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The Image of the Csángós in the Hungarian Press of Transylvania

The Csángó, the Press and the Power

The Csángós have been a permanent topic in the Romanian postcommunist press. It is mostly the Hungarian-language newspapers that have shown more interest in this matter, while the Romanian ones, usually the tabloids of Bacău – as regional means of control –, have had a specific approach to the question. National newspapers also occasionally talk about Csángós, but they don't treat the topic as a priority (see Gazda 2005). Nevertheless, if we try to summarize all the articles, we will face a corpus of texts of unimaginable size. That is why the present paper sought the limitation of sources, analysing the articles after 1989 that can be found in the Csángó Archive of the Kriza János Ethnographical Society based in Cluj-Napoca. It might seem a superficial and arbitrary decision, but it is one possible way to handle the sources; furthermore, the material in the Csángó Archive is quite rich, and by its specific selectivity it manages to provide a general image of the issue. The most complete collections are of the daily papers published in Cluj, *Szabadság* and *Krónika; Háromszék* of Sfântu Gheorghe, completed by materials from *Hargita Népe* (Miercurea Ciuc), *Brassói Lapok* (Braşov), *Bihari Napló* (Oradea), *Erdélyi Napló* (Oradea), *Romániai Magyar Szó* (Bucharest), *Európai Idő* (Sfântu Gheorghe) and others.

I chose newspaper articles not for their scientific proceeds, but because I believe that they are an excellent type of source for studying the public image of a group, in this case the image of the Csángós, how they build the group's image, and how and what they use that particular image for. It is more than trivial to say that the press, the media has a major impact on society, but it is a fact which can back up the use of this present analysis.

Choosing daily newspapers was not a coincidence, as sociologists have pointed out that Transylvanian Hungarians usually read these dailies; in fact, two different surveys came up with similar figures: 62% and 67% (Lampl–Sorbán 1999: 232, Magyari 2003: 115).

Being a topic of enormous ethnic and political weight, the question of the Csángós – as many other topics – shows a specific and unified image, due to the specificity of the Transylvanian Hungarian press. The latter mirrors the specificities of minority existence (Gál 2000: 142), because the Hungarian press as a minority institution, besides information, education and leisure, undertakes to foster mother tongue and national consciousness, too (Balló 2002:183). In the last few years, mostly thanks to modern professional education in mass media, the image has been changing, but in relation to some topics (like the Csángós), we can still talk about a homogeneous discourse. And this is not an accident, because the newspapers themselves show many similarities. For example, the prestige of

literature is omnipresent, leading to a mixture of public life, literature and journalism. So there is a literature-like journalism in the public sphere that legitimates itself based on Transylvanian Hungarian identity (Magyari 1996: 45–46).

On the other hand, the existence of these papers is related to different personalities with a public function. Even the “common” journalists reveal an interesting picture: 55% are members of a Hungarian political party, 62% a member of a non-governmental not-for-profit organization. Therefore, the press is strongly related to politics, it has its own taboo topics and it still shows signs of nationalism, intolerance and prejudices (Papp 2001:202–208).

In my study, I planned to use 400 articles; as this was still a considerable number, I adopted a specific approach. My previous readings indicated that there is a consistent way of writing about the Csángós, a common discourse in the papers, which grabbed my attention most. Because talking about something means possessing it, describing and limiting it, naming its place in this world. Using of course the term of Michel Foucault, the aim of my study is to analyse the discourse on the Moldavian Csángós, to reveal its belonging to or interference with other discourses. I am aware of the fact that my results are only partial, which must be completed by similar studies on the discourse of newspapers from Hungary and on Romanian language newspapers from Romania, in order to investigate the larger context of the topic.

After 1990, the Hungarian society in Hungary and in Transylvania was free to discover the Moldavian Csángós with the help and the basic filter of the mass media. A public image of the Csángós has existed only since the media and science created it, providing a combined common image that allows anyone to identify this ethnic group. It was not only the Hungarian media that created an image of the Csángós and a specific discourse about them, but also science, politics and the Romanian media. These discourses sometimes differ from each other, sometimes they overlap, depending on who is producing them. It is a fact that there has always been fighting over discourses, as on the one hand discourses mean power, and on the other hand, they are means of power (see Foucault é.n.: 51). They are not only means of fighting for power, but also functional contributions of power itself. The Csángó discourse is a means of power over the Csángós to such an extent that it provides the possibility of identification (of oneself and by others), of representation and of decision-making concerning this ethnic group.

My study focuses most of all on the Csángó discourse, more exactly on one specific aspect of it: the relation between the Csángós and the Hungarian nation, using the number of articles mentioned above. I do not say or think that this is the only possibility, or the only proper approach, but this is what I can undertake at this stage. Before starting this analysis, I divided the newspaper articles about the Csángó into two major groups. However, there are many texts that are not real articles, but only short items sharing some news. For example, they tell us in two or three sentences that in a specific city on a certain day there will be an exhibition or a conference about the Csángós. I did not use these items extensively, although I do mention and record them, because their existence supports the importance of this topic. In spite of their short extent, they notify us (read-

ers and researchers) that there is an important Csángó topic people should know and talk about. On the other hand, I used all the other “real” articles, which communicate more by both their extension and their national rhetoric.

Texts and Situations

All images from the press are constructed realities. First of all, they are texts. And texts – written or not – are not the equal of the topic they are talking about. They are representations, some secondary images that are included into certain interpretations. All representations and interpretations can have infinite variants, according to their actual purpose.

Viewed in this context, the Transylvanian Hungarian press approaches the Csángó topic as described above. It presents a discourse which names and considers – as if it was obviously natural – all Csángós Hungarian, a part of the Hungarian nation. More precisely, it does not name them Hungarians; it already talks about them as if they were *ab ovo* Hungarians. The texts – besides their aim to inform the readers – are not objective, but take an obvious position on this topic, naming the case of the Csángós a national cause, and considering the Csángós the fate-symbol of the endangered Hungarian nation (Peti 2004: 1).

The year 1989 became a turning point in the life of Hungarians, too. We can confidently state this, even if we know that limited time periods are subsequent historical constructions, determined by scientific research rather than the events themselves (cf. Kövér 2002: 351–355, Kulcsár-Szabó 2000: 92). Periodization is in fact an anthropologic demand, a poor means to fight time. Periodization is the rhetoric of time, a rhetoric that uses different shapes and forms, thus serving the construction of identity (Kulcsár-Szabó 2000: 102). The period of time exists because of the consciousness of the very period, and in this context identity has a central role. From the year 1990 Hungarians stepped into a new period, and as they can feel it, they search for new interpretational and identificational frames. All periods have had their symbols in the case of Hungarians as well, and some of these symbols disappear, others remain permanent (see Kapitány Á.–Kapitány G. 1998, 1999). In the last fifteen years the Moldavian Csángós became the fate-symbol of Hungarians. This process probably started earlier, it generalised during the 1990s, and reached its peak at the turn of the new millennium. At least this has happened in the mass media. Csángós have become the symbol of the vanishing Transylvanian Hungarians and furthermore, that of the dwindling Hungarian nation – at least that is how the media presents them.

Not only texts, but also the terms they use are constructions. Scholars of social sciences are quite familiar with the artificial notion of nation, a specific result of a historical process. It is quite trivial to quote Benedict Anderson with the term of *imagined political communities* (Anderson 1989: 4), but it is surely helpful in our attempt to analyze the case of the Csángós.

Nevertheless, the press does not take into consideration such scientific approaches, but rather relies on a two-hundred-year old conception of nation, so poetically formu-

lated by Johann Gottfried von Herder: *Every nation is a nation, because it has its own national culture and its own language* (Anderson 1989: 5). This discourse contains a nationalist self-interpretation, according to which a nation is never a construction, but a given existential condition, and this national existence is always and end in itself. And just like no-one can escape the human condition, no-one can escape national existence (Demeter 2002: 53–54). Now it becomes obvious – and this could stand for a conclusion as well – that the discourse on the Csángós is a national one, precisely a Hungarian national discourse.

To status of belonging to a nation should be expressed by national identity, a term that could mean lots of things, but the bottomline is that it is a form of identity, or one level or aspect of identity. The discourses of the press do not consider the character and functioning of identity, and – to their excuse –, the situation is controversial enough on the level of social sciences as well. Too often do we think that identity is an image, a picture of oneself, but in fact identity is a contextualized cultural attitude. It depends on context, because the construction of self differs from context to context, depending on the purpose. It is cultural, because we learn to act in different situations by a never-ending process of socialization, and the same process shows us how to be ourselves in different situations. National discourse claims loyalty of its members, so it operates with constructions that are not related to the situation-oriented social existence, but to an artificially built static system of notions. If national discourse ever mentions a different attitude, it stigmatizes it as a deviant one, and presents it as such to the public.

We can exemplify how contextualized identity exactly is by using the case of the Csángós. It is a fact that there are Moldavian Csángós who consider themselves Hungarians, and others, who name themselves Romanians or simply Csángós. This fact is acknowledged by the press, too, although it only accepts the Hungarian identity of the Csángós; those who name themselves Romanians are seen as misled, assimilated and so on. Contrary to the latter, there is another, so-called mystified behaviour massively imbued with national feelings and national thinking. All this is about the topic of “service”, a characteristic of minority existence. Beyond responsibility, there is humbleness towards someone’s own nation, the undertaking of moral duties and “free work” – all in the context of survival. The texts about those who left Hungary or Transylvania to teach Hungarian language in Moldavia reveal this aspect most efficiently, at least as concerns the used corpus.

The Narrative Colonization of the Csángós

In the shaping of its own colonizing discourse, the press was inspired by ethnography. The daily papers seem to provide information, as a national service, using a typical mass media language, an almost uniform, informing speech which seems to be objective, focusing on facts. But the selection of facts to be presented, the organization of different elements, motifs, the choice of order counter the condition of objectivity. It is not only

the facts, but also the violent style. Violence and language form a contrast in which they define each other, limiting the quantity of each other, too. In a philosophical meaning, besides the violence of the starting point, of the lead question, there is a specific violence of the discourse itself (Ricoeur 1998: 125–131). The language of violence can make some things more peculiar, more outstanding, giving them a different moral weight. It usually presents the things that are closer to us in a more emotional, personal manner, while the things that are far away (like the starving Africans) in a prosaic, uninterested manner – this is the common language of journalism (Hall 1999: 48–49). In the present situation, the Csángó topic can be considered a violent starting question, which is slowly revealed by a violent (national) discourse, seeking legitimacy. This creates a moral indignation in the everyday reader, because the Csángós are very close to us, therefore the style of speech is more personal, too.

In approaching a topic, text takes possession of it, shaping and transforming it, showing its limits and characteristics. The reader gets only this representation, an image created or recreated, packed for consumption in a specific way. It is similar to anthropologic fieldwork. In the mentioned discipline, the construction of the studied element is an anthropologic issue, defined by the researcher's questioning and problem-setting. The trademark of anthropology, fieldwork, was seen for a long time as an action of "no interference"; however, I believe we could talk about a "violent interference" instead. Anthropologists used to think that they would sink into a certain – already existing – social problem, when in fact fieldwork always reconstructs a problem for itself. That is why a more problem-raising attitude is required in research, granting the possibility of external self-observation spiced with a bit of healthy self-irony (Kaschuba 2004: 168–182).

But the point of view employed in the media is not an anthropological one; it is more like classical national ethnography. The discourse of the latter is used and quoted by the press, along with some other sciences: history, sociology, linguistics. But the traditional ethnographic point of view is the determining one. Ethnographers are scholars, who – as a result of their research – draw the limits of one culture or community, revealing the specific costume, dialect, customs, settlement structure and so on. This is the specific and professional area of ethnographers, they are the ones entitled to write monographs, thus to record, to describe a culture or traditions within the limits named also by themselves. All these are taken and used by the press and by others, too.

Let us not forget that – just like in the case of other nations – Hungarian ethnography and the Hungarian nation were shaped in the 19th century. In the process of nation-building, ethnography had a distinctive role, because national culture was built from regional cultures, and we can experience what we call identity especially on the level of regional cultures. National culture and nation are notions that were recorded on the combined pile of regional popular specificities (cf. Löfgren 1988: 162).

The acceptance of ethnography's colonizing character is a very young aspect of scientific thinking in the Hungarian area, although every discourse is a colonizing one, so that goes for ethnography as well. Edward Said states about Orientalism that it is a western pattern that aims the possession, the ruling and transformation of the Orient, plus it is

a discourse, so it is an authority, too (Said 2000: 12–13). The result of its activity is the creation of the Orient. Of course, this cannot be independent from politics, therefore in the case of Orientalism we can also witness the mixture of science and power (Said 2000: 56). In other words, Orientalism is a system of representations, so it is a discourse that oppresses something and creates something at the same time (Szamosi 1996: 432).

Ethnography, as a professional authority, undertakes the recording and interpretation of facts. This has been different during certain periods of time, as we can find out for example from the book of László Kósa on the history of ethnographic research (Kósa 2001). The author outlines all periods in the history of this discipline, and also mentions the impact of anthropology on ethnography, but there is no sign regarding the construction of the subject of research, the self-reflection of scholars or the admittance of the colonizing character. There are several similar works, monographs, dictionaries and so on. Finally, not long ago, studies of a different conception started to be published. The works of Vilmos Keszeg on the Arieş region of Transylvania deal with the colonization of that area. We find out about all the authors who wrote about that region, and as a result, how and when it penetrated the science of ethnography. Keywords like *ethnographic speaking/discourse* and *representation* are underlined successfully, and the reader realizes how the official, the public image of the region was compiled, with support provided by science, literature and myth (see Keszeg 2001, 2004).

Similar research should be done on the Moldavian Csángós, too. Ethnography and linguistics fulfilled the colonizing work in the 20th century, monographs, genre monographs, historical works, linguistic dictionaries and studies made this ethnic group recordable and identifiable. All these were seeking, or at least resulted in the emergence of relations between the Csángós and the other Hungarian groups forming the Hungarian nation. As the easternmost and most disadvantaged group, the Csángós became the metaphor of archaism, ancient origin and ancient pureness.

The same process of colonization is identifiable in the press, which through its own discourse inserts the Csángós in the body of the Hungarian nation. The role of the press is to communicate, to perform an act of communication forming an entire public system. And if we are talking about communication, from all theoretical approaches, the summary of Griffin shall help us out. Griffin states that communication has a theory on cultivation, too, which means that the act of communication entails not only emitting signals, but also creating something. That is how the Csángós as a community and as a symbol come alive on the communicational channel between the media and the individual. In many cases, the latter identifies himself, thinks about or fears these elements commercialized by the media, and not the real ones (cf. Griffin 2001: 359–368). These elements are not physical entities, but more like directives and meanings. Media products recreate certain social meanings and values (Hall 1999: 47).

In the present case, we are dealing with texts in which the notion of Hungarian nation is recreated, also including the Csángós into the newly created version. It is obvious that the notion of nation is an artificial one that can be recreated and transformed in concordance with the actual public or political interests. This narrative reconstruction of the

Hungarian nation is in fact a contemporary process of nation-building, and thus it is a specific part of a national discourse.

Péter Niedermüller distinguishes between the three elementary cultural forms of national discourse: oral and written political and scientific texts (*language level*), cultural rituals and ceremonies (*ritual level*) and the visual presentation through the media (*visual level*). These three dimensions are not really separated; they produce their effect by completing each other (Niedermüller 2000: 95). The Csángós have been more than present on all the three levels in the last few years, a fact presented by the media itself. As there is an obvious nation-building aim in the media presentations, I shall discuss all three levels in detail later on. In the presented context, the texts published in the press are not simple communications, but already interpreted stories, with ready-made interpretations. Therefore, the notion and the term Csángó has become – to phrase it like Niedermüller did – a *narrative abbreviation*, that is an already interpreted construction with an outstanding emotional and historical filling. And one of the main tasks of the national discourse is in fact to make these narrative abbreviations accepted and canonized by the members of the nation (Niedermüller 2000: 106–107).

In fact this nation-building process takes place in a contemporary society more and more characterized by mobility and multi-local belonging (cf. Niedermüller 2002: 141–142), a fact which can be exemplified among the Csángós by means of the widespread phenomenon of workforce migration. Therefore it is a late nation-building process, more exactly another wave of nation-building, a strong re-nationalization that seems to be quite well spread in Europe. Anyway, it is an anachronistic way of thinking, which ignores present mobility, the extended building of trans-national ways of life and communities, and the fact that nation itself is gradually losing its importance (Niedermüller 2002: 143–146).

The Dimensions of Narrative Colonization

It becomes quite obvious that the practice of inserting the Csángós into the Hungarian nation is based on the concept of cultural nation. This is more than interesting, because even nowadays people say that the culture of the Csángós is untouched, and due to the harshness of history they were not a part of language renewal, of the events from 1848–1849, of the modern Hungarian culture. As a conclusion, they were never a part of the modern Hungarian nation as a historical construction. In spite of all this, there are some components of the nation-building process that cannot be replaced: a common past or memory which is interpreted as fate, then several linguistic and cultural relations resulting in a high level communication, and the concept on the equal status of the members of the community (see Hroch 2000: 5). National discourse quotes all these as unquestionable arguments. The Hungarian press of Transylvania does not represent an exception in this case.

Compact Communities vs Occasional Spokesmen

The ease with which the Csángós are named Hungarians in the newspaper articles is outstanding, but not surprising. Although we cannot talk about a coherent use of terms in this sense, because the *Moldavian Csángó*, the *Csángó Hungarian*, the *Moldavian Hungarian* and the *Moldavian Csángó Hungarian* are all synonyms. However, this is not the same for the so-called Romanian part, and politicians are quick to take advantage of this taxonomic chaos. They interpret the international recommendations in a specific way, saying that all recommendations talk about the Csángó language, not the Hungarian one, so not Hungarian should be allowed into schools and churches, but the Csángó “language”. This unsteadiness of terms in the political and everyday use is upsetting especially because the Csángó topic has become one of the most discussed and sensitive parts of Romanian–Hungarian confrontations.

The Hungarian press continues to consider the Catholics from Moldavia as a homogeneous mass, and this can be remarked in their practice of titling, too: *The Moldavian Csángó Hungarians Demand Hungarian Mass* or *The Bacău Court Rules in Favour of the Csángós*. Moreover, the articles do not forget to permanently present names or lists of names as important evidence. Usually scholars do quote authors like Pál Péter Domokos, Péter Halász and the *Codex Bandinus*, which contains lists of names, truly Hungarian ones. According to this discourse, names are automatic vouchers of belonging to a certain nation, but this is not how things work in the 21st century. Of course, there are people like András Duma, Antal Csicsó or Katalin Fehér, who really undertake a Hungarian or/and Csángó identity, and state it on several occasions. But it does not follow suit that we can consider all the others Hungarians, because nowadays name and spoken language still give space to identity alternatives. Antal Csicsó realized this important aspect, but he considered it as a lower step on the ladder of social evolution, declaring that *in the programmes we have to weigh the fact that the Csángós are underdeveloped, they do not really form “the Csángós”, but they are a kind of unstructured, unorganized gathering of persons who feel like Csángós* (Háromszék. March 30. 1999).

I mentioned a few names, so I want to underline that in the papers, the Csángós are identified with some representatives, sometimes with the MCSMSZ (The Association of Csángó Hungarians from Moldavia). The concept of nation surely names the intellectuals as the spokesmen of the nation, because they are the ones who teach and lead the members of the nation. They are capable of foresight and of making the right decisions for the community, for the nation. This is the case of political and cultural entrepreneurs, people who monopolise some discourses, too. They usually have a conservative approach, declaring that the brave “national” past, the heritage of the people has to be defended against the process of modernization (Dieckhoff 2002: 18).

In fact, we can distinguish two cases in these texts: that of political and protective nature, which feature the voices of Csángó intellectuals, representatives, Transylvanian and Hungarian politicians, scholars and protectors of their interests; and that of a more prosaic nature, resembling reports, which feature the Csángó representatives, plus the “everyday Csángós”, who are referred to as uncle Michael or aunt Elisabeth. The texts

use them to prove the grassroots reality, featuring the people, and quoting their voices as facts of life. It is another anthropological parallel, the validity of “being there on the field”, though short of self-reflection or problem-raising.

The Power of Ancient Origins

An always returning and permanent topic is the question of origins. The discourse on Csángós refers to it in a determined way: the Csángós are Hungarians, because they are of Hungarian origin, thus they are a part of the great Hungarian nation. And this is so, even if many of them are not familiar with their own origins, and *horribile dictu* – are not interested in it. The same approach is adopted by the Romanian part as well. The famous conferences (in Bucharest and in Iași) that were labelled “scientific”, were meant to prove the Romanian origin of the Csángós, thus declaring them a part of the great Romanian nation. In these cases, too, science serves power, legitimating its points of view. The Hungarian sphere organized its own conferences as well, and the press immediately made the conclusions public: *Myth of origins burnt to ashes* – states the front page of the daily paper *Krónika* (April 29. 2003).

It is quite interesting that the controversy of free identity alternatives and of stigmatization from above appears in these articles, but always related to the Romanian side: *One of the most elementary human rights is that every individual can choose his/her own nationality, and if it is the case, he/she might even change it. Nationality and name can be chosen, but history and facts cannot be falsified in a civilized scientific world. [...] Because it is one thing if a Csángó declares himself/herself Romanian, and another thing when a whole ethnic group is declared something else than it is in fact.* (Háromszék. March 28. 2001). So there can be individual strategies, but after all, we can be only “one thing”, and that is what we “really are”. For the author of the above-quoted article it seems that there is no question of the fact that he, who represents a Hungarian discourse, does the same as the proponent of the Romanian discourse, declaring a whole ethnic group something based on a conception of a system of artificial notions.

The continuous quotation of Hungarian origin and Hungarian history somehow tries to overshadow the process of nation-building, presenting the Hungarian being of the Csángós as something that is naturally given. Apparently, the discourse reveals rather than constructs: *If the Moldavian Csángós were not an ancient stratum of the Hungarians, separated from them a long time ago by the harshness of history, they would not cry out in their Csángó dialect like this: Csángó Hungarian, Csángó Hungarian...* (Romániai Magyar Szó. January 16. 2002). Another text covers the group of Csángós with a Hungarian historic name, inserting them into the body of the Hungarian nation: *Something has moved in Moldavia, but I could also say Etelköz, because there is a late wish bursting out from the depths of our history.* (Háromszék. November 5. 1997) It is clear that all this is about our Hungarian history, a part of our nation that “has been delayed”, meaning it was divided from the body of the nation, but now it wants to get back there. Probably I do not have to mention again, how often the phrase *our eastern brothers* is used, and how emotionally charged it is.

The Sanctity of the Hungarian Language

There is a simplest way of belonging to a nation: someone is Hungarian, because he/she speaks Hungarian. This is a specific means of the Hungarian press, considering a member of the Hungarian nation whoever speaks Hungarian, or if not, he/she has a Hungarian name or somebody in that very person's family speaks or once spoke Hungarian. According to this, the Csángós speak a kind of ancient archaic Hungarian. These affirmations on the one hand generalize too much, on the other hand present the Csángó dialect as a linguistic relic, an important part of the national patrimony. We know that the Csángós speak in their own dialect, a fact supported by the scientific prestige of the linguistic dictionary, but there are differences in the dialect of the Northern, Southern and Szekler Csángós. A very illustrative example shall follow. *The Northern Csángós of Roman speak the language of the Halotti Beszéd¹, the Southern Csángós from the surroundings of Bacău speak the language of Bálint Balassi², while the "youngest" stratum, the Szekler Csángós speak the language of Mikes³. In the Csángó conscience it is a fact that they are the descendants of Attila's people!* (Kronika. October 14–15, 2000) What is happening here is the use of outstanding, canonized elements of Hungarian history and culture, the projection of these over the Csángós, and through them, the Csángós are inserted into the Hungarian nation – in spite of the fact that it is very hard to find a Csángó who is familiar with the name of Balassi or Mikes.

There are some people who note that it is not the written Hungarian language that is found in Moldavia, but rather oral history. They also were astonished by the fact that Moldavians representing the Romanian side speak Hungarian. In other accounts, the representatives of the press were passing through a Csángó village where people did not really know Hungarian. But when a fire started in the village: *We were heading to the fire along the Oituz river. The streets were full of curious people. It was interesting that almost everybody was speaking Hungarian. Fear instinctively made them use their mother tongue* (Háromszék. July 11. 1998).

Actually it is far more convincing when the press makes the people talk, and they are the ones to admit things, to formulate opinions and to give arguments. András Duma formulated the complexity, or oppositely, the simplicity of the situation: *All this started two years ago. Before 1990 we did not know that we were Csángós or Hungarians. We knew almost nothing about our history. But we have always spoken Hungarian; many of the elders cannot speak Romanian, not even today.* (Gyergyói Kisújság. August 19–25, 1998). History is our genealogy, without knowing it, we are not ourselves. In any case, the language taught by our mothers helps us in our identification.

¹ The oldest Hungarian text discovered so far, a prayer written entirely in Hungarian.

² A canonized 16th century Hungarian poet, one of the first to use Hungarian.

³ Kelemen Mikes, a canonized character of 18th century Hungarian culture and literature, possibly the first to practice the genre of literary letters.

The Church and the School

A dominant part of the press material is about mass and education in Hungarian for the Csángós. This question is mainly about fighting for minority rights, and I would like to talk about the representatives in this fight later. For the time being I shall present some appreciations about the Hungarian language that reveal a duality in the question. The requests for Hungarian mass and education shows that the Csángós have already entered the virtual community of the Hungarian nation, because the petitions stand for rights related to mother tongue. At the same time this is also a part of the nation-building process, because by their requests, the Csángós can be included into the nation. This is proved by the declaration of one of the leaders in this fight. *We know that the Vatican is against masses held in dialects. But we do not ask for a dialect, we ask for the Hungarian language in church. In Pustiana people want a true Hungarian language, a beautiful Hungarian language, and that is the Hungarian standard.* (Kronika. Nr. 84. 2002).

The argumentation is also built on the role of mother tongue and of constitutional human rights: *They say they want it, especially women, because they do not really speak Romanian, but not many people undertake it. The eyes of the young man with a body like Miklós Toldi⁴ showed real fear.* (Háromszék. March 7. 1998).

Educational programmes have their own political agenda, but besides the political influence, the articles point out the natural demand for mother tongue education. Of course, there is no doubt that the educational system is seen as the basic institution for nation-building. Many Moldavian students have been studying in Transylvania and in Hungary, but only a few returned home, although the main purpose is: *the basic education of Moldavian Csángó children in Hungarian language, their preparation for further studies in concordance with their abilities, the basis of the formation of a Moldavian Csángó intelligentsia* (Erdélyi Napló. December 7. 2003). The programme will be successful only when these youngsters return home. The press could find an example for such an attitude. Some Csángó students from Szeklerland declare that *they want to become Hungarian teachers, and to teach the Csángó children Hungarian.*

– And if there will not be Hungarian teaching in Moldavia? – I painted the future in dark colours.

– Then I'd rather not teach at all. I want to teach only in Hungarian.

That is what I call determination. (Háromszék. August 20. 1994). And that is what we can call nation-building discourse.

Another related aspect of the question is the camping of Csángó children, as an alternative educational form. We learn from some articles that Csángó children spent one or two weeks away from home learning how to read and write in Hungarian, learning Hungarian folk songs and folk tales, thus being educated as Hungarians. The natural communicating style of the article becomes an emotional one when presenting the symbolic

⁴ A hero with outstanding powers from the works of national poet János Arany; the Hungarian Hercules.

actions: *Specific folk songs from the Csángó region and from Mureş county were heard in the late afternoon of the educational camp. Csángó children in their folk costume lined up in the yard of the camp and when they started to sing the Csángó Anthem in their interesting dialect that was so unusual, but at the same time so kind to our ears, there were tears in many people's eye.* (Krónika. July 19–20. 2003).

Hungarian education appears in political speech as well. *We should raise support for educational programmes in the next years in order to make the Hungarian consciousness of this divided group stronger and stronger – declared a politician* (Szabadság. December 3. 2003). Another step in the specialization of the Hungarian press which refers to the Csángós as not only to the most ancient stratum, but also the one that was divided from the Hungarians of Transylvania, becoming *the minority of the minority*.

Ancient Past – National Heritage

The Csángós are not only the easternmost Hungarian group, but also the keepers of the national culture's most archaic stratum, the symbol of ancient Hungarian origin. Inspired by the discourse of different sciences (ethnography, history, linguistics), this aspect is repeated over and over by the press. And there is no national discourse without the sanctity of origins. This makes the *Csángó Days* and the similar events so important. Referring back to the thoughts of Péter Niedermüller, it is all about the ritual level of the discourse, because these events celebrating a part of the Hungarian culture function as variants of national days. *Besides their specific talk, beautiful costume and folk songs, our Moldavian guests also brought the products of their gastronomy. In giant pots there was stuffed cabbage, milk loaf, meatballs, gravy, everything that went well with our local wonderful bread. We all who were there consumed these as if it was Host or Holy Communion, and we had the feeling that the poor and the haunted might be wealthier than the rich and the indifereant.* (Háromszék. November 28. 2001)

Paradoxically, the validity of the ancient nature as the symbol of survival is guaranteed by the “national science” of ethnography. Csángó culture is appreciated by everyone; scholars, politicians, public personalities are usually the ones to open the exhibitions, hold lectures and give their name to the formulation of national discourse. At the opening of a Csángó exhibition the following statement could be heard: *Nowadays they are more open to the world, their changing life carries within the danger of their disappearance, and we must delay this process deliberately.* (Szabadság. March 2. 1998) An ethnographer stated, *I thank the Moldavian Csángó Hungarians that they keep our treasures.* (Háromszék. November 25, 2002) This is the ethnographic approach that is well received within the Hungarian press, an excellent source for the Csángó discourse.

In their action plan, the Csángó representatives clearly declare their belonging to Hungarian culture, thus to the Hungarian nation. *There is no nation without culture! The Hungarian culture cannot be complete without the admittance and use of each and every Hungarian group's values and traditions. It is our belief that every Hungarian's desire is the survival and inclusion of the easternmost and most disadvantaged Hun-*

garians' – the Moldavian Csángós' – ancient values into the consciousness of our nation. (Bihari Napló. December 1, 2000) This is one of the main messages of the plan that was read on a Csángó Day. Its initiators and editors were the leaders of the Csángó Association, intellectuals of Csángó (and not only) origins. The action plan also contains the request for organizing a Csángó Day every year, which is in fact a request for the ritual actions of the national discourse, directing public attention to the emotional dimension, to the welcome into the Hungarian nation and to emotional identification.

Representation and Fight for Rights – from Locality to the European Council

The keeping and popularization of traditional culture, the fight for Hungarian mass and education appear in the press as a national cause that attracts the support of different institutions and private persons. For the national discourse it is not all the same who is the one to raise his voice for the Csángós or to represent them. As a first step the MCSMSZ was formed in 1990, and not anyhow, but by joining DAHR. Then the paper *Csángó Újság* appeared, but the euphoria of the starting period was followed by a sudden decay caused by lack of funds. Therefore the Hungarian press expressed its deep indignation about the situation, asking DAHR to solve these problems, and also condemning it for not having a special Csángó programme. One of the leaders of the party declared that there was no need for such a programme, because the Csángós are a part of the Hungarians from Romania, therefore they are included in all programmes and activities.

So DAHR is the institution appointed to fight for the Csángós' rights, because they are also a part of the Hungarians from Transylvania and implicitly of the Hungarian nation. After this, the Csángós became the *stepchildren of DAHR* or the *minority of the minority*. This representation seems quite natural, because the Csángós with Hungarian identity founded their association in relation with DAHR, and later on they usually asked for the help from the same organization: *they asked for political defence from DAHR in order to solve the situation or as a request of the Csángó Hungarians, DAHR paid a visit to Csángó-land*. The cry for help also strengthens the same national discourse. In spite of the harsh political situation in Moldavia, DAHR proposed the founding of the party's local organizations and in a few years this really happened in Cleja, Pustiana, Răcăciuni and Luizi Călugăra, plus in November and December of 2003 the regional organization of Suceava and the county organization of Bacău were also founded.

Another step further was the appeal to the Hungarians from Hungary and from all over the world: *To the invitation of the MCSMSZ, Zsolt Németh paid a visit to the county of Bacău during his visit to Romania. The Hungarian undersecretary for foreign affairs had a meeting with the representatives of the Moldavian Csángós at Cleja* (Háromszék. February 17, 2000).

The Transylvanian and Hungarian representation of the Csángós is obviously legitimated by the fact that the Csángós themselves (more precisely their representatives) asked for protection, for their integration into the nation and for the care of this nation for them. Some voices of the press have commented on the lack of representation and

political protection, and as a result, the readers themselves accept the Csángós into their nation, they identify themselves with this group and also make their voice heard on their emotional bounds to the same group. And they do this even by means of public letters to political leaders showing no signs of shyness or modesty: *Well, Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Undersecretary of the State, this is the point where it occurred to me, that there was a serious shortcoming – which has become a huge one since – in the Hungarian–Hungarian dialogue: the representation of the Moldavian Csángó Hungarians. Or: the representation of the Eastern Hungarians. I think it is pointless to tell you, as you know it very well, that of the few hundred thousand Catholics from Moldavia some fifty or sixty thousand still speak their ancient Hungarian mother tongue, and despite their damaged identity, secretly though, and only in their dreams, they hold themselves Hungarians* (Erdélyi Napló. March 2. 1999).

The Hungarian press also uses the European initiatives for human rights, the recommendations of the European Council as a support for its own discourse. The Tytti Isohookana report was published several times, and since then, the Csángó discourse has quoted not only the constitutional rights naming the exact paragraphs, but this report and recommendation, too. The exact and formally unquestionable quotations are meant to declare the official and well-founded nature of the Hungarian point of view. What else can prove better the rightfulness of Hungarian demands than the care of the European forums for the Csángó question? The European reactions are quoted and directed towards the Romanian part in such a way that, when reading these articles, I personally have the feeling that on the one hand this discourse considers the belonging of the Csángós to the Hungarian nation historically proved and natural, and on the other hand all this is presented as a compensation for the historical damage, for Trianon, for the “unjust Hungarian fate”. Finally Europe admits our disadvantages. A permanently recreated Hungarian discourse of pain is represented again, a discourse re-legitimated by the Csángó example as well.

Sponsorship – State, Group, Private Person

The press lets us know what kind of financial sources can be used by the Csángós, who the main sponsors and supporters of their case are. The subdivisions of the Hungarian state institutions, Hungarian foundations, and Hungarian TV channels are the biggest names. There is a Csángó programme, meaning that one part of the central budget is destined to the question, so there is no doubt where they are expected “to return”. There are many Hungarian organizations and private persons all over the world, who sponsor this issue, and all of them act in the name of the great Hungarian nation, based on a concept of nation that does not know political borders, but it is formed on artificial principles similar to the political nation.

There are also some foundations which were set up exclusively for the Csángós: The Lakatos Demeter Association, The Domokos Pál Péter Foundation, etc. and new ones continue to emerge. Csángó magazines are published not only in Szeklerland (*Moldvai*

Magyarság), but in Budapest (*Csángó Tükör*) and in the Csángó regions, too (*Mi Magunkról, Az Első Magyaróra*). Nowadays so many people and institutions are involved in the Csángó question that it seems like the whole nation is a part of it; in spite of all, the Csángós' everyday life has not become easier. A few years ago the Magyarfalu Foundation was formed to give a helping hand with economic relations, and in support of educational programmes a *godfather programme* was set out with the participation of such public persons as the members of the Hungarian Embassy in Bucharest.

The same national relation and union are revealed by written texts, too. For example, a member of the so-called Beszterce Csángó Hungarian Foundation was present when a report was being prepared. His words need no comments, I think. *N. Gy. is in fact an electrical engineer. He has no family yet, but he says that this is his family, pointing around to the children of Lespezi who stand there as if marking the limits of the Carpathian basin as well.* (Háromszék. August 20. 1994). The service and the sacrifice brought to the nation sometimes can take quite extreme forms: *Uncle B. [...] said that – if needed – he would steal, cheat and kill for the Csángós. Well, anyone, do not steal, cheat or kill for us.* (Háromszék. February 16. 1993).

Standing for the Cause, or the Image of the Csángó Martyr

I must emphasise that nothing can be more convincing or more legitimating than the emotional dimension, the voluntary standing for the cause, which is the identification with the Hungarian nation. The clearest formula is that someone is Hungarian, when he/she declares himself/herself Hungarian. When can we meet that on the official level? At the national census, for example. But *the census among the Csángós – it is well known – is like counting sheep. The nationality is bleated in by the official* (Háromszék. November 29. 1997). Practices of the past have showed us how easily statistics can be manipulated, although these numbers are considered official in politics and usually in social sciences as well. These numbers are quoted in discourses to provide evidence, ask for help or fight for a rightful cause. We cannot trust the statistics from the last fifty years, but we shall not think that only the Romanian official was the slave of the system. A series of reports in a newspaper dealt with a former teacher from Moldavia, who was a census operator some decades ago. *There were some troubles. It occurred to us how everyone was registered as a Romanian. I got in touch with dr. Bányai, who was the Minister of Education at that time, and he took care of it. In only forty-eight hours, there was another census in the area. A mixed committee set off to do the work. Most of the people, when asked if they were Romanian or Hungarian, answered, "I am a Catholic". We wrote all of them in as Hungarians. Even the Romanian teachers agreed on this.* (Háromszék. October 10, 1998). I will not call this the possibility of free identification either, but it is an illuminating detail on how complex the phenomenon of identity is, and how many differences can be between an individual's self identity and the artificial categories and terms provided by official institutions. One of the conclusions is that in some situations the system of terms produced by a certain ideology has no relevancy at all in the real social existence.

Some people are not bothered by this fact, and they continue to insert the Csángós in one or the other well defined social or national box, showing no respect for individual decisions or the always changing social network of everyday life. At a Csángó conference a public personality said: *it is no question how many of the Csángós want to regain their Hungarian identity, because this is a misled, unpretentious, frightened community that hasn't got the proper historical knowledge to choose the right thing* (Háromszék. April 1. 1997). It certainly appears that specialists and public personalities are the ones to talk on behalf of the Csángós, to understand them and to make the best choices for them. They know that the Csángós are Hungarians, *deep down in their heart they are Hungarians. The same will happen to them as to the Scots: they will not speak Hungarian, but they will consider themselves Hungarians* (Romániai Magyar Szó. June 26–27. 1993).

The list of personalities that speak out in front of the press is more than illuminating. We find out about scholars like Elek Gegő, Pál Péter Domokos, Péter Halász, Zoltán Kallós and so on, people who made important contributions to the discovery and popularization of the Csángós. The leaders of this group - and we are talking about persons whose education is related to Budapest or to even western locations, people who have the proper historical knowledge to make the right decisions - make their daily statements in the press. The questions that remain are: how many are they, and who do they really represent? If we take a look at the so-called Csángó action plan, we will discover the people who compile it and take it upon themselves to represent the Csángós: *The Csángós consider themselves part of the Hungarian nation, and they rely on the nation's help – states the plan developed by the three civic organization of the Csángó Hungarians. The basic principle of this action plan compiled by educators, ethnographers, Sz. Zs, Member of Parliament, S. A., Ministerial Counsellor and by the members of the Csángó organizations is that the solution to the question can be found only in Moldavia* (Krónika. November 10. 2000).

Another further step in the Csángó discourse is the fact that if they consider themselves Hungarians, they are no ordinary ones, but the most disadvantaged ones, who have to fight and suffer for their Hungarian identity. Texts depict the image of the Csángó martyr and warrior who suffers because of his/her own “natural” Hungarian existence. He/she fights for educational and religious provisions in his/her mother tongue. *Stigmatization resulted in obstinacy – instead of fear and submissiveness – in the case of the short Csángó woman. She even stands up against central power for her rights and truth, and as a last possibility, she sues the police. [...] On his death-bed my father told me: “Never let go of your mother tongue, my girl!” These words were my heritage, and these words made me start teaching kids later.* (Erdélyi Napló. June 22. 1994).

In spite of the ferocious fight put up by these representatives, assimilation is advanced, a fact that even the press has had to admit. This brings about another aspect of the problem. The dwindling Csángó population has become the fate symbol of the dwindling Hungarian nation. Therefore an important part of this discourse refers to the fact that the Csángós have to be rescued, or else the Transylvanian Hungarians will follow in their footsteps, and so will the Hungarians from Hungary (cf. Peti 2004: 3–4). *Because*

let us not forget: we all, Transylvanian Hungarians, are them. In this fear and in this merciless assimilation (Szabadság, February 1, 2003).

Conclusions

The Moldavian Csángós had no contribution to the formation of the modern Hungarian nation, but the press always talks about them as if they were a part of it, and that would be naturally given. The topics and the elements included in the texts are in fact components of the cultural nation, meant to prove belonging to the nation itself. These elements are omnipresent; they occur in every discussion. Hungarian origins, language, ancient culture, common fate are as many nation-building components, as many narrative structural elements of the national discourse. The texts discuss how Hungarian or Transylvanian Hungarian organizations, political parties or public personalities do care and do represent the Csángós, how they are sponsored from abroad, how they are emotionally identified by everyday readers, and how all these elements together insert them in the body of the nation, covering them with the well known symbols of the Hungarian history and culture.

Belonging to the nation can be maximized by the voluntary actions and attitudes, the suffering and the struggle for national identity. The opposite is also true: if there is no identity declaration, no symbolic sacrifice, the result can only be the disappearance of the nation. The image of the easternmost Hungarians is one of an assimilating community, associated with the apocalyptic vision of the death of the nation. Thus they are the main fate symbol of the vanishing Hungarian nation.

For an ethnographer or an anthropologist the Csángós issue raises different problems and yields different results. Namely, the different approach regarding the artificial creation of the nation and the complexity of national identity. Thus, in real social interactions, identity is not related to artificial terms, but to the actual contexts, showing an accentuated dynamic nature. The articles studied are ever so interesting because they can lead to major conclusions regarding the creation and re-creation of this artificial structure exactly with the help of professionalized science.

However, the Csángó image becomes concrete in a specific discourse which can be considered a national one, because its main characteristic is the process of nation-building. This discourse, as any other discourse, contains the power of creation, that is by using the legitimacy of professionalized sciences it creates the community of the Csángós by talking about it, and especially by the manner of approaching it. First of all, we are dealing with the colonizing concept and discourse of ethnography, which is frequently quoted by the press to add a scientific touch to the texts and reveal the exotic specificities of Csángó culture. The Csángós' archaic prayers, their genres of folklore, their "interesting" dialect are excellent examples for this exotic aspect, which at the same time prove perfectly suitable in the search for roots and for emotional identification.

The analysis of this specific discourse has a personal relevance and result for the author of this study: the understanding of the notion "nation". It is quite clear that the

nation is really an artificially created community and notion. It is a notion that requests a contextualized interpretation, i.e. we can only define it in a certain context, because in another one it might not be the same. The notion must be re-defined periodically or repeatedly in relation with the changing social and historical context. The Csángó discourse is an illuminating example in this respect. It uses a rigid nation-concept, it tries to consolidate its structures, but on a historical level this is only one stop. This concerns not only the process of re-nationalization – even if it is mostly about it – but also the permanent construction of the ideological contexts of human existence. Nowadays, when we are free to talk about the Csángós, we really witness the re-defining of the Hungarian nation – along the characteristics of cultural nation –, and this time the Csángós are a part of it. But it also becomes obvious that this works only in a given context, because many elements of this artificial system of terms have no functional equivalents in everyday life. And even if they do, they are formulated in symbolic actions, and the relation to them is personalized in terms of individual identity.

There is a term and a notion: the Csángó. In everyday public Hungarian speech, it is the equivalent of the Moldavian Csángó. And the “Moldavian Csángó” has become such a well known term in the last fifteen years, that it has been included in a canonizing process, yielding a future narrative abbreviation, as formulated by Péter Niedermüller. I think that on a certain level it is already such a narrative abbreviation. Because not only have the Csángós become an organic part of the Hungarian nation, but as latest arrivals, they have gained a symbolic value. So, wherever and whenever we hear the term Csángó, we automatically make some associations: Hungarian, of Hungarian origin, Hungarian speaker and keeper of ancient values. Then: someone who undertakes his/her own Hungarian identity with all the related fear, suffering and confrontation. Next: an endangered group, a community hit by assimilation – the symbol of the dwindling Hungarian nation. If they disappear, the Transylvanian Hungarians are next, and finally those from Hungary will follow. It is an already interpreted notion, a concreted interpretation with massive help from the press, from the mass media in general. Therefore, to Mohács, Világos and Trianon, we can now add the Csángós.

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