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The Totalitarian Catholic Identity of the Csángós in Moldavia

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The groundwork of this article lies in the empirical section of my dissertation paper, namely the field research carried out in the Csángó community from the village of Trotuș, in the Moldavian region[1]. Challenging the theories that take for granted and endorse the religious and ethnic *amnesia* of the modern individual[2], the research emphasizes on the adjacent paths followed by these two identities of the Csángós. In the endeavour to grasp the dynamics of ethnicity and religion within this minority, the study reached intriguing conclusions. It was these interesting results that triggered the writing of this article, its general focus being on the religious identification of the Csángós from Trotuș

Moreover, in the framework of a dynamic *social construction of reality*[3], the research challenges the privatization of religion by revealing that the Catholic faith pervades every aspect of the communal social life. Unlike its ethnic counterpart, the Csángó religious identity does not incorporate the *amnesic* feature conceptualized by the French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger. In this sense, the Roman-Catholic tradition has never been questioned by the individuals who have Csángó roots, its authority on the religious community and its members being unquestioned. In other words, they are not subjects to the general process of secularization, the authority of the traditional religious institutions influencing their lives as Catholic Christians. What is more, the external categorization mirrors the internal identification. In the mists of the controversial origin of the Csángós, the only undebatable subject in the process of group identification is religion. Scholars, researches and officials on both the Romanian and the Hungarian side perceive the Roman-Catholic belief as a clear element of differentiation.

Furthermore, religion has not acquired the bricolage feature that is strongly visible in the modern context, the principles of tradition and continuity safeguarding the Catholic faith from competition. Not only is the Catholic religion no subject of contestation, but it serves as a replacement for ethnic identification. In this sense, religious identification surmounts the ethnical one as individuals identify themselves foremost as Catholics. Nevertheless, from one generation to the other, the Catholic faith acquires a feature that Grace Davie calls *vicarious*[4]. In other words, the behaving dimension of the younger generations is delegated to the religious professionals, such

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[1] Roxana Maria ARĂȘ, *The Dynamics of Ethnic and Religious Identification: Study Case: The Csángó Minority*, 2011.

[2] See Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, *Religion as a Chain Of Memory,* Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 2001.

[3] See Peter L. BERGER, Thomas LUCKMANN, *The Social Construction of Reality,* Anchor, New York, 1967.

[4] See Grace DAVIE, „Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge", in Nancy T. AMMERMAN (ed.), *Everyday Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 21-36.

as priests and older age groups. The Church and the village priest manage to impose their authority on the individual behaving sphere only in the case of older generations, who regularly attend the Sunday mass. In this sense, religious community is becoming less and less active, nonetheless manifesting an unquestioned symbolic religiosity.

What is more, the religious memory invariably implies a certain degree of competition due to its assertion of holding the *true memory* of a group[1]. In this sense, it may enter into conflict with the other social memories, thus acquiring the status of a "totalitarian and conflicting memory"[2]. Such is the case of the Catholic tradition within the researched Csángó community, which has acquired a totalitarian characteristic by occupying the empty space left by the *amnesic* ethnic identity. In addition, this empirical finding challenges the theory according to which the exclusiveness of religious memory gradually dismantles in the modern context of multiple authoritative memories[3]. Following this line of thought, the article makes an inquiry into how the religious identity of the Csángó minority has replaced the empty space left by the assimilated ethnic *Self*.

Moreover, the structure of the article consists of a theoretical inquiry into the main theories on identity, emphasizing on the imperatives of memory and continuity in the case of religious identification. This section is complemented by an analysis on the dynamics of religious identity within the Csángó community from Trotuș, focusing on the authoritative Catholic memory. Yet, before proceeding to the theoretical endeavour, a clear definition of the employed main concepts is required. In the framework of this research, identity may be defined as a process of

> "building symbolic models which give meaning to the world, offer an interpretation of experience and enables people to understand the reality of life in its present form, as well as the past and the future"[4].

What is more, a terminological differentiation is required between individual and collective identifications, between the human being as a singular entity and the human being as a member of a collective. However, these two identities are mutually influencing each other, their development being strongly intertwined. On the one hand, the individual *Self* is socially determined as "it acquires its meaning and significance only within a context of social relations between people"[5]. On the other hand, the collective *Self* is generally defined as an aggregation of individuals who

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[1] Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, Jean-Paul WILLIAM, *Sociologies et religions. Approches classiques*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2001, pp. 216-223.

[2] *Ibidem*.

[3] Nadia LOVELL, "Belonging in Need of Replacement?", in IDEM (ed.), *Locality and Belonging,* Routledge, London, 1998, p. 5.

[4] James A. BECKFORD, N.J. DEMERATH III, "Introduction", in IDEM (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, SAGE Publications, London, 2007, p. 9; main source, Z. MACH, "The Roman Catholic Church and the Transformation of Social Identity in Eastern and Central Europe", in I. BOROVICK, G. BABINKSI (eds.), *New Religious Phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe,* Nomos, Krakow, 1997, p. 65.

[5] Richard D. ASHMORE *et al*, „An Organizing Framework for Collective Identity: Articulation and Significance of Multidimensionality", *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 130, no.1, 2004, p. 81, main source: B. SIMON, "Self and Group in Modern Society: Ten Theses on the Individual Self and the Collective Self", in R. SPEARS, P.J. OAKES, N. ELLEMERS, S.A. HASLAM (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Stereotyping and Group Life,* Blackwell Publishers Ltd, London, 1997, p. 321.

perceive themselves as being alike or sharing the same experiences, circumstances or behaviour[1]. Last but not least, from an array of definitions put forward for the concept of religion, the one developed by the French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger resonates best with the objectives of this article. Emphasizing on belief and memory, she defines religion as

> "an ideological, practical, and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed and controlled"[2].

In other words, religion is the process of believing that takes its authority from a tradition and passed from one generation to the other through authoritative memories.

Theoretical Framework

For a fruitful comprehension of the identity concept, an emphasis should be laid on its functional character as "identity is not something that one can have or not; it is something that one does"[3]. In this sense, it would be more accurate to talk about identification rather than identity. Identification is a routine process of daily life, where individuals constantly identify themselves and categorize others[4]. In the context of social interaction, both individual and collective identities are the result of a clash between internal identification and external categorization. The *Self* is the result of a intertwinement between how *I* perceived myself and how the *Others* identify me. Also, these two identity perspectives may resemble, be complementary or contradict each other. In this sense, self-identification made by the members of a community clashes with the external categorization made by *the Others*, in the framework of intergroup and intragroup interaction. Thus, identification is a multi-dimensional, never-ending process of "being" and "becoming" within the societal framework, requiring flexibility and negotiation.

Furthermore, in the Durkheimian school of thought and discourse, the individual is a *homo duplex*, his identity entwining a personal and a social nature[5]. On the one hand, he is endowed with a personal identity, characterized by an innate self-interest. On the other hand, his human nature is characterized by an innate need to transcend his selfishness and socialize. In this sense, he develops a social identity by the internalization of collective identifications and the interaction with other group members[6]. In this sense,

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[1] Richard JENKINS, *Social Identity*, Routledge, New York, 2008, p. 103.

[2] Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, *Religion as a Chain Of Memory*, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 2001, p. 82

[3] Richard JENKINS, *Social Identity*, cit., p. 5.

[4] James DINGLEY, *Nationalism, Social Theory and Durkheim*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2008, p. 5.

[5] Chris SHILLING, "Embodiment, Emotions and the Foundations of Social Order: Durkheim's Enduring Contribution", in Jeffrey C. ALEXANDER, Philip SMITH (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 212.

[6] Richard JENKINS, *Social Identity*, cit., p. 242; main source: J.C. TURNER, "Social Categorization and the Self-concept: A Social Cognitive Theory of Group Behaviour", in E.J. LAWER (ed.), *Advances in Group Processes: Theory and Research*, vol. 2, CT:JAI Press, 1984, pp. 77-122.

„the very being of an individual is dependent upon the collective: Collective life is not born from individual life, but it is, on the contrary, the second which is born from the first"[1].

In other words, the individual is the "product" of the collective which he lives in, yet having a personal state of mind and determination[2]. Simply put, the unique structure and function of a social system determine the behaviour of the whole and of its parts[3].

One such social system is the community, a socially-bonding category where individual members gain a sense of themselves and others by belonging to a common environment and a network of relations[4]. An expression of everyday reality, the community is more than the sum of its individual parts,

"it is also a source of life suis generis. From it comes a warmth which animates its members, making them intensely human, destroying their egotisms"[5].

In other words, it is a *conscious collective* that expresses its *conscience* and *consciousness* through *collective representations*[6]. These representations are enhanced through public discourse and help in shaping solidarity and group identity. Thus, they are constructed by society and represent society, "for society has constructed this new world in constructing itself, since it is society which it expressed"[7].

Moreover, these representations must reflect the collective ideals in a manner such as "to be seen by all, understood by all and represented to all minds"[8]. In this sense, they have a symbolic character and take the form of places, objects, days, words. It may be a religious or national holiday, a great individual figure, a place of pilgrimage, oaths etc. The crystallization of these collective representations is built and modified in time, its authority being endorsed or diminished by the passage of time[9]. In addition, these representations are enhanced by collective patterns of behaviour, members of a group having a standard of thinking and acting which they must resonate to. Through this resembling of action and common codes of meaning, collective narratives are devised and solidarity is created[10]. What is more, the collective consciousness is determined not only by the network of relations between the members of the collective, but also by the rituals and ceremonies that act as remembrance agents for the individual. These ceremonies enforce the collective solidarity by making each individual feel a part of

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[1] Emile DURKHEIM, *The Division of Labour in Society*, transl. by W.D. Halls, Free Press, London, New York, 1984, p. 279.

[2] James DINGLEY, *Nationalism*...cit., p. 134.

[3] Niklas LUHMANN, "Operational Closure and Structural Coupling: The Differentiation of the Legal System", *Cardozo Law Review,* vol. 13, no. 1422, *HeinOnline (http://heinonline.org)*, 1992, pp. 1419-1421.

[4] Richard JENKINS, *Social Identity*, cit., p. 134.

[5] Emile DURKHEIM, *The Division of Labour*...cit., p. 26.

[6] See IDEM, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, transl. by Joseph Ward Swain, The Free Press, London, New York, 1965, pp. 463-496.

[7] *Ibidem*, p. 471.

[8] James DINGLEY, *Nationalism*...cit., p. 96, main source: Steven LUKES, *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical Study*, Peregrine, London, 1975, pp. 423-424.

[9] Emile DURKHEIM, *The Division of Labour*...cit., p. 291.

[10] James DINGLEY, *Nationalism*...cit., p. 96.

the whole and restate his own, individual identity[1]. If the individual goes astray, the shared symbols and rituals within the ceremonies have the role of reminding him of his collective obligations.

Furthermore, this baggage of this collective consciousness passes from one generation to the other, each inheriting the past, the traditions, the beliefs and the history of that specific collective. Then, it is up to each particular consciousness to internalize these inherited collective values and meanings, defining its identity and place[2]. The strength of the collective determines the authority of the collective consciousness and the successful internalization by its individual members[3]. Nevertheless, through individual internalization, new members and generations constantly recreate the inherited collective consciousness. In other words, the history of the collective becomes the biography of the individual[4]. By comparison, it resembles the *two bodies of the King* theory, developed by Ernst Kantorowicz. Even though the human body of the King fades away, his body politic surpasses generations and individuals[5]. In the same manner, even though individual consciousness fades away in time and space, the collective one connects consequent generations through memories.

Nonetheless, every community entails an imagined character, individuals constructing and emphasizing the similarities between them and the differences from others. This symbolic communalization is enforced and preserved through symbols, ceremonies, public discourse, rituals etc.[6]. They have the role of activating the collective memory of the past, reinforce it in the present and assure its existence in the future. Moreover, the attribute of belonging requires a dimension of remembering, an idea metaphorically expressed by Maurice Halbwachs when stating that "la société est comme la matrone d'Ephese, qui pend le mort pur sauver le vivant"[7]. This process of recollection brings into present a set of common values and meanings that reinforce the solidarity of a religious collective. Through ceremonies, rituals and symbols, the social identity of the individual enters into effect. He experiences the solidarity of a community that transcends time and space and whose power is rooted in the authoritative memory of a tradition[8]. This solidarity relies greatly on the capacity of each generation to inherit the tradition, to recognize its authority and leave it further as heritage.

Memory is the framework for the construction and development of individual and collective identity. It must have a constant active character as once a society forgets its past, it loses its identity and becomes incapable of constructing a future[9]. A scholarly inquiry into the concept of memory was undergone by the French sociologist

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[1] Nadia LOVELL, "Belonging in Need of Replacement?", in IDEM (ed.), *Locality and Belonging*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 16.

[2] James DINGLEY, *Nationalism*...cit., p. 136.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 95.

[4] Richard JENKINS, *Social Identity*, cit., p. 38.

[5] See Ernst H. KANTOROWICZ, *The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1997

[6] Danièle HERVIEU–LÉGER, "Space and Religion: New Approaches to Religious Spatiality in Modernity", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2002, p. 100.

[7] Danièle HERVIEU- LÉGER, Jean-Paul WILLIAM, *Sociologies et religions*…cit., p. 202, main source: Maurice HALBWACHS, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Alcan, Paris, 1925, p. 167.

[8] James DINGLEY, *Nationalism*...cit., p. 97.

[9] Nadia LOVELL, "Belonging in Need...cit.", p. 16.

Maurice Halbwachs. Innovating on the theories of Emile Durkheim, he succeeds in bringing forth a revolutionary perspective on the two axis of time-memory and individual-collective identity. In *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* and *La morphologie sociale*, Halbwachs states that the individual memory cannot be developed outside the memory of a collective. Our conscience interacts with the social and cultural environment, mobilizing and ordering memories determined by the environmental conditions. Thus, in order for memory to manifest, both individually and collectively, it requires

> "un milieu naturel et social ordonné, cohérent, dont nous reconnaissons à chaque instant le plan d'ensemble et les grandes directions"[1].

It is in this socially ordered environment that the individual receives the confirmation of his memories, through the alignment with the memories of the other members of the collective.

Moreover, Halbwachs' theory has a deterministic character, as the memories of the individual are triggered and guided by the frameworks of the collective memory. These frameworks acquire a normative character through the groups that have the capacity to remember, thus exercising their legitimate role on the individual memory. In this sense, they have the potential to offer spatial and temporal landmarks and a series of guiding historical, geographical or political notions. Also, the collective frameworks are dynamic structures, constantly moulding on the present conditions and recreating the past[2]. Their plurality is determined by both time and space, through the sequence of generations and the level of societal ramification. Space and time are crucial for the process of remembering, "immemorial spatial memory being critical for the stable realization of myths of community"[3]. Moreover, this deterministic phase is complemented by a dynamic part, as it is the individual who does the rememoration through reason, evaluation and judgment. In other words, the collective and individual memories are constantly intertwining and reinforcing each other; the individual memory feeds on the collective one, itself the product of aggregated individual memories[4].

In addition, memory is crucial in the sphere of religion, a domain where believing is required on the basis of a tradition. The religious tradition is a form of authorized memory that legitimizes the claim for believing through an organized system of rituals[5]. It entails a collective *nomos* to be transmitted from one generation to the other, contributing to the shaping of the individual and collective religious *Self*[6]. This religious collective consciousness is moulded on beliefs that are not put under experiment, verification or the inquiries of reason. They have their own reason in the sense that

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[1] Danièle HERVIEU- LÉGER, Jean-Paul WILLIAM, *Sociologies et religions…*cit., p. 202.

[2] *Ibidem.*

[3] Ana Maria ALONSO, "The Politics of Space, Time and Substance", *Annual Reviews Anthropology*, vol. 23, 1994, p. 387.

[4] Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, Jean-Paul WILLIAM, *Sociologies et religions…*cit., p. 201.

[5] *Ibidem*, p. 213.

[6] Lester R. KURTZ, *Gods in the Global Village. The World's Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Pine Forge Press, SAGE Publications, California, 2007, p. 129.

they give meaning to the experiences of the persons who have them[1]. This heritage of beliefs and meanings gives legitimacy and authority to the patterns of behaviour and thought promoted by the religious community and institutions. Furthermore, the religious time is one of repetition and eternity, being clearly different from the fragmented time promoted by other social spheres of life. In other words, the circular character of tradition comes in opposition to the linear time of history, thus delimiting the sacred from the profane. In this sense,

> "le dogme, comme le culte, n'a pas d'âge: il imite, dans le monde changeant de la durée, l'éternité et l'immuabilité de Dieu...."[2]

In the same line of argumentation, Danièle Hervieu-Léger emphasizes the principle of continuity through her metaphorical *chain of memory.* Resembling the *collective consciousness* concept developed by Emile Durkheim, the role of this chain is to transmit the collective memory within a group from one generational link to the other. In this sense, the chain unites past, present and future through the continuity of religious tradition, thus sustaining a community[3]. An important factor in this process of continuity is the religious institution, focused on "the production, management and distribution of the particular form of believing which draws its legitimacy from reference to a tradition"[4]. The religious establishments are the depositors of this tradition, while the religious professionals are the main carriers of collective meanings and symbols. Yet, the sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger states that the generational continuity of religious beliefs alone does not assure the authority of the religious symbols and meanings. They must also be internalized by the individual believer and the religious tradition must make sense to him.

Moreover, "the relationship between remembered pasts and constructed presents is one of...perpetual...renegotiation over time"[5]. The religious traditions characterize the cultures of the past, thus they must be in a constant process of renegotiation so as to fit the modern dynamic context. "To believe is belief in motion, belief as it is lived."[6] Yet, the authority of these religious bodies and their professionals is assured by the members of the religious community, who internalize the institutionalized beliefs and meanings. They must feel part of a group whose unity and solidarity transcends time[7]. This process of internalization requires reinterpretations and innovations applied to the "heritage of beliefs", in order to mould on the present context. Thus, the concept of continuity must incorporate these changes determined by context and generation.

Nevertheless, Danièle Hervieu-Léger states that the modern societies are no longer capable of transmitting this collective memory due to their fast-pacing change.

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[1] Hugo José SUÁREZ, "Religión y Modernidad. A propósito de La religion pour *la mémoire*", *Desacatos*, no. 18, 2005, p. 181.

[2] Richard JENKINS, *Social Identity*, cit., p. 214.

[3] Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, *Religion as a Chain Of Memory*, cit., p. 156.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 101.

[5] Jeffrey K. OLICK, Daniel LEVY, "Collective Memory and Cultural Constraint: Holocaust Myth and Rationality in German Politics", JSTOR, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 62, no. 6, 1997, p. 934.

[6] Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, "Religion as Memory", in Hent de VRIES (ed.), *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2008, p. 253.

[7] Lester R. KURTZ, *Gods in the Global Village*...cit., p. 129.

Thus, the broken chain leads to loss of memory and societies become amnesic[1]. Such is the case of the religious sphere, where collective identification and shared values are essential for the authority of religion as a source of meaning. Memories passed from one generation to the other no longer make sense to an *religiously illiterate*[2] audience, thus leading to a lack of continuity and tradition. What is more, in the modern society the principle of continuity strongly fades away as a means of authority, the individual and collective action no longer being determined by tradition. According to Danièle Hervieu Léger, this lack of continuity springs from the fact that modern societies are intrinsically corrosive of these traditional forms of religion. Their action leaves behind "utopic spaces"[3] that can be filled only by religious forms. In Durkheimian terms, thus, the modern society leaves the individual *anomic*, lacking moral order and regulation and focused on developing his self-interest[4]. In this context, one may agree with Nietzsche's famous affirmation that "God is dead".

The British sociologist Grace Davie develops a different perspective on the concept of religious memory and its authorized forms. In her attempt to dismiss the secularization theory within the modern European context, she puts forwards the concept of *vicarious religion*[5]. Accordingly, the behaving dimension of religion has not disappeared but has rather undergone a process of relocation. In this sense, individuals no longer feel the need or the obligation to personally practice their religious beliefs. Yet, they do demand of religious institutions and professionals to behave according to the religious moral codes in their name[6]. In other words, the religious institutions "behave appropriately" on behalf of the believing individuals. In addition, the responsibility of preserving the religious memory is delegated on the hands of the religious professionals. Thus, the minority represents the majority in memory preserving and religious behaving[7].

Nevertheless, the individual is a member of a series of groups, being the subject of an array of identifications. In this bricolage of identities, his religious *Self* may be intertwined with his ethnic consciousness, contributing to the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. In this sense, religious institutions can organize several activities that enhance the ethnic identification of their members, such as language lessons[8]. However, there are exceptional cases when the religious identity survives after ethnic assimilation. Such is the case of the Csángó community from the village of Trotuș, a subject to be inquired in the second section of the article.

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[1] Grace DAVIE, *Religion in Modern Europe*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 30, main source: Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, *Religion as a Chain Of Memory*, cit.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 60.

[3] Thomas C. LANGHAM, review to Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, *Religion as a Chain Of Memory*, cit., *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2003, pp. 693-695.

[4] James DINGLEY, *Nationalism*...cit., p. 99; main source: Emile DURKHEIM, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, Routledge, London, 1970.

[5] See Grace DAVIE, "Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge", in Nancy T. AMMERMAN (ed.), *Everyday Religion*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 21-36.

[6] IDEM, *Religion in Modern Europe*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p. 49.

[7] See IDEM, "Vicarious Religion...cit.", pp. 22-23.

[8] Herbert GANS, "Symbolic Ethnicity and Symbolic Religiosity: Towards A Comparison of Ethnic and Religious Acculturation", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1994, p. 582.

Empirical Framework

The origins of the Csángó population settled along the Siret river are shrouded in mystery, representing a subject of heated debate between an array of scholars from different domains. Nonetheless, the scarcity of historical resources is not the only criterion that shapes these heated controversies. Another decisive role is played by the nationality factor, the argumentation developing within the boundaries settled either by the Hungarian or the Romanian political discourse. Thus, a large palette of theories have emerged on the origins and ancestral roots of the Csángó communities settled in the Moldavian religion. Also, the ambiguity of their roots and the diversity of their external categorization have strongly affected their self-identification. Crucial elements for the enhancing of collective consciousness are put under question by the significant *Others*, such as language, folklore or history. In this sense, the individual and the collective identifications of the Csángós lie under a question mark, such as their origins.

Nowadays, the remains of this "relic of the Middle Ages"[1] are aggregated in two enclaves within the Moldavian region. On the one hand, the Southern Csángós are concentrated around the county of Bacău, in cities such as Târgu-Ocna (*Aknavásár*) or Trotuș (*Tatáros*) and in villages such as Gioseni (*Gyoszény*) or Gălbeni (*Trunk)*[2]. On the other hand, the Northern Csángós are registered in the area surrounding the city of Roman, in villages such as Săbăoani *(Szabofalva)* or Pildești *(Kelgyest)*. In addition, the appellative of Csángó is sometimes employed to name the minority communities residing in the Ghimeș Pass, in the so-called "Seven Villages"[3] around the town of Brașov and in the Bukovina region.

However, these communities are not homogeneous, different virtual identities gathering under the all-encompassing nominal concept of Csángó. For example, if the Moldavian Csángós are strongly associated with the Catholic religion, the ones near Brașov express a Lutheran religious identity. What is more, each community has undergone different levels of acculturation and assimilation, gradually losing the specificity of their identity in favour of the Romanian majoritarian culture. Yet, probably the most controversial aspect of the Csángó population is its group categorization. Heated debates have been stirred up on whether they should be catalogued as an ethnic minority or as a religious one. On the one side, it is held that the only characteristic that assures them the status of a minority is their Catholic faith. Thus, their categorization would have its basis on religious grounds. Yet, this perspective implies that all the Catholics from the Moldavian region are of Csángó origin, theory which was proven wrong during the 2002 Census. Accordingly, if 119 618 registered as Roman-Catholics in Bacău, only 4317 declared themselv as Hungarians and 796 as Csángós[4]. On the other side, the Csángós are also categorized as an ethnic minority, their Hungarian roots and origin supporting this claim. However, the Romanian state does not official recognize

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[1] Tytti ISOHOOKANA-ASUNMAA, Report on "Csángó Minority Culture in Romanian", Document no. 9078, forwarded to the Council of Europe on 4th of May 2001; source: http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/doc01/EDOC9078.htm (accessed on the 15.05.2001).

[2] Vilmos TÁNCZOS, "Hungarians in Moldavia", transl. by Miklos Zeidler, Institute for Central European Studies, Budapest, 1998, p. 3 (originally published in *Magyar Kisebbseg*, no. 1-2 (7-8), 1997, pp. 370-390).

[3] Baciu, Turcheș, Cernatu, Satulung, Tărlungeni, Zizin, Purcăreni, Săcele.

[4] The 2002 Census in Romania, source: http://recensamant.referinte.transindex.ro/ (accesed on the 1.06.2011).

their status as an ethnic minority, thus the Csángós do not enjoy the privileges and rights normally assured for minorities within the Romanian state.

Furthermore, identification requires the intertwinement of external categorization and internal identification[1], the self-perception of the Csángós being the framework of this article. It is the self-recognition as a Csángó or a Catholic that ascribes the nature and the boarders of *Us* and *the Others* and determines which values are to be internalized by the individual. In addition, the development of both the individual and the collective consciousness within the Csángó communities is a highly challenging task, where a multitude of variable must be taken into account. The specificity of the geographical region, the linguistic characteristic, the cultural feature are only few of the variables to be taken into account when researching both the intergroup and intragroup interactions of the Csángó communities.

For these reasons, the field research was carried out in the small village of Păcurele *(Degettes)*, pertaining to the city of Târgu-Ocna. Situated along the Trotuș river, this village is a part of the region where large percentages of Hungarians and Catholics have been registered ever since the 1859 Census[2]. What is more, Păcurele is a part of the present aggregation of Csángó communities around the county of Bacău, its members being seldom referred to as Southern Csángós. Last but not least, the field research was carried out over a 5 day-period and was applied on a sample of 30 inhabitants of the above-mentioned village. Two variables were taken into consideration in this research, namely age and gender. As far as the age factor is concerned, three main categories were designed, respectively [20-40], [41-60], [61-80]. Also, the methods of research employed in this study were mainly individual-based, having both a qualitative and a quantitative character. On the one hand, the questioned subjects were required to fill in two questionnaires that were focused on their religious and ethnic identifications. On the other hand, focus groups and individual interviews were carried out with strategic members of the community, such as the Catholic priest of Păcurele.

Moreover, this article deals with only a selection of the research findings, an encompassing analysis being developed in my dissertation paper. For example, when asked about their group identification, a striking percentage of 63.3 identified as Catholic-speaking Romanians. The next position was occupied by the Catholic-speaking Hungarian category, with a percentage of 13.3%. Thus, the religious identification of the Păcuri inhabitants proves to be of paramount importance, shadowing the rest of the identities both among younger and older generations[3]. Surprisingly, the Catholic identity was even chosen by respondents several times in the case of ethnic identification. An edificatory example was given by a 67-year-old woman:

" – I heard that Păcurele is inhabited by both Romanians and Hungarians. What are you?
– I am a Romano-Catholic.
– Yet, but are you Romanian or Hungarian?
– Well, I am a Romanian Catholic because I was born in Romania"[4].

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[1] See Richard JENKINS, *Social Identity*, cit.
[2] See www.ceangai.ro
[3] See Roxana Maria ARĂȘ, *The Dynamics of Ethnic and Religious Identification*...cit.
[4] Romanian version:
"– Am auzit că aici sunt și unguri și români. Matale ce ești?
– Eu sunt româno-catolică.

Furthermore, the reasons put forwards by the respondents in order to explain the Csángós assimilation into the mainstream Romanian culture are worthy of analysis, mainly due to their strong religious implications. In this sense, the ethnic assimilation of the Hungarian-speaking Csángós is perceived as being the consequence of religious factors. Two testimonies can be mentioned as relevant examples:

> " – Are there still Csángós in Păcurele?
> – There are but only few......there are more in the villages around Bacău, but we have followed the Orthodox people. (*81-year-old woman*)
> " – Are there still Csángós in Păcurele?
> – Well, this village was 'Romanized'. The young people married Orthodox believers who came in this village and 'Romanized' it"[1]. (*65-year-old man*)

A difference in attitude towards ethnicity and religion can be easily observed in the above-mentioned examples. In this sense, the Csángós identified as Romanians, yet manifested a negative attitude towards the Orthodox that entered the village community and "Romanized" it. In this sense, the "guilty" element for ethnic assimilation is the religious identity of those who entered into the village community of Păcurele.

Furthermore, language is generally considered to be an element of ethnic identification of paramount importance, easily delimiting the borders of a community. Yet, as far as Csángós are concerned, language is not an essential element in building their ethnic character. They would rather emphasize the differences between their dialect and the Hungarian language, constantly stating that a Csángó and a Hungarian would not understand each other. The testimony of a 67-year-old woman is relevant for this affirmation:

> "We and the Hungarians do not understand each other, we speak a 'broken' Hungarian....sometimes, even the Orthodox understand our sayings"[2].

In addition, this dialect may not be perceived as an element of ethnic identification, yet is surely endorses the religious one. In support of this affirmation, a quote from Geta Martin, a 67-year-old woman, is significant:

> "–What language do you speak?
> – Well, if an Orthodox comes to me, I speak Romanian. Look...the man who came to put sticks for my beans was a Catholic, but he speaks Romanian.

– Da, dar esti român sau maghiar?
– Păi eu sunt Româno-Catolic, pentru că m-am născut în România".
[1] Romanian version:
"– Credeți că mai sunt ceangăi în Păcurele?
– Mai sunt dar nu foarte mulți...în satele din Bacău mai sunt, că noi ne-am dat după ortodocși".
„– Credeți că mai sunt ceangăi în Păcurele?
– Apăi s-a românizat satul, tinerii s-au căsătorit cu ortodocși și au venit aici în sat și s-a românizat satul".
[2] Romanian version: "Noi cu ungurii nu ne înțelegem, noi vorbim stâlcit ungurește...uneori din vorbele noastre înțeleg și ortodocșii".

– Yes, but in general, what is the language that you use most of the times?
– Well, I speak the Catholic language"[1].

As far as community belonging is concerned, the percentage of those identifying with those who have the same faith was the highest, registering 43.3%. It was closely followed by those who speak the same language, with a percentage of 33.3%. In this sense, the religious and the linguistic elements are the most authoritative agents of collective identification in Păcurele. However, the belonging to the Catholic community is unquestionably stronger that the linguistic one. Even so, if we take into consideration that language is rather an element of religious identification, the Catholic religious identity becomes strikingly predominant. For example, when asked what language did he speak, an individual stated that he spoke the *Catholic language.* Also, a fragment from an interview clearly reflects this perspective:

"– But what is more important between being a Romanian and a Catholic?
– Well, my religion is the most important"[2].

Furthermore, concerning the nature of the affiliated religion, a striking percentage of 90 identified as being Catholic, the supremacy of this identification being unquestioned. Also, there were few whose belonging dimension may have been Orthodox, yet their behaving identity was clearly assimilated within the Catholic dimension. For example, a woman stated about her husband that "he is an Orthodox but he goes to the Catholic mass more than a Catholic"[3] A reason for this assimilation may be the fact that Păcurele has only a Catholic place of worship, the distance to an Orthodox church being quite large. Moreover, when it came to the believing sphere of the religious affiliation, a striking percentage of 90 stated that they believed in the image of God promoted by the church. This is a clear argument that the traditional, institutionalized Catholic faith remains unquestioned in the case of the Păcuri inhabitants. The Catholic religious tradition still hold the necessary authority on its members. Consequently, the religious identity, in general, and the Catholic one, in particular, are uncontested. In this sense, the Catholic institutions and traditions seem to still satisfy the needs of their believers, Thomas Luckmann's theory of invisible, privatized religion not being applicable for the Catholics in Păcuri.

This authority of both the church and the priest was strongly visible during the field research. In order to gain the confidence of the respondents, I asked the priest to speak on my behalf after the Sunday mass and inform people of my research. Prior to this event, the inhabitants of Păcuri were quite reluctant in talking to me, being uninterested in my research. Yet, after the priest announced my arrival and encouraged the believers to help me in my endeavour, their interest in my research increased exponential. Thus, after the evening Sunday mass, I was able to organize

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[1] Romanian Version:
"– Ce limbă vorbești matale?
– Păi dacă vine un ortodox, vorbesc românește...Uite...omul ăsta care a venit să imi pună aracii este catolic dar vorbește românește".
[2] Romanian version:
"– Dar care este mai important între a fi român și a fi catolic?
– Păi religia mea e cea mai importantă".
[3] Romanian version: "El este ortodox dar merge mai rău ca un catolic la slujbă".

a focus group with four Hungarian-speaking Catholic women. Moreover, women generally list a higher percentage of church-going, their behaving dimension being more developed than that of men. For example, 10% of the respondents declared that they go to church every day, out of which all were women[1]. This research findings mirror the observations made during Sunday mass. On the one hand, the morning mass gathered 55 members, their ages roughly ranging from 40 to 85. Few exceptions could be observed among children, who were singing and ministering during mass. Out of those 55 present, 30 were women and 25 were men. This gender difference increased during the evening mass, when only 5 men and 25 women attended the mass, their age approximately raging between 50 and 75 years old.

Furthermore, in the village of Păcurele, religion and ethnicity do not follow the same line of evolution. If ethnicity registers a strong process of assimilation, the religious identity is a strikingly active element of individual and collective identification[2]. However, field observations did not stop at this conclusion, identifying a further fascinating element. Religion is used not only to define ones religious identity, but also his ethnic one. In this sense, it is religion that has filled the empty space left by the lack of specific ethnic elements of identification. In other words, the ethnic characteristics are understood through religious terms. Simply put, if Csángós or Hungarians are Catholics, Romanians are prone to be Orthodox. In this sense, the interviewed members would frequently replace the Romanian appellative with the Orthodox one and the appellative Hungarian with the Catholic one.

What is more, the archaic-religious mentality still characterizes the villagers of Păcurele. The mechanic solidarity of this community is still visible as far as religion is concerned, as it pervades every aspect of life and every process of identification. Unlike the inevitable dissolution of the Csángó ethnic identity into the Romanian mainstream culture, the religious identity was never contested by the members of Păcurele. The authority of the traditional Roman-Catholic religion and its institutions was never challenged either by other new religious movements or by the majoritarian Orthodox tradition. The patterns of behaviour and thought promoted by the Romano-Catholic conscience collective still have the necessary authority on its members.

The respondents unanimously identified themselves as Romano-Catholics, their beliefs following the lines imposed by the institutionalized Catholic tradition. In this sense, a striking majority declared that they believed in God and in the Church, the religious institutions still satisfying the needs of the individual. Interestingly, there were cases where respondents declared that they initially belonged to the Orthodox religious cult. However, through marriage, they became members of not only the village community, but also the Catholic community within Păcurele. Their fast-pacing process of religious assimilation and the intense character of their religiosity are two other arguments supporting the active role played by the Catholic religion in this community. Yet, it is true that other elements contributed to this religious assimilation, such as the fact that Catholicism is majoritarian in Păcurele and the village has only a church following the Catholic rit.

Furthermore, as far as age and gender differences are concerned, women and older generations register higher percentages as far as the behaving dimension of religiosity is concerned. In this sense, the field observations reveal that these two segments of

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[1] See Roxana Maria ARĂȘ, *The Dynamics of Ethnic and Religious Identification*...cit.
[2] *Ibidem*.

respondents are more inclined to frequently attend religious masses, pray and confess. The low levels of religious behaving of men is a fact emphasized by psychological studies also, revealing the more pragmatic nature of men and the more spiritually-inclined character of women. Also, a generational decrease in religious behaving and mass attendance was registered among the younger generations, tendency which can be explained through a concept employed by the British sociologist Grace Davie, namely *vicarious religion.* In this sense, believers delegate their responsibilities as Catholic Christians to the religious professionals, respectively the priest of the village and the elder women and men. They continue to have strong nominal identification as Catholics, yet their virtual identity is characterized by low church attendance and community involvement. In other words, if the believing and belonging dimensions of Catholic religiosity are uncontested, the behaving dimension registered a gradual decrease. Thus, with each passing generation, the religious identity becomes a symbolic one, uncontested but unpractised. However, this lack of religious practice may in time lead to *religious illiteracy*, individuals identifying as Catholics but not surely knowing what being a Catholic means.

Conclusion

The modernisation theory predicts the decline of ethnic identity, prone to be dissolve under the imperative of uniformity and transnationalism[1]. Consequently, acculturation and assimilation are taken for granted, the minority cultures and groups submerging to the majoritarian ones. Nonetheless, the identity dynamics of the Csángós minority from the village of Păcuri partially challenges this taken for granted evolution of religion and ethnicity in the modern context. On the one hand, their ethnic identity has followed the ascribed patter, the anyhow contested Hungarian characteristics dissolving into the mainstream Romanian identification. The levels of ethnic acculturation and assimilation of this minority are said to have reached alarming grounds, their self-identification as Csángós fading away at a fast pace[2]. In this sense, the Csángós do not feel attached either to the Romanian or to the Hungarian ethnic consciousness. They have become an *amnesic* community, incapable of transmitting their traditions from one generation to the other. What is more, their lack of recognition as an ethnic minority fastens the pace of assimilation, members no longer wanting to be perceived as Csángós[3].

However, this is not the case of their religious identity, *as furiously religious as ever*[4], pervading both the private and the public space of the community. Probably the most remarkable observation identified during the research on the Csángó identity was the supremacy of the religious awareness. In this sense, the results mirror the

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[1] Richard JENKINS, *Social Identity*, cit., pp. 200-206.
[2] Tytti ISOHOOKANA-ASUNMAA, Report on ″Csángó Minority Culture in Roma-nian″, cit.
[3] See Vilmos TÁNCZOS, ″Hungarians in Moldavia″, cit.
[4] Grace DAVIE, *The Sociology of Religion*, SAGE Publications, London, 2007, p. 4, main source: Peter BERGER, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity*, Free Press, New York, 1992.

sayings of Dimitrie Cantemir, who stated that Csángós are Catholic by both ancestry and religion[1].

Furthermore, not only does religion embody the most pervading category of identification, but it also acquires a totalitarian character by infringing on the territory of other identities. As mentioned, one such infringed identity is the ethnic one, where the process of identification is made through religious lenses. In this sense, the ethnic and the religious intertwine up to the point of confusion. To be Romanian is the same thing as to be Orthodox, while to be Hungarian is the same thing as to be Catholic. Yet, paradoxically, those questioned individuals who acknowledged their Hungarian roots have declared themselves Romanians and Catholics at the same time. Furthermore, elements generally employed for ethnic identification are used for reinforcing the religious identity of inhabitants of Păcurele. One such example is the issue of language, the Csángó dialect being perceived as a proof and expression of a Catholic consciousness. In other words, the Catholic religious element has a totalitarian characteristic, being an element for identification for other areas such as ethnicity. Nonetheless, taking in consideration the dynamics of identity and its particular social construction, the subject of this article is an intricate and challenging subject of inquiry. In addition, the non-homogeneous character of the Csángós and the specificity of their social and environmental domains require further contextually, research-based analysis into their intriguing identities.

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[1] Dumitru MĂRTINAȘ, *The Origins of the Changos*, transl. by Laura Treptow, The Center for Romanian Studies, Iași, 1999, p. 19, main source: Dimitrie CANTEMIR, *Descrierea Moldovei*, Minerva, București, 1973, p. 2.