

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF A HARD TO COUNT POPULATION THE CASE OF MOLDAVIAN CSANGOS¹

CĂLIN COTOI

Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest

Motto:

*Dar ungurii aceștia, fără a fi români pe de-a întregul,
nu sunt nici pe departe așa de străini cum s-ar putea
bănui*

(These Hungarians, not being entirely Romanian, are
not at all as strangers as they seem)

Nicolae Iorga

The Csangos/ Ceangai are a very hard to define ethnic/ religious minority from Eastern Romania (the historical province of Moldavia). The first problems appear when the Csangos are counted. According to the 1992 census, in the eight counties of the historical Romanian province of Moldavia from 276,650 inhabitants of Roman Catholic confession, 267,739 consider themselves to be of Romanian nationality, 6747 Hungarian, and 2165 Csango. In 2002 the recorded number of declared Csangos was 769. The huge discrepancy between these figures and the ones used by some scholars – 80,000 is the number of Csangos proposed by Kalman Benda; 62,000 is the number put forward by Vilmos Tanczos etc. – cannot be just a technical problem of counting and even less one of scholarly (dis)honesty.

My central hypothesis is that Csango population is caught between two antagonistic nationalizing projects; the Hungarian and the Romanian one. The Hungarian-based one is stressing the archaicity, the Middle Ages characteristics of the Csangos, transforming them, in the process, in a mirror for the modern Hungarian self. The Romanian nationalizing strategy appears, at first, as a counter strategy trying to unveil the “Hungarianisation” of Moldavian Cangos. The Csangos are, according to this point of view, essentially “hybrids”, half-denationalized Romanians, having, as the only alterity sign, differentiating them from other Greek Orthodox Romanians from Moldova, their Romano Catholic religion.

Keywords: identity, minority, csangos, cyberspace, media anthropology.