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Meeting points

A narrative representation of cultural “otherness” in a Moldavian Csángó village, Luizi-Călugăra, Romania

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1. In the present study, I analyse the specific features of cultural “otherness” as the reflected relationship between Self and Other in its various narrative forms. In the context of work migration, 61-year-old Klára, from the village of Luizi-Călugăra in Romanian Moldavia, was given the opportunity to travel abroad, first to Hungary and subsequently, on several occasions, to Italy and Germany. As a participant in tourist mobility, the world “opened up” for Klára, as for other inhabitants of villages in Romanian Moldavia, while at the same time its everyday framework became more constricted, with a narrowed focus on relationships with neighbours and networks outside the immediate family, as children started spending longer periods away from their native villages.
2. In addition, I introduce the concept of *transcultural space* in connection with the lifeworlds of the “Csángó” village communities of Romanian Moldavia, pointing out the correlations between the specific features of the present-day sociocultural reality of the Romanian Moldavian “Csángós” and the transnational space associated with modern European diasporas. The sociocultural reality of the Romanian Moldavian “Csángós” is a transcultural social space: within the lifeworld connected to this spatiality, permanent orientation is required between two cultural systems of relationships, the different worlds of “Csángó” and Romanian culture; individuals are expected to participate in and comply with the challenges of both the “Csángó” and the Romanian cultural systems.
3. For the researcher as well as for the subject community, the prevailing narrative structures related to the topic of the “Csángós” of Romanian Moldavia have fundamentally determined, and continue to determine, the roles manifested in the course of interactions as well as those that appear in descriptions, [1] and thus the cultural and social explanations and interpretations. The Csángó narrative is to be found in articles written in the Hungarian and Romanian media and texts in the political and academic sphere, just as in both the operational texts and functional texts associated with the activities of the various cultural programmes of Transylvania, Hungary, and the Roman Catholic Church, as well as those of organisations representing the interests of the Csángós. [2]
4. In the reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the subject community, the Csángós typically emerge as an oppressed community, and at the same time as a community that preserves archaic traditions while employing various forms of resistance. This is true despite the fact that the Csángós’ everyday life experience and lifestyle does not naturally correspond to the past, present and future processes described by researchers. Nowadays, the Csángós relate very little either to the romantic image of the past ascribed to them or to the role of present-day

political victims. They simply go about their everyday lives and celebrations in accordance with a lifeworld that is subject to various kinds of change.

5. Nowadays, Csángó-related research is an academic task carried out primarily as a narrative undertaking – that is, as an undertaking that generates a variety of texts. In academic narrative creation, using the “someone is talking to someone about something” approach (Rákai and Z. Kovács 2003:251), narratives that are generated from an individual perspective are also the objects of interpretation. In this way, the Csángó narrative contains, simultaneously, the images and texts generated by the external observer, the typically unexamined self-narratives of the representatives of the culture, as well as the life stories constructed in the speech situation engendered by the research.
6. The present study examines research materials belonging to these two last text types [3]: it analyses the meeting points between the lifeworld of a Csángó woman from Romanian Moldavia (meaning her native village of Luizi-Călugăra and the nearby town of Bacău in the narrow sense [4]; and in the wider sense Romania) and the external sociocultural environment, in light of travel abroad in the context of work migration.

Romanian Moldavia and transcultural “being in the present”

7. For centuries, Romanian Moldavia functioned as a “refuge” for people from the surrounding area fleeing persecution for religious, political, and social reasons. The phenomenon of migration, for whatever reason it occurred, was an integral aspect of life in the village communities of Romanian Moldavia and served to maintain the internal population balance. With the rapid surge in modernisation and globalisation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, these solutions have assumed, and continue to assume, new forms.
8. Modernisation has brought not only economic but also social, cultural, and political changes that together are mutually shaping the community’s internal structural relations. In parallel, encounters between the bilingual Romanian Moldavian sociocultural sphere of the Csángós and cultural systems different from their own have multiplied, while the interface between the two has expanded in terms of both depth and scope, giving rise to conflicts and engendering a crisis situation. This has necessitated the development of new models of adaptation. For some researchers, this is associated with the danger of disappearing norms (Peti 2005:161), although, looked at from another perspective, it might also be seen as a process of the gradual and natural re-evaluation of norms.
9. In the wake of the restructuring of the economic and social system associated with agriculture and the relegation to the periphery and deliberate abandoning of traditional lifestyles, individuals have been forced by circumstances to reassess their identities and adapt to the situation at hand by constructing a new self-image. At community level, new models for living that emerge alongside the traditional life strategies adopted earlier provide individuals with opportunities for choice. In this situation, individuals driven primarily by “personal prosperity” adjust to the more favourable economic circumstances that typically accompany a change in social status.

10.

In the complex fabric of economic, social, and cultural changes, I believe it is worth noting the correlations between the present-day sociocultural reality of the Csángós of Romanian Moldavia and the specific features of the European transnational space associated with modern diasporas. [5] The concept of transnational space refers to the social arena of contemporaneously valid, divergent cultural attachments that are independent of territoriality. The places in which the participants live, the venues in which they engage in the various different social processes and interactions, and their actual geographical location do not correspond to the context of their cultural and/or social identity or the place of identification — which thus appears as an imaginary locality. A transnational space may be created in three kinds of social situation that engender the simultaneous accumulation of cultural relations: 1. “through continuous and reflexive movement between two nations and two cultures”, as, for example, in the case of the Csángó guest workers who constantly commute between countries, without settling; 2. through parallel and simultaneous presence in the political, economic, and cultural life of several societies — this might be true, for example, of people of Csángó origin who work in cultural or other organisations to protect the interests of Csángós who settled in Hungary following the change of political regime; and 3. in large, multicultural cities, where different cultures come up against one another in the course of everyday contacts in a single geographical space (Niedermüller 2006:41). This last situation can be observed in the case of Csángó migrants who have moved to large cities abroad, primarily in Italy or Spain. With regular movement between the different territories (whether actual or symbolic) and cultural reality, individual success is expressed by maintaining one’s integrity in the sociocultural environment linked to the given locality rather than by the appropriate adoption of a single and exclusively dominant identity (Niedermüller 2005:59–64).

11.

Based on my experiences in the field, it is these same processes that create the “lifeworlds” of Romanian Moldavians. It is for this reason that I introduce the concept of transcultural space, connected with transnational space, in relation to the Csángó village communities of Romanian Moldavia. The sociocultural reality of the Csángós of Romanian Moldavia is a *transcultural* social space: within the lifeworld that is connected to the selfsame spatiality, permanent orientation is required between two cultural relationship systems, the different worlds of Csángó and Romanian culture; the individual is expected to participate in and comply with the challenges of both the Csángó and the Romanian cultural systems. [6]

12.

In the course of their everyday lives in Romanian Moldavia, the members of the population, whose daily existence is lived out side by side but who amalgamate divergent community traditions in terms of how their lives function, bring group-specific lifeworlds into play in a space determined by identical geographical endowments. Regular and natural passage between the Csángó and Romanian cultures, and simultaneous and continuous presence in two cultural contexts, are daily occurrences here. It is a double existence — an existence lived in two divergent cultural traditions. In this situation, the dilemma between assimilation and the preservation of the cultural heritage of the ethnic minority simply does not emerge among the members of the transcultural space.

13.

The Csángó communities of Moldavia remained outside the nation-building processes that took place in nineteenth-century Hungary, just as they were excluded

from the establishment of a united and unified Romanian state and national identity. [7] Their sociocultural reality is characterised by cultural in-betweenness, an idiosyncratic network of Csángó–Romanian cultural specificities in which a different relationship is shaped with each locality. The existence of the transcultural space, and everyday “existence in the present” within it, may also explain why, rather than elements that give rise to manifestations of national identity coming into play in the Csángó communities of Romanian Moldavia, priority is naturally given to the aspects that ensure validity in the given cultural environment.

14.

In this unique situation, the multi-directionality of assimilation-related changes (the act of reception and the “turning of something into something else similar”), as well as the functioning of the directly associated processes (acculturation, accommodation, adaptation and integration) that sheds light on certain aspects of assimilation, [8] draw attention to the permeability of the realities that are shaped and experienced in the different locations and situations, as well as to the mobility of their adoption. [9] In our case, the adoption of a cultural and ethnic identity is in all likelihood the option that offers “the greatest opportunity for differentiation within coexistence, not exclusively in the sense of separation but, quite the contrary, in the sense of identification with others” (Biczó 1999: 175).

Memory, narrative, and cultural “foreignness”

15.

At the centre of my research on the forms of narrative representation of cultural “otherness” stands the figure of 61-year-old Klára from the village of Luizi-Călugăra. [10] Klára comes from a big family, being one of six siblings. Her elder sister also lives in the village. Klára has raised seven children and currently lives alone with her husband. Her everyday life is lived not in the romantic Csángó past conjured up and cultivated by public discourse in the Carpathian Basin and by academic researchers, but in the transcultural present peculiar to the bilingual Csángó communities of Romanian Moldavia.

16.

The images and concepts created by Klára in terms of the relationship between herself and “otherness” are shaped in the course of remembrance in the form of narratives conveying observations and experiences. The linguistic and ethnic-cultural differences that feature in her stories are located on a scale between the two endpoints of the self and the absolutely other. The elements of dissimilarity change their position situationally and alter their value in the process of recognition and reception as a function of their positioning.

17.

Remembrance is manifested in textual form, through the generation of narratives. Through the act of remembrance, Klára revives various episodes from her life, preserving or altering their specific formal features and content. To quote the apposite epithet coined by Vilmos Keszeg, a Hungarian folklorist, the human being is a “homo narrans” — that is, humans live through continuous narration, in the continuity of narrative, using the tool of narration to demonstrate their existence. [11] Narrative is one of the basic forms of human meaning creation (Orosz 2003:11), and with its help Klára too interprets the events taking place around her and maps out the world. The word “narrative” encompasses two kinds of meaning: on the one hand, it implies the narrative process itself; while on the other hand it refers to the narrated story. The texts that are generated in the course of

narration, however, never constitute a closed unity: Klára's stories are connected diachronically and synchronically with the cultural and social contexts of the Romanian Moldavian Csángó community, in just the same way as they are connected with Klára's individual circumstances and with the other stories with which she has become familiar in the course of her life.

18.

The structural and supplementary elements of remembrance and storytelling alike can change. The criterion of veracity is met if Klára recounts a particular story or scrap of memory on several occasions using an identical structural schema. Here we are faced with another methodological peculiarity that must likewise be taken into consideration. In the course of repeated retelling, certain elements in Klára's stories are consolidated, while other details are omitted, regardless of whether or not they really happened. The swapping of structural elements and the shifting of emphases disrupt the original structure, giving rise to a new basic pattern, which, depending on the circumstances, is complemented by newer or older elements. Once imbued with an altered significance, it can then be regarded as a new story.

19.

Another unique aspect of remembrance is the fact that, in the course of alteration, external factors may shed new light on events that took place earlier; the previously constructed framework of memory may be rewritten. As a consequence, in Klára's case, too, the act of remembrance carries within itself the mechanisms of forgetting, just as Klára singles out those elements that she intends to preserve using the tool of selection. The cultural, social, and psychological means associated with the dialectic of memory and forgetting make it possible for Klára to express her self-identity, just as they allow her to effect a distinction between herself and others.

Tourism and mobility [12]

20.

Following the change of political regime in 1989, and especially from the second half of the 1990s, foreign employment rapidly emerged as a fundamental life strategy, representing the widening of the world's spatial and cultural frameworks, even for Klára. Since she herself has never worked in another country, she encountered the representational forms of cultural otherness indirectly, through stories narrated on television or by her husband, children, [13] relatives and neighbours, and as a participant in tourist mobility. In her case, verbal communication and visual mediation also meant that, in the first two cases, her conceptualisation of otherness was shaped by means of translations and the subjective interpretations of others. The Other, and the other culture, were thus perceived without personal experience.

21.

Nowadays, middle-aged people from Moldavian villages travel abroad as tourists to visit relatives, or in many cases for the purposes of independent employment, thus it is via interpersonal connections that they come into direct contact with the cultural specificities of the foreign context. Klára would happily have travelled to Italy to work in the service sector, where employment is dominated by female guest workers from Eastern Europe — in other words, she would have been happy caring for elderly people or perhaps working as a babysitter: “You look after a little one and you get money for it.” However, she is well aware of the fact that you need to be fit and healthy to hold your own on the labour market, and, via her children,

she also appreciates that even abroad “money doesn’t grow on trees. And [youngsters] have to guard their jobs with their lives.”

22.

Klára has a correct appreciation of the interconnections among skills, education, and work opportunities. She is well aware that, because of her “qualifications” — or rather her lack of them — she is capable of performing only those tasks that require practical experience, meaning tasks that she is able to conceptualise and with which she is already familiar. “You’re not going to work in an office”, she says of herself, acknowledging the socially recognised value of literacy, knowledge, and time devoted to studying. On another occasion, she emphasises the advantages and disadvantages of certain occupations that are endowed with different local values within society. [14]

23.

The employment of women and women’s participation in work migration catalysed the disintegration of traditional female and male roles and the reinterpretation of the meaning attached to gender. The transformation of traditional roles within the family began in the mid-1960s, in line with the economic changes taking place at the time and in parallel with the mass exodus of village populations (Pozsony 2003:149–150). “I was the man of the house as well as the woman”, explains Klára, as she recounts how her husband left for work in Bacău before it was light and got home after dark, and frequently worked on a Sunday, too. Commuting to work in the town transformed not only the family, as a system of collective relationships, but also the traditional social structure of the Romanian Moldavian villages. Nowadays, family roles have become confused, or rather reversed: it is women who are leaving behind their children and husbands, spending weeks or months at a time away from them to work abroad, while the men try to cope with the housekeeping and bring up the children — typically alongside work in the fields or other kinds of seasonal or permanent employment.

24.

Although Klára is affected by the process of work migration primarily indirectly, she is still an active participant in the foreign tourism generated by it. Her first direct interaction with Hungarian foreignness and Hungarian cultural “otherness” took place through her daughter, Krisztina. Her second daughter had travelled to Budapest on the occasion of the visit there by Pope John Paul II in 1991, then, after returning home, she also took her mother with her to visit the Hungarian capital. Klára tells the following story about her experience in Hungary: while taking a short break during a sightseeing trip, she accidentally left her handbag on a ledge at the foot of one of the buildings. As soon as she realised, she and Krisztina rushed back to the spot. They found the bag exactly where she had left it. She concludes her narration of the events by drawing a comparison with her own village: she describes Luizi-Călugăra as “unsafe”, as a place where street thefts are likely and where people’s bags are snatched out of their hands let alone taken from where they’ve been left.

25.

On the one hand, this illustrates how the village value system, along with the specific world of Romanian Moldavia that once formed a more isolated unit, are currently undergoing transformation. However, it also draws attention to the fact that certain aspects of the changes that are perceptible in the village — regardless of their nature — are typically associated from the outset with negative characteristics and are automatically rejected by the community, and primarily by the middle-aged and older generations. In the act of recollection, Klára describes events

in the big city that left a positive impression on her. In reality, however, she misunderstands the import of her stories: in her interpretation, the bag is proof of the honesty of the inhabitants of Budapest and the safety of the city, while it never even occurs to her that in the brief time that had elapsed it was quite possible that no one in the crowded city had even noticed the forgotten item.

“Germanness”

26.

Klára’s other personal “foreign” experience is associated with Germany. Her first-born son, Adrián, emigrated to Germany in the summer of 1990. For Klára, Germany and “Germanness” had previously been completely shrouded in the mists of obscurity, lacking even the essential features necessary for the establishment of “otherness”. In other words, “Germanness” did not fall anywhere within the range of interpretation connecting the two endpoints of the horizontal plane between the self and the entirely unknown. For her, German culture was situated outside the “specific form of reciprocity” (Simmel 2004:56). Her relationship with German culture was initially shaped by her son’s narratives and the news that she devoured. It was these narratives, in the absence of first-hand experience, that conveyed to her the “foreignness” of the Other.

27.

The relationship between Klára and German cultural otherness underwent a qualitative change several years later, in 1995. It was then that she came into direct contact with “Germanness”, when she, as a Csángó woman from Romanian Moldavia, experienced how the characteristic features of German culture differed from her own in the course of personal interactions, sightseeing, family shopping trips and church attendance. However, the encounters and discoveries that took place in the process of familiarisation with this other culture occurred in the context of a fundamental relationship imbued with emotions and presuppositions, since the connotations associated with Germany as the destination for migration — in accordance with the events and occurrences that defined Adrián’s life — had both positive and negative values.

28.

According to the canonised version of his mother’s narratives, the idea for the young man’s emigration or “escape” to Germany took shape as a result of his experiences during his military service in the Securitate. On the instructions of the authorities, Adrián found himself in the Romanian capital in 1989 in the thick of the political changes. As they were getting out of their truck, he witnessed at close quarters the deaths of his companions, who had been ordered to Bucharest to suppress the “revolution”. He himself only “escaped from the jaws of death” because, as kitchen personnel, he did not get down from the vehicle at the site of the shooting. According to the story, which is interspersed with elements of myth, “they waded ankle-deep in blood through the metro”, while the ambush led to the immediate deaths of 40 “innocent” soldiers. It may be that empathy and the internalisation of the horrors witnessed by Adrián led his parents to forgive him for the crime of stealing from them the money he needed to emigrate and legitimised the act of “running away” — that is, his escape to Germany.

29.

Afterwards, Adrián literally went through fire and water to reach East Berlin (by swimming a river). From there he went to Stuttgart, spending a year in a refugee camp where he was obliged to learn German, after which he was given a work

permit for a further 12 months. Before his permit expired, he met his current wife, to whom he got engaged very quickly. For Klára, the camp, which she refers to by the German name *lager*, was the place from where her son sent home money at regular intervals to pay back the savings he had stolen. After 17 years, the time came for Adrián to ask his mother's forgiveness: for the "theft", for the drastic course of action he had taken after she refused his repeated requests for the savings she had put aside, and for the wedding ceremony that had taken place in secrecy. [15]

30.

Klára did not attend her son's wedding: the family was represented by just one of Adrián's sisters, her presence indicating the family's consent to the marriage. In Romanian Moldavia in the mid-1990s, there was very little acceptance of marriages between young people from Luizi-Călugăra, or possibly the neighbouring villages, and outsiders. [16] In keeping with convention, Klára had even come up with allusions and examples in an attempt to guide her eldest daughter in the "right" direction on learning of the keen interest and intentions of a young man from a different village, despite his respectful attentions and his highly esteemed ecclesiastical studies, which he had interrupted as a result of external pressure. According to the moral values recognised in the village, marriage to a man who was not a local would have been a huge "disgrace". [17]

31.

In the course of their correspondence prior to the wedding, a concerned Klára, in line with the village traditions, advised her first-born son that he had gone to Germany to work and to earn money, not to get married. After all, in the arguments that Adrián had addressed to his mother, he had justified his migration as a way of obtaining the financial basis required to establish an independent life: he had gone to Germany in order to be able to return to Luizi-Călugăra and build himself a house with the money he made there. However, Adrián's life had taken an unexpected turn: he had got married in haste to an "unknown" girl, whose parents had moved to Germany from Timișoara, [18] and he had neglected the traditional gesture of introducing his chosen partner to his parents. Klára even asked her son whether he had married "*din dragostea sau din interes*" (i.e., for love or interest), simply to comply with the official requirements for remaining in Germany.

32.

Despite these preliminary and vicissitudinous experiences in connection with "Germanness" and the phenomenon of Germany, when Klára narrates her first personal encounter she associates "Germanness" and cultural difference wholly with images that occupy a place in the highest stratum of the value scale of her own lifeworld. Klára made her first trip to see her son and his family in Stuttgart in 1995. Alone. Even at that time she felt she had arrived in Canaan, as she imagined it based on her reading of the Bible. In connection with the Germans and their country, she noted their orderliness and cleanliness — in effect the stereotypical features typically attributed to them. She was amazed by the beautifully tended flowerbeds and the open spaces planted with green shrubs. In the course of her narration, she considered the situation in Italy, another Western European country with which she is now equally familiar, as unworthy of comparison with what she experienced in Germany. In Klára's stories, the idea and image of Canaan surfaced regularly during her recollections of her visits to Germany, regardless of the fact that her son, to Klára's enormous sorrow, despite his upbringing does not "keep the faith" and does not regularly attend church there.

33. Klára was quick to accept Adrián's new habits, interpreting them in her own mind in the following way: "You can wear out the walls of the church, but if you come out and behave badly it's worth nothing." "You might as well wear out your knees, too, if you're not going to do good." It is not the act of going to church but rather living according to faith, being guided by its principles, doing good deeds and having good intentions that represent the cornerstone of what she considers a proper life in this concrete situation. For a person to know what they ought to do, and how, in various situations, they do not need to be constantly going to God's house: they must rather transplant the teachings of Holy Scripture into their daily practice and live according to their essence. Although her acceptance of Adrián's lifestyle has changed nothing in terms of Klára's original notions regarding her own way of life, this "other" lifestyle has been integrated within the bounds of what can count as possible and acceptable behaviour.
34. In Klára's lifeworld, religion and the religious observances prescribed by the Catholic Church, along with the consistent fulfilment of the related obligations, are a natural part of everyday life. However, this does not exclusively imply a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible or "judgement" against the commission of sins, since God alone is infallible and everyone is guilty of smaller or bigger transgressions. Saying "Far be it from me to judge" implies that it is not the place of human beings to stand in judgement over others or evaluate their actions according to a divine order. Individuals can show tolerance and understanding towards others as towards themselves, since "you can't go running to the priest about every little thing".
35. Among her first, defining personal experiences in connection with "Germanness", it is also worth mentioning the story of how, despite her lack of knowledge of the German language, she was lucky enough to encounter a channel of communication that she recognised as her own. On her first trip, Klára accidentally ended up on the outskirts of Stuttgart. Finding no available taxis, she decided to wait in a nearby petrol station. After some time, a taxi did turn up and Klára showed the driver the paper on which the address in Stuttgart was written. She heard the man counting under his breath as he leafed through the street map to the relevant page and was delighted to recognise familiar-sounding words. Her happiness came not from hearing, in this foreign environment, one of the two languages familiar to her: it was not the manifestation of an emotional or conscious response to one or the other language. It was rather that this shared channel of communication created a sense of home, giving her a feeling of safety and establishing the basis for mutual understanding in the foreign environment.
36. Differences between cultures are also given expression in terms of which verbalised information is indispensable for understanding in the context of language use; what is regarded as necessary, or possible, to verbalise; and what the members of a community understand without verbal expression, through the use of figurative words or omissions (Hidasi 2004:75–76). As a result of random coincidence, Klára encountered a migrant from Central Europe, working as a taxi driver, who spoke one of the two languages used by Klára, thus on her arrival she did not face either the difficulties caused by a lack of linguistic knowledge, or the question of the role in the dialogue of the extralinguistic aspects of communication. Through the taxi driver, "Germanness", as a set of cultural attributes, which years

earlier had belonged to the territory of the unknown, was immediately transformed into an interpersonal connection that even encompassed an identical linguistic medium of reciprocity: the “degree” of “otherness” was at once positioned within her own boundaries, even if Klára had by no means come into contact with an autochthonous member of the “foreign” community.

Italy

37.

In the last third of the 1990s, enormous numbers of young people of working age from the villages of Romanian Moldavia were absorbed into a wave of work migration to Italian cities. All six of Klára’s other children moved to Italy during this period, living initially in various small towns in Northern and Central Italy before settling in Turin and its immediate surroundings. The stories Klára recounts in connection with Italy focus far more frequently on the dissimilarities in her children’s current lifestyles, their life strategies, and elements that illustrate the changes in their world view.

38.

Klára is well aware that accepting employment in a foreign country is sometimes essentially a strategic move made in the interests of resolving problems that have arisen in the context of relationships within the immediate family or among in-laws. In practice, it is a form of separation or divorce, “*nu cu H mare, cu h mic*” (with a small h rather than a capital H) — that is, a form not recognised by the official institutions. It is also a legitimate, village-based solution to difficulties that cannot otherwise be resolved within the family — and even offers a glimmer of hope that family peace will be restored. A fierce outburst by Klára illustrates the everyday existence of this new way of thinking: “I’m not looking a drunkard in the eye! Let them take themselves off to Italy to look after some old woman!”

39.

This kind of problem-solving approach has also profoundly affected Klára, as one of her brothers was “left behind” in a similar fashion by his wife and children, who established a new life for themselves abroad. Left to his own devices, he sought a way out of his difficulties in drink. Klára initially attempted to help him, offering encouragement and guiding him towards faith and a god-fearing lifestyle through words and “reading”. In vain. The next step was acknowledgement and acceptance — assistance that was initially given primarily in the form of loans of money was gradually replaced by support in the form of the biological requisites for survival: “God-given” food and drink (polenta, beans, potatoes, eggs, wine, etc.).

40.

Klára’s first visit to Italy took place in 2000. On this occasion, she became very angry with her middle son, when, despite their best efforts at secrecy, she discovered that the young couple were living together without being married. By contrast, according to the upbringing Klára had given her children, as well as village morals and the public system of discipline, young people were not permitted to cohabit right up until the early 1990s. With the help of various control mechanisms, members of the traditional peasant society were kept continuously under collective supervision — resulting in the permanent reiteration of the models of community and individual identity. Shame, and the sanctions that governed punishment, established the parameters for the observance of norms recognised and established in the social sphere, and obedience to the external authorities (Kotics 1999:56).

41. In connection with this story, Klára posed the following question: “Does Italy have a different God than Romania? Isn’t there just one God?”, faced as she was with the differing interpretations of the Bible and the Church’s changing pronouncements in relation to how people live their lives, having learned that cohabitation is even officially permitted by priests in Italy. The exploration of points of encounter with cultural “otherness” contributes to the recognition, understanding, and acceptance of the changes that have taken place in the relatively closed systems of the specific culture of the villages of Romanian Moldavia, and especially the presence of structural openness.
42. Klára’s youngest daughter is engaged to an Italian. Initially, Klára found it strange that her daughter quite naturally got the young man to wash the dishes, do the laundry, and lend a hand in other household chores, although she later had a good laugh about it. By way of explanation, she talked in terms of women’s self-respect and emancipation, according to which the joint procurement of household finances implicitly justifies the sharing of “women’s work”, too. A great deal has changed in the institution of marriage in two decades. Other than exceptional cases, marriage to a foreigner has become an entirely accepted and established custom in recent years among young people coming from what was formerly a strictly endogamous village community, although, in the case of youngsters of marriageable age who stay in the village, even if it is acceptable it does not happen in practice. On the one hand, this draws attention to the differences between the migrant-sending context of Romanian Moldavia and the migrant community, while on the other hand it also demonstrates the intra-generational transformation taking place within the community of young people alongside the inter-generational changes between parents and children.
43. In the period following the regime change, the organic transformation of “home”, meaning the sociocultural “reality” of Romanian Moldavia, the migrant-sending context, can be observed thanks to the changes set in motion as a result of capitalist modernisation and large-scale migration. It is not only partner-choice strategies and female–male / mother–father relationships that are noticeably in a state of transformation but also the customs associated with marriage. Young couples are now organising their weddings in the country where they work, whereas earlier it had been almost obligatory for weddings to be held in the village. Weddings are being held primarily in Italy, regardless of the young couple’s nationality. The norms of their native country and of the migrant-sending Romanian Moldavian context no longer oblige these young people to return home and hold their wedding ceremonies in the village, since the legitimating authority of the home context now operates at a merely symbolic level.
44. In the surface and subsurface transformational space, however, land is still a possession endowed with traditional values that counts as a fundamental means of subsistence — primarily in the case of the older generation. As Klára put it, if you own land “You won’t die of hunger! You’re young and strong and you can work!” Nevertheless, the parallel process of separation from the land has already begun, together with the transformation of relationships to land: alongside change of ownership in accordance with the order of succession within a family, it is increasingly common for land to be partially leased out or sold. On several occasions, even Klára and her husband have offered use rights to land of theirs not under

cultivation to poor, large families in exchange for a share of the profits, although the families have declined the offer not because of a lack of workforce but because of the prohibitive preliminary costs of cultivation.

45.

At the same time, adherence to agriculture, as an unquestioned and central life strategy or as a way of supplementing a livelihood, does not imply complete isolation from innovations in agrarian culture. Indeed, the utilisation in the village of experiences acquired abroad is presented as something of a requisite, since outside the village context, young people's minds have been "broadened" and they have "seen a great deal", which, on their return home, they can incorporate into their everyday lives, of which agricultural work is an integral aspect.

46.

Openness to, and acceptance of, innovations is synonymous with the longed-for return of young people who have left to work abroad. In practice, behaviour with respect to the phenomenon of work migration as a life strategy is characterised by duality: on the one hand, there is a discourse that accepts and justifies migration and that is reconciled to its existence; on the other hand, there exists a kind of incomprehension, an attitude of questioning as to why these young people do not return to their native village and translate into practice the skills they have picked up abroad.

47.

Klára comes face to face with the various manifestations of the changed world chiefly on the occasion of her trips abroad and her visits to the city. She is truly grateful for innovations that prove useful in her own life and the lives of her children, such as the existence of the Internet, for example — even if she does not have the slightest understanding of how it works. "But God is bountiful!", says Klára in gratitude, giving thanks to the Almighty for providing an opportunity for the invention of modern things that she herself can make use of, for example, in communicating more easily with her children and siblings (e.g., the mobile telephone, or Internet video services, when, with the assistance of her daughter who is working in Italy, after two years she was once again able to see her son who is living in Germany).

Closing remarks

48.

The existence in Romanian Moldavia of transcultural space and transcultural processes; the resulting natural permeability among the various social, cultural, and economic spheres; existence in multiple realities adjusted to differing expectations; as well as the "prosperity-centeredness" of Romanian Moldavian Csángó sociocultural reality, deriving from the value system of peasant society, have created the basis for the acceptance of employment abroad as a standard life strategy among members of the migrant-sending community, meaning those who have "remained at home".

49.

Through her children, Klára has been confronted with cultural "otherness" that differs from her homeland in the narrower and broader sense as an organic aspect of tourist mobility based on her visits to her family. [19] For her, and for the populations of the villages of Romanian Moldavia, the world has "opened up", while at the same time its everyday framework has become more constricted, with a narrower focus on relationships with neighbours and networks outside the immediate

family as children are now spending longer periods of time away from their native villages. Nevertheless, besides the primarily social issue, the politically coloured question of when these youngsters will return home, or whether in fact they will return home at all, makes sense largely only when raised by the parents.

NOTES

1 Cf. Bruner 1999. The use of the term *Romanian Moldavian “Csángó” culture* is justified by the fact that in both the academic (ethnographic, historical and linguistic) discourse related to this topic, and in everyday practice in Hungarian-language communities in the Carpathian Basin, the terms *Moldavian Csángó* and *Csángó Hungarians* are regularly used to distinguish the Catholic ethno-cultural minority of Hungarian descent living in Romanian Moldavia — and this remains largely true to the present day. However, this does not correspond in every case to the self-definition of the local communities, while it also neglects the diversity that exists within the ethno-cultural minority. The placing of the word *Csángó* in quotation marks is intended to draw attention to this relationship. I omit the quotation marks hereinafter, in the interests of readability.

2 In his study *Az erdélyi magyar sajtó csángóképe az ezredfordulón* [The image of the Csángós in the Transylvanian Hungarian press at the turn of the millennium], Sándor Ilyés examines the image of the Csángós and the constructive character of the resulting discourse, to the development of which the Hungarian media, as well as academia, the political sphere, and the Romanian media, contributed, and continue to contribute. The author analyses the content of articles written about the Csángós in the Hungarian press in Romania. As a term and concept, “Csángó” — using the terminology of Sándor Ilyés quoting Niedermüller — has become a “narrative abbreviation”, in the form of a “pre-defined construction with a not insignificant affective and historical charge” (Ilyés 2006:108). Lehel Peti outlines and analyses the “Csángó-preservation” mechanism following the regime change by means of activities connected with various aspects of it (media, academia, politics, the Catholic Church, programmes, Hungarian-language education) — examining the relationships cultivated by the local population and validating the community’s point of view (Peti 2006).

3 The research is based on 10 months of fieldwork carried out in Luizi-Călugăra. The research required for the writing of the present study was made possible by a grant from the Hungarian Scholarship Board and by the support of the Ethnography Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Debrecen.

4 The settlement of Luizi-Călugăra lies 10 kilometres from the county seat of Bacău, in the immediate vicinity of Măgura. The commune (*comuna*), which also includes the settlement of Osebiți that existed as an independent village before 1968, had a population of 4,590 according to the 2002 census. Within this population, 4,527 people (98.62%) were Roman Catholics, 59 belonged to the Orthodox faith, 11 were members of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, one person belonged to the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, and one person was a Greek Catholic. (According to the 2007 figures, the commune had a population of 4,555.) From the late 1990s, however, many of the villagers emigrated for employment reasons, thus a large proportion of the working population now works abroad, primarily in Italy, Spain, Hungary, Israel, and Germany (cf. Pozsony 2005:178). Work migration to foreign countries has given rise to a unique social structure in the village community, and the population is adjusting to the changed circumstances by developing new life strategies. In the last two decades, the extent of emigration of surplus labour has intensified, while in practice this is a trend that is characteristic of the whole of Romania.

5 In the course of migration, members of modern diaspora communities ended up in their present place of residence, where they form ethnic minorities. Group members are bound by many threads to their original homes. Through emotional and practical ties, they are regularly in touch with their “compatriots”, relations, and friends, as well as with one another within the community (Fejős 2005: 13). This is also true of the communities that emigrated from the Romanian Moldavian Csángó villages in the vicinity of Bacău, which have typically settled as villages in the given town or its vicinity. On the theoretical background to transnational space and transnational processes, and on its application in empirical research, see, for example, Glick-Schiller et al. (eds.) 1992; Hannerz 1996; Kearney 1995; Kennedy-Roudometof 2002; Portes et al. 1999; and Vertovec-Cohen (eds.) 1999.

6 Connected to this is the change of attitude referred to as the “spatial turn”, which views space as an independent social entity and as the unique manifestation of social relationships. The more nuanced exploration of the correlations between transculturality and spatiality as a relationship concept remains a task for the future. On the “spatial turn”, see Gyáni 2007:4, 12. On opportunities for the analysis of ethnic spaces and contact zones, see, for example, Keményfi 2004.

7 There are many studies addressing, or touching on, the question of the national identity of the “Csángós”. See, for example, Arens-Bein 2004:114; Benda 1989:40; Bodó 2004:156; Halász 1999:34; Pozsony 2005; Tánczos 2001; 2003:61.

8 Nevertheless, these processes do not make the narrower range of interpretation or sociological scope of the concept of assimilation graspable and describable, but rather encompass them (see Biczó 2004:23–31).

9 For more on transcultural space as the sociocultural reality of the bilingual Romanian Moldavian Csángós and the associated concepts, see Lajos 2006:177–184.

10 I have changed Klára’s original name and the names of the members of her family to preserve their anonymity.

11 The author writes the following about the relationship between “homo narrans” — that is, the human being who produces narratives, filling them with life and living within them — and the world: “The stories of homo narrans, the human being who creates and preserves stories, and whose behaviour is guided by stories, are unavoidably present in the world in a prescriptible manner. [...] It is precisely their stories that bring things into existence, whether they be tangible or invisible” (Keszeg 2002:6–7).

12 The use of the expression “tourism” is justified by the fact that these trips, besides being visits to family members, typically include sightseeing tours to the most famous local, regional or national monuments, churches, museums, etc.

13 Klára had eight children, although her first baby died. She raised four daughters and three sons. Six of them live in and around Turin, while the eldest son lives in Germany with his wife, who comes from Timișoara, and their son. Two of the siblings who live in Italy are not married. Among those with families, the youngest daughter is the only one who married an Italian rather than someone from her native village or from Bacău.

14 As a mother adjusting to the changing circumstances engendered by collectivisation and industrialisation, Klára would have liked to see her children educated, with the integration of study as a positive value into her family preference scale. However, respecting her children’s own decisions, made in the atmosphere of the 1980s and 1990s, she did not force them to study: at most, she tried to use her powers of persuasion and verbal reasoning as effectively as possible to make the case for further education.

15 Klára had refused his first, second and third requests for money, as well as the appeal he made via one of his sisters. She was saving the money in case of sickness or death, “so at least there’ll be something for my funeral”. The wrongdoing of taking the savings without permission was compounded by a lie: Adrián told her that the funds needed for the journey had come from money put aside while working at the rectory. This apology ended Klára’s earlier sorrow, since the thought of her son’s theft had always caused her pain and sadness — despite the fact that, within a short time, Adrián had been able to return the entire sum to his parents.

16 See Halász 1998:427–428.

17 See Kotics 1999; Pozsony 2005.

18 Adrián’s wife’s mother is of Hungarian origin and her father is Romanian. The family had emigrated from Timișoara to Germany in the early 1990s.

19 The topic of the relationship between the bilingual Romanian Moldavian Csángó community and cultural “otherness” might be explored through the raising of further questions — for example, the issue of the dual moral structure, which, in terms of practical application, creates a spatial difference between its own (village) and the foreign (urban) environment, while, for example, cohabitation before marriage, as an opportunity to get to know another person, is regarded as correct in theory and appropriate in practice.

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