in the Moldavian settlements until the introduction of civil law. They were usually treated with great deference and respect in the village, advising the elected village justice between council meetings, as well as the gendarme captain, appointed by the central administration, and the parish priest, sent by the Roman Catholic bishop (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 199).

These days, the Roman Catholic Csángó only form compact communities in rural villages. The rural Csángó settlements were little affected by industrialization until the collectivization of 1962. The social makeup of their communities was homogeneous, since the relatively isolated village society was extremely careful that no significant division could take place, material or financial, taking definite steps to prevent an individual from amassing a greater amount of goods than his neighbors. The strict – but unwritten – rules of their communities also paid careful attention that the Csángó settlements would not become too focused towards any of the various occupations or social groups.

Interestingly, the size of a landholding did not significantly differentiate – internally – the population of a Csángó village. The holdings of more modest families usually ran around 1–3 hectares and, since they could not make a living off that, they rented land from others, worked as laborers on the boyar's lands, or took on sharecropping. Those with farms of 3–5 hectares could support their immediate families but, during the winter, they took jobs in the boyar's forests. Usually, every Csángó rural community had 3–4 families who possessed over 10 hectares of land (plowed, hay fields and forest). On the flatlands around Roman, farmers usually had about 3–4 hectares until 1962. In the decades following forced urbanization, they used intensive methods to produce and ship

vegetables to the markets of nearby towns (Halász 1998: 426–427). It is interesting to note that a greater number of children of vegetable growing families were educated to a higher level.

These days, the Csángó do not have their own urban middle class, intelligentsia, trade and craft class, to unite them. During the golden age of the Hungarian kingdom of the Middle Ages, the Moldavian towns developed significant civil communities, which played an important role in the emergence of crafts and trade, the spread of Protestantism in Moldavia, the court events of the Moldavian principality, the administration of the voivodine, diplomatic relations and defense. The series of Mongol and Turkish incursions during the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries destroyed these urban communities. Thus, by the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Moldavian Hungarians no longer had meaningful numbers of town dwellers. Although members of the younger generation sought a better life in the nearby towns (e.g. – Bacău, Onești, Roman, etc.) or farther afield (e.g. – Braşov, Miercurea Ciuc, Făgăraş, Sfântu Gheorghe, Timişoara, etc.) during the artificial industrialization or collectivization after WWII, nowhere did they form an independent social entity. Everywhere they integrated into the urban lifestyle dominated by Orthodox family values.

The social structure of the Moldavian Hungarian communities is weak because of the scarcity of the intellectual stratum. In most of their villages, education was of a poor quality. Lacking their own educated stratum, no one drew the youth's attention to the fact that education was the fastest and most effective method of rising in society. With the establishment of the bishopric of Iaşi at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, higher theological instruction was begun in Moldova. First, the various Catholic seminaries, then the Iaşi theological institute, trained such 'blessed' priests from the children of the Csángó-Hungarian families who consciously turned against their own native language and, except for a small minority, did not serve the communities consigned to their care but lorded over them, in a feudal manner.

The Church remains the most fundamental, significant institution of rural Csángó society. Every family in a Catholic Moldavian village is able to experience its everyday and holidays only as part of the Church. In these settlements, the Church has retained its community character. The young and old of a village are intrinsically part of its life. Those who are unable to become a part of the local structure soon become so alienated that, in most cases, sooner or later, they leave the village.

The parish priest is not only the local representative of the Roman Catholic Church, not only does he attend to the spiritual care of the flock, but also plays an important role in the community's family, educational and moral life. The clergy has consciously and unequivocally taken on the propagation and dissemination of Romanian national identity in the Csángó populated region since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Similar to the Orthodox churches active in the region, most have directed the villages relegated to their care with feudal methods. Usually, there is an asymmetrical relationship between parishioner and priest who, as God's earthly embodiment and representative, is due unquestioning respect. They stand on an unattainable level above the congregation, able to pry into the intimate details of everyone's life, yet no one is entitled to find any human failings in their

lives, much less to point it out. The priest is still within his rights to appraise the moral fiber of his parishioners, punish the sinners and, similar to the Orthodox ministers, able to carry out some arcane, paranormal tasks. Those individuals who hold opinions that differ in any way from the priest's – and give voice to them – are, in many villages, most often shamed and intimidated by brutal means (e.g. – sermonized from the pulpit, threatened with excommunication, etc.). As a matter of course, these medieval means are employed against those persons or families who openly dare to ask for liturgy and education in their native tongue (Benedek 1998: 12).

Beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the Roman Catholic Church was gradually reorganized, a system of defined fees came into being. The parishioners were obligated to pay a pre-set amount for a christening, wedding, funeral or a memorial Mass for the deceased (*Almanahul...* 2000: 24–72). These 'donations' grew to such an extent by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Catholics around Roman threatened their church leaders with mass conversion to the Orthodox rite (Pilat 2000: 98). It is not unknown today that a widow will pay an amount to the parish priest that sorely tries her annual income – and existence – to have a Mass said for the memory, and salvation, of her deceased husband.

To the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, few priests were active in their villages, and those all represented the unification and assimilation aspirations of the majority in the nation during the period of the creation of the Romanian nation state. Alongside these priests, the role of *cantors* (or deacons), whom the Csángó called *clerk* (deák in Hungarian), assumed greater prominence in their villages in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tóth 1988). In the centuries before the current civil era, these cantors guided them – in their native language – in their religious affairs, as opposed to the missionaries who spoke Italian, Polish, Bosnian and later, only Romanian. Although they did not have the bishop's authorization, especially during the serious priest shortage at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they performed such rites (e.g. – confession, communion, baptism, marriage, funeral, etc.) for which they had no dispensation. Over the centuries, virtual dynasties of cantors sprang up in the Moldavian Hungarian villages. Most completed their studies in the Carpathian basin and were familiar with several languages. They had important roles in the organization, preparation and guidance of groups visiting the religious fairs. Under their tutelage, the Moldavian Hungarians most often went to the fair held during the Feast of the Epiphany in Șumuleu Ciuc. There, they first visited the shrine-church, completed the Stations of the Cross on Calvary Hill, usually spending the night in the nunnery church. On Saturday, they attended the main Mass of the festivity; at dawn, on Sunday, they gathered on the mountainside – facing east – to await the Holy Spirit in the guise of a dove. In the sacred grove at the top of Calvary Hill, they tore alder branches to touch the icon of the Virgin with those and kerchiefs brought from home. Attendance at the festivities in Șumuleu Ciuc, organized by the cantors, first of all represented a spiritual rejuvenation for the Moldavian Hungarian communities. Secondly, they were able to come into contact with other Hungarian-language groups from Transylvania, learn the popular songs and prayers of the Szeklerland, and purchase Hungarian-language religious publications (Tánczos 1992).

Until the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Catholic population of a settlement chose and invited a deacon to lead the community. After the emergence of nation states, the borders became harder to cross. These deacon families were now unable to send their young men to attend Hungarian religious institutions. In spite of this constraint, they continued to keep their Hungarian-language prayer and song books; their knowledge was passed verbally from father to son. To about the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some indulgent priests turned a blind eye to the parishioners singing and praying in the church in Hungarian, lead by the cantor, until the beginning of the Mass. Later, it was only in the private sphere, in a private dwelling, where they could sing and pray in their native language, mainly at vigils beside the deceased and wakes. In the closing three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the men of the Securitate searched the houses of the deacons in many settlements, mainly at the instigation of the Roman Catholic Church of Moldova, confiscating their Hungarian books. They were also forbidden to lead the singing of religious hymns or prayers in private dwellings (Csoma 2004: 36–90). During the most difficult years of the Ceaușescu dictatorship, the place of the peasant cantors was gradually filled by ‘lead singers,’ even less educated than the cantors, but with an excellent repertoire of Hungarian-language religious hymns and prayers. During the 1980s, Luca Hodorog in Cleja doggedly and determinedly filled such a role (Tánczos 1995a).

### **Local Social Restratification after 1944**

Similar to Stalinist authorities in the two decades after WWII, Romania also strove for the rapid homogenization of its society, suddenly dispensing with the social structures that emerged naturally over the centuries.

The basic social changes only took place after the collectivization of 1962, when the totalitarian regime stripped the farming families of their lands, farm implements and animals. However, it soon became evident that the poorly operating collective farms were unable to support the continually growing rural population, leading to an exodus by the younger and middle aged generation toward the massively oversized industrial centers. The Csángó families intentionally strove, especially after 1965, to have their children educated in one of the larger towns, however distant, for them to be able to obtain a job there and start a family. This exercise in mass departure shortly resulted in the children and the younger generation not being socialized within the confines of their native village, surrounded by their family but in a Romanian-language artificial urban setting established by the Communist authorities.<sup>2</sup>

This also brought about a gradual loosening of the formerly close family and kinship ties and this process began the gradual fracture and disintegration of rural Csángó

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<sup>2</sup> This became especially evident when, beginning in 1990, the young began to be unemployed and were forced to move back ‘home’. The difference of their socialization made their reintegration difficult.



society. More and more, every family had to deal with members who left for greener pastures, until, in a space of about three decades, such deep rooted changes took place in the social make-up of rural society that it exerted considerable stress on all concerned. For example, only about a quarter (26.66%) of the men born after the second world war in Ciucani remained in their village, as most of them commute daily, or return only on weekends, while earning their living. Until 1989, the majority of their wives (94.66%) remained behind, contributing to the family's income with modest incomes from the collective or state farms.

	<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Farmer</b>	<b>Worker</b>	<b>Com-muter</b>	<b>Un-employed</b>	<b>Office worker</b>	<b>Domes-tics</b>	<b>In school</b>	<b>Other</b>
<i>Grand fathers</i>	150	107	12	15	1	1	–	–	14
<i>Grand mothers</i>	150	140	2	–	–	–	8	–	–
<i>Husbands</i>	75	20	24	13	12	1	–	–	5
<i>Wives</i>	75	71	2	–	1	–	1	–	–
<i>Children</i>	318	94	61	9	13	–	2	138	1
<i>Grand children</i>	99	–	1	–	–	–	–	98	–
<i>Total</i>	867	432	102	37	27	2	11	236	20

In the survey made in 1993, the makeup of the village of Ciucani was predominantly of farmers up to the 1962 collectivization. Two-thirds of the men born between 1900 and 1920 supported their large families from agriculture and animal husbandry. After the collectivization of agriculture, a few of this generation also departed for industrial centers near and far – others adopting the commuter lifestyle – while their wives stayed at home to run the household and raise the children.

The male generation born after WWII shows a more diverse picture: of 75 in the village, 20 farm in and around the village, 24 work in industrial concerns, and 13 commute to some industrial jobs in nearby towns. In the years after the regime change of 1989, this generation was hard hit by the rapid and radical change in Romania's economic reality. The vast industrial works went bankrupt, one after the other, making many of them unemployed. The majority of their wives stayed behind, carrying on what farming they could in lieu of their absent husbands, raising the children who now see no future whatsoever within the confines of their native village.

In the ten years after 1989, a significant portion of those commuting from village to town were let go from their places of work, returning to their village bitter and disappointed. The current occupational model remains to be for Csángó families to orient their children towards industrial jobs in urban centers but the mass unemployment following 1989 continues to effectively frustrate them. This excess workforce is now drifting farther afield (Italy, Spain, Germany, Hungary and Israel) in search of work. In 1992, for instance, 10% of the population of Tazlău, out of a total of 931 people, worked in the intensively cultivated greenhouses around Szeged, Hungary (Ozsváth 1999: 164). The acceptance of

temporary work abroad has completely reorganized life in Arini, lying between the Siret and Prut rivers, where close to 10% of the working-age males work out of the country. Out of these relatively isolated villages, in 2001, 21 breadwinners (men) were temporarily in Israel, five in Hungary. From among their children, 38 were working in Israel, 30 in Hungary, 5 in Italy and 1 in Greece. In Cleja, close to a quarter, or approximately 1,000 people have only accepted work abroad in the past few years.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that working in foreign lands has not yet reorganized their value system, tradition and modernization existing peacefully side by side. They see nothing strange in the sight of a middle aged woman – in traditional voluminous skirt (*katrinca*) – talking on a cell phone, in the middle of a plowed field, with her husband who is working in Italy. Or, to go into an Internet café in Bacău to send an email to her grandchild living in Spain. Although the work in distant lands brings them into contact with countless elements and values of modern life, when they return to the village, they slip into the traditional lifestyle seamlessly (Hegyeli 1999).

Although there were active artisans in the Moldavian Csángó settlements (furriers, tanners, carpenters, potters, smiths, etc.), they mostly produced their wares and services to satisfy the local demand. The lifestyle and value system of the rural artisans, due to the peculiar dynamic of Moldavian social and economic life, was not significantly different from the way of life of the farmers. The potters of Oituz did not increase their output to satisfy the demand represented by tourism after 1989. They continue work at their craft during breaks from farm tasks, whirling their wheels on rainy days and, true to ancient tradition, only firing up their kilns two or three times a year. For most of the year, they plow, plant corn, hoe by hand, cut firewood and cut hay, etc. In days gone by, very few of the young would be sent to a nearby town to apprentice in a workshop, where they could have come into contact with the elements and values of an emerging middle class. A particular craft, and its lore, was usually passed from father to son.

### Relations between Generations and Sexes

The Moldavian Csángó villages, seemingly homogeneous from the outside, are partitioned internally by well defined family, kin, generational and sexual boundaries. In their communities, the only acceptable social position was within the state of marriage. Elderly bachelors or unmarried girls were, in most of the settlements, held in contempt, marginalized and continually scorned. Up to the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, boys usually married at 17–18, girls at 16–17. Among the surrounding Orthodox, they married even younger (Pilát 2000: 94). In the decades following WWII, this practice adjusted: women married at 20–26, men at 24–30. After the wedding, the young couple usually moved in with the groom's parents but soon built a house of their own with the combined support

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<sup>3</sup> The population of Cleja consisted of 4,331 people in 1992 (see Tánčzos 1997: 378).



of the extended families. In the Csángó villages we find not only nuclear families but also extended, three-generational ones. The immediate family unit formed by the ceremony is in continuous contact not only with their immediate parents but also the wider kinship. As a rule, they tended their meager lands as a family unit and also celebrated the various church feasts together (Benedek 1998: 11–14). The extremely tight-knit network, based as it was on mutual assistance of family and kin, until very recently still provided a measure of safety and protection for an individual.

The relatively tight-knit family relationships are still evident in the Csángó settlements, which is reflected in the richly detailed family terminology. This diversity partly stems from the fact that the ancestors of some communities settled in Moldova from the Carpathian basin at different times and from different regions. As contact with the Romanians increased during industrialization, the terminology for relatives also expanded with Romanian expressions: *bunika* for grandmother, *tátám* for father, *nyepót* for grandchild, etc. We must, however, stress that, in many cases, even in those northern Csángó villages where they no longer speak the language of their ancestors on a daily basis, they still use the Hungarian terminology. Secondly, we must point out that in their kinship terminology, they retain many archaic nouns to this day, e.g. – *lér* for ‘husband of older sister’. They have special pseudo-relative names (*vérem*, *vésár*, *mátkám*) for those with whom they formed a ritual kinship during ceremonies enacted on *White Sunday* [a week after Easter – *Ed.*] (Halász 1998: 428–429).

Today, Moldova is the most populous region of Romania, where the most significant demographic reserve came into being after WWII. In this area, between 1930 and 1992, the total population has essentially doubled, within which the 118% increase of Roman Catholics was even more spectacular (Tánczos 1997: 375–376). As but one example, the village of Coman, on the banks of the Tazlău River, had a total population of 411 in 1930, and rose to 931 in 1992. Although the rapid industrialization of the area affected the village through migration to the city, in a relatively short 62 years, the settlement doubled in size (Tánczos 1997: 378).

An in-depth analysis of the family structure shows that, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Moldova, a pre-industrial family model existed, devoid of family planning (Benedek 1998: 15–18). In the village of Ciucani, hidden among the hills south of Bacău, the large family model is still the most common in our time. In this settlement, 20% of the families still raised three children in the 1990s, while many had 4–5–6–7 children. Up until the regime change of 1989, for the inhabitants of Arini, some distance away, large families were in vogue. At the end of 2001, the distribution of the number of children per family was as follows:

Number of families	Number of children											
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	> 10
281 (100%)	8.9%	14.6%	21.7%	13.2%	9.6%	8.5%	9.2%	6.4%	4.7%	1.5%	0.7%	1.0%

It is only in the past two decades that the young consciously put off having children for a few years after marriage. As a response to urbanization and working abroad, 14.6% of the families in this relatively isolated village are now uniparous and 21.7% have two children. Hence, the two-child family is becoming more and more the model, although the earlier large family model still remains in parts of Moldova.

The resolute and unequivocal anti-abortion stand of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the cultural and family models that influence Moldova, result in that, in spite of the mass migration of the young, the Moldavian villages are neither being depopulated nor aging. The age and sex distribution of the population of Ciucani is as follows:

<i>Age groups</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>1–7</i>	44 (11.13%)	16 (4.05%)	60 (15.18%)
<i>8–16</i>	29 (7.34%)	28 (7.08%)	57 (14.43%)
<i>17–25</i>	34 (8.60%)	36 (9.11%)	70 (17.72%)
<i>26–40</i>	48 (12.15%)	49 (12.40%)	97 (24.55%)
<i>41–60</i>	37 (9.36%)	39 (9.87%)	76 (19.24%)
<i>Over 61</i>	19 (4.81%)	16 (4.05%)	35 (8.86%)
<i>Total</i>	211 (53.41%)	184 (46.58%)	395 (100% )

The population distribution of these relatively isolated villages is still comparatively balanced today: children up through school age make up a third of the village; young, married earners make up a quarter; and the 41-60 middle-aged group forms 20%.

It is noteworthy how few elderly live in the village. In Ciucani, the number of people aged 61 or over does not even reach 10%. As a result of the Romanian and Moldavian demographic explosion after 1968, the village social structure is primarily dominated by the younger generation. This situation we can attribute to the major political, economic and social events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which substantially thinned the ranks of the elderly still alive. Their formative years were greatly impacted by WWII and the serious droughts in the following years. At an early age, they lived through the forcible nationalization, anti-kulak hysteria, and collectivization imposed by the Communist regime; the Ceaușescu dictatorship with its serious food distribution problems that tried the personal integrity of all; and the re-privatization following 1989. During our research, we noted with surprise the extent that the younger generation has distanced itself in the last few decades from their elderly family members.

The Moldavian Csángó families living in this isolated existence devoted little care to the education of their children up until the end of WWII. To take Ciucani as an example, 50% of the older generation, today's grandparents, had no formal education at all and a further 47.3% only completed grade 4. Of the 75 heads of households, four were without any schooling whatever, 38.7% finished grade 4 and 24% completed all eight elementary grades. Although the majority of them received their socialization post-WWII, only 13.3% finished middle school and 18.7% went to trade school. Among their wives, 15 received no

formal schooling. While a shade more attended elementary school than their husbands, substantially less completed the compulsory eight years. It is only thanks to the social and local mobility following collectivization that a number of them were able to finish middle school. It is a sad fact that, in the half century after the war, of all the youths of Ciucani only one was able to gain acceptance to university. A similar pattern was found in Arini at the end of 2001:

	<i>Total</i>	<i>No educa- tion</i>	<i>Grades I–IV.</i>	<i>Grades V–VIII.</i>	<i>Grades IX–X.</i>	<i>Trade school</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Univ.</i>
<i>Husbands</i>	265	4	89	88	62	10	12	–
<i>Wives</i>	265	9	92	91	67	–	6	–
<i>Total</i>	530	13	181	179	129	10	18	–

It is primarily among the elderly, male and female, that we find some who were unable to complete even four grades of elementary school. Of the men and women of the older generation, 35% finished only grades 1 to 4. The majority of those who grew up post-war successfully completed their elementary 8 grades. During the 1970s and '80s, the 8 grades of elementary school were compulsory. It is notable how few went on to middle and trade school from this village. After 1989, a number of local children enrolled in Transylvanian and Hungarian middle schools, and a few in university.

The educational levels attained by the Csángó were defined by several fundamental factors. For one, up to collectivization, education had no real value or particular significance in the life stratagem of the family. As noted before, the more middle-class families of the Csángó villages have only realized in the last decades that education is one the surest and quickest paths to social advancement. The Hungarian-speaking Csángó were always treated by the appointed administration of the day with disdain and condescension; the level of education was intentionally not raised. There has always been a grave shortage of trained teachers in the villages of Moldova (in the Orthodox settlements, too), Romania's most backward region. The school board of Bacău County most often appointed untrained teachers to these villages labeled as second-rate. These Orthodox 'teachers', of Romanian origin and mother tongue and commuting from nearby towns, were astounded even in the 1970s to note how badly the Csángó children spoke Romanian. Hence, in most of the Roman Catholic villages, they deliberately neglected their spiritual instruction and education.

It is an interesting phenomenon that the socialization of young children in Moldova does not come from their parents or grandparents; rather their older siblings play a more defining role. In the Moldavian settlements, the younger children and youths play an important role – within the family framework – in the raising of animals and crops. Boys, on approaching their teens, take part in rituals important to the whole of local village society. In times gone by, the Csángó youth became part of a group (*ceata*), whose most important task was the organization and running of the local festivities. On Shrove Tuesday, the boys of Săbăoani, for instance, would dress up resembling scarecrows (*matahala*)

and greet the parish priest in front of his house, who would present them with gifts of boots and articles of clothing. At the open air festivities, they created a merry atmosphere with their comic outfits (Wichmann 1907). The flock of boys had an important role during the local church fairs, too. They greeted the Roman Catholic bishop of Moldova at the outskirts of the village, usually on horseback and in their Sunday best, and escorted him to the church in the center of the village amid singing and music. After the official memorial Mass, they organized an outdoor entertainment, complete with dancing, on the village square. For these events, they usually obtained the church and state permissions, hired the musicians and looked after order.

The girls of the Moldavian Roman Catholic villages were able to meet the young men at these public dances and lay the basis for pair-bonding. If, as a result of one of these events, a girl eloped with an Orthodox lad to get married, the local parish priest would firmly intervene and, with the assistance of the local authorities, prevent the marriage from taking place – even if the Romanian boy gladly expressed an interest in converting to the girl's religion (Pilát 2000: 95). The Roman Catholic Church and the Csángó families vehemently banned planned marriages with Orthodox youths, and this strict religious segregation led to many unfortunate suicides by love struck couples.

The winter spinning gatherings [communal preparation of wool for homespun linens-*Ed.*] of the past represented important meeting opportunities not only for the girls but also for the boys. Up until the 1962 collectivization, wool, flax and hemp played an important part in the making of clothing and textiles for home use. The spinning houses represented important meeting places where the boys could gauge a girl's work ethic, dexterity and artistic ability, where they could get to know each other and have a good time together. In the Moldavian villages, in the two weeks before a wedding, the young people would gather at the bride's house and hold a sewing bee, together producing the bride's linen dowry (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 204). Since the 1970s, mate selection among the young has largely been based on emotional attraction. Of late, the majority of girls meet their future partners at the city school, place of work or a disco.

### **The Role of Local Contacts**

Until the outbreak of WWI, the Csángó villages led a relatively closed lifestyle. The settlements were surrounded by fence, berm and rampart, the access points from them protected by gates and guards. The inhabitants fixed the surrounding fence every spring, which not only prevented their animals from straying but also provided significant protection from external attack.

The settlements were subdivided into smaller, internal group of structures (*cot*) and external farmsteads (*cățun*). The inhabitants of these smaller units were usually linked by close family or friendship ties, which usually provided security against outside groups (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 200). There was an unwritten law in the Moldavian villages that governed neighbourly relations of mutual respect and assistance. The families living next to each other

helped one another not only during major family events (e.g. – christening, wedding, funeral) but during the course of everyday events. In Săbăoani, it is still the living tradition that, after the slaughter of a hog, it is not only the relatives but also the closer neighbors who receive a portion of meat, bacon or sausage (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 205). During recent times, if someone wanted to sell his land, it was an unwritten law that it be first offered to the relatives to purchase, then to the neighbours (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 202).

Péter Halász examined the relationship between the Moldavian Csángó villages (Halász 1997). According to his findings, the northern Catholic bloc, living around Román, is precisely divided from the southern and Szekler Csángó settlements. Up until the very end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic communities of the northern and southern blocs were characterized by strict rules of endogamy. Interestingly, the young Csángó living in the larger – and more distant – cities of Braşov, Timișoara, Făgăraş soon overcame the cultural and territorial boundaries separating them. In the Transylvanian towns, a Csángó searching for a mate gave precedence to a Catholic young person more familiar with Moldavian traditions than a better situated or socially higher ranked Transylvanian Hungarian.

The settlements northwest of Bacău, in the valleys of the Tazlău and Bistrița Rivers (e.g. – Pustiana, Frumoasa, Lespezi) are, to this day, in close religious and family connection with each other. These ties may also become evident in the choosing of a mate; at the very least, they visit each other's churches during the fairs. The group of Csángó villages South of Bacău are separated by the Siret River. The villages lying on its left bank (Gioseni, Chetriş, Arini, Vladnic) form a small sub-group, in spite of their settlement history and dialect differences. The similar state of their language, the relatives who moved to Hungary and the migration of workers towards Hungary strengthened their mutual sense of identity (Halász 1997: 22). Similarly, good relations are evident in the villages on the right bank of the river (Luizi-Călugăra, Valea Mare, Valea Seacă, Fărăoani, Cleja, Şomuşca, Ciucani, Răcăciuni), although they can not be considered homogeneous from a historical or linguistic perspective. The neighboring, lisping dialect, Csángó and Szekler villages have deeper family and economic ties with each other than with the left bank villages of the Siret or with those living in the Tazlău valley (Halász 1997: 23). The people of the Hungarian villages found between the Oituz, Trotuş and Tazlău rivers (Bahna, Tuta, Oituz, Oneşti, Nicoreşti, Pârgăreşti) also differ markedly from the previously described groups in their familial, economic, social and religious relationships (Halász 1997: 25).

The Moldavian Csángó villages were characterized by relative isolation up to the 1962 collectivization. This was evident in their selection of mates when, even after their migration to the cities, the younger generation consistently married partners from their own, or a neighbouring, village.

Since we were able to successfully examine the structure of 75% of the family units in the village of Ciucani in 1993, we shall illustrate the shift in local mobility with an example from there. Of the 75 husbands, 21 (16%) are from some other village, some from neighboring villages and a few from as far away as Transylvania. In the case of the wives, 25 (33%) were imported, mostly from the vicinity.

### The Moral and Legal Value System

The moral value system and the view of the world are closely intertwined in the Moldavian villages. Not only in their holidays but also in their everyday lives, it is a medieval-like view that allows them to decipher the world around them, a view that is largely unaffected by the Rationalism of the Enlightenment or the Materialism of our own day. Every action and expression of theirs is given a deeper meaning by their profound faith in God and in a life hereafter. "The world view is rendered solid and static by the certainty of a God, and earthly events only have any real value within the context of this hereafter. Life here has not yet lost its Catholic metaphysical perspectives." (Tánczos 1995b: 290) Every individual in every Moldavian Csángó village essentially strives all his life to ensure divine redemption after death. Their ethical and legal value system, inseparable from a deep sense of religion, is fundamentally based on the Ten Commandments. In their communities, until very recently, murder, robbery and abortion,<sup>4</sup> theft, agnosticism and not attending church were held to be among the most serious sins. Second to a faith in God, their moral outlook was defined by their work ethic. They held a man to be an honest person if he supported his family by means of honest labour. They deeply despised those unwilling to work, irresponsible drunkards and thieves (Kotics 2001: 32).

How they respond to crimes against property sheds some light on the Moldavian Csángó mentality. Most wronged individuals would visit an Orthodox priest or monk and have a Mass said, in the hopes of inflicting stern punishment on the transgressor. Often they would resort to fasting (not even taking water on odd-day Fridays) in an attempt to bring punishment on the thief through ritualistic means. Others would resort to reading beans or cards to identify the thief. Most often they would relate these magical and ritualistic acts to relatives and neighbours and the guilty one, under psychological stress, would either return the stolen goods or publicly admit to the deed.

The village community dealt with local crime according to ancient traditional and codified means. If someone killed a neighbour's cow, the village council would convene and, if the accused admitted to the act, he would be obliged to purchase a similar animal or pay an equivalent amount (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 201). They were more lenient in lesser matters, such as the stealing of fruits. The thief would usually be forced to beg for forgiveness and have to return the purloined items. If a second occurrence happened, the punishment meted out consisted of having the stolen items displayed around his neck, paraded up and down the village streets, while shouting: "Whoever does what I did, will get what I did!" After this shaming ritual, the offender would most often disappear immediately from the village, where he would not dare to return, even after long decades (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 201).

In the past, the village communities consistently and sternly punished murderers. If anyone was undeniably proven to be a killer, the assembled 20–25 men – relying on

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<sup>4</sup> In Cleja, they still hold that a woman who has an abortion will have to consume 40 tons of rotten child-flesh in the afterlife.



the right of self-judgment – would kill the criminal without a second thought. In one instance in Săbăoani in 1947, a gang of thieves killed the saloon-keeper. When the gang was captured and taken to the scene of the crime, the men of Săbăoani were stunned to find two of their own among the criminals. The enraged crowd lynched them on the spot for having committed an unpardonable sin and for bringing shame on their village (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 202). Since the village council dealt with all manner of serious wrongs and conflicts in the Csángó settlements, it has only been since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that they have begun to turn to the government courts.

Up until the 1962 collectivization, everyone in their villages had to relate the same way to the model of moral norms and behaviours held to be the correct and exemplary. Every local community continually evaluated every detail of an individual's life and reserved the right to intervene at any time. The people in a Csángó village were able always to gain insight into the lives of their neighbours, thus having very detailed information about each others' lifestyle. By day, every action and saying of an individual was observed by neighbours; by night, God did the observing. Thus, with the power of public opinion, the village communities punished transgressors with the severity of social rule. For persons who deviated, the villages most often resorted to such 'handling', which primarily shamed the guilty person and family. Secondly, the aim was to replace the equilibrium of local social order. The process against the sinners usually took place in public before the village community. Until the mass migration at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, individuals accepted without reservation the verdict of the local community and related to their actions in a manner expected by the community: they admitted to stepping outside the community's accepted standards and felt *shame* at the public punishment meted out. They thus internalized the community's judgemental opinion (Heller 1996).

In most villages, persons found guilty of deviation were severely marginalized and mocked but were reaccepted back into the community after having concluded their punishment. Only in the most serious cases were persons expelled from the community. A most effective means of punishment for one who overstepped the societal rules was gossip. A man or woman carrying on a sexual relationship outside of marriage soon became the talk of the village. Since everybody was on guard to uphold their good name and reputation, they went to great lengths to avoid being the general topic of conversation. A husband or wife having an affair was usually castigated by the priest from the pulpit during Sunday Mass. The Roman Catholic Church was poorly organized in Moldova to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, hence many Catholics adopted the looser lifestyles prevalent among the Orthodox families (e.g. – men could simply leave their families and take another wife). With the gradual establishment of the Church during the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, replacing the institutionalized lax morals, the leadership of the church and its representatives took a more serious leadership position in the eyes of the parishes. The priests strictly condemned the age old practise of the abduction of girls [elopement, really – *Ed.*], and the young men who indulged in it were excommunicated (Pilát 2000: 94).

The Roman Catholic families placed great value and attention to have their daughters retain their purity until their marriage. If a girl hid from her fiancée the fact that she was no lon-

ger a virgin and it became apparent on their wedding night, the husband was entitled to send her packing back to her parents, similar to the Orthodox practise. This was also ritualized with an intent to shame: the girl, in a torn shift, was tied atop a harrow made of thorns – drawn by a donkey – and transported back to her parents' house. A great shame to fall on a family – in the eyes of the village. The duped husband usually demanded an increased dowry from his father-in-law, normally in the form of money and livestock. Later, at home, he would thoroughly chastise his wife – whom he would also mistreat later on – and attempt to wring from her the name of the man. In most cases, his vengeance was more focused on the other man, who was seen as a rival, than on his wife. The young man, so deeply injured in his self respect, could, at times, physically destroy his perceived competitor (Pilát 2000: 95). In Cleja, an Orthodox man only found out on his wedding night that his Csángó bride was no longer a virgin, sending her packing back to her parents, only taking her back when she converted to the Orthodox faith (Kotics 2001: 33). These days, the usual practice in Moldova is that those who reject the mores of the Roman Catholic communities normally leave and become Orthodox.

If it became known in a village that a young man and girl were having a sexual relationship, until recently, they could expect to be humiliated publicly. In Săbăoani, a girl found to be in a sexual liaison was taken to the church steps, had a yoke put around her neck and caned by the priest (Imreh–Szeszka 1978: 206), as an example for the other girls. If a girl became pregnant, she and the boy had to stand in front of the altar during Sunday Mass, each holding a black candle. In other communities, they had to hold a black cross in their hands during Mass. These public measures were deemed to be a great shame and humiliation. The affected young people had to accept it, else the priest would not sanction their betrothal and subsequent official wedding. The young men refused to accept this humiliating ritual after the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – it usually fell to the girls to endure it – instead paying a substantial amount to the Church.

In the years after the regime change of 1989, in the following power, ideological and ethical vacuum, the position of the Church in Moldova again solidified. Without naming names, priests continue to reprimand from the pulpit pregnant girls, marginalizing unwed mothers. They become involved in the family life of husbands and wives who quarrel and fight; suicides are not buried with full Church rites (Kotics 2001: 44–45).

As a result of modernization, the moral and legal value system has undergone rapid transformation in Moldova. One of the most obvious changes is the treatment of women who step over the line. Until 1962, public opinion punished them more seriously than men for any transgression. Earlier, any woman who was seen to frequent a pub was dealt with most sternly. In recent decades, married women are also taking part in the work-migration, leaving children and homes to work as domestics in Italy, Spain, Germany or Israel. This increased frequency of leaving the village confines has led to the situation where, if a girl or woman becomes the topic of conversation for her looser morals, she simply leaves her village – head held high and without any sense of remorse – and pointedly takes up residence with an Orthodox male.

The result of the large scale local mobility is that not only the younger generation but increasingly other groups as well pointedly reject the overview of local village society. As a consequence of rapid individualization, countless aspects of moral and sexual activ-

ity no longer fall within the sphere of public opinion, becoming a private matter in the Moldavian Csángó villages, too. The masses of foreign job opportunities undertaken have exposed the Csángó to a multitude of other cultures, resulting in a fundamental shift of opinion of communities and individuals who think and act differently. This increasingly rapid process, a part of globalization, effectively influence the pluralisation of moral and ethical standards, fundamentally altering the inter-relationship of the various generations and their relationship to the Church. Increasingly, they question in their villages the validity of a faith based value system (Kotics 2001: 42).

### Conclusions

As we stated in the preface, Moldavian social structures to this day retain elements and facets of a pre-industrial society. Family and relatives continue to play a large role in their lives. Even those working abroad are expected to take part in significant family or village events (e.g. – church fairs). The hard earned money, made in distant cities or foreign lands, is most often spent on symbolic goods, hence the rituals demonstrating family unity often quietly consume it.

Due to unique historical, social and economic reasons, the emergence of a civil society has lagged in the region to the very end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which contributed to the prolonged existence of influential structures, effectively hindering the freedom of personal choice and individual career options. Although governmental and administrative influence waned in their villages after 1989, the role and position of the Roman Catholic Church has strengthened, leading to a one-sided reformation.

Increasingly during the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many such institutions came into being in the Carpathian basin settlements where people with a common interest or point of view could meet (e.g. – musical groups, choirs, women's groups, farmer co-operatives). In Moldova, the governments of the day and church authorities stifled every attempt of organization from the bottom up, essentially impeding and delaying an individual from becoming a free citizen, the emergence of a civil society. A few associations came into being in their villages in the past decades – primarily as a result of outside pressures – but they are not the free gatherings of individuals with similar interests or views, being operated for the interest, and by the contact network, of individual families.

For centuries, the Csángó were used to having their lives dictated by an external authority or power. They accept, with biblical stoicism, their difficult situation and fate, casting a resigned look toward an uncertain future. In their value system, the fundamental goal was the precisely reliable social, economic and political position, which is why they still have a horror of fundamental changes and do not rebel against their lot in life. They live and evaluate their lives, in biblical acceptance, based primarily on the Christian values of the Roman Catholic Church.

In the decade of local and social mobility following the 1989 'revolution', in a relatively short time – and at the same time – such significant forces are operating as the mass mi-

grations due to forced urbanization, rapid class changes, modernization, globalization, cultural and identity shifts. While the traditional folk culture of settlements inside the Carpathian basin was replaced with a new, but Hungarian-language, popular culture, the Csángó who drift away from the traditional Hungarian-language folklore have only the option of living in the Romanian-language mass culture of Moldova. The assimilation espoused by governments and Church powers has been accelerated by the cultural assimilation present with modernization.

The impact of the listed processes has resulted in the break-up of many village communities, as individualism spreads, replacing the certainty of traditional lifestyles and values with uncertainty and dread. We can clearly state that the rapid changes that come with globalization and modernization have caught the citizens of Moldova unprepared, that the road to Europe – and its ideal of *fellow citizen* – will be a long and arduous one for the Hungarian Csángó settlements. In our opinion, this fact alone will essentially define, in the decades to come, the results of the modest advocacy and integration attempts of the Moldavian Hungarians.

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