THE IMPLICATIONS IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND SELF-IDENTIFICATION CAN HAVE IN A BORDERLAND REGION OF TRANSYLVANIA, ROMANIA

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2009
ABSTRACT

THESIS: The Implications Identity Construction and Self Identification Can Have In a Borderland Region of Transylvania, Romania.

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DEGREE: Master of Arts

COLLEGE: Science and Humanities

DATE: December 2009

PAGES: 54

Ghimes-Faget, Transylvania, Romania is a complex region where ethnic identity is not clearly defined. The area has been going through a continuing process of change. In the past century, as a result, history has been an important aspect in the daily lives of individuals there. With these political and social changes occurring through time, this has impacted ethnic identity in the region. This region is posed to be “the Csango” region in Transylvania and continues, as a result, to increase in tourism. However, when examined in detail a number of factors influence how people in Ghimes-Faget ethnically identify themselves. This thesis examines some of the factors and the elements that were found to be essential in defining ethnic identity in the Ghimes region. These examples come from field research that was conducted in Ghimes-Faget in the summer of 2008.
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the assistance and direction of a number of people. First I would like to thank Dr. Gail Bader, Dr. James M. Nyce, Dr. Paul Wohlt and Mr. Gerald Waite for encouraging and guiding me to the field of anthropology. Without their dedicated support I would not be in the Department of Anthropology. I am also thankful for all the professors in the Department of Anthropology for supporting me in my studies throughout my two years of graduate study. They allowed me to grow and sharpen my educational skills through hands on experience as well as course work. I would also like to give a special thanks to my thesis chair, Dr. Gail Bader, for the continuous and insightful guidance that she has provided me. Through the two years, she provided me with support that I could not compare. I would like to give special thanks to the students who attended the field school, and my research colleague, Horatiu Burcea, for his translating and partnership throughout the entire six weeks. Most of all I would like to thank those informants of Ghimes-Faget, for without their participation I would not be able to write this paper. I would also like to thank my family for their undivided support throughout my entire educational career. I would not have been able to continue and grow without them.
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“Remoteness is a specification, and a perception, from elsewhere, from an outside standpoint; but from inside the people have their own perception….a countespecificaiton of the dominant or defining space, working in the opposite direction” (Kurti 2001: 17). Whether people know where Transylvania is located or whether they believe it is a mythical place where Dracula lives, people have different perceptions about what Transylvania really is. In the book, *Do Fish Drink Water? Puzzling and Improbable Questions and Answers*, Bill McLain, asks the question “Is there a place called Transylvania?” (McClain 1999: 131). It may seem a mythical place to someone who knows nothing about it. However, it is this lack of information about Transylvania that has caused certain perceptions about it to persist.

Understanding ethnic identity is essential when discussing the region of Transylvania. It is important because not all people living in Transylvania, Romania are Romanians. Transylvania is not a region of clear boundaries and clear understanding of an ethnicity. In order to understand ethnicity you must also look at the history of the region. In the case of Transylvania, understanding ethnic identity is not simple and may require examining it from different angles.

In this thesis, I will be discussing ethnicity among two populations the Hungarian and Csango populations in the Ghimes-Faget area of Transylvania, Romania. The Csango population is an ethnic group of people living in certain areas of Romania. The Hungarians primarily live in the counties of Covasna, Harghita, and Brasov. The Csango population lives in other areas around Romania. However, I will be discussing the Csango people living in the Ghimes area. I will be looking at how ethnic identity is perceived and created by both of these groups. I will argue that ethnicity, for them, draws on at least three main elements or markers: religion,
language and history. These three markers of identity are used by, both Hungarian and Csango peoples to talk about ethnicity.

It is important to understand that the Hungarian and Csango peoples are not merely creating an identity for themselves; they are also rejecting the identity of Romanian. The Ghimes-Faget area contains people of at least four ethnic groups: Hungarian, Csango\(^1\), Roma, and Romanian. Roma, also known as gypsy’s, are another group of people living in Romania. The Romanian government considers all these populations to be Romanian citizens. For many Hungarian and Csango peoples however the identity of “Romanian” is not an identity they accept willingly. For these populations their ethnic identity as “Hungarian” or “Csango” is more legitimate than the identity as “Romanian” citizens. In this thesis I will discuss the creation of an alternative identity as Hungarian or Csango in the face of Romanian citizenship.

Throughout this thesis I will discuss three of the essential elements used by the Hungarian and Csango people of Ghimes-Faget in Transylvania, Romania to create ethnic identity. Beginning with a discussion of the anthropological literature on ethnicity and the creation of ethnic identity, then I will discuss the methods involve in my research in Ghimes-Faget. I will also look at how the history of Hungary, Transylvania and Romania have affected the Ghimes-Faget area then continue to examine the construction of Hungarian and Csango identity in Ghimes-Faget. Finally some of the larger points important to this thesis will be discussed. The term ethnicity is very important when discussing Romania. However, ethnicity is not a single dimension rather it is a term with multiple dimensions that I will be looking at throughout this thesis.

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\(^1\) Csango is an ethnic group thought to derive from the Szekely who fled from persecution in the 15\(^{th}\) century and settled in the Ghimes Valley (Burford T and Longley N 2004:245)
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will discuss the notion of ethnic identity and how it has been understood in the anthropological literature. First, beginning by tracing how identity has been used in this literature and how it is currently defined. Focusing on the work of Fredrik Barth, I will show how his notion of identity can clarify the situation in Ghimes-Faget.

Ethnicity as a Construction

The study of ethnicity has a long history in anthropology. For many years both scholars and people in general defined ethnicity as the values, beliefs, and traditions handed down over a number of generations by a specific group of people. According to George Hicks and Phil Leis (1977) early studies of ethnicity focused on group behavior with the idea that ethnic groups rejected change and valued what others termed traditional behavior. This approach to understanding ethnicity changed with the work of Frederick Barth (1969) and his emphasis on the idea that ethnicity is symbolically constructed.

Barth’s work marks a critical change in the anthropological understanding of ethnicity. Moving away from the idea that ethnicity is primarily the result of tradition and the handing down of cultural behaviors and values, he focused on the construction of ethnicity. Barth argues that ethnic and group boundaries are created through the use of symbols and are used by people to create their own identity (1969). Thus, according to Barth, ethnicity is seen at the “boundaries” of groups as individuals construct and signal their membership and non-membership in various groups (1969). Ethnicity, according to Barth is self-ascribed. Moreover,
the symbols or “markers of identity” that are constructed to signal ethnic identity are not passed down throughout history but reflect the context in which they were being created (Barth 1969).

So when one traces the history of an ethnic group through time, one is not simultaneously, in the same sense, tracing the history of ‘a culture’: the elements of present culture of that ethnic group have not sprung from the particular set that constitutes the group’s culture at a previous time, whereas the group has a continual organizational existence with boundaries (criteria of membership) that despite modifications have marked off a continuing unit (Barth 1969: 38).

Barth argues that our earlier understanding of ethnicity with its focus on group behaviors reflected a particular definition of culture. In the past he says culture was viewed as an almost biological entity that involved the sharing of fundamental cultural values, a shared field of communication and interaction, and an ongoing membership which shared a similar identity (Barth 1969). Barth redefined culture. He sees culture not as a passing down of traditions but as continuous creation with new and old elements that are not easily distinct or separable (1969). In the old perspective of ethnicity and culture, what is emphasized is the sharp and radical separation of cultures and groups, with each culture and group maintaining and passing down specific cultural items. Isolation is an important way of maintaining ethnic identity. This approach however prevents us from explaining or understanding cultural diversity (Barth 1969). “Categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories” (Barth 1969: 9).

Social boundaries are not clear and sharp; rather, Barth argues that social boundaries are continuously being created rather than represent a set of continuous, clear cut boundaries (1969). I will pursue Barth’s notion that ethnic boundaries and identities are created. This will be an important concept in my analysis of the construction of ethnicity in Ghimes-Faget. I will look at
those three “markers of identity” religion, language, and history that are used by the Hungarian and Csango peoples of the area to create ethnic identity. These three markers of identity are used in different ways to construct one’s ethnic identity as either Hungarian or Csango, and may be used by Romanian people as well.  

In the next section I will expand Barth’s notion of ethnic identity by introducing the idea of ethnicity is a communicative strategy using the work of Hicks and Leis (1977).

**Ethnicity as a Way of Communicating**

Hicks and Leis argue that ethnicity should not be thought of as some sort of “thing”. Rather, they argue that ethnicity should be seen as a way of communication (Hicks and Leis 1977). They argue that ethnicity is a way of telling others about who you are in a particular set of circumstances (Hicks and Leis 1977). They proposed that ethnicity is most useful when seen as one attribute of a role like sex, age, kinship affiliation, political persuasion, and religious membership. People have many roles or personas to choose among in any given situation. We choose certain personas or identities in order to create a particular impression. Ethnicity is one of these identities that we can select in order to present certain information about ourselves when in a social situation. Identity can be imposed on us through the society, for example, the identities of a teacher, director, boyfriend, father, and friend are often imposed (Hicks and Leis 1977). I will use this idea that certain roles are chosen depending on the social interaction.

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2 My research focused on those people who identified themselves as either Hungarian or Csango. I did not specifically look at the ethnic identity of those people identifying themselves as Romanian. I did however, interact with some Romanian people enough to believe that at least some Romanian’s may draw on the same markers to talk about Romanian ethnic identity.
The approach Hicks and Leis take (1977) suggests a specific way of understanding society. In their view society is “a matrix where negotiations never cease, bargains great and small are struck constantly, and society itself generates change from within by this myriad of alliances, oppositions and monetary agreements” (Hicks and Leis 1977: 7). They believe that ethnic groups function much like interest groups and, in so doing, are frequently re-invented (Hicks and Leis 1977).

Hicks and Leis help us see that ethnic identity is situational, defined, and that as interests change identity may also change too (1977). To the individuals involved this change in identity seems to merely reflect their changing situation. In other words, as the situation changes, role changes are also appropriate. This, I argue is the situation in Ghimes-Faget in relation to the ethnic group labeled the Csango.

The Ghimes-Faget region is a well known tourist destination in Transylvania because it is considered to be the home of the Csango people, according to The Rough Guide to Romania (2004), a tourist guide book on villages and cities in Romania (Burford and Longley 2004). The guide considers the name “Csango” as derived from the Hungarian word for “wanderer” referring to a group of people known as the Szekely. According to the guide, the Szekely fled from religious persecution to the Ghimes-Faget region from other areas in Transylvania (Burford and Longley 2004). They were thought to have done this during the fifteenth century. They were later joined by others fleeing military conscription in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

People of Hungarian, Romanian and Csango ethnicity among others live in Ghimes-Faget. The tourist literature on the region, advertise the existence of the Csango as a unique ethnic group with its own traditions. Indeed guide books claim that the primary attraction of the
Ghimes-Faget region is the existence of the ethnic “Csango” in this region (Burford and Longley 2004).

Drawing on Hicks and Leis (1977) I will show that some of the Ghimes-Faget inhabitants have been influenced by their participation in the tourist industry to make claims about the ethnic identity. Hicks and Leis see ethnicity as a role people use in situations (1977). People pick certain roles to play in certain situations. I will argue that the ethnic identity of the Csango has been influenced by the growing tourist industry in Ghimes-Faget. This is possible because both Hungarian and Csango identity is constructed by drawing on the same set of ethnic markers religion, language, and history. In this situation individuals can, with ease, construct themselves as members of these different groups. Interestingly, it may well be the case that Romanian ethnic identity draws on the same set of ethnic markers as well. Thus, by drawing differently on the same three markers, one may be able to claim one of three possible ethnic identities. The tourist industry is based on local people claiming their Hungarian or Csango ethnicity in order to increase travel to the area by tourists who provide economic support. It also benefits the industry itself as it allows tourist trade promoters to attract tourist to the region because there exists a large “traditional” population.

The ability to shift between ethnic groups brings us back to Hicks and Leis and their notion that ethnic identity is a form of communication (1977). Ethnic identity is no longer about people making irreversible statements about their biological or cultural essence. Shifting ethnic identities is not about “crossing” impenetrable ethnic boundaries or undergoing a “transformation” of social identity in the process. Rather, people have a collection of ethnic attributes from which they can select the ones they consider most suitable to a given situation.
The possibility is open for people, as it were, to move back and forth across several ethnic boundaries (Hicks and Leis 1977).

**Culture and the Construction of Ethnicity**

The notion of ethnicity that I am using in this paper has important implications for the concept of culture. The works of Barth (1969), and Hicks and Leis (1977) all depend on understanding culture as something that is created, negotiated and manipulated by actors. Culture is not, in their view, something that is imposed, learned by rote and exists unchanged over long periods of time as it once was thought (Hicks and Leis 1977). The same is true of the notion of tradition according to Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin (1984). They argue that tradition, like culture and ethnic identity, are constructed, can change over time and that these changes reflect the situation in which they were created.

Handler and Linnekin reject the idea that ethnic traditions consist as a set of unchanging elements of culture passed down over a certain number of generations (1984). Rather, they see tradition as a symbolic process in which members of each generation “interpret” tradition, and thus changes what is seen as “traditional” cultural elements. Interpretation of traditional cultural elements results changes over time in tradition that reflect current circumstances as much as they reflect the past (Handler and Linnekin 1984).

I see Hungarian and Csango ethnic identities as the result of interpretation by individuals located within particular situations. Indeed, people I interviewed in the Ghimes-Faget region claimed that they were unable to definitively list the elements of a Csango identity. While all of the inhabitants I talked with knew that the Ghimes-Faget region was a Csango area, many of these people were very hesitant about claiming such an identity or even the defining
characteristics. Ultimately I will argue that both Csango and Hungarian identities share three essential categories or makers of ethnicity. People in the region identified different markers to claim identity using these same categories as either Csango or Hungarian.
CHAPTER 3: HISTORY

When discussing the history of Transylvania, it is necessary to talk about national identity. National identity refers to the identity people chose based on their nation-state and geographical and political location. The national identity of Transylvania has changed a number of times over the course of its history. It not only involves Romania but also other countries including Hungary, Moldavia, among others. In this section the discussion will focus on the history of Transylvania’s national identity beginning in the nineteenth century.

At this point I touch upon those areas that figured most prominently in influencing twentieth-century Hungarian-Romanian controversy, eventually leading up to the rise of the state socialist contestable mechanism. Hungarian and Romanian nationalist historiography since the turn of the twentieth century has been a complex and much debated phenomenon (Boia 2001: 26).

Because of the many shifts in national identity, it is possible for the various ethnic groups living in Transylvania to claim historical support for a variety of chosen ethnic identities. I will explore this shift in national identity in the following section.

Hungary, Romania and Transylvania: The Shift in National Identity

Present day Romania is made up of three historical territories; Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania. “Wallachia, in the south, between the Danube and the southern Carpathians: Moldavia to the east and Transylvania to the west, separated from the other two by the curves of the Carpathians” (Boia 2001: 16).

Two hundred years ago Romania was not composed of these three territories. Please refer to Figure 1.
Figure 1. Eastern Europe, Mid-13th Century (Figure Credit: Hupchick and Cox 2001: 19).
Throughout the middle ages, Transylvania governed by Hungary. Boia also talks about this in his book. “It is clear that Wallachia and Moldavia were different countries, and that, although largely populated by Romanians, Transylvania as a state (considered in terms of its ruling elite and institutions) was not Romanian but Hungarian” (Boia 2001: 72). Romania first emerged as a nation in 1859.

Each of these territories, Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania were culturally quite different. Romania first emerged as a nation only in 1859, however the nation only comprised of a small portion of what it is today. Indeed, Romania as a nation is so young that in 1918 it doubled in size and became a much larger nation with the addition of Transylvania and what is now present day Romania (Boia 2001). Please refer to Figure 2.

Figure 2. Hungary after Trianon Treaty, 1920-1939 (Figure Credit: Hupchick and Cox 2001: 45).
The year 1918 is critical because the nation of Romania, including the region of Transylvania, was created after World War I. The war was precipitated by the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary by a Serbian nationalist in 1914 (Hupchick and Cox 2001). WWI was the result of late 19th century imperialistic, territorial and economic rivalries among Germany, France, Great Britain, Russia, and Austria-Hungary (Hupchick and Cox 2001).

Attempting to take advantage of Habsburg preoccupation with its far-flung war fronts, Romania declared war on Austria-Hungary and invaded Transylvania in August 1916. Romania was defeated and was occupied by the Austria-Hungarian empire in early 1917 (Hupchick and Cox 2001). However, by 1917 the Habsburg emperor Charles I, 1916-1922, who succeeded Francis Joseph, was aware of the disaster that loomed on the horizon for his empire should the Central Powers be defeated (Hupchick and Cox 2001).

The likelihood of this increased in April 1917 when the United States entered the war on the Entente’s side, and President Woodrow Wilson issued his fourteen-point declaration3 of American war aims (Hupchick and Cox 2001). In 1918 the Austria-Hungarian Empire collapsed. Taking advantage of this collapse various minority ethno-national groups across the empire, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Slovenes, and Romanian, declared their independent national existence echoing Wilson’s Fourteen Points (Hupchick and Cox 2001). The Hungarians and Austrian Germans did the same (Hupchick and Cox 2001).

In 1920, the Treaty of Trianon was signed and this treaty ended Hungary’s participation in World War I. The Trianon Treaty rewarded Romanians by, among other things giving them the region of Transylvania (Hupchick and Cox 2001). With this dramatic loss of the territory for

3 The fourteen point’s declaration was a speech given by President Woodrow Wilson in order to ensure that the war was being fought for moral causes and for post war peace in Europe (Hupchick and Cox, 2001).
Hungary, many ethnicities, including, Magyars, became residents of different and adjacent countries. Thus a situation was created in Transylvania and Ghimes-Faget of the multiple national-ethnic identities that continues to exist today. Transylvania is a country that has belonged to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and is currently part of Romania (Hupchick and Cox 2001).

The Hungarians, in Hungary and Transylvania, considered the newly determined borders created by the Trianon Treaty to be artificial and illegitimate because they were imposed by force (Hupchick and Cox 2001). This was one reason why Hungarians became one of the most outspoken proponents for revising the Versailles peace settlements in Europe. The Hungarian nationalistic slogan, in Hungary “nem nem soha” (no, no, never) referred to accepting the Trianon borders and the Hungarian rejection of those borders. This slogan has reverberated throughout Hungary’s modern history and in many parts of Transylvania up and through World War II (Hupchick and Cox 2001).

The Trianon Treaty played an important role in Hungarian history because it has been seen as unfair and illegitimate; it also affected how Hungarians viewed both Transylvania and Romania. Looking at the treaty from a Hungarian viewpoint, territories that had been part of Hungary for centuries had been cut away by force and forcibly incorporated in neighboring countries (Hupchick and Cox 2001).

The Trianon Treaty looked quite different from the Romanian point of view. From the Romanian perspective Transylvania was populated by a majority of ethnic Romanian people. The collapse of the Austria-Hungary Empire in World War I led to the reunion of a Romanian

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4 Magyar is the Hungarian word for Hungarians.
5 Some of these countries include Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic and Serbia.
6 The political map of modern Eastern Europe originally was drawn by the victorious Entente Powers (specifically, Britain, France, and the United States) during the negotiations at Versailles, 1919-1921 that ended World War 1. (Hupchick and Cox 2001: 45)
population with a Romanian nation from the Romanian point of view. The union of Transylvania and Romania doubled the size of Romania. This union incorporated into Romania, large number of ethnic Romanians who had been living under Hungarian rule along with minority populations of Hungarian and Germans (Hupchick and Cox 2001). From the Romania perspective the unification of the country was an advantage to Romania. With large minority populations now living in Romania, Romania’s government focused on politically and socially unifying Romania into as one nation.

The Treaty of Trianon validated both acquisitions. The Romanians then implemented programs that would weaken the minorities in their newly enlarged state and strengthen themselves. Non Romanian governing institutions were eliminated and minority officials were systematically weeded out of their posts. Public schools became tools for Romanianizing the minorities, while minority church and private schools were either seized by the government or closed on the most specious of pretexts. Beatings and imprisonments of non-Romanians became commonplace (Boia 2001: 45).

The attempt to nationalize ethnic groups was not new in Transylvania. Romanians living in Transylvania supported the Treaty and the new border for a number of reasons. At least one of these reasons was related to the treatment of Romanians by the Hungarian government when Transylvania had been part of that nation. There are many Romanian people living in Transylvania and scholars argue that these Romanians were put through a process called Magyarization. Magyarization is term used to indicate how the Hungarians would force the Hungarian culture on ethnicities other than their own. For example, forcing an ethnic Romanian village to speak Hungarian and lose their Romanian characteristics. Historian Edith Lehrer gives an example of this perspective in his book, Transylvania: History and Reality, there he provides a view rather different from what has been discussed before (1986).

There is a debate about how the Hungarian and Romanian nations dealt with minority populations. In fact, there are two versions of history when dealing with Transylvania, a
Hungarian version and a Romanian version. My position in this thesis is that there is truth in both versions. Lehrer argues that some forced Magyarization did occur during the twentieth century and this continued for some years after Transylvania was unified with Romania.

The Szecklerization continued during World War I when the small number of Romanians who had managed to survive the forced Magyarization was obligated to adopt either the Catholic or the Calvinist faith. It is interesting to note that the process of Szecklerization continued during the first years of the establishment of Romanian rule. This was due to a number of phenomena, including mixed marriages and the limitation of baptismal ceremonies to the recognized churches. “Even under Romanian rule,” wrote Sabin Opreanu in 1927, “The Romanians could not cope with the pressures of the Szeklers masses (Lehrer 1986: 19).

There are of course counter arguments from scholars Hupchick and Cox (2001), for example, claims that the Romanians forced Romanian ways on Hungarians living in Transylvania after the Trianon Treaty and not vice versa. Lehrer (1986) also makes much the same point.

Romanian officials bullied minorities living in their districts and showed utter contempt for the laws they were sworn to uphold. The Agrarian Reform of 1920 also was an outwardly progressive policy that was used to discriminate against non-Romanians. While certainly needed in the former principalities, where traditional feudal relationships still existed, it also offered an excellent means for depriving minorities of their land, which supported their religious and educational activities, thus weakening the minority’s national aspirations and giving the government direct control of minority education (Lehrer 1986: 45).

Lehrer goes on to describe some of the ways in which Hungarians forced various kinds of change upon Romanians. For example he describes how under Magyarization, authorities in villages punished people if they spoke the Romanian language (Lehrer 1986).

It is evident from these two scholarly arguments that there are opposing views of Romanian history. These arguments are not confined to academia. Rather these different interpretations play an important role in everyday life in some areas of Transylvania, particularly in areas with large concentrations of citizen who claim a Hungarian ethnicity. Indeed, this issue
does not belong just to historians; these positions create very different realities for some parts of the population living in Transylvania. Certainly in Ghimes-Faget when we are discussing a particular time or event in history, the version one hears differs from one person to another, from situation to situation, and often varies by ethnicity.

At this point I would like to look at ethnic distribution in Transylvania and how it has played a role in ethnic identity in Transylvania. It is important to remember that Transylvania has experienced many political changes, the fall of communism in 1989, transition to a market economy, de-collectivization, and entrance into the European Union in January 2007. These changes are only a few examples of the long line of political changes and historical changes of Romania. In Boia’s book, *Romania*, he explains that Romania is characterized by a permanent instability and a ceaseless movement of people and values (Boia 2001: 28).

There are two important factors that I believe have helped to create the problems people experience when they discuss ethnicity and national identity in Romania. These two factors are; 1) the many shifts in national identity as geographical boundaries changed and 2) the presence of minority population, a population which includes a wide variety of ethnicities. Transylvania’s history, in particular, has been impacted by both factors. Transylvania’s population contains a majority of ethnic Romanian people. It also contains minority people claiming ethnicities that include Hungarian, Szekely, Csangos, Roma and German ethnicity (Boia 2001). Further, Transylvania ethnic zones are not often clearly defined. People of various ethnicities are intermixed, living in the same villages or areas. Boia describes it thus (2001).

A country can be multiplied endlessly. It is made up of a multitude of people and things, each with their own individuality. It is a history, that is, not a static picture, but a film made up of multiple sequences. And it is not only what we see now and what once was but also the consciousness of people about the present and the past, about themselves, indeed about anything (Boia 2001: 8).
As Boia points out, the situation in Transylvania is not one sided, simple, and clear. Romania is a complex country because of the history of shifting national borders and identities.

Romania is made up of ten provinces, Transylvania, Moldova, Debrogea, Banat, Crisana, Maramures, Bucovina, Muntenia, Basarabia, and Olteni (Boia 2001). Within these provinces there are currently forty one counties and within these counties ethnic distributions varies. While there are many ethnic Romanians throughout each county, there are also many people who claim other ethnicities, including Hungarians, Romas, Germans, Jews, and Serbians are to name a few (Boia 2001). Although the largest number of minorities lives in Transylvania, many minority peoples also live in the surrounding provinces. In this paper however, I will be focusing only on Transylvania.

The three counties in Transylvania that contain majority Hungarian populations, (including an ethnic group Szekely7) and German Saxons8 are Brasov, Covasna, and Harghita. In Transylvania overall, ethnic Romanians made up 57.6 percent of the population in 1930, Hungarians 29.1 per cent and Germans 7.9 percent. However, prior to the Trianon Treaty, 1920, the Romanians accounted for only 35.8 percent, Hungarians 39.8 per cent and Germans 12.7 percent (Boia 2001: 10).

Boia claims that some Transylvania towns that were established by various ethnic groups have become predominantly Romanian in population over time. “For example, Cluj (Kolozsvar9), and Tirgu Mures (Marosvasarhely10) were purely Hungarian towns, while the Saxon foundations of Sibui (Hermannstadt), Brasov (Kronstadt) and Sighisoara (Schassburg)

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7 An ethnic group which is thought to have settled in the Carpathian Mountains for protecting the borders of Transylvania (Akeroyd 2006)
8 The Saxons came to Transylvania not as invaders but as welcome immigrants. In the 11th and 12th century the Cumans, a Turkic people from the northern Caucasus, were pressing on the eastern marches of Hungary. To counteract this threat, in1143 King Geza II of Hungary invited Germans from Flanders, Luxembourg and the Moselle Valley, Saxons, to settle, farm and defend the then sparsely populated Transylvania plateau. He granted them land, virtually autonomy and tax advantages; he may also have seen them as a means to strengthen his power against his own nobles. The 12th and 14th centuries saw much German migration into central Europe, including parts of Prussia Poland and Bohemia. (Akeroyd 2006)
9 This is the Hungarian name for the town.
10 This is the Hungarian name for the town.
retain the appearance of typical German burgs” (Boia 2001: 24). During my field study in 2008 village and town architectural features often maintained the appearance of the “old” ethnic towns.

Although Romania’s primary language is Romanian, many other languages are spoken including Hungarian and German. There are counties in Transylvania where Hungarian and German are commonly used. In many villages in the Harghita County street signs that are posted in Romanian and Hungarian.

It should be clear, from these examples, that Romania, particularly the Transylvania region, has a history of shifting of national identity. To understand the history of Romania the persistence of national identity and ethnic identity has to be taken account. In fact, these factors are very important and crucial terms to examine. This shift in national identity, more than any other has lead to the existence of ethnic groups with strong ethnic ties and dispute over the “correct” national identity of Transylvania. Because of these shifts, national identity has continued to be a topic of discussion among scholars and citizens of Romania. In the next section I will discuss how the history of Transylvania has affected the village of Ghimes-Faget.

**History and Ghimes-Faget**

In this section I will discuss the history of the village that I studied, Ghimes-Faget. I will describe historical events that villagers identified as central to current ethnic understanding and were used to create or argue for a specific ethnic identity. I will also show how people in Ghimes-Faget used history as a way of talking about ethnic identity.

Ghimes-Faget is recognized in both Romania and Hungary as a historically important site because it is a village that sits on the border of “old Hungary”. Until 1918, the area of
Transylvania in which Ghimes-Faget is located was part of the Hungarian nation. Indeed, all of Transylvania was part of the Hungarian nation. For people living in this area there are two important ways of conceptualizing this area. In one view, the Ghimes-Faget area is seen as a “lost land”. In this view the area is a part of Hungary that has been separated from the larger Hungarian nation. The second way of conceptualizing this area is to see it as a land historical populated primarily by Romanian people ruled by non-Romanian nation. The Trianon Treaty finally unified Transylvania with the larger Romanian nation.

Because the Trianon Treaty, 1920, was the point at which national identity shifted from Hungarian to Romanian, the treaty has continued to play an important role for the people of Ghimes-Faget. For example, I was working in Ghimes-Faget during the anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon on June 4, 2008. When I talked with people who claimed Hungarian ethnic identity, they often talked about the treaty as though it marked Hungary’s loss of land.

This was apparent when I also interviewed another woman in the village. She claimed that even in the year 2008 people from Hungary still came to the border land on June 4th, the date the treaty was signed, to see how a Hungarian region had survived the shift to a Romanian national identity. She said that some Hungarian people “are in pain” because a part of them was lost when the Trianon Treaty ceded the area to Romania. She went on to say that in Hungary, the state government organized a demonstration to show how the state is still against the Trianon treaty because it “cut the country into pieces”. She then said that this happens every year on the date of the treaty’s signing but that it seemed even more important in 2008. However, she said that she does not know why this was the case. She developed this metaphor to talk about how Hungarians feel about the loss of Transylvania. She believes that Hungarians feel like a child
might feel at the loss of both parents. Then she said ‘this child will always remember how things used to be when the parents were alive.’

I was struck by her tone of voice and the emotion she expressed when discussing this issue. She expressed clear feelings of resentment. This example characterizes how for some the idea still exists that the Ghimes-Faget area had once been and still should be a part of Hungary. Both the Hungarians coming to the village and the ethnic Hungarian people living in the village claimed that the area was representative of “old Hungary”. They also displayed feelings of nostalgia for that time and place.

Of course not all village residents felt this way. For many of the ethnic Romanians, I was told the treaty marks the unification of Transylvania and Romania. For these villagers, Ghimes-Faget has always been Romanian. For them the unification of Transylvania with Romania simply reflected the recognition that this territory should naturally be part of Romania.

This position can be seen in an interview I conducted with one of the village priests and his wife. The priest and his wife, both ethnic Romanians, believed that Romania and Transylvania were legitimately and correctly unified into one nation. The wife explained that Romania is “now a welcoming country” and that people are allowed to speak their own Romanian language. This claim implicitly refers to a period when Ghimes-Faget was under Hungarian rule. As part of the “Magyarization” of this area, Romanian speakers were not allowed to speak Romanian. The hope was that by speaking Hungarian, non-Hungarians people living in the area would become more “Hungarian like”. Under the Romanian government, the priest and his wife were claiming that the Romanian government is more open to minority people and does not try to force one ethnic identity over another. They contrasted the time prior to the
Trianon Treaty when non-Hungarians were subjected to the processes of forced Magyarization. Now, under the Romanian government “we are one nation” claims the wife.

Throughout Ghimes-Faget, villagers were split regarding, how the 1920 unification of Transylvania and Romania is viewed. Nevertheless, everyone I spoke to held one of these two very different understandings. In the following chapter I will discuss the construction of identity by some of the Hungarian and Csango people living in Ghimes-Faget.
CHAPTER 4: FIELD WORK IN GHIMES-FAGET

The data for this research was collected in a period of six weeks during the summer of 2008 using ethnographic methods including participant observation, formal and informal interviewing and direct and indirect observation. Due to the literacy rate among older village inhabitants, the most effective approach to data collection was informal interviews. The strength of ethnographic research and informal interviews is that it highlights the individual and the individuals view of the world. Forty individuals were interviewed in the six week period. I will use some examples throughout this paper that represent the majority of informant’s responses. The forty informants were not asked the same question; however, they were asked similar questions. Using an ethnographic approach, the participants are able to give their own views and understandings on a topic.

I bring with me some experience in this area of Transylvania. I was born in an ethnic Hungarian village, Vlahita, Transylvania, located in the Harghita County, approximately forty five miles from Ghimes-Faget. In 1987, at the age of four, I moved to the United States with my immediate family. In the twenty years that I have lived in the United States we continue to speak fluent Hungarian in the household as well as visiting Hungary and Transylvania each year. In addition to the family visits to the region I have also conducted research in Transylvania through the Ball State University’s Department of Anthropology for two consecutive years. I became interested in researching the area because of my regular visits to my family’s village. Because I saw changes happening in village life and the subsequent emerging from those changes I decided, with my language skills and family history, to focus my study on Transylvania.
Methods

This research was conducted in Ghimes-Faget, Romania, located in the county of Bacau during the summer of 2008. The county of Bacau borders two Romanian provinces Transylvania and Moldova. The location of the county, between the two provinces is very important for understanding ethnicity in the area. The location of the region is important due to the historical division of the political geography. Hungary and Moldavia formed the national political geographic boundaries. Before 1920, the province of Transylvania belonged to Hungary while Moldavia belonged to the Romanian nation (Hupchick and Cox 2001). Thus, the county of Bacau has been subject to shift of nationality. This shift set the stage for understanding current life for Hungarian and Csango peoples living in the region.

Research was conducted over six weeks. During the first three weeks I took part in a Ball State University course on field methods\(^\text{11}\). During this time, I collected data with the class which was composed of fifteen students. The class provided a Romanian translator and three translators who spoke Hungarian. The Hungarian translators were members of the village in which the class worked in or they were members of nearby villages. As a class we conducted interviews with a variety of residents in the villages, including the mayor, the librarian, the local ethnographic museum director, the Catholic and Orthodox priest, a bank employee, the train station chief, English teachers, the village doctor, the police chief, and a Roma worker. Research that took place with the class was focused primarily on the village of Ghimes-Faget.

\(^\text{11}\) This course, Anthropology 570 was taught by two Ball State University faculty members from the Department of Anthropology, Dr. James M. Nyce and Dr. Gail Bader. Dr. James Nyce and Dr. Gail Bader have conducted fieldwork in Romania and have acquired considerable experience within the area. This course provided students with hands on experience in ethnographic field methods.
Each interview was either recorded on microcassette tape or/and notes were taken during the interview. Interviews were conducted in either Hungarian or Romanian depending on the informant’s preference. People were selected for interview by a variety of methods, networking, snowball sampling, purposive sampling and convenience sampling. Snowballing sampling is when you talk to a key individual in the community and ask him/her to suggest some people in the community who might be interested in participating in your research. Purposive sampling is when you purposively select specific people to interview. Convenience sampling refers to interviewing people who happen to be present at a particular time. We gathered many informants through key informants and attending local social event including, religious events, school gatherings, and informal gatherings at local grocery stores and bars. Following the three weeks of class-based field work, the notes and transcripts were gathered and shared among all of the students in the class. The notes and transcripts are now available on a secure website to facilitate the sharing of information.

After the class members and faculty left the village, I continued to conduct three more weeks of field work with another class member and colleague, Horatiu Burcea. Burcea was born in Romania and moved to France with his family at the age of eight. He is a native speaker in Romanian. Research was facilitated by my ability to speak Hungarian and Burcea’s ability to speak Romanian. While both Burcea and I conducted individual interviews, we also conducted shared interviews as well. Burcea and I also interviewed people from nearby villages.

As a research team Burcea and I also re-interviewed some individuals from the first three weeks of research. Re-interviewing these individuals gave us a better opportunity to acquire more information from our informants. With our different language and ethnic backgrounds we

12 Prior to the interview informants were asked for their consent to participate in the research.
13 The local social events took part in three connecting villages, Ghimes-Faget, Lunca de Sus, and Lunca de Jos.
14 The two other villages are Lunca de Sus and Lunca de Jos.
were able to build trust and develop an understanding with village residents who spoke different languages and claimed different ethnic identities.

Throughout this thesis, I wish to acknowledge that Burcea and I shared data we collected together. We also informally discussed our analysis and, given our different but complementary language skills, were able to explore and investigate a number of cross-language situations. However, the final analysis in this paper is mine alone as, of course, are any errors. Throughout this paper, I will use the pronoun “we” when discussing data collection. In analytic statements I will refer to myself as “I”.

The Village of Ghimes-Faget

According to a local train station worker the village of Ghimes-Faget has a population of approximately five thousand inhabitants. The term “Ghimes” refers to a region that consists of three main affiliated villages, located on a main road; Lunca de Sus (Ghimesfesolok), Lunca de Jos (Ghimeskozeplok), and Ghimes-Faget (Ghimesbukk). This main road is approximately thirty kilometers long and a number of smaller villages are located off this road.¹⁵

Physically, the village stretched out along a busy main road. At times the road ran through flat valleys and the village side roads and homes were clearly visible. At other times the high mountains were close to the road and it was difficult to see the side roads extending up through the mountains and the homes built on the mountain side.

Currently, Ghimes-Faget consists of people from many different ethnicities including Hungarians, Romanians, Csango and Roma. There are also multiple languages spoken in the area

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¹⁵ The villages extending from the main road were officially considered parts of the village, however, informally various sections of the village were given particular names. For example, Aldomas Patak was one name of an area on the outskirts of the village.
with the primary languages being Romanian and Hungarian. There was however no clear distinction between these ethnic groups. There were many individuals who spoke both Hungarian and Romanian.

Claims villagers made about the ethnic makeup of the region varied. Some informants claimed that they were Hungarian but they also identified themselves as Csango because they lived in the Csango region. Another informant claimed that the Csango region is populated primarily by ethnic Romanians and there are very few Hungarian people living in the area. It should be clear that even among some of the inhabitants of the area there was no consensus about the ethnic make-up of people. It became clear to me as I did my research that although tourist guide books and local members of the tourist trade claimed that this was a traditional Csango area, there was no real consensus on this point.

The lack of consensus did not mean that local inhabitants refrained from making claims about other people’s ethnicity. This can be seen by how the various villages that make up the region are identified by the inhabitants. For example, Ghimes-Faget is located next to the village of Palanka but there is no obvious boundary between the two villages. The two villages are however distinct to at least some of the villagers since several informants viewed the village of Palanka as an ethnic “Romanian” village.

Although people from different ethnicities lived in this region, people of one ethnicity were typically excluded by the villagers during discussion about the ethnic make-up of the area: the Roma. Indeed, the Roma were typically not even mentioned when regional ethnicity was discussed. I believe the Roma population was excluded is because the villagers denied them membership in the community. Thus, when villagers talked about the Roma they failed to consider them members of the local community. The village librarian, for example, claimed that
the Roma exclude themselves from community identity. The Roma, she said, have always been a separate part of the village. The Roma “make their own community”. Although the Roma lived together within one specific area of the village, they were not seen as having membership in the larger community. Rather they were seen by others as creating their own community remote from the larger village.
CHAPTER 5: FACTORS AFFECTING IDENTITY

In this chapter I will focus on how ethnicity is constructed in the Ghimes-Faget area. My focus will be with people who claim a Hungarian and Csango ethnic identity. I will show how ethnicity is constructed through categories and markers common to Ghimes-Faget.

My basic argument is that for Hungarians living in the Ghimes-Faget area there are three markers or categories that they draw on to construct identity. These three markers are religion, language, and history. Each of these markers carries significance for the villagers. Daily life in the village is carried out and shaped by ideas about religion, language and history. Thus, while the villagers may claim a lack of definitive knowledge about what constitutes these various ethnicities, the three primary markers of ethnicity, religion, language, and history, are everyday realities that they encounter over and over. I will begin by looking at how religion is drawn on to make claims about ethnicity.

Religion

For the Hungarian informants I interviewed, and by implication Romanian, ethnicity was marked by one’s adherence to either the Orthodox or the Roman Catholic religion. Religion has a large impact on daily life in the village and is an important element in the construction of ethnic identity. Religion is woven through every aspect of the daily lives of the people. Religious events and religious personal, whether Orthodox or Roman Catholic, provide many basic services to the villagers. Not only does the Roman Catholic Church provide religious events it also sponsors community events. For example, the Hungarian school works directly with the Roman Catholic
Church to provide the end of the school year celebration. If the children attend the Hungarian school then they have internet and computer access at the church’s computer laboratory. Hungarian village members also emphasized during interviews that the priest at the Roman Catholic Church announces when job opportunities are available. The priest was also one of the leaders in the village and had access to information and access to the internet resources. Whether the church was Roman Catholic or Orthodox, the churches were part of the everyday life of the villagers because they framed village life, provided basic information to the villagers and organized social events for the community. Regardless of the specific religion one belonged to, churches were an important part of everyday life for people living in the Ghimes-Faget area.

When Burcea and I interviewed the Orthodox priest and his wife, both ethnic Romanian, they both stressed the role churches play in the village. The priest began the interview by discussing some of the differences between the Greco-Catholic, Roman Catholic, and the Orthodox religion. He went on to describe the history of the Orthodox religion. At this point, his wife said that the Orthodox religion was part of the national identity in Romania. The Romania nation, she said is defined by the “ancient” Orthodox religion. A little later in the interview the priest himself said that “…the Orthodox is Romanian and the Roman Catholics are Hungarian”.

The linking of ethnic identity to religion was wide spread. For example, when interviewing two local Roma men in Ghimes-Faget, they claimed that if a person was Roman Catholic then that person would be Hungarian. Further, if a person was identified as a member of the Orthodox Church, they would be Romanian. In the opinion of these two men, religious affiliation also identifies the ethnic community one belongs to.

In another interview with the local woodcarver, he claimed that all Roman Catholics in the village would also be Hungarian. The woodcarver identified himself as a Roman Catholic
Hungarian. For him, as for the Roma and many others in the village, religion and ethnicity are linked.

These examples show how religion is assumed to be a marker of ethnicity. In Ghimes-Faget religion affiliation is important for Romanian villagers and those who claim Hungarian identity as well. This majority of the forty informants I interviewed linked religious affiliation and identity in Ghimes-Faget. However, religion was not the only such marker. Language also was used to construct and mark ethnic identity.

**Language**

In Ghimes-Faget, language was directly linked to ethnic identity. Many people in the village spoke two languages, Romanian and Hungarian; some people spoke one of these languages fluently and had various levels of competence in the other. Because of this, no simple equation can be made between the language spoken and one’s ethnicity. What is the issue here are the claims and counterclaims about a national language. Among Romanian villagers, it was often asserted that all Romanian citizens should speak Romanian and other languages should be subordinate to Romanian. Among Hungarian villagers there was some resistance and resentment that they needed to speak a language other than Hungarian.

Thirty informants stated that they saw language as a marker of ethnicity. When, for example, when we interviewed a woodcarver and his wife, they talked about the link between ethnicity and language. The woodcarver was born in Ghimes-Faget and he grew up speaking Hungarian in his family home. However, when he went to school, he was required to learn Romanian. During communism, before 1989, the schools were required to teach in Romanian
and no Hungarian was allowed to be spoken or taught in the school system. The result was that though many families spoke Hungarian at home, the children were required to learn to speak Romanian in school.

The question of which language one spoke was often seen as linked to the stance once took on the issue of national identity. This was made clear to us in the interview with the Orthodox priest and his wife. The priest and his wife were Romanians, spoke the Romanian language. My research colleague, Burcea was translating from Romanian to English for me. Before we began the interview we had decided to play down our ethnic or gender roles, mine as a Hungarian female and his as a Romanian male. When we explained to the couple why we were in the village and what our research was about, the wife made direct eye contact with me and asked Burcea, in Romanian, if I was Hungarian. Burcea told them about my background, explained that I was Hungarian but I currently live in America. She also asked Burcea if I spoke the Romanian language. When I indicated to her that I did not, she reacted strongly. She made clear, her dislike of Hungarians who do not speak the country’s language.

My interview with a woodcarver and his wife also related to the issue of language and ethnic identity. This interview was conducted at their home and involved a number of Ball State University students and myself. Although the group was greeted courteously by the man and his wife, they were clearly uncertain about us. Throughout the interview the wife displayed an uneasy demeanor. The man answered the interview questions slowly and carefully. His wife rarely smiled and watched carefully as her husband answered questions. This kind of response to being interviewed was very surprising because the young, female Romanian translator is very skilled at interviewing traditional craftsmen. Still the care the woodcarver took when answering

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16 One factor that influenced our decision to present ourselves the way we did was the fact that I do not speak Romanian. However, I was born in Romania. In the past, I have personally experienced situations where ethnic Romanians have strongly resented Hungarians who live in Romania but do not speak the country’s language.
questions and his wife’s silent but stern and watchful expression indicated that the couple felt some unease with the interview.

At the end of the interview with a woodcarver and his wife our Romanian translator told the couple, in Romanian that I am Hungarian. She told them that I would be continuing my research in the village after the university group left. Upon learning this, the man and his wife asked me a number of questions all the while smiling and speaking Hungarian with me. They were particularly interested in what village my family came from and my connection to the area. After speaking to me for a short while, they then offered the entire group coffee. Offering coffee is a sign of welcoming a guest or guests among Hungarians. There was a noticeable change in the couples’ attitude towards the group after they learned about my ethnicity and what language I spoke.

These experiences linked language and ethnicity and, apparently, community. It also indicates that some tension exists between the ethnic groups. Once it was established that I shared a language and a common ethnicity with them, the woodcarver and his wife seemed to relax and offered all of us coffee. The notion that one was communicating with a member of one’s own ethnic group was a far more risk free situation for the couple than communicating with a member of another ethnic group, particularly a member of the Romanian group.

Language, whether Romanian or Hungarian, was identified by the villagers as a marker of ethnicity. In turn ethnicity was assumed to relate to issues ranging from national identity and feelings of acceptance, belonging and community. Again it is important to remember that many in the village could speak at least some of both languages. At worst nearly all people in the village knew someone else who could speak both languages. In short, it was not proficiency in
the two languages themselves that demonstrate ethnicity; it was the choice of language used that was important.

History

In this section I will examine “history” as a marker of ethnicity. By history I mean the long period of time during which this area in particular, and Transylvania in general, experienced a number of shifts in national identity and control by various nation states.

Ghimes-Faget is situated on the border of the old national boundary between Hungary and Transylvania. Ghimes is located on the east end of Transylvania and is now in the country of Romania. However, prior to 1920, Ghimes-Faget was the last village that belonged to the Austria-Hungary Empire. Now the border of Hungary is located on the west end of Transylvania. Please refer to Figure 3.
Figure 3. Eastern Europe, 1923 (Figure Credit: Hupchick and Cox 2001: 42).
There are many historical sites in and around the village that remind the residents of the areas of its place in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. The railroad station, for example, is particularly large and beautiful. In the past this railroad station marked a border crossing between two nations, the Austria-Hungary Empire and Romania. All of this reminds the villagers, both Hungarian and Romanian of the changes in national identity experienced by those who live in the region.

The constant historical shifts are also recalled by the tourists who come to the area. There is a small but important tourist trade that supports village life. This tourist trade is primarily composed of Hungarians who arrive in large buses. The pension owner where the students and I stayed also runs a business providing tourists with tours of the area’s, ruined castle, traditional Csango meals, and performances of traditional Csango music and dancing. These dinners typically included the singing of the Hungarian national anthem after dinner in the midst of the Csango performance. Finally, there is in Ghimes-Faget an ethnographic museum that focuses on Csango and Hungarian traditional items and artifacts.

All of this helps keep alive for inhabitants and visitors the most recent shift in national identity. As discussed before, this shift in national identity is understood very differently by ethnic Hungarians and Romanians. For many of the ethnic Hungarians and Csango, these historical places and the current tourist trade based on a Hungarian past serve to remind them of what they see as an illegitimate shift of nationhood. The ruins, the tourists, the historical sites, and the ethnographic museum offer Hungarians an opportunity to reflect upon their ethnic identity based on the area’s linkage to the Hungarian nation.

For the informants I interviewed who claimed a Hungarian ethnic identity, history was one of their most important markers for ethnicity. For example, Hungarians in Romania often
pointed to the region’s long history as a part of the Hungarian nation as evidence of their Hungarian nature. Interestingly, Romanian ethnicity was marked by that same history. From the Romanian point of view, the same historical places could mark instead the long awaited “legitimate” return of Transylvania to Romania. Romanians living in Transylvania can see the return to Romanian nationality as legitimate because for centuries Transylvania’s population has been composed of a majority of ethnic Romanian people.

History, historical places and event were important markers of identity for both ethnic Hungarians and Romanians. Defined though, in different ways they provided two different ethnic groups a “definitive way” to make claims about identity. In the following chapter I will look more closely at Csango ethnicity and the role of tourism has in ethnic identity.
CHAPTER 6: FACTORS AFFECTING CSANGO ETHNICITY

The Ghimes-Faget area is identified in The Rough Guide to Romania, as an area made up of three ethnic populations: Hungarians, Romanians and Csango (Burford and Longley 2004). However, when I studied the region, it became clear that this simple; three-ethnic community did not exist for a number of reasons. First, a fourth ethnic group was excluded from this notion of community: the Roma. Secondly, while Hungarians perceive and create a sharp distinction between themselves and ethnic Romanians, they do not do the same when it pertains to the ethnic group known as the Csango. However, the construction of Csango identity differed from the Hungarian identity in that it had the addition of one marker of identity: place of birth and the existence of “authentic traditions”.

Moreover, while people clearly identified themselves as ethnic Hungarian and imposed an ethnic Romanian identity on others, it was no simple matter to decide whom among the Hungarians was Csango. In this chapter I will look at the construction of Csango identity by the Hungarians I interviewed in Ghimes-Faget. As well I will examine some of the implications the tourist trade may have for identification of self as Csango.

The Definition of Csango

Prior to our fieldwork, the class organizers were told that Ghimes-Faget was composed of an equal mix of ethnic Romanians and Hungarians. The Ghimes-Faget area is also identified in, as an area made up of three ethnic populations: Hungarians, Romanians and Csango (Burford and Longley 2004). Some guide books even identify the Ghimes-Faget area as the Csango region.
in Romania (Burford and Longley 2004). Because of this statement I was interested in how the inhabitants of the region defined “Csango”?

An important part of answering this question involved knowing something about the history of the Csango peoples. One of the first steps I took involved looking at the scholarly literature on the Csango people. What I found was that in the, tourist literature there appears to be a very clear definition of what constitutes Csango identity (Burford and Longley 2004). This, however, was not the case in everyday life in the Ghimes-Faget region. What I found is what it meant to be Csango overlapped with the definition of Hungarian. Many people in the region were unsure whether they were Csango or even to define this ethnicity at all. I will begin with the published definitions of Csango ethnicity.

In the, *The Rough Guide to Romania*, the Csango are defined as an ethnic group descended from Szekely (Burford and Longley 2004). The Szekely are an ethnic Hungarian group, closely related to the Magyars but speak a distinctive Hungarian dialect and cherish a special historical or ethnic identity (Burford and Longley 2004). The Szekely and the Csango fled from religious persecution in Transylvania during the fifteenth century to the Ghimes-Faget region. They were joined later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by other groups of people escaping from military conscription in Transylvania. The connection between the Szekely is supported by looking at the word “Csango” itself. The Hungarian word “Csango” is thought to be derived from the Hungarian word for “wanderer”. The word wanderer was also the term used to refer to the Szekely.

The Csango region in Transylvania runs roughly through is the border between Transylvania and Moldavia (Burford and Longley 2004: 242). This is an area in which the struggles between Romanian and Hungarian peoples have a long history and running through the

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17 Magyars is the Hungarian word for Hungarian. Szekely are also an ethnic Hungarian group who speak Hungarian.
region is the contested post WWI border between Hungary and Romanian. In this area, whenever
ethnicity is discussed, one question must be answered for the primarily Hungarian villagers I
talked with: did the Csango ethnic group descend from Hungarian or Romanian peoples?

This struggle between the Romanians and Hungarians over the Csango has been
documented in the scholarly literature.

The group known in Moldavia and Ghimes as “Csangos” is itself a contested
community, for both nations claim it as their own. For the Romanian nationalist,
the Csangos are an archaic Romanian ethnic group that converted to Catholicism
during the forceful Magyarization process throughout the centuries. The
Hungarian stance is equally spurious as well as dubious. All historical, linguistic,
and ethnographic evidence to the contrary, Hungarian intellectuals continue to see
the Csangos as distinctly but fundamentally Hungarian…..the problem of
difference, or otherness, in the Csangos case is neutralized by the very argument
that the Csangos are actually Szeklers who were forced to cross the Carpathian
mountain borders and migrate further eastward hundreds of years ago. Their
separation from the main group of Szeklers in fact justifies the Csangos distinct
culture patterns: they remained at even more archaic level of civilization (Kurti
2001: 112).

In the Ghimes-Faget region the primary issue is whether or not one traces descend from
either Hungarians or Romanians. Interviewing local people made this clear to me. Few people
had difficulty placing themselves in relation to one of these two main groups. Although most of
the people I interviewed were Hungarian, they had no problem pointing to those they thought
were Romanian or those who they would label as Romanian. For the Csango this was different.
Here people exhibited some uncertainly, even those individuals who claimed a Csango identity.
What is obvious in the scholarly and tourist literature was not at all clear to people living in the
Ghimes region.
Constructing Csango Identity

Most of the people I interviewed, whether they claimed an ethnic Hungarian or a Csango identity linked the two ethnicities. As I argued earlier, Hungarian ethnicity is marked by three characteristics: religion, language, and history. When people claimed Csango identity these same three characteristics were included as the grounds for claiming that identity. However, claims of Csango identity included and were supported by the marker place of birth and authentic tradition. In this section I will begin by talking about these additional elements.

As I studied this issue it became clear that one of the markers the villagers draw on when discussing Csango identity is the notion of authentic Hungarian traditions. The Csango, local Hungarians claimed, represent an older, more authentic traditional lifestyle. They have, it is believed, preserved traditions that reflect an older way of Hungarian life.

During my work in the village, I heard many times that Csango people are Hungarian people. If one was Csango, one was also Hungarian. One man, when asked about his ethnicity, replied that he considered himself to be Hungarian because he speaks Hungarian and he came from Hungarian descent. He then mentioned that he was also Csango because he was Hungarian. When he was explicitly asked what Csango meant, he simply said that Csango descended from Hungarians. He had earlier explained that the Csango were Hungarians who came to the Ghimes-Faget region and settled here from Moldavia. Throughout the interviews we continued to see linkages made between Csango and Hungarian ethnicity.

This can be seen, in an interview with the Hungarian owner of the pension I stayed at. In this interview he said that “The Csango from this valley belonged to the Hungarian ethnicity”. He went on to say that the Csango in this area represent more authentic and “pure” traditions.
This was because the Csango people who lived in the Ghimes-Faget area were isolated by the mountainous terrain from other ethnic groups.

The idea that ethnic Csango people are marked by and continue “authentic” traditions is also played up in the tourist literature and by the local tourist industry. Again, the tourist performance put on by the owner of the pension we stayed in illustrates the tie between the local definition of Csango and the idea of “authentic traditions”. People from all over Hungary as well as other areas came to see the region as a site of historical importance. The owner of the pension capitalized on this idea by serving what its owner claimed to be a “traditional” Csango meal, and performed “traditional” Csango music and dance for tourist groups arriving by bus from Hungary. Authentic traditions, used by this tourist industry, have in turn become an important element in constructing Csango ethnicity. In this region Csango ethnicity is presented as a version of Hungarian identity.\footnote{Indeed, it seemed that villagers sometimes identified themselves as Csango because it was easier to base ethnic identity on what they assumed tourists knew.}.

The pension owner reinforced his claim that Csango ethnicity was a version of Hungarian ethnicity by linking Csango ethnicity to another marker of Hungarian ethnicity: history. The owner, for example, argued that the Ghimes area had long been part of the nation of Hungary. He argued that Ghimes was part of ancient Hungarian kingdom until the Trianon Treaty in 1920.

A second marker of a Csango ethnicity was that of place of birth. For some people Csango ethnicity was equated with being born in the Ghimes-Faget area. Some people we interviewed claimed to be Csango simply because they lived in an area known to be inhabited by the Csango. For example, when we asked a woman from a local family in Ghimes whether she identified herself as Csango or Hungarian, she responded “I am Csango because I live here, I
have to be”. In short, not only did informants indicate that ethnic identity was marked by
descent by geographical location as well.

This claim, that ethnicity could be based on ones birth or descent, can be seen in another
interview with a woman who was a newcomer to the village. She had moved to the village
approximately five years ago when she married a man from the village. The interview was
conducted in Hungarian but the woman claimed a Csango ethnic identity. When she was asked
about the definition and meaning of Csango ethnicity she claimed that “This is what we got from
our grandparents, we are just Csango”. Another woman who was an employee of the pension we
stayed at also claimed that, “We are Csango because we have to be; we were born and live here”.
Throughout the interviews informants commonly claimed birth place and descent as evidence of
Csango ethnicity.

Indeed this idea can also be seen in an interview we did with a local painter and his
family. The painter’s wife was asked about her ethnicity. She said that she is Szekely. Her
version of Csango history stressed the areas “mixed” ethnicity because it was a border region.
She went on to say that the Szekely actually settled in the region but that they were joined by
people from all over, including, Moldavia, Turkey, and Germany. These people, she said, came
to this area to escape from their previous homes. When they tried return to the area they came
from, they were attacked and shot. Because of this the people who came to the Ghimes-Faget
area ended up staying here.

She went on to say that the people who live in the Ghimes-Faget area are all Csango
because they live in the Ghimes area. Her family and friend from Sekelyodvarhei, a village in
Harghita County, now joke that she “Meg Csangostal”. The Hungarian phrase “Meg Csangostal”
can be translated into English as “you became Csango”. Her husband the painter expanded on
this by saying that all of the people in the area, even the people who came from different areas have become Csango and are Csango because they live in the Ghimes-Faget region. They both argued that the Csango people are composed of many different people from other countries and areas of Romania, for example, the painter included among the Csango the many Polish who live in the area.

My last example of the importance of place of birth can be seen in an interview with a local Roma man from the village who was born in Ghimes-Faget. During this interview the man also claimed that he was Csango because he “has to be”. He explained that he is Csango “Because my family and I live here”. When we asked him to talk about Csango history and he said “I do not know what the history is”. Again we see the claim that place of birth is a primary marker of Csango ethnicity. This also may be a result of the influence the tourist trade has had on people living in the Ghimes-Faget area. I will discuss this below.

The ethnic markers for the Csango include the markers of Hungarian ethnic identity but add two more. Not only are religion, language and history linked to Csango identity place of birth and authentic tradition marked this as well. The tourist industry has also influenced how Csango is defined and who is Csango: this will be taken up next.

**Csango ethnicity and the tourist industry**

Although I focused on the construction of identity in the Ghimes-Faget region, I am adding here a more general discussion about the impact of the tourist trade on ethnicity. Because I did not specifically focus on the tourist trade I have no strong evidence to support my ideas.
However I have some examples that may point to eventual changes in ethnicity in the Ghimes area.

Hungarian people living in the Ghimes region who are employed in the tourist trade may be feeling more economic pressure to identify themselves as ethnic Csango. Many of the people who we interviewed complained about the lack of jobs in Ghimes-Faget. With the collapse of state-run industries after the fall of communism, many smaller communities have lost jobs and Ghimes-Faget is no exception. Informants claimed there was only one large factory in the area and that their children now had to leave the area to find work.

In Ghimes-Faget the tourist industry is one very viable source of employment. Tourism brings in fairly large numbers of people into Ghimes-Faget by the bus and train load. Tourists in large groups walk to a ruined castle nearby and the ethnographic museum located in the village near the train station. Although it probably does not employ a large number of people currently, the scenic, rural beauty of the area and the historical draw of Csango people suggest that the industry may well grow and provide more economic opportunities for local people.

From observations made at the Hungarian pension where we stayed for a period of time, I would like to suggest that tourism can induce people to shift their ethnic identity under certain circumstances. The pension owner attracts a substantial number of Hungarian tourists by emphasizing the Csango nature of the area and its Hungarian history. When we first arrived, I noticed that the pension was decorated with many Hungarian decorations. There were, for example, many statues around the pension that were Hungarian, various Hungarian flags on the walls and the posters they were written in Hungarian.

I have already talked about my interviews with the employees of the pension we stayed at. When I initially interviewed these people, they told me that they were of Csango ethnicity.
Much later, after the students left and I continued to stay in the village, they told me that they actually consider themselves to be Hungarian. With the rising tourism in the area, in my assumption, more people are identifying themselves as ethnic Csango.

We also interviewed a local Roma man who identified himself as Csango. He claimed that he was Csango “Because my family and I live here”. This is an interesting ethnic identification because for many of the people who live in Ghimes-Faget, the Roma form an excluded category within the community. The village librarian for example claimed that the Roma exclude themselves from the village, living in a separate part of the town and forming a community of their own. The village of Ghimes-Faget does have a section that other residents of the town identify as “the Roma section”.

This example of a “Roma man” who claims a “Csango” identity may foretell the importance of the employment in the tourist trade. The village of Ghimes-Faget has much to offer a visitor. It is located in a beautiful, mountainous area that has a long Hungarian and Romanian history. However, the Csango add an important dimension to the region because tourists are attracted to the region because of the Csangos authentic, traditional life ways. Both Romania and Hungary are industrialized nations. They, like many other modern nations, struggle to retain and often valorize traditional life ways. The existence of the Csango adds an important element to attract more tourists.

Providing people with Csango identity may be an important element in the continued growth of this industry and of the village of Ghimes-Faget itself. Given the claims made about Hungarian and Csango ethnicity, many people who consider themselves Hungarian may feel more inclined to identify themselves as Csango in at least some situations. This is of course in

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19 It should be noted however that the timber industry (and the illegal timber industry) are having an impact on the village. Broad areas of the hillside are now becoming denuded as the timber is clear-cut above the village.
keeping with how Hicks and Leis and Barth view ethnicity: For them ethnicity is a marker that individuals can use strategically and opportunistically. While the evidence remains slight at best, future research on the growth of the links between the growth of the tourist industry and ethnic identity in Ghimes-Faget may be important to carry out.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Through the research I did in Ghimes-Faget and through the literature review of the various authors in anthropology, history, nationalism, and ethnic identity studies, I have identified and discussed the categories that I found to be essential in the construction of Hungarian and Csango ethnicity in the Ghimes-Faget region. The three categories that I found to be the most important when people claimed a Hungarian or Csango ethnic identity is the following: religion, language, and history. During the interviews we conducted we found that nearly all of our informants drew on these categories to support or “prove” their ethnic claims.

Religion played an important role in how Hungarian; Csango and, Romanian people identified themselves. The Orthodox religion was strongly linked to Romanian national identity. Some of the Romanian villagers we interviewed also claimed that Romania is undergoing a process of unifying Romania. If this unification process is continues, I argue that the Orthodox religion will play an important role in the identification of what it means to be “Romanian”. From the data I gathered from people identifying themselves as Hungarian, Csango and Romanian, it will be important for people identifying themselves as Romanians, to also identify themselves as part of the Orthodox religion.

This is because the majority of these people already strongly identify with the Roman Catholic Church. As I have argued religious affiliation and ethnic identity are so strongly linked that, for the villagers, to identify one’s self as Orthodox or Roman Catholic is to identify one’s self as Romanian or Hungarian/Csango. If the notion of “Romanian citizen” is so linked to religious affiliation, that is Orthodox; it will be very difficult for Hungarian and Csango peoples to easily fit into that definition. For them it may require a change in religious affiliation in order to show the “appropriate” characteristics regarding national identity.
The second marker of ethnic identity that played an important role in defining ethnicity was language. It was not important which language villagers speak as the majority of villagers could speak at least a very small amount of both Romanian and Hungarian. If they could not speak one of these languages they could, without difficulty, find someone nearby who could speak one or the other of the two languages. Hungarian and Romanian also marked ethnicity not just by the language they spoke but also by the things people believed about a particular language.

Language as an ethnic marker centered on what was involved in and constituted a national language. At various times throughout modern Romanian history one language or another has been privileged or perceived to be dominant. Many Romanians argued that during the years of Hungarian rule in Transylvania, they were forced to learn and speak the Hungarian language. During the Communist years, Hungarians argued that they were required to learn and speak Romanian. The result is that the idea of designating a “national” language has created a situation where language choice has become equated with taking a political position on Transylvania’s national identity.

In Ghimes-Faget I talked with ethnic Romanians who criticized Hungarians who spoke Hungarian and did not speak the country’s language, Romanian. The criticism was based on the idea that one’s language choice should reflect one’s national identity. However, Hungarian and Csango people wished to speak a language they considered part of their culture regardless of their citizenship. In this situation language can be linked to ethnicity and language use and choice can be interpreted to show support for a variety of issues about national identity. It can, as the ethnic Hungarian wood carver and his wife showed, also be taken as a sign of trust and acceptance.
The third category that I found people drew on when constructing ethnic identity was the history of Transylvania. History as a marker of identity has a number of aspects that need to be discussed. The first aspect that I will discuss is the existence of very different versions of historical reality.

There are at least two realities when discussing the history of Transylvania, an ethnic Hungarian reality and a Romanian reality. For those villagers, claiming a Hungarian/Csango identity, their version of history hold that Transylvania has for centuries been a part of the Hungarian nation. Further these villagers see the Trianon Treaty as an illegitimate act cutting off a part of the Hungarian nation and giving it to another nation, Romania. For at least some villagers claiming a Romanian ethnic identity Transylvania had for centuries been populated by a Romanian nation. The Trianon Treaty finally and rightfully joined Transylvania to the nation of Romania. Although the Hungarian/Csango peoples held a different version of history from that held by the ethnic Romanian peoples, for all three, history is important marker of identity.

To this point I have looked at how ethnic identity is constructed by Hungarians and Csango people in Ghimes-Faget. However, I believe, that the tourist industry in the area may well have an impact on ethnic identity in the years to come. Ghimes-Faget is an economically depressed area. As we interviewed people, one of the problems that they talked about consistently was the lack of jobs. The area is, however, attractive to tourists and today has a small but growing tourist industry which employs at least some villagers.

The object of this tourist trade is to visit the home of the “traditional” Csango peoples. Many of the people I interviewed believed the importance of this region said in fact that it was so isolated that Csango tradition has remained authentic. This claim that the region lay in the which an “authentic traditional way of life” has been persevered drew people from Hungary and other
countries. In a sense the tourist industry, particularly the Hungarian tourist trade, is relying on the same markers of identity to draw in tourists that the villagers draw upon to talk about ethnic identity. The markers of religion, history, language, “authentic tradition”, and place of birth are being use to bring in tourists and create jobs and economic opportunities.

However, the tourist industry may well have another impact as well, one that touches directly on Csango identity. Because the village lacks jobs and the tourist industry provides jobs, I believe that Ghimes-Faget residents may be encouraged to identify themselves as ethnic Csango. A number of the “Csango people” we interviewed claimed a dual ethnicity as both Csango and Hungarian. With the lack of jobs and the increase of tourism, I there may be more and more incentive for people in the village who claim dual Hungarian and Csango ethnicity to identify themselves as “Csango” only. This may be the case for individual who claim Csango-Hungarian, Hungarian and even Romanian ethnicity. If there are ethnic Csango people in the village, tourists are more apt to come.

With the lack of job opportunity in the village, the increase of tourism is positive and can benefit families in the village by providing jobs. Currently there are very few jobs available and, as a result, many people leave the village to find work in other areas of the country or even abroad. The village will be hard pressed to thrive or even survive if the majority of young people feel they must leave the village to find viable jobs. The number of people moving out of Romania to find well-paying, stable jobs is becoming a national problem. If the tourist industry can continue to grow and provide more job opportunities, this could help more people stay in the village and the country.

In this paper I have argued that ethnic identity is constructed in the Ghimes-Faget region by drawing on a number of categories that allows individuals to identifying themselves as
Hungarian and Csango. Although I did not work specifically with Romanians I believe that three of these categories, religion, language, and history, are also drawn upon by them when they talk about ethnic identity. I have also speculated on the impact tourism may have on ethnic identity in Ghimes-Faget. I believe that we may see an increase in the number of Hungarian/Csango people who stress their Csango identity in an attempt to gain employment in and support the growing tourist industry.
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