

PhD Dissertation Thesis

**INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE
EASTERN PART OF COVASNA COUNTY
(ROMANIA)
HUNGARIAN – ROMANIAN – GYPSY COMMUNITIES
IN HARALY (HARALE), PÁVA (PAVA) AND
SZÉKELYPETŐFALVA (PETENI)**

by Lilla Szabó M.A.

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Róbert Keményfi



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN
Doctoral School of History and Ethnography

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I. Objectives of the dissertation, topic outline

The last decades brought radical changes in the demographic, ethnic and economic structures of the villages in Szeklerland which essentially contributed to the reorganization of the relationships among the cohabitating ethnic groups (Hungarian, Romanian, Roma ethnic groups). The objective of the dissertation is to thoroughly study and analyse these changes and confer them with the results of the Hungarian and the Romanian researchers. Szeklerland appears in the national media, in the political sphere and in everyday life as the scene of interethnic conflicts between Hungarian and Romanian ethnic groups.

Another objective of my dissertation is to present, analyse and study the types of relationships between the different ethnic groups. Besides these objectives, I would also like to dissipate those stereotype images that consider Szeklerland an exotic region, as viewed from Bucharest, or an archaic spot, the pure origins of the Hungarian nation, as viewed from Budapest. Both aspects point out the fact of *being different*, which most of the time satisfies the enquirers. The relationship among the ethnic groups living together could be improved by surmounting the romantic, mythic concepts adopted with the Szeklers by Romanians and Hungarians, by laying interethnic relations on a substantive basis and by drawing a real picture of the Szeklers.

I carried out the field research in the eastern part of Covasna county called Orbaiszék, home of Hungarian, Romanian and Roma ethnic groups. The studied communities all live in the villages neighbouring Zabola (Zăbala), my birthplace. The

villages of Páva (Pava) and Székelypetőfalva (Peteni) are administrative units of Zabola, while Haraly (Harale) is administratively part of Gelence (Ghelința) village. Páva is the only one among the three villages that is not an independent village, it was annexed to Zabola during the 1964 administrative-territorial reorganization of Romania. Although part of Zabola, on symbolic representations level it is considered an independent unit both by the community of Páva and that of Zabola.

I started my researches in 2003 then continued in 2014 and 2015 after a longer brake. The last interview was recorded in April 2015. Between the two periods of my field research students and teachers of Babeș–Bolyai University in Kolozsvár, Faculty of Hungarian Ethnography and Anthropology as well as their visiting researchers carried out a thorough field research in Páva in 2011, which was organized by the Csango Ethnographic Museum of Zabola. The research was focused on revealing the ethnic, religious, social and economic structure of the village, as well as the effects of modernization and globalization processes going on after 1990.

In the case of Székelypetőfalva and Haraly I have found a field full of challenges from ethnographic-anthropologic point of view as there have not been conducted any researches concerning ethnic issues and coexisting habits before. In Székelypetőfalva Viola Rádu, student at Babeș–Bolyai University, Faculty of Hungarian Ethnography and Anthropology carried out some ethnographic research for her BA thesis, which she hasn't finished yet.

The structure of the dissertation moves from the general towards the particular. The first four chapters present the

development of the different ethnic groups and communities, the theories concerning the definition of the notions used as well as the results achieved by other scholars in the field of interethnic relations. The results of the field researches are presented in three different chapters as case studies. In the case of Petőfalva and Haraly the results are analysed around three main subjects: 1. demographic changes, provisions and possibilities; 2. economic resources; 3. the representation of ethnic identity on a symbolic level.

The demographic resources reveal the structure of the families forming the community which present to what extent the ethnic groups in the village are able to reproduce themselves; the number of minor and adult children clearly indicate the future of the ethnic groups. The provenance of the married couples reveal the motivations and the guiding aspects of pair choice. I have also studied the immigration processes in order to see where people, who come to stay in the village, come from; why people buy a house there and who they are; to what extent they integrate in the life of the village or take part in different activities. Besides immigration I have also considered the size and causes of emigration. The connections between demographic processes and religious devotion show the spirit of the community and their need to be together. The central scene of Hungarian and Roma relations in all the three villages is the religious field.

The economic resources of the villages can be observed in the size of the tangible real property (land), the land claims and possession of machinery and equipment necessary to work the land. The economic power of the countryside consists of the

possession of forest, arable land, field, and animal husbandry. The extent these possessions are used and worked by the different communities show the economic sphere of interest of the village. The main source of income of the locals shows not only the economic power they possess but confirms the demographic indices. Qualifications and occupations define the sources of income, while education reveals the degree of modernization and the achievement of middle-class status.

Ethnic representations can be studied along the symbolic border outlines and contact zones. I have gathered the self-identification objects used by the ethnic groups (flag, coat of arms, photos and pictures) seen in the houses I visited and the objects written down in the questionnaire. The most important elements of social life are the family celebrations, the religious and national holidays and the way they are celebrated. When studying the celebrations and festivals I have also observed to what extent the ethnic borders are permeable during these occasions, how people react to each other, whether these occasions and reactions are different from everyday life or not. The questionnaire ended in an open question referring to the perception of the other ethnic group. The answers I received revealed the attitudes the cohabitating ethnic groups show towards each other.

After presenting the three individual cases in three case studies, I carry on with generalisations and emphasizing the typical and atypical cases while summing up the results of the field work, searching for the answers to the starting questions. I have also tried to compare my results to similar researches carried out in interethnic communities and to find similarities

between them. The last chapter of the thesis, the outlook, sums up the different ethnic situations I have witnessed by placing them in a more general ethnic model using the national and the international bibliography.

I. Outline of the applied research methods

Survey research serves as ground for the dissertation. The methods used during the research were focused and semi-structured interviews completed by participant observation. I have also used the results of earlier researches carried out in the area.

Between 2014 and 2015 I conducted a survey research in the villages of Székelypetőfalva and Haraly in order to carry out the ethnic-anthropologic study of the population. The questionnaire lying at the basis of my empiric research had four main parts. The questions in the first part referred to occupation, school, religion, nationality, inner structure and state of families. The second part consisted of questions about the land and the house, asking about the structure of the land, the rooms in the house as well as the equipments used and the way they are furnished, at the same time focusing on the visible ethnic, religious and familiar representations. The third part was asking open-ended and closed-ended questions connected to farming, land property, animal husbandry and the place of work. The last part was dealing with human relationships by asking questions about the religious life, the celebrations connected to the family and the ethnic group, the interferences

between the cohabitating ethnic groups as well as the way they spend their free time. The questionnaire ended with an open-ended question which made it possible to express opinion about the other ethnic group freely.

Besides the data gathered by the use of the survey research I have also used my personal experiences during the field research. The villages and the communities I have studied are all well-known to me since my childhood; I have evoked memories and experiences during the field work by empiric observation. My earlier experiences and knowledge about the field helped me in establishing connections with the locals, in defining the questions used as well as in understanding and analysing the answers I received. With the help of focused and semi-structured interviews and the method of participant observation I could get an insight in the everyday life of the villages and the villagers. I could experience how ethnicity worked in everyday life while focusing on the survey of the real ethnic, cultural and economic situation of the villages. The personal stories of the interviewees revealed to me the structure and relations between the members of the different ethnic groups.

I recorded five interviews in every village between 2014 and 2015. The subjects of the interviews were usually chosen among the local elite; where there were no elite in the village I was taking an interview with the people responsible of the village or the people who were `looked upon` by the other villagers, their deeds, decisions and attitudes were an example to follow for the rest of the community. I have also talked to people who had moved from the village but still went back to visit or work the gardens. Their opinion was more objective about the processes

going on as they were viewing their home village with the eyes of an outsider. I have processed the results of the research in two steps: first I made the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the questionnaires, then noted down and studied the recordings and the interviews. The data obtained was compared with the data and the statistics made by the local governments, the National Institute of Statistics – Romania and the data published in Hungarian publications. Finally, based on the above, I have put together the demographic figures of the villages valid for 2015, as well as the graphics and numbers used in the dissertation.

II. Thesis-like enumeration of the results

1. The ethnic and demographic processes going on in the three villages demonstrate the drastic changes occurring in the villages of Orbaiszék. These changes have contributed to the decrease, weakening and aging of the Hungarian population; and to the increase of the Roma ethnic group. Although there have not been visible and basic changes in the number of the Romanian population, their influence and role in state institutions have significantly intensified.
2. The constant rise of the number of the Hungarian speaking Roma community ensures the maintenance of Hungarian language education. We can witness in several villages that Hungarian education is due to the growing number of Roma children.

3. Most of the economic power in Orbaiszék (lands, forest, animal husbandry) constitute the property of the Romanian community. Most of the agricultural entrepreneurs are of Romanian origin, they rent the lands of the elderly Hungarian farmers not only in their home village, but also in the neighbouring villages.
4. Ethnic representations do not take a central role in the life of the people of Orbaiszék. It is important though to celebrate Hungarian national holidays like March 15 in the centre of Kézdivásárhely, and the religious holiday of August 20 in the chapel built on the hill of Perkő. Besides these celebrations we do not find spectacular celebration occasions here.
5. The Hungarian community represents the bearer of the culture for the Hungarian speaking Roma community. They accept the set of norms and values established by the Hungarian community, try to live according to them, but first of all they want to meet the demands of their own community, to suit their own set of norms and values.
6. The borders of the three ethnic groups are not keenly separated in space, but the ethnic conscience, the belonging to their own ethnic group lives very strongly in each of them. They usually define themselves relating to the other ethnic group, and try to face the constantly changing ethnic processes in a natural way.

III. List of publications related to the dissertation

1. A patakok szerepe Felsőháromszék életében. *Ethnica* VII/1. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Néprajzi Intézet. 2005. 30–31.
2. Kisebbségi közösségek Háromszéken: románok és cigányok. In: Ilyés Sándor – Jakab Albert Zsolt (ed.): *Kulturális gyakorlat és reprezentáció*. Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság. 2013. 93–106.
3. „Ezt szoktuk meg. Ez a mienk.” Magyar–cigány együttélés Orbaiszéken. In: Jakab Albert Zsolt – Vajda András (ed.): *Érték és közösség. A hagyomány és az örökség szerepe a változó lokális regiszterekben*. Kolozsvár: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság. 2015. 1–19. (under publication)
4. Együtt vagy külön? Magyarok és cigányok Székelypetőfalván. In: Telenkó Bazil Mihály (ed.): *Régió és regionalizmus a történelemben és néprajzban*. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Néprajzi Intézete. 2016. 1–32. (under publication)
5. Change and Transition in the Life of Hungarian, Romanian and Roma Ethnic Groups in Eastern Part of Covasna County. In: *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies*, vol. 9. Kolozsvár: Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania. 2016. 1–13. (under publication)

IV. Conference presentations related to the dissertation

1. *Kisebbségi közösségek Háromszéken: románok és cigányok.*
Title of the conference: Kulturális gyakorlat és reprezentáció.
Haáz Rezső Múzeum, Székelyudvarhely. 19–20 April 2013
Organizers: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, Haáz Rezső Múzeum
2. *Együtt vagy külön? Magyarok és cigányok Székelypetőfalván.*
Title of the conference: Régió és regionalizmus a történelemben és a néprajzban. Debreceni Egyetem, Néprajzi tanszék. 16 September 2015
Organizers: Debreceni Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Történelmi és Néprajzi Doktori Iskola, Nemzetközi Inter-regionális Társadalomtörténeti és Néprajzi Kutatóközpont, az MTA-DE Néprajzi Kutatócsoportja, a Történelmi Intézet és a Néprajzi Tanszék
3. *„Ezt szoktuk meg. Ez a mienk.” Magyar–cigány együttélés Orbaiszéken.*
Title of the conference: Érték és közösség. Új utak és kihívások az erdélyi értékkutatásban. Székely Nemzeti Múzeum, Sepsiszentgyörgy. 9–10 October 2015
Organizers: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, Székely Nemzeti Múzeum

V. Other publications

1. Kolozsvári Magyar Napok. In: Bodó Barna – Szabó Lilla – Széman Emese Rózsa (ed.): *Erdélyi Magyar Civil Évkönyv 2015*. Kolozsvár: Magyar Civil Szervezetek Erdélyi Szövetsége. 2015. 1–13. (under publication)

VI. Books redacted

1. *Kincses Kolozsvár Kalendáriuma 2012*. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Magyar Nemzeti Tanács – Kriterion Könyvkiadó (technical editor)
2. *Kincses Kolozsvár Kalendáriuma 2013*. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Magyar Nemzeti Tanács – Kriterion Könyvkiadó (technical editor)
3. *Kincses Kolozsvár Kalendáriuma 2014–2015*. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Magyar Nemzeti Tanács – Kriterion Könyvkiadó (technical editor)
4. *Kincses Kolozsvár Kalendáriuma 2015–2016*. Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Magyar Nemzeti Tanács – Kriterion Könyvkiadó (technical editor)
5. *Erdélyi Magyar Civil Évkönyv 2015*. Kolozsvár: Magyar Civil Szervezetek Erdélyi Szövetsége (technical editor Bodó Barna, co-editor Széman Emese Rózsa). Kolozsvár: Magyar Civil Szervezetek Erdélyi Szövetsége. 2015. (under publication)

VII. Book translations

1. Seulean, Tudor – Ruijters, Maarten – Van Rijen, Ton: *Transylvania. The Saxon Legacy*. Cluj-Napoca: Grinta Publishing House. 2009.

VIII. Other conference presentations

1. *Szervezz velünk! Kolozsvári Magyar Napok workshop. Beszélgetés a Kolozsvári Magyar Napok szervezőivel: Gergely Balázs főszervező, Sánta Levente fesztiváligazgató, Szabó Lilla programigazgató*

Title of the conference: TÁJOLÓ erdélyi közéleti konferencia. Kolozsvár. March 23–25, 2012

Organizers: Reconstructio Egyesület, Integratio Alapítvány

2. *A Kolozsvári Magyar Napok kommunikációs stratégiái.*

Title of the conference: IV. Kommunikációs Napok, Kolozsvár. December 7–8, 2012. Organizer: Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Politics, Public Administration and Communication Sciences, Institute of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising

3. *Kolozsvári Magyar Napok. Sikertörténet és ami mögötte van.*

Title of the conference: Kriza János Szakkollégium, Kolozsvár. February 17, 2016

Organizers: Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, Kolozsvári Magyar Egyetemi Intézet



Candidate: Lilla Szabó
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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book chapter(s) (3)

1. **Szabó L.:** Együtt vagy külön? Magyarok és cigányok Székelypétőfalván.
In: Régió és regionalizmus a történelemben és néprajzban. Szerk.: Telenkó Bazil Mihály,
Debreceni Egyetem Néprajzi Intézete, Debrecen, [1-32], 2016.
2. **Szabó L.:** "Ezt szoktuk meg. Ez a mienk!": Magyar-cigány együttélés Orbaiszéken.
In: Érték és közösség : A hagyomány és az örökség szerepe a változó lokális regiszterekben.
Szerk.: Jakab Albert Zsolt, Vajda András, Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság, Kolozsvár, [1-19],
2015.
3. **Szabó L.:** Kisebbségi közösségek Háromszéken: románok és cigányok
In: Kulturális gyakorlat és reprezentáció. Szerk.: Ilyés Sándor, Jakab Albert Zsolt, Kriza János
Néprajzi Társaság, Kolozsvár, 93-106, 2013. ISBN: 9789738439733

Hungarian scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (1)

4. **Szabó L.:** A patakok szerepe Felsőháromszék életében.
Ethnica. 7 (1), 30-31, 2005. ISSN: 1419-8177.

Foreign language scientific article(s) in international journal(s) (1)

5. **Szabó, L.:** Change and Transition in the Life of Hungarian, Romanian and Roma Ethnic Groups in
Eastern Part of Covasna County.
Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Eur. Reg. Stud. Accepted by publisher (2016) p. 1-13, p. 1-13. - ISSN:
2066-639X.



List of other publications

Foreign language international book(s) (1)

6. Seulean, T., Ruijters, M., Van Rijen, T., Huber, I., Wittstock, U., Balázs, R., **Szabó, L.** (ford.):
Transylvania : The Saxon legacy = Moștenirea sásescă din Transilvania = Erbe der sie
benbürger Sachsen = L'Héritage saxon en Transylvanie = Erdélyi szász örökség. Grinta,
Cluj-Napoca, 190 p., 2009. ISBN: 9789731261638

Hungarian book chapter(s) (1)

7. **Szabó L.**: Kolozsvári Magyar Napok.
In: Erdélyi Magyar Civil Évkönyv 2015. Szerk.: Bodó Barna, Szabó Lilla, Széman Emese
Rózsa, Magyar Civil Szervezetek Erdélyi Szövetsége, Kolozsvár, [1-13], 2016.

Periodic publication(s) (1)

8. H. Szabó G., **Szabó L.** (szerk.): Kincses Kolozsvár Kalendáriuma. -Kolozsvár : Erdélyi Magyar
Nemzeti Tanács : Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 2012-

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the iDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on
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