1. Aims and the Delimitation of the Project

In our present days the Moldavian villages are sustaining and functioning such special cultural and social mechanisms, that are considered outstanding and unique throughout the whole Central-Eastern European Hungarian language area. The macro social changes that occurred in 1989 have started a more moderated process of modernization also in the Csângó communities from the Moldavian rural areas, a process which – in some of its components – alludes to the 20th–21st century urban societies of the West, nevertheless the social structure formed within the 18th–19th centuries, the most diverse aspects of the secular social practices put their imprints on the Moldavian Csângó culture with an influence lasting up to the present.

The basic condition for the optimal functioning and inner structure of a rural community, which is valid for Moldavia as well, must be the formation – based on explicit, but mostly tacit consensus – of a system of norms regarding each and every member of the society in question, and an efficient control of this normative construction, a control that can be applied to all members, regardless of their social status. But in the same time, a determining element of a conflictless functioning of a deeply religious Catholic Moldavian society is the embedment of moral norms in the religious sphere, and their partly differentiation from juridical regulations and civic legislature. The system of norms limited by the Church – the Church norms – do not differ from the normative structure of the central power in their articles, but in the elaboration of the norms’ moral aspects and in the means of punishment regarding lawbreakers: the author of an action that is not agreed by God, the supreme judge, will be struck by a transcendental judgement. Official, respectively communal norms are separated very precisely by the members of the community even in our days.

The secular and ecclesiastical, formal and informal institutions of social control within the Moldavian Csângó societies are characterized by a disproportionate presence and surface of interference. If one of these is having a more intensive control on the level of society, the existence of the others will not be really necessary. For example, in the villages where the priest has overtaken the control practices over different social groups, communal control seems weaker or even indulgent regarding the groups severely judged by the priest. While in the villages when the presence of the priest does not imply interference in moral offences or breaking communal system of regulations, the communal control seems more intensive. Similarly, the passivity of the police, regarding the discovery and punishment of the lawbreaker, contributes to a more intense practice of communal control.
Deep religiosity on the spiritual level asks for an equivalent on the social level, which is severe ecclesiastical control, being the normative base of all other normative and controlling institution. According to this, the opinion of the priest, as the representant of the church, will be reflected both in public opinion and local official jurisdiction. But his status, including a wide palate of social roles, has been going through a process of massive value loss, its sacred content seeming to empty, the justification of his interference being more and more questioned by the community.

With such starting points, my research analyzes the motion of tones that has appeared in the last two decades within everyday interaction between ecclesiastical and secular sphere, in the case of some Csángó villages influenced by modernization on multiple levels; the forms of communal system of norms’ controlling factors that have survived until today; the legitimacy they might have in the 21st century. Through a line of examples I shall point on the forms of institutional/communal judgement regarding the individual exiting this sphere of control, and the alternatives he/she might have to move on in today’s Csángó society. Before the presentation of these elements, as a first step I must define what social control means, followed by an indispensable historical review, concerning social life, the appearance and functioning of controlling institutions, their local–central, ecclesiastical–secular opposition in the Csángó villages, over the last few centuries.

Beyond the presentation of the institutions of control, my aim is to make the picture on the social structure of the Csángó villages more concrete. I suppose that, as in a healthily functioning culture, for the understanding of structuring and functioning principles of the Csángó lifeworlds, the categories of custom, jurisdiction, law, morals and work cannot be percepted as an aggregation of casual institutions, but as constructions forming a unitary system. Starting from this, I shall analyze social structure through its own functionality, outlining social morphology through social physiology. In many aspects the hidden dark side of the Csángó society makes the events of the visible surface understandable within a different frame of interpretation. In my analysis I shall try to define this deep structure and to expose its functioning principles by following the ethnological form of system analysis proposed by Michel Foucault, with a positioning between the recognized and distortioned categories of society, for a vertical visualization of social structure. The everyday realities of the Csángó villages include the fact, that in spite of the severely determined collective norms and the heavy sanctions, the inner structuring of the community and of the family often differed from the normative Christian family model, the consolidation and functioning of which nowadays is more and more difficult to be defined by public opinion.
Thus to reach my objectives, I have chosen the modeling of the organization of some Csángó microsocieties – with a quite clear structure – along the Siret river, and the social ethnographic and cultural anthropologic analysis of normative institutions and their controlling factors. Starting off from the system-like character of social structure, I think that the analysis of the institutions of social control and of the sanctions in the region in question can be done on a structural basis, within their functionality, and within their inner and betwixt system of relations. The aim of structural and functional modeling is to be able to present all the facts observed.

Knowing that the permanent presence and activity of the Catholic Church and its local representants is the basic determining factor of Csángó culture, in my research I emphasised the revealing of ecclesiastic norms and sanctions, of the traditional and present status of the priest, of the relations between community and church as well as community and priest. The analysis of the conflicts between ecclesiastic/secular norms and everyday life practice, respectively community and priest, has an important role also in unveiling social structure and functioning. I will keep in mind that, in fact, at the Csángós all means of control and punishment brings within the intention of corresponding to the ecclesiastic (sacred) sphere.

My work also aims to enclose the schematic, sometimes idealistic picture of the ethnographic literature, which rarely deals with social functioning, to the realities of Csángó life. My endeavours, aiming objectivity, justify the presence of shorter chapters regarding categories like norm-breaking (deviant) attitudes (lie, fraud, theft, verbal and physical abuse, suicide, homicide, blasphemy, profanities, religious conversion, carnality, sexuality, tomb and body desecration, divorce, living on tally with someone, love child, marriage at a late age, alcoholism), formal institutions of control (confession and Church, priest, school, police, mayor, law court), informal institutions of control (public opinion, gossip, informers, collective control – taking the law into one’s hands, magic).

I have carried out my research also with the intention of completing the ethnographic literature: with the processing of archive documents we can get a picture of the morality, lawbreaking and means of punishment of the Csángó communities, about what was expected from a priest in the last few centuries according to a traditional scheme, but there is no work at hand regarding social sciences, which would expose that within the present social and economical conditions, in a world with a different view, undergoing secularization, what are the changes occuring within the unwritten moral codex because of the rapid adaptation of small communities, within communal needs regarding religious life and the role of the priest, how does the Church overwrite the sanctions used by the priest on the local level, at all what are those tasks that are dealt with nowadays by social institutions of religion and the Church,
the status of the priest, school, police, court law, mayor and his/her office, respectively by public opinion, gossip, collective control, the gesture of taking the law into one’s hands, and magical practices.

2. Methodology
In the delimitation of fieldwork and the chosen processing methods the starting point was given by the theories of Clifford Geertz, according to which the scene of research is not equal with the object of research, that is anthropologists are carrying out their research in the villages, not on the villages. I have taken into consideration that different things can be studied in different locations, and the best way to study some things is within smaller, well defined units. But during the delimitation of the geographic context, no single village proved to assure such a basis, that would serve all the necessary examples for a complex processing of this topic, because of the mentioned disproportionate presence and surface of interference of the institutions of social control.

Concerning data collecting proceedings, because of the topic’s moral and social sensitivity, I have used mainly the so-called soft methods of social sciences, rotating or combining working methods of ethnography, anthropology and sociology, and modulating the questions according to given situation, I have tried to succeed in a most complete data collecting possible. Discussing with my informants, I have preferred deep interviews and unstructured interviews. In the case of more reserved, uncommunicative persons, or in situations – working occasions, active participation at ritual events – where a recording was not possible, I have appealed to the informal interview, resulting a rough text, but reflecting a more open opinion than usual, or to some quick notes on the location to be completed later on from my memory.

During my research in the Moldavian Csángó villages, different techniques of participating observation have enriched the empirical chapters of this topic with several casual pieces of information. However, in the case of social control, social roles and deviance mostly the techniques of passive or moderate participating observation were at hand.

My male and female informants represented all age groups, the different problematics of the research naturally determined the sex and generation group of those answering to my questions. Outlining the social role of the priest, for example, was possible with the help of the younger generation, presenting an opposition of principles, respectively with that of my elder male and female informants. In the same context my youngest informants unveiled, more sincerely than the elders, the atmosphere of religious courses causing more informal situations and the means of punishment aiming those who sinned against parohial orders.
Within my endeavours regarding family reconstruction and deviance observation especially middle aged and elder women proved to be better informed and communicative.

Besides observation and oral history-based fieldwork, I have studied the parohial folders starting from 1883, the folders of the local councils and the gendarmerie from the 1940s and 1950s, found in the Archive from Bacău. I have completed my work with a documentation given by these sources.

Starting with the year 2001 I have been carrying out regular fieldwork in more than a dozen Moldavian Csângó villages, that means at least twenty occasions featuring from three to ten days. I have managed to carry out a more profound study in the Szekler Csângó villages along the Siret river (around Bacău) – Cleja, Şoimuşca, Fărăoani, Valea Rea, Ciucani, Gheorghe Doja, Luizi-Călugăra –, respectively in some Southern Csângó villages with medieval origins – Galbeni, Gioseni, Valea Mare and Valea Seacă. Further valuable information comes from a Szekler Csângó village along the Bistriţa river: Lespezi and the nearby Gârlenii de Jos, respectively from Pustiana along the Tazlău river, and from the most eastern Csângó village, situated east from the Siret: Arini.

I consider myself especially lucky as in several cases I was able to experience the monitorizing and sanctioning role of social control within its own functioning, I was witness to the active or demonstrative expression of some control factors, and in a few cases I was the one to be measured by local norms and habits, until from a stranger, disturbing the peace of the village, I have become a regularly returning acquaintance, a friend, I might say. Exactly this profound personality, often pointing well beyond research, has made the objectivity of fieldwork questionable for me. In fact starting from choosing the topic, the preconceptions, the point of view formed by ethnographic literature, all are inevitably determined and influenced by the system of ideas and values of my own society. These dilemmas have been partly dispersed by the theoretical and methodological mile stones of cultural research. For example, the ideas of A. J. Gurevits regarding the work of cultural history seem quite calming: according to him, during research and interpretation one cannot turn off completely the “sound level of the apparatus”, meaning the contemporary images of the author.

For the revealing of society’s controlling structures and for a multileveled interpretation I recorded the reports of individuals standing on different steps of social hierarchy, of the local priests and the representants of the law, and I confronted the contradictory opinions on the level of analysis. In the same way, during the processing of the collected data, it was inevitable to contradict or complete some theses of the specific literature, which makes the analysis even more valuable. I agree with Geertz: “a research means advancement when it is
more profound than the antecedents – whatever this expression means; but it doesn’t really rely on them, rather it goes by them, provoking and being provoked.”

3. The Enumeration of the Results

In my thesis I have described social control and its institutions, assuring communal stability in the Moldavian Csángó villages, along with the presentation of the structure from the starting actions of norm-breaking to the means of punishment ending up some of the cases.

Through history the outer representation, positive qualification of the Csángó communities, the presentation of a unitary culture to the world has been determined by the dominant category of the social structure, the agricultors, who have been in majority against deviant elements, this situation making also the judging public opinion to function. In order to make the essence of control understandable, I have considered necessary a detailed presentation of the Csángó communities’ attitude towards moral issues. The chapter on the breaking of norms in fact enumerates the most frequent sins, the prevention, filtering of which was meant by social control. With the outlining of sanctions I presented the depth of control effects given by certain institutions of control. Describing the most characteristic means of punishment in the Csángó villages, I emphasized the archaic forms of punishment and restauration of social order, and their rooting in the deeper strata of cultural history. I have also emphasized the unitary, all European character of medieval, modern and contemporary customs of punishment through the comparison of Western European, Szekler and Csángó examples. Finally, the last chapter presents the analysis of a case, with its deviant characters challenged all institutions of control, raising the anger of the community, provoking a centuries old practice: mob law.

The extreme difficulty of the description and interpretation of the Moldavian Csángó culture and society is given, on the one hand, by the sincronity of archaic and modern, on the other hand, by the restricted number of accessible historical, archive sources and historical presentations, carrying within the possibility of revealing the past. Therefore the starting part, dealing with the historical past of the Csángó society, is only a rough initiative, undertaking only the brief presentation of the social structuring of certain periods of time, posted relevant by one or another scholarly approach, of the dominant institutions of control, norm-breaking, sins and sanctions. In the chapter in question I presented the main points in modern and contemporary Moldavian Csángó history, analyzing the processes during which the collective system of norms, assured by tradition and the communities’ inner cohesion, had become subordinated to the regulations brought by the political and/or ecclesiastical power of certain ages. With my analysis, in fact, I have succeeded in presenting some missing stations of the
polarity between social control, folk customs, morals and institutional control. Within the chronological presentation one could see how communal control limited to certain settlements was gradually overwritten by a mechanism of power codified in official laws, spreading over all fields of life, overtaking such controlling and punishing means of popular practice, without which collective control couldn’t be able to fulfill its preventive function, legally possessing none of the earlier means after the moment of norm-breaking.

Nevertheless the composition of the institutions of social control functioning in the Moldavian Csángó villages meant no rigid structure, but functioning as a constant change throughout history, and within this scheme the direction of the change points from the unitary, democratic popular institutions towards the appearance of centralized structures of power, the functioning of which couldn’t be influenced by the local communities, respectively in which secular and ecclesiastical power was racing to expropriate and serve the control over the traditional Csángó communities, which were meant for assimilation. Further more, not only the institutions’ position within the structure have been different throughout history, but also the institutions of control themselves; certain mechanisms were brought to life or exiled by different political periods, different secular and ecclesiastical ideologies during the ages.

The characteristic of the period in question, namely of the 17th – 21st centuries, is that a Csángó society so strongly bounded to religion has been constantly laying more and more emphasis on elaborating and functioning mechanisms releasing the sense of remorse. Numerous forms of individual remorse and penitence drawn to communal scene, from individual and common confession to fast, the feasts and liturgies of collective purification had been playing the same role in the communities’ life: through the punishment of an individual breaking common rules, the possibility of social reintegration was offered. The harshness and impartiality of control was given by public opinion and by the gauge of the transcendental judge, thus moral judging meant mainly a religious screening, the direct or indirect correspondence to a religious world view. With these regulations the defining majority of the means of punishment and forgiving was concentrated in the hands of the ecclesiastical power, that forced the submitting communities into a status of dependence. Besides the Church, also secular power – through its consolidation and the formation of its institutions – had gained more and more field in punishment and the release of remorse, but side by side with the obvious dominance of officialized ecclesiastical and secular power structures, there was a surviving control of the local communities, conserving old traditions and legal customs, assuring the frames of communal life, thus showing a higher level of adaptability.
Based on almost a decade of fieldwork, I discussed how the Western-type cultures and modern life patterns, gradually discovered by the Csángós starting with the 1990s, are confronting in many segments traditional life organization. This confrontation generates serious changes rather on the level of social structure and functioning than on that of material culture. A massive work migration towards the urban areas and especially to other countries causes a high number of incomplete families, as it is a general phenomenon in the Csángó villages, that the active members of the family are working abroad, regularly in Spain and Italy, most time of the year. It is well known that migrant work is undertaken by a social group between 20–40 years, the one that would have a determining role in the local society regarding the stability and preservation of social structure, respectively leadership. Thus society has lost exactly the stratum which would be capable of decision and action-taking on the most diverse levels of communal life.

The leadership over the remaining youngest and elder generations was undertaken by the most influential personality of the place: the priest. His controlling practices, besides religious life supervision, also covered the happenings of everyday life. He confronted the possible resistance of community with the power of faith, his sanctions being fortified by ritual and magical practices. Black mass, for example, besides a continuous intimidation of the community, represents a great source of income. This practice appeared within the activity of the Moldavian Catholic priests due to the magic-exorcistic practice of the Orthodox priests, and its concrete effects and efficiency is not questioned neither by the deeply religious habitants, nor by the younger generations living between faith and doubt. It is this specificity, on the one hand, that gives the relevancy of the analysis of Moldavian Csángó social control in the light of ecclesiastical and magical aspects. On the other hand, it is quite remarkable a moral downturn, which – altogether with an increasing number of deviant individuals – determines the revival of centuries old forms of social control.

With the 20th century dissolution of traditional Csángó communities, another society was born, deeply articulated along convictions, interests and ideologies, within which the unitary public opinion has disappeared, and with the gradual faintening of a unitary system of norms, the consequent control over society has lost its basis, thus also the collective means of punishment, assuring the rehabilitation of social order, have mostly disappeared. The period from the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st is characterized by structureless cultural transition, mixing traditional and modern world views, within which the anacronistic nature of the archaic custom law system is shown by the elements of punishment that appear from time to time in popular jurisdiction, behind which the traditional cultural senses have mostly disappeared from.
To the end of the 20th century traditional popular religiosity has been replaced by an ecclesiastical religious practice paying more attention to the secular scenery, also an international “popular religiosity” has been spreading among the traditionally homogeneous Catholic population of the Csángó villages, a modern world view tolerating and including different ideas of certain religious sects and groups. The relation to Church, to religion and to priest was reevaluated, and these attitudes are creating constant situations of conflict. The weakening tendency of professed religious practice is strongly related to the demythologization of the priest and the desacralization of his status. As an influence of modernizational processes, the inner order of the community has fallen apart, also the legitimacy of social control practiced by priest or community has been questioned. The individual is gaining more and more authority in self definition and identity construction within the local structure of the community, thus communal control cannot really limit individual choices and decisions. Deviant attitudes, impeding the functioning of social control and social order, along with a desintegrating public opinion are only signs of a deeper danger within social structure, threatening with the loosening of social relations in the case of a traditionally defined society, with the damaging of its social texture, and with the decay and total disappearance of social cohesion-sustaining traditional system of values.

4. Related publications of the author

- A társadalmi kontroll és intézményei a moldvai falvakban. Normák, normaszegők és