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SWITCHING ANTAGONIST ROLES: CONFLICTING IDENTITIES  
AND MAJORITY/MINORITY REACTIONS. A CASE STUDY ON  
THE REGION OF SZEKLERLAND - TRANSYLVANIA<sup>1</sup>

**Defi(n)ing Szeklerland**

On football and on Szeklerland (the largest compact Hungarian area in Romania) almost everybody in the country seems to have an opinion, largely based on rumors or media presentations and less on first-hand experience. Of course, there are first of all the things "taken for granted": stories and local events that "everybody knows", which shape a primary, sensationalist and spicy imagery about people in the region. It is believed, for example, that in Szeklerland one finds almost everywhere open hostility towards everything Romanian, starting with local administration and ending with the smallest everyday gestures; if you are just driving through, the shop assistants won't oblige you unless you speak Hungarian; Romanians here are "hungarised" or - in a totally different perspective - most of them are "intruders", largely displaying an arrogance, as if they were the masters, disregarding the

<sup>1</sup> This paper is the result of a research study undertaken within the frame of the *NEXUS* international team project on "How To Think About the Balkans: Culture, Region, Identities", one of the research branches of the *Blue Bird* policy project. The project was hosted by the Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia and supported by the *Volkswagen Foundation*, the *European Cultural Foundation* and the *Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study*.

The interpretations included here draw upon interviews and data surveys carried out by the author in association with Irina Curie, Anca Covrig, Lorand Cziprian, Camil Postelnicu, Cristina Ra{ and Stefania Toma, sociologists and research assistants from Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, members of the scientific team of the Research Center for Interethnic Relations (CCRIT). For this presentation the author has used the results of the sociological survey of (CCRIT) carried out between June 25-July 5, 2000 in the counties of Szeklerland (Szekelyfold in Hungarian, Secuime in Romanian), as part of a project entitled "The Deconstruction and Reconstruction of an Image: the Population of Covasna and Harghita Counties", financed jointly by the Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center and the Open Society Foundation". Data refer also to the *Ethnobarometer. Interethnic Relations in Romania, May-June 2000*, research financed by the United States Agency for International Development.

A shorter, earlier version of this study focused on identity perceptions and interethnic relations in Szeklerland. Elements for a "deconstruction" and a "reconstruction"\*, in Lucian Nastatsa, Levente Salat (ed.), *Interethnic Relations in Post-Communist Romania*, Cluj-Napoca, Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, 2000.

locals and their traditions. There is a perception that this state of affairs causes interethnic tensions to rise to explosive levels, etc. The common representations - heavily fueled by the media and politics - transform Szeklerland into an exotic and somewhat strange realm, where everything is upside down as opposed to the order in the other regions of the country. As related to any "terra incognita", there are vigorously stirred fears directed towards the inhabitants here, like the representations of the Alien; the legends of Szeklerland are becoming "well-known truths", criteria of the normality to which the concurring interpretations of events relate, depending on the "minority" or "majority" perspective. "Hie sunt leones" seems to suggest itself to the traveller, journalist or researcher who - "trained" by the stories and rumours that attend any contact with the region - considers paying a visit here.

Therefore, trying to investigate such an environment, the first inquiry should be not only on the object of the research but on the researcher himself: as an ethnic Romanian, how much would he be affected by his national belonging - and how much credit would he pay to one of the "camps" disputing the legitimate version about the facts in the region? The solution might stand in the study itself. Probing into majority-minority relations in Szeklerland would provide an excellent methodological therapy for preventing the "double insider syndrome"<sup>2</sup>: it would create the necessary objectivation of the researcher, clearing some of his possible dilemmas: as a member of the national majority group, he might find both a key to understanding the logic of the majority, together with more compassion for the minority of Romanians, which would make him sensitive to the minority problematic; at the same time, treating Hungarians in a "minority studies" paradigm, he would also have access to the majority lens<sup>3</sup>.

But what is *Szekleland*? Part of Eastern Transylvania, the so-called Szeklerland<sup>4</sup> - land of the Szeklers (*Secuime* in Romanian, *Szekelyfold* in Hungarian) remains for Romania one of its most intriguing regions. Located just in the core of the national territory of this country, Szeklerland is inhabited mostly by a Hungarian speaking population. With unclear historical roots, it seems likely that Szeklers are the descendants of some warrior tribes brought into Transylvania at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century to serve the ancient Hungarian Crown and defend the Eastern borders of its kingdom. Being part of the political system of the *Unio Trium Nationum* ("The Unity of the Three Nations": Hungarian, Saxon and Szekler) in medieval Transylvania - in which, in spite of the pre-modern semantics of the concept of 'nation', ethnic Romanians were supposed implicitly to be excluded - Szeklers became also part of the Hungarian nation itself, in the modern age, and have constantly expressed a

<sup>2</sup> I am appropriating here the anthropological concept of Slobodan Naumovic in *Identity Creator in Crisis: Reflections on the politics of Serbian Ethnology*, in "Anthropological Journal on European Cultures", 8 (1999) 2.

<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, in the often emotionally inflamed context in which the problems of the region are raised, one notices that the very term "sociological survey" is somewhat inappropriate. It is perhaps useful to clarify that its sphere of competence is strictly scientific. In other words, the present study did not grow out of a wish to magnify a dispute, nor does it mean to clarify it: it does not aim at judging or "making justice", but rather at explaining, revealing the more profound resorts that motivate the evolution of the main actors, in the hope that in this way it will contribute to a more precise definition of the issue. Its role is to maintain a permanent distance between analysis and the intrusion of politics, according to a well-known methodological exigency which separates judgments of value from judgments about values.

<sup>4</sup> At present, the name of the region refers to only two counties (Covasna and Harghita), but historically speaking it covers a great many settlements of Mures county, too.

strong Hungarian identification. Yet, modernisation meant reducing Szeklerland to a precise function in the defense system of the Habsburg and then the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, until 1918, which envisaged in a peripheral status for the whole area. However, the 20<sup>th</sup> century engaged this part of Transylvania in a process of nation building, the Szeklers being assimilated to the Hungarian nation and assigned (as the whole of Transylvania too), a symbolic central place within the national mythology.

This is why Great Romania - the Romanian State that emerged as a result of the expansion after World War I - as a Nation State, faced serious difficulties in its cultural policies when it tried to integrate the non-Romanian populations of Transylvania. Resisting the newly introduced administrative and educational centralizing measures, which aimed to make Romanians a privileged dominant nation with regard to ethnic minorities, Hungarians were treated in a rather hostile way by the Romanian governments of the inter-war period. International politics contributed to escalating tension rather than to relieving it. In spite of this general attitude reflecting all sorts of resentments, Szeklers were seen as different from other minority groups, the official policies tending to subject them to a rather "peaceful assimilation"<sup>5</sup>. "Romanians have always emphasized the difference between the two groups, viewing the Szeklers with less hostility than the Magyars. Policies and initiatives designed to deal with the Szeklers rested on the assumption that they could be Romanized and that many Szeklers were really «hidden» Romanians. Authorities attempted to take account of the presumed Szekler Romanians and to educate them gently back toward Romanian culture."<sup>6</sup>

This attitude was doubled by a very assertive one towards the "Romanian element" spread in the area - a small Romanian population, whose number was supposed to be higher than in the demographic statistics, due to a former process of "Magyarization" applied to all non-Hungarians in the Hungarian part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Nationalist cultural activists stated that in Szeklerland: "The [Hungarian] state power has acted by all means, legal and illegal, to the detriment of the Romanians who, little by little, have abandoned the language and faith of their ancestors, thereby augmenting the number of Szeklers. This is why today we meet at each step in all the towns and all the villages denationalized Romanians, representatives of Magyar public life: here, as notables of the bar, there, as distinguished educators, elsewhere, as leaders of Hungarian political organizations, etc. - none of them wishing to own up to their origins."<sup>7</sup>

In fact, this idea of a "denationalizing" process of Romanians in Szeklerland -very difficult to document on a large scale - makes pair with a tendency to delegitimize the assertions about the Hungarian identity of Szeklers. The latter tendency is based on the assumption that they form a distinct ethnic group from the Magyars. The Romanian nationalist version suggests that Szeklers are an invention of the Hungarian elite after the revolution of 1948, designed to maintain the control over Transylvanian ethnic balance, dominated by

<sup>5</sup> "The sacrosanct dogma towards the Szeklers should be that of assimilation. The roads ought to be built in such a way as to bring the Szeklers easily toward Bucharest and other Romanian centres. They should not be left in isolation. Bucharest will swallow them up easily." These were the words of Sabin Manuila, the then Director of the Demographic Institute in Bucharest (see Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania. Regionalism, nation building & ethnic struggle, 1918-1930*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000 (the first edition in 1995), p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> Irina Livezeanu, op. cit, p. 139

<sup>7</sup> Gheorghe Popa-Liseanu, *Sicules et Roumaines: Un proces de denationalisation*, Bucharest, Socec, 1933 or Ion. I. Russu, *Romanii si secuii*, Bucuresti, Editura stintifica, 1990, p. 51, apud Livezeanu, op. cit, p. 140.

Romanians. As the aggressive Magyarisation became the main instrument of this policy, affecting not only individuals, but also the core cultural institutions of Romanians, such as the School and the Church, remedial action was required. This becomes later (and in some aspects to the present day) the ideological basis on which The Romanian Nation State justifies its claims and national politics in this region of Transylvania: it treats the problem in terms of "justice" and "legitimate" restitution<sup>8</sup>. It follows that proofs of "denationalization" would always be useful - but only in the late communist period would they be associated with a so-called "hostile" attitude against the intervention of the Romanian state in "national" matters.

So, during the communist regime the benevolent attitude of the State, declared between the two World Wars, turned progressively into a rather hostile one, as long as communism in Romania became, mostly under Ceausescu, "national". The arguments of the "re-nationalisation" theory lasted, but the policies were abandoned. The explanation may consist in the escalation of the Romanian-Hungarian conflict, leading in 1940 to territorial losses for Romania (The so-called Vienna Arbitrage\* passed over half of Transylvania to Hungary, Szeklerland included!). The explanation could also be sought in the «divide et impera» policies of the Soviet regime, after 1945, when ethnic problems in Transylvania were used by the Soviet Union to impose and maintain political control over communist Romania. In the 50's, Szeklerland became Regiunea Autonoma Maghiara (The Autonomous Region of Magyars) a region with a special administrative autonomy, similar in some aspects to Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan, in the conditions of the maintenance of a highly centralized political system. The Autonomous Region of Magyars became soon the main reason for the territorial "reorganization" of 1968, in which its special status disappeared and its territory was divided into three – today's counties of Covasna, Harghita and Mures.

Within the context of political struggle and the agenda of democratization, post-communist ideologies promoted the concepts of the "freed" Szeklers (free from Ceausescu's hostile nationalism, from communism, but also from the imposed silence and anxiety) and of the members of Romanian majority, unaware of the problems faced by ethnic minorities before as well as frightened by the threat of ethnic clashes (which effectively occurred in Tirgu Mures in March 1990 between Romanians and Hungarians). In such a context the "ethnicization" of the social and political change became, on both sides, a strong temptation. Hungarians from Szeklerland often interpreted the success of the Revolution of 1989 in terms of a certain Hungarian revolutionary vocation<sup>9</sup>. In exchange, Romania's new political rulers (close to Ion Iliescu), accused of "neocommunist" in 1990 by the civic anticommunist opposition and the so-called "historical parties" (the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania was also part of the political opposition), tended to de-legitimise *post hoc* the contribution of the Szeklers to the revolutionary change, interpreting their mass movements and attacks of local police stations (events that happened almost everywhere in Romania in December 1989) as a "anti-Romanian" and "irredentist" rebellion, attempting to the stability of the state.

Soon, policies towards Szeklerland became part of a revived nationalist politics, very active in the first half of the 90's. Despite all promises of

Later, the Szekler elite will use the same "restorative" logic in order to claim a "restitution" of former "lost" collective rights. The logic of confrontation will become the logic of conflicting "legitimate claims", on both sides.

<sup>9</sup> As a reminder, the hero who unleashed the revolutionary events in Romania in December 1989 was the Hungarian Protestant priest Laszlo Tokes.

democratic reform in politics and administration, the new governing body came to extend beyond the limit of 1989 the mentality of the authorities of the previous regime. Notorious were, for example, the "investigations" carried out by a parliamentary commission in 1991<sup>10</sup>, or the "visit" initiated by the PDSR members of Parliament a few years ago<sup>11</sup>, meant to "uncover" the "plot" against the state permanently planned by the Szeklers - which were in fact actions of threat and intimidation, the effect of which only triggered the adverse reaction against any kind of interference from the Centre.

Finally, in such "visits" the former mentality of communist administrators survived. Basically, treating the two counties in a bizarre manner as if they were occupied areas (not explicitly, of course: see the implicitly authoritarian symbol of the huge Stalinist monument dedicated to the Romanian soldier in Sfintu Gheorghe), Ceausescu's state only produced and reproduced, in often less conscious shapes, an authoritarian ethnocratic discourse about its own power, and through this, tacitly, of the illegitimacy of its presence in a territory with "foreign" ethnic dominance. This also revealed once more the limitations of the perspective of nationalist etatism and the fault that separates the local specificity of the region from the fundamental principles of the state. It must be admitted that here is one of the important sources of ongoing ethnic tensions that have affected the evolution of Romanian democracy since 1989.

### **The Banality of Comparisons**

Anyway, appearances can hardly reveal the profound tensions. And the responses to the sociological surveys carried out in the region refer to the banality of everyday co-existence rather than to the conflicts and "attacks to Romania's integrity", which inhabit the catastrophic imagination of politicians, feeding their so often fiery pleas.

The social and economic characteristics of the population here do not differ very much from those in other regions, even though in certain respects the area appears to be underprivileged. The data in the 1992 Census show that the percentage of the urban population (46.9% for the entire region) is under the country's average (54.3 in 1992 and 54.9 in 1996) and under the Transylvanian average (57.35%). The low urbanization level must undoubtedly be due to the low rate of industrialization, a very important element in the regional homogenization of the country, which the old communist regime made full use of, but which was inconsistently applied in Szeklerland as compared to the other counties at a similar level of development. However, the high economic potential of the communes (close to that of Brasov and

<sup>10</sup> See *Raportul comisiei parlamentare de audiere apersoanelor care, dupa 22 decembrie 1989, au fost nevoite sa-si paraseasca locul de munca si domiciliul din judefele Harghita si Covasna (Report of the Parliamentary Commission on hearing the people -who, after 22 December 1989, -were forced to leave their workplace and residence in Harghita and Covasna counties)*, Bucureşti, 1991. The conflicts in the area after 1989 are explained here by "the Hungarians' and the Szeklers' wish to return to the status of dominating nationalities in Harghita and Covasna counties, which "generated anti-Romanian actions that constitute the object of the present report" (p. 24).

<sup>11</sup> Partidul Democraticei Sociale din Romania (Party of Social Democracy in Romania), *Informare privind concluziile delegafiei parlamentare care a vizitat judefele Covasna si Harghita. Propuneri pentru pastrarea identitafii romdnilor (Information about the conclusions reached by the parliamentary delegation that visited Covasna and Harghita counties. Proposals for the preservation of the Romanian identity)*, 1997.

Sibiu counties, which have the richest villages) and the above-average ratio of human capital development<sup>12</sup> help balance the situation to a certain extent. Thus, with a deficient economic infrastructure and transportation network, the area still has an average rather than low rate of development as compared to the entire country.

Also, population movement within the counties and beyond their confines does not show, at first sight, any uncommon characteristics as compared to the general tendencies at country level. A recent analysis of the migratory fluxes in Romania<sup>13</sup> based on the statistics of the past few years leads to a classification of the counties depending on the rates of departure from and arrival in the county. In this respect, the two departmental units of Szeklerland rank at the level of moderate departures, the percentage of those that settle down here coming from somewhere else placing Harghita among the low-level immigration counties, and Covasna among the average-level immigration areas<sup>14</sup>. The destinations of those who leave the region, according to the study, are Mures County (for most of those who leave Harghita) and Brasov County (for people from Covasna)<sup>15</sup>.

The conclusions of the two sociologists are based on the data provided in the 1992 Census. Table 1, built on these data, reveals the trend of decrease in the population of the area in general, mostly because of massive migrations of people from Harghita County towards other counties.

**Table 1. Population movement toward and from the counties of Szeklerland, according to the data of the 1992 Census:**

| County   | Moving within the same county | Coming from another county | Leaving for another | Migratory balance |
|----------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Covasna  | 44.140                        | 36.032                     | 34.342              | 1.690             |
| Harghita | 62.539                        | 33.160                     | 62.501              | -29.341           |
| Total    | 106.679                       | 69.192                     | 96.843              | -27.651           |

Thus, almost half (49%) of the people of Covasna that leave for other counties head for Brasov County; other important destinations of the migratory flux are Harghita (9.8%), Bucharest (6.4%) and Mures County (6.2%). People from Harghita, on the other hand, prefer Mures County (24.9% of those migrating outside the county) and then Brasov (12.9%) and Covasna (12.3%).

The exchange of migrating population between the two Szeklerland counties is in favor of Covasna, which receives 7,668 people from Harghita, as compared to only 3,365 that it sends toward the same neighboring county.

The area that those who migrate into Szeklerland come from is the Transylvanian proximity of the region, and there is also a rather significant - though not decisive - influx from the neighboring Moldovan counties. Thus, people come to Covasna mostly from Brasov County (26.7% of the immigrants), Harghita County (21.3%), Mures County (11.1%) and Bacau County (9.3%). To Harghita people come from Mures (32.9%), Bacau (13.7%), Covasna (10.1%), Neamt (8.9%) and Brasov (7.3%).

<sup>12</sup> High average (Covasna) and average (Harghita), according to the classification of Dumitru Sandu in *Spațiul social al tranziției (The Social Space of Transition)*, Iași, Ed. Polirom, 1999, pp. 136-137.

<sup>13</sup> Traian Rotariu, Elemer Mezei, *Asupra unor aspecte ale migrației interne recente din România (On Certain Aspects of Recent Internal Migrations in Romania)*, in *Sociologie românească*, - new series, no.3, 1999, pp.5-37.

ibidem, p.28

<sup>15</sup> - ibidem, p.23.

## **Internal Migration and "colonization"**

Despite these banal appearances, the internal migration of the population, at the level of arrivals in and departures from the region, represents a permanent bone of contention. In the discourse of the political representatives of the Hungarians the phenomenon is often envisaged as a Romanian "colonization" carried out by Ceausescu's regime with a view to changing the ethnic composition of the area, and warnings are issued about its potential resuscitation. On the contrary, the political discourse of the nationalist Romanian parties revolves around Romanians "who have been driven away" by the Hungarians after 1989, and the ethnic persecutions directed against those who have remained. Both positions are trying to produce empirical arguments, without being able to make them very convincing, outside their obvious political commitments; in this context, the review-type official data that are published can hardly confirm any of the statements.

In the middle there is, on the one hand, the Transylvanian Hungarian population's fear of assimilation into the Romanian majority, frequently displayed in the discourse of the elite, though it does not come first in the hierarchy of reasons for the population's concern, while in the case of Szeklers, who live in a region where they are the majority, this is less pressing.<sup>16</sup> As a discursive reason, "assimilation" belongs to the larger theme of preservation of identity, having a defensive-integrating function that ensures the solidarity of the ethnic community by invoking threats (whether real or imaginary). Examined for a longer period, the demographic percentage of Hungarians in the Szekler counties shows a slight tendency of decrease (see the percentages in Table 2), which fuels demographic stress. The perspective of "extinction" seems to the Hungarians an implacable force whose causes are placed, at the level of common perception, not so much in a system of objective demographic determinants (the ageing of the population, the decreasing rate of fertility, the tendency towards emigration, etc.), but rather in a premeditated project.

**Table 2. The percentage of the Hungarian population in Covasna and Harghita at the 1966, 1977 and 1992 censuses:**

|                                 | COVASNA | HARGHITA |
|---------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Percentage of Hungarians in the | 79.40   | 88.10    |
| Percentage of Hungarians in the | 77.90   | 84.50    |
| Percentage of Hungarians in the | 75.20   | 84.70    |

On the other hand, the ethno-demographic distribution in the rural/urban profile indicates, maybe despite common expectations, a comparatively more important Romanian presence in the towns than in the villages (25.1% in the towns of Covasna, as compared to 21.08% in the villages of the same county; in Harghita 17.13% in towns, 10.02% in villages); the differences must be accounted for by the areas of recruitment of the newcomers in the process of urbanization. As the table below shows, the urban immigration of the Romanian population takes place on a significantly larger scale on account of those who settle down in the county coming from a

<sup>16</sup> According to the data in the CCRIT archive, the hierarchy of the Szekler's concerns, on the basis of a closed list, is: progressive impoverishment, emigration, Romanian nationalism, the weakening Hungarian identity, conflicts within the UDMR, assimilation, the breaking out of an interethnic conflict and the weakening religious faith. As one can notice, the economic and social fears prevail over those of ethnic nature.

different county, compared to the Hungarians, who come to town mostly from within Szeklerland.

**Table 3. Origin of population in Szeklerland, by ethnic belonging and rural/urban residence**

| Sample     | Mobility: Area of origin |                     | Residing in |        | Total  |
|------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------|--------|--------|
|            |                          |                     | Rural       | Urban  |        |
| Romanians  |                          | Do not move         | 67.7%       | 40.7%  | 53.5%  |
|            |                          | Coming from         | 9.0%        | 12.4%  | 10.8%  |
|            |                          | Coming from outside | 23.3%       | 47.0%  | 35.8%  |
|            | Total                    |                     | 100.0%      | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Hungarians |                          | Do not move         | 64.0%       | 47.0%  | 56.2%  |
|            |                          | Coming from         | 28.3%       | 34.7%  | 31.2%  |
|            |                          | Coming from outside | 7.7%        | 18.3%  | 12.6%  |
|            | Total                    |                     | 100.0%      | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The sociological survey has managed to identify the main tendencies of immigration in the localities of the area, related to the two ethnic groups. Thus, in both communities it can be noticed that the prevalent tendency is to move from the village to the town, in the case of both within-area and outside-area migrations, especially of individuals with medium and higher educational level. There is also a significant reverse tendency of migration from the urban to the rural areas, more frequent in the case of Hungarians from Szeklerland, which we must connect to the recent tendency of abandoning towns by those recently urbanized as a result of industrial decline. These people return to their native villages where they own property.

In the countryside, changes of residence take place as a result of marriages. As expected, many of those who move from one place to another are women who follow their husbands to their native place; this phenomenon involves mostly local movements of population at the level of the Szekler counties. A specific tendency among Romanians is represented by the immigration into the rural settlements of the region of skilled workers (graduates of vocational schools, recruited mostly from Moldova) and of professional people who have come from other counties than Covasna and Harghita. We should note that those who do not change their residence tend to be less qualified.

In urban areas, migration reveals more distinctly an ethnically differentiated pattern. Here the immobility of Romanians is associated with lack of qualification (with the exception of an important segment of Moldavians settled in the last few decades, who have a low level education): more local people tend to have finished middle school and high school, as compared to the newcomers, who are holders of vocational school certificates (another segment of those who originally come from Moldova) and university degrees (those who come from other localities in Szeklerland, Transylvania or Muntenia).

Consequently, there are two migratory directions at the level of the Romanian population: one from Moldova, associated with a population that is meant to meet the demand for industrial workforce, and one of the arrivals from Transylvanian, or to a smaller extent, Muntenian counties, meant to satisfy the need for qualified workforce.

In the case of Hungarians also migration to urban areas takes place at two levels. Those with average qualifications are mostly to be found among the local people rather than the non-locals. The newcomers, however, show two kinds of

tendencies: one is represented by the "internal" regional recruitments - immigrants born in Covasna and Harghita, most of whom are high school certificate holders; the second tendency is of the "external" recruitments of university graduates coming mostly from Transylvanian counties.

In conclusion, internal migrations indicate differentiated trends: while with Hungarians migration is predominantly "internal" (at the level of the region represented by the localities in Szeklerland), in the Romanian population the migrations are "external", the percentage of those who come from outside the area being higher than that of those who come from within its borders:

**Table 4. Areas of origin of imigrants in Szeklerland for the main ethnic groups (% of the sample)**

|                                    |                        | Sample   |            | Total  |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|----------|------------|--------|
|                                    |                        | Romanian | Hungarians |        |
| Mobilit<br>y: Area<br>of<br>origin | Do not move            | 53.5%    | 56.2%      | 55.7%  |
|                                    | Coming from            | 10.8%    | 31.2%      | 27.7%  |
|                                    | Coming from<br>outside | 35.8%    | 12.6%      | 16.6%  |
| Total                              |                        | 100.0%   | 100.0%     | 100.0% |

The phenomenon is a constant one, seen both before and after 1989. The differences between the two periods are felt mostly at the level of the Romanian group, where the influx after 1989 decreases in favor of those that come to Szeklerland from other counties, proportionally fewer than before the collapse of communism. The educational structure of the area - in correlation with the professional one - which appears at present proportionally distributed between the ethnic groups, reveals, however, a slight deficit of professional people among the Romanians in the urban areas, and a relative overrepresentation of those Romanians who have only finished elementary school in the rural areas. This seems to justify, in a close perspective, a policy of providing for the demand for professional people, which is not an easy one to satisfy. This demand has been met by resorting to predominantly internal human resources, as in the case of Hungarians.

**Table 5. Education level and residence in the Romanian and Hungarian populations in Szeklerland (% of the sample)**

| Residing | Educatio |                | Sample    |           | Total |
|----------|----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-------|
|          |          |                | Romanians | Hungarian |       |
| Rural    |          | Elementary     | 41.0%     | 36.4%     | 37.1% |
|          |          | Vocational     | 25.7%     | 32.7%     | 31.6% |
|          |          | Highschool     | 24.3%     | 23.8%     | 23.9% |
|          |          | College/Univer | 9.0%      | 7.2%      | 7.5%  |
|          | Total    |                | 100%      | 100%      | 100%  |
| Urban    |          | Elementary     | 16.6%     | 15.3%     | 15.6% |
|          |          | Vocational     | 25.6%     | 20.0%     | 21.1% |
|          |          | Highschool     | 35.8%     | 39.3%     | 38.7% |
|          |          | College/Univer | 22.0%     | 25.3%     | 24.7% |
|          | Total    |                | 100%      | 100%      | 100%  |

Thus, if the thesis of "colonization" seems to find enough arguments in the presented data, the phenomenon appears to have come to a halt at present. Indirectly, it has been confirmed, however, by those who - in their politically founded surveys - had been eager to disseminate it. In a historic introductory ex-course, mentioning the "privileges of the Hungarian and Szekler population" of the old Hungarian Autonomous Region, the Parliamentary Report of 1991 approaches the regional policy of the Ceausescu regime, within an attempt to achieve the post-Stalinist

"re-nationalization", of Szeklerland in the following manner: "The period of assigning privileges to the Hungarians and Szeklers lasted until the late '60s. After 1970 the central authorities gradually tried to re-balance interethnic relations, a process that was more emphatic after 1980. Thus, they established more schools and classes for Romanian students in Harghita and Covasna Counties; more Romanian teachers were sent to the area; measures were taken towards establishing a respect for the state's official language and for all the insignia of the Romanian state, etc. There were some exaggerations, such as the establishment of more classes for the Romanian students than the real percentage of the Romanian population would have asked for, and in the same way proportions were disregarded when leaders of companies and administrative units were appointed. These errors of the communist leaders made the Hungarian and Szekler populations wrongly identify the Romanian people with the ex-leaders of the country, and therefore anti-dictatorial action was mistaken for anti-Romanian."<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the last years of the Ceausescu regime imposed a drastic reduction of education in Hungarian, even in the places where the Hungarians were the majority. The data of the contemporary Ministry of Education have revealed, at the level of high school education in Harghita County, a progressive reduction in the percentage of Hungarian students studying in their mother tongue: from 91.5% in the 1984-1985 academic year, they diminished to 83% in 1985-1986, 67.1% in 1986-1987 and 55.5% in 1987-1988. A 36% decrease in just four academic years! At national level, in 1989 59% of the Hungarian high school students were studying in Romanian; out of 7,091 Hungarian students, only 527 students were studying in their mother tongue - a few subjects only!

Praising such practices (even if in a plenary meeting language that admits of the fact that "there were some exaggerations" committed by the "communist leaders", comrades!) relates in fact not only to a certain centralizing administrative inflexibility, but also to the inability to assess their consequences in the long run. Therefore, the "pacifying" solutions, which bring them back to the present, would seem even stranger.<sup>1</sup>

At the level of everyday life this was, at that time, a real concern. For the Hungarians working in the educational sphere in the late 80's - who would discreetly debate in the staff room -, the Romanisation of the educational system, not mentioned officially in any document, was never discussed with the Romanian colleagues. But nevertheless, the Romanian newcomers "transferred to a school got an anticipated role through which they appeared as a means of the Romanisation of Hungarian schools... As a matter of fact, the process of Romanisation posed a threat to Hungarian teachers as they might - in the near future - lose their jobs, be transferred to weaker schools or even to schools in the surrounding villages... It was no accident that before the

<sup>17</sup> *Raportul comisiei parlamentare de audiere a persoanelor care, dupa 22 decembrie 1989, au fost nevoite sa-si paraseasca locul de munca si domiciliul din judefele Harghita și Covasna (Report of the Parliamentary Commission on hearing the people -who, after 22 December 1989, -were forced to leave their workplace and residence in Harghita and Covasna counties), București, 1991, pp. 23-24*

<sup>8</sup> *Informarea privind concluziile delegafiei parlamentare care a vizitat judefele Covasna și Harghita. Propuneri pentru pastrarea identității romnilor (Information about the conclusions reached by the parliamentary delegation that visited Covasna and Harghita counties. Proposals for the preservation of the Romanians' identity), edited by PDSR in 1997 recommended similar measures to "improve the ethnic situation in Harghita and Covasna counties; among other prescriptions, it recommended the adoption of some measures peculiar to "special areas", or the "stimulation of Romanians who by the very nature of their work (the military, the police, education, culture, agriculture, tourism, etc.) may want to settle down in these areas". ( p. 20).*

beginning of each school year Hungarian teachers had to deal with the question of how many and who were coming, which subjects would have to be taught in Romanian, which of the local teachers would have not enough classes, who would have to leave."<sup>19</sup>

*"Practically, we had no other way to find out, relates a Romanian witness, but there, at that high-school and in the schools and high-schools in the whole county of Covasna, the Magyar teachers were discontent enough (and they didn't confess this unless you befriended) the fact that there existed a tendency towards strangling Hungarian language education. In what sense? It was enough... I don't know how to put it... There didn't exist a clear political decision, but the Inspectorate [the County Office controlling the educational institutions - n.a.] started to cut off — and this is what I found while I worked there for 4 years ...to cut off, to decrease the number of sections in Hungarian language. So, in my first year of teaching, in the entire 5<sup>th</sup> grade, for example, you had three classes taught in Hungarian and one taught Romanian —for, the proportion should be two to three or even two to two. Simply, the Inspectorate said that, as of this year, we should have one Hungarian section less and one new Romanian section more." (Extract from an interview with a former Romanian teacher in Sfintu-Gheorghe, before 1989).*

It was, perhaps, the most important generator of exclusion practices enacted by the local Hungarian population against Romanian newcomers. The political uses of demographic stress capitalize on fears and mobilize the population, generating reactions of exclusion. This creates the frame for self-confirming negative clichés towards Romanians. In everyday life, a sort of mode of re-production of ethnic boundaries occurs through which "local people were looking for those *negative characteristics* in the arriving person, who would justify the previously elaborated pre-dispositions. They strictly observed each arriving stranger's appearance, clothing, her/his whole behaviour from saying hello when entering among locals for the first time, to her/his facial expression. As a result of purposeful selective work during and after observation they sorted out the negative characteristics"<sup>20</sup> Thus, in the absence of Romanians, among the Hungarians "it was frequently discussed that the strangers were ill-mannered, could not behave and were too noisy. Local people clearly despised these 'blunders' among themselves and related them to ethnic affiliation. The personal dispositions became ethnic markers in the interpretation of local people; the stranger could not help it, because "They are like that! "<sup>21</sup> Finally, the self-admiring and ethnocentric distance was retained even in the most "tolerant" appearances: "There was a well defined border between local people and strangers, even when it seemed that local people gave concessions to the strangers. The following typical statement that - with smaller or bigger changes - could be heard very frequently, indicates this role-distancing gesture very well: "When she/he (the stranger) came here she/he could not behave or dress properly at all, but has learned something while being with us for these two or three years; she/he is not that ill-mannered and tasteless anymore."<sup>22</sup>

Zoltan Biro and Julianna Bodo: *Exclusion and Incorporation Techniques in Interethnic Relationships*, in Biro Zoltan A., Lorincz Jozsef D., editors, *Szeklerland in transition. Essays in cultural anthropology*, Miercurea Ciuc, Pro-print in association with the WAC - Center for Regional and Anthropological Research, 1999, p. 206.

<sup>19</sup> ibidem, p. 207.

<sup>21</sup> ibidem, p. 211.

<sup>22</sup> ibidem, p. 213.

## The Logic of Competition: Demographic Percentages and the Majority/Minority Game

The element that individualizes the region remains the local ethno-demographic configuration, a reality that is able to defy the data of the mental and sentimental geography of the homogeneous nation. Besides explicit self-identification (by declared nationality in the census), more criteria of ethnic identification might have been revealed<sup>23</sup>: identification by mother tongue (including the use of language in the family), by descendants (relating to the parents' and grandparents' ethnic group), and identification in territorial terms. Here, Szeklers continue to assert themselves as distinct not only from Romanians, but also from the rest of Hungarians -inside or outside Transylvania - in considerable proportions.

The *Ethnobarometer*... evaluated the weight of the most common ethnic self-denominators for Hungarians in Transylvania. The regionalization of the Hungarian ethnonym ('Magyar of Transylvania', compared to 'Magyar of Romania') intend to emphasize, first, the link between a national belonging ('Magyar') and the ex-centric/extra-territorial position with respect to the "Mother Nation" (by the inclusion of a territorial reference, too); secondly, it creates a symbolic cut inside the Romanian territory, marking the "inside" and "outside" boundaries of the ethnic community, appropriating these confines in terms of "Motherland", Implicitly, they are opposing - and also excluding - the Romanian "legitimate" ethnic territory. For Hungarians in Szeklerland the regional ethnonym ('Szekler') is the second one, after the most widespread self-denomination as 'Magyar of Transylvania', and tends to equal the former in rural localities with a dominant Hungarian majority. The symbolic inclusion/exclusion relationship involved here refers also to the Transylvanian-Hungarian territoriality, putting the belonging to the Szekler region as a distinctive marker (see below).

**Table 6. Self-identification and regionalisation at the Szekler population of Transylvania**

| Self-Identification | Hungarian Ethnic self-identifications in |             |  |
|---------------------|--|-------------|--|
|                     | Rest of                                  | Szeklerland |  |
|                     |  |             |  |

<sup>23</sup> The *Ethnobarometer* carried out by RCIR in 2000 had to cope with the important question of the definition of ethnicity: it followed that ethnicity is, at least partially, a methodological construct. This is the result of a social process that incorporates and "naturalizes" pre-formulated sociological categories related to the social definition of 'nation' and 'ethnicity', making them function as given categories of 'reality'. The list of items for ethnic and national identifiers was:

1. the declared nationality of the subject at the census (Filter question, for identifying the ethnicity of the subjects : "Tell me if in this household there is someone who declared himself Hungarian at the last census".
2. Self-identification (the answer to the question referring to self-identity, for Romanians: "Among the following expressions, which describe your identity best? In the first place, I consider myself... In the second place I consider myself..., In the third place I consider myself... The question gave pre-formulated options, mixing national and regional denominators, but gave the subjects the opportunity to add other items to self-definition).
3. The declared nationality of the parents and grandparents.
4. The first language that the subject learned (Romanian, Hungarian, German, Romani, other).
5. The language used in the family.

The survey used 2051 standardized questionnaires, applied to 1253 Romanians and 798 Hungarians. Both samples - Romanian and Hungarian - were over-represented. The Hungarian sample was enriched to obtain reliable data on Hungarians in Transylvania and in the Romanian sample 287 individuals, living in the counties of Harghita and Covasna, with a majority of Hungarians - standing for only 5 individuals in the weighted national sample - were added.

|                             | Transylvani |       | Transylvani |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------|-------------|
| Maov̄ar of Romania          | 17.4        | 9.8   | 15.4        |
| Maov̄ar of Transylvania     | 57.7        | 41.7  | 53.7        |
| Romanian citizen of Maov̄ar | 18.8        | 8.9   | 16.1        |
| Szekler                     | 2.1         | 39.6  | 13.3        |
| Other                       | 3.9         |       | 1.5         |
| Total                       | 100.0       | 100.0 | 100.0       |

Of course, both Romanians and Hungarians build their national identity in terms of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century discourses on the Nation: national identity appears as an issue that is linked both to the genetic component (ancestors belonging to the same ethnic group) and, more importantly, to a cultural one - mother tongue and commitment to culture and national symbols - and of solidarity through declaring oneself Romanian or Hungarian. However, the differences are significant and they depend on the different percentages attributed to citizenship when defining one's nationality (Romanian for the Romanians or Hungarian for the Magyars). Romanians link nationality to the state and to the territory more than the Hungarians, who take into account items of communitarian solidarity: mother tongue, commitment to Hungarian culture, etc. The Transylvanian Hungarians' self-definition as a cultural nation answers their need to stick to the "Hungarians", clearly distinguishing between loyalty to the state and loyalty to the nation, the symbolic co-belonging expressed by culture - albeit in the shape of a culture of adoption - being the substitute for territorial co-belonging.<sup>24</sup> (see table 8)

**Table 7. Self-definition of national identity with Romanians and Hungarians: "In your opinion, which are the three most important things for someone to be considered Romanian/Hungarian?"**

| Definition of national identity                | Romanians about |                  |       | Hungarians about |                  |       |
|--|-----------------|------------------|-------|------------------|------------------|-------|
|  | The             | Szekler<br>-land | Total | The              | Szekler<br>-land | Total |
| To be born in                                  | 56.4%           | 47.4%            | 54.3% | 3.9%             | .9%              | 3%    |
| To be a Romanian/Hungarian                     | 37.1%           | 33.4%            | 36.2% | 9.3%             | 5.5%             | 8.2%  |
| To be a native Romanian/Hungarian              | 41.8%           | 43.9%            | 42.3% | 80%              | 88.5%            | 82.5% |
| To be baptized in a Romanian/Hungarian         | 30.1%           | 30%              | 30.1% | 26.9%            | 15.3%            | 23.5% |
| To live in Romania/Hungary                     | 18.2%           | 21.6%            | 19%   | 2.5%             | 2.1%             | 2.4%  |
| To honor the Romanian/Hungarian                | 14.8%           | 24.7%            | 17.1% | 16.9%            | 18.3%            | 17.3% |
| To feel Romanian/Hungarian culture as your own | 23.2%           | 19.5%            | 22.3% | 41%              | 53.6%            | 44.7% |
| To feel Romanian/Hungarian                     | 40.2%           | 47.4%            | 41.8% | 62%              | 68.1%            | 63.8% |
| To respect Romanian/Hungarian                  | 22.5%           | 20.9%            | 22.2% | 26%              | 18.7%            | 23.9% |
| To speak Romanian/Hungarian in the             | 14.7%           | 10.1%            | 13.7% | 24.1%            | 28.9%            | 25.5% |
| Other  | .1%             |                  | .1%   | 1.6%             |                  | 1.1%  |

<sup>24</sup> cf. Also the data of the CCRIT survey of 1997: *Romani și maghiari în tranziția postcomunistă. Imagini mentale și relații interetnice în Transilvania (Romanians and Hungarians in the Post-communist Transition. Mental Images and Interethnic Relations in Transylvania)*, co-ordinated by Irina Culic, Horvath Istvan, Marius Lazar și Magyari Nandor Laszlo (Cluj-Napoca, 1998).

Thus, the two groups appear to be well differentiated: the Romanian one proves to be more homogeneous than one could have predicted given the condition of coexistence with the Hungarians.

**Interviews in depth confirm also a certain reluctance towards mixed marriages on the part of Romanians, religion being one of the most important perceived barriers against them:** *"Long before, as I was a child, the question of mixed marriages was never asked, says a woman living in a rural area in an interview. / think if they marry they should be aware they have different religions and they have to reach a compromise each other before marriage, to agree."*

Otherwise, the barrier can be found in ethnic traits:

*"The Hungarian's conception about marriage differs from that of Romanians. Hungarians in mixed marriages wish to impose themselves as the Romanians try to find understanding and familial peace"... The problems in this kind of marriage are generated by "the hostility of the families, economic difficulties, misunderstandings related to children's education. If the Romanian partner shall not please the Hungarian one, which means renouncing his language, habits, his pride in being Romanian, sooner or later they will break apart."* (Woman, 49 years old, living in a rural area)

Ethnic boundaries - among which homogamy in marriages and the use of mother tongue in the family are the most important indicators<sup>25</sup> - are preserved, even if the declared inter-community distances are not so significant. Ethnically mixed ancestry (in which at least one parent or grandparent is of a different ethnic belonging from that declared by the subject) applies to 15% of the Romanians and 10% of the Hungarians - which are close to the average value for the entire Transylvania (15%).

Under these circumstances, it is hard to reveal a process of assimilation of the Romanian minority by the Hungarian majority above a predictable level characterizing the general tendency in Transylvania – a tendency of ethnic homogenisation of the mixed population territories to the benefit of the majority, in spite of the scaremongering discourses of political activists. (Here I mean the areas where one of the ethnic segments is clearly a minority, and not the conditions of ethno-demographic parity). The phenomenon could only be characterized more accurately over several decades.

On the other hand, with a Hungarian majority of 75.2% of the total population in Covasna and 84.7% in Harghita, the region represented by the two counties imposes a logic adapted to the functioning of majority-minority relations.

*What is, however, their general operational framework?*

25

Another significant indicator might be the ethnic pattern in trading land: both Romanians and Hungarians (but Hungarians more likely, as expected) tend to buy or sell land mainly from people belonging to their ethnic group, as in the data below: **Trade with land in Szekerland counties (% of land owners, only)**

|                          | Sample                                      |   |   |   |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|
|                          | Romanians                                   |   | Hungarians                                  |   |
|                          | Have you bought land in the last ten years? | Have you sold land in the last ten years? | Have you bought land in the last ten years? | Have you sold land in the last ten years? |
| Yes, from/to a Romanian  | 15,5%                                       | 6,8%                                      | 2,0%  | ,4%                                       |
| Yes, from/to a Hungarian | 5,1%  | ,9%                                       | 18,9%                                       | 8,3%                                      |
| No                       | 79,5%                                       | 92,3%                                     | 79,1%                                       | 91,3%                                     |
| Total                    | 100,0%                                      | 100,0%                                    | 100,0%                                      | 100,0%                                    |

Previous studies<sup>26</sup> have revealed a strong link between interethnic tension and the ethno-demographic composition of the localities. There is a variation of inter-community perceptions depending on the percentage respectively of the majority and minority in the region. Thus, given the competition between the two ethnic communities spread differently in the territory - as is the case of Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania - it can be concluded that the declared hostility toward the representatives of the adverse group is smaller in the areas where the two groups co-exist than where the population is perfectly homogeneous.

The explanation consists in the difference between the Other's image perceived through the means of mass communication and the image conditioned by direct interaction among members of different ethnic groups in the same community. The images of the Other shaped exclusively by the mass-media or by rumor depend on the emotional charge of the mediatized message. It refers to the representative of the other ethnic group as to an Absolute Alien, whose imagined features distance him from the familiar characteristics of the group of belonging and place him in the threatening posture of potential enemy. Direct contact with individuals of a different ethnic group, on the contrary, reduces the social perceptive distance to the dimensions of a Familiar Alien - ("our Hungarians/ Romanians/ Gypsies", who are more decent than "the other Hungarians/ Romanians/ Gypsies" in general) - whose characteristics and reactions are easy to control if an adequate behavior pattern is used.

Problem-raising ethnic otherness is defined rather at the level of "imaginary communities" than at that of inter-community relations in the locality, in relation with which individuals have the feeling that they possess enough means to control them. The source of conflict is generally projected outwards, "the real reasons for conflict" being commonly attributed to and "explained by" reference to the "others' group" - whether these latter are competitors or simple intruders: for the preservation of one's *status-quo*, any exterior intervention is condemned. Individuals show trust in their ability to manage community issues themselves, but they are afraid of external factors. One of the dominating behavioral reflexes in relating to conflict consists in drawing the limit between community and extra-community, and in neutralization through the exclusion of exterior factors or people that can influence or interfere with a potential conflict. In this way, stereotype mechanisms and clichés can act to the benefit of preserving interethnic balance - and then they themselves build a non-conflictual mechanism of communitarian solidarity.

On this basis, mixed communities manage to control tension by establishing tacit norms of conflict avoidance, through which they permanently draw frontiers between them and the others, but also build contact zones. This does not involve a "more tolerant" attitude, but rather *a social process of building tolerance* as an instrument of exercising control over potential conflict - through which divergence with others - though admitted in theory - does not break out. The recommended conduct is discretion and avoidance of provoking situations, even though feelings - which are almost always dominated by fear - are most often repressed. As an everyday strategy of conflict avoidance this is also the usual form of "harmonizing" relations at community level: implicitly, there is an "embargo" on the topic of ethnic

<sup>26</sup> see Marius Lazar, *Transilvaneni la vot. Mize reformatoare și controverse etnice in alegrile generale din 1996* (Transylvanians at the poll Reforming stakes and ethnic controversy in the general elections of 1996), and Istvan Horvath and Marius Lazar, "Reinventarea" localului și relațiile interetnice ("Reinvention" of the pub and interethnic relations), in Irina Culic, Istvan Horvath, Cristian Stan, *Reflecții asupra diferenței* (Reflections on difference), Cluj, Editura Limes, 1999.

frictions, a prohibition that condemns stirring discourse. This is a convention that does not exclude kindness, but which suspends clarifying discussions for an indefinite time. Related to the mechanisms of "in-group" and "out-group" position, it generates at the same time mechanisms of humanization and ritualization of hostile relations through which the explosive potential of the latter is diminished. (This accounts for the paradoxical situation in which though many of the Transylvanians accept that there are conflictual relations between the Romanians and the Hungarians, effective ethnic conflicts hardly exist). The figures in tables 6 and 7, taken from the database of the Ethnobarometer accomplished by CCRIT under the patronage of the Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center<sup>27</sup> (see infra) are meant to illustrate the described phenomenon, following - with special reference to Szeklerland - the variations in the perception of Romanian-Hungarian relations.

<sup>27</sup> Also see: Research Center for Interethnic Relations, *Ethnobarometer. Inter ethnic 'Relations in Romania, May-June 2000*, financed by the United States Agency for International Development, second, revised edition, October 2000.

**Table 8. Which of the following expressions best describes the relations between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania?**

| Group     | Percentage of Romanians | Regions of the country | Conflict | Cooperation | Mutual ignorance | S3   | O      | N    |
|-----------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|------------------|------|--------|------|
| Romanian  | Majority                | The rest               | 16.5 %   | 42.7 %      | 17%              | 3%   | 20.9 % | 100% |
|           |                         | Szeklerland            | 14.3 %   | 37.6 %      | 18%              | 1.5% | 28.6 % | 100% |
|           | Parity                  | The rest               | 13.2 %   | 33.8 %      | 19.1 %           | 7.4% | 26.5 % | 100% |
|           |                         | Szeklerland            | 29.8 %   | 42.6 %      | 12.8 %           | 6.4% | 8.5%   | 100% |
|           | Minority                | The rest               | 5%       | 65%         | 15%              |      | 15%    | 100% |
|           |                         | Szeklerland            | 12.3 %   | 56.6 %      | 19.8 %           | 1.9% | 9.4%   | 100% |
| Hungarian | Majority                | The rest               | 30.5 %   | 23.8 %      | 28.1 %           | 1.6% | 16%    | 100% |
|           |                         | Szeklerland*           | 50%      | 50%         |                  |      |        | 100% |
|           | Parity                  | The rest               | 43%      | 17%         | 23.7 %           | .7%  | 15.6 % | 100% |
|           | Minority                | The rest               | 45.9 %   | 19.4 %      | 24.1 %           | .6%  | 10%    | 100% |
|           |                         | Szeklerland            | 33.0 %   | 23.8 %      | 24.7 %           | 1.3% | 17.2 % | 100% |
| 3 E2      |                         |                        | 24.1 %   | 34.9 %      | 20.4 %           | 2.3% | 18.3 % | 100% |

\*Only four subjects in the box

**Table 9. Of the following expressions, which one describes best the Romanian-Hungarian relations in the region where you live?**

| "&      | Percentage of Romanians | Regions of the country | Conflict | Cooperation | Mutual ignorance | 0     | 1     | 1    |
|---------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------|-------------|------------------|-------|-------|------|
| 1       | Majority                | The rest               | 6.7%     | 62%         | 9.8%             | 4.3%  | 17.3% | 100% |
|         |                         | Szeklerland            | 7.5%     | 54.9%       | 13.5%            | 6.8%  | 17.3% | 100% |
|         | Parity                  | The rest               | 2.9%     | 70.6%       | 11.8%            | 7.4%  | 7.4%  | 100% |
|         |                         | Szeklerland            | 10.6%    | 68.1%       | 14.9%            | 4.3%  | 2.1%  | 100% |
|         | Minority                | The rest               |          | 87.5%       | 6.3%             |       | 6.3%  | 100% |
|         |                         | Szeklerland            | 10.4%    | 67.9%       | 16%              | 1.9%  | 3.8%  | 100% |
| Hungari | Majority                | The rest               | 13%      | 44.9%       | 32.7%            | 2%    | 7.5%  | 100% |
|         |                         | Szeklerland            | 50%      | 50%         |                  |       |       | 100% |
|         | Parity                  | The rest               | 25.9%    | 32.6%       | 31.1%            |       | 10.4% | 100% |
|         | Minority                | The rest               | 8.2%     | 41.2%       | 40.6%            | 6.5%  | 3.5%  | 100% |
|         |                         | Szeklerland            | 6.6%     | 43.6%       | 22.9%            | 10.1% | 16.7% | 100% |
| 1       |                         |                        | 10.3%    | 51.3%       | 22.7%            | 4.8%  | 10.9% | 100% |

\*Only four subjects in the box

From another perspective, the percentage of minorities in the locality also contributes to the variety of tension perception. Communities in a situation of parity have the most pronouncedly tense relations, and hostility - whether symbolic or effective - is often expressed openly. The smaller the minority, the more the majority tends to express its tolerance in a relaxed manner, and the readier to compromise the minority is. In this case, the explanation relates to the mobilizing potential of the communities in the event of open conflict: the closer the ethno-demographic ratio, the higher the capacity of mobilization and the chances of those in the minority, as communities have a tendency to polarize, not leaving space for those who are immobile to express themselves (this is what made it possible for the conflict to occur in Tirgu-Mures in March 1990, a conflict the effects of which are still felt in the mentality of the inhabitants). At this level, the role of the elite is essential: conflict will, in fact, jeopardize the position of its members, who are most motivated to manipulate the situation in their interest<sup>28</sup>.

Therefore, data lead us to an explanation of the tensions as a result of inter-elite competition. The changes that took place in Szeklerland in 1989 were marked, as in other places, on the one hand by the pressure of the population's eagerness to put right the injustice they had to bear before 1989, their civil pride being linked with

their national and local community pride. On the other hand, technical expertise within the context of the region, or etatist nationalism outside it constituted for the ex-activists of the regime the last resources of legitimacy put at stake with a view to preserving their dominating position. Nationalism, therefore, was a feasible weapon, both for those in offensive positions and for those in defensive ones: for the Szeklers, the oppression of a personal communist dictatorship was easy to be represented as a form of national oppression, too. At the same time, those who had lost their positions were able to justify their former activity through loyalty to the nation-state, not to the dictator. Some of them, who had left the area, were once again able to feel victimized in their posture of "patriots" removed by force from their high mission – a posture which was called upon to supplant their identity of ex-activists of the communist regime.

### **The Logic of Self-Situation: Majority in Minority, Minority in Majority**

Such a paradox is made possible in the conditions of reversed relations of domination between the majority and the minority, which the ethnic configuration of the region imposes.

This is because the question, eventually, remains: Who is the majority and who is the minority here? The reversed ethnic composition, related to its structure at the level of the country, upsets the clichés of ethnic majority-minority relations. In fact, both the Hungarian and the Romanian community show contradictory self-situating feelings and attitudes as related to the national self-definition on the one hand, and the game of interethnic co-existence on the other.

As representatives of the dominating nation in the State, the Romanians expect to be taken into account and allowed to assert their position as the majority. Impregnated by the etatist-nationalist ideology induced by their identity concept, they display expectations depending on the mentality prescriptions of the dominating national group. In exchange, they are treated either with condescension by the Hungarians in the region (they are decent, but only because they are "our Romanians"), or with suspicion, because they are the local extension of the state surveillance bodies, being also perceived as reproducing at regional level the discourse of official authority. They are faced, in other words, with the objective situation of a minority.

The Hungarians in Szeklerland, forced to refer to Romania as an exclusively national state, come to represent themselves mostly in the framework of a minority identity discourse, warding off any attempt at discrimination and abusive enforcement on the part of the state authority. They suspect the integration policies of being assimilationist, and transform even potential discrimination into a resource for strengthening an ethno-centrist discourse. Moreover, they tend to project the same discourse on the Romanian minority, on whom it refracts magnified, like a threat that affects the very cultural framework of ethnic survival. Under these circumstances, the Romanians experience what the Hungarians in other parts of Transylvania feel when in contact with the ethno-centrism of the Romanian majority. Actually, the Hungarians come to assume- almost without realizing it - a bored aloofness when it comes to the problems of those in the minority.

Belonging to the majority means facing the others' problems incidentally, without your life depending on this very much. But belonging to the minority means bearing this condition every day, with no chances of escape. Therefore, the reactions will always be disproportionate, when it comes to claims and issues raised by the minority: the irritated indifference of the representatives of the majority ("What do these ones want again?") and the hyper-responsiveness in the face of real or imaginary obstacles.

The majority - minority game becomes in the end a *role-play that varies depending on the system of reference* - and the apparent "schizophrenia" or "identity confusions" – turn into *a means of contradictory management of some role conflicts*.

See, here, one of the typical reactions coming from an Orthodox priest, when asked about the majority-minority relation. He actually refuses to accept any definition of the Romanians as a minority: *"We are in Romania, so it would appear absurd to me to say that Romanians are a minority. Even if in the region there are more Hungarians than Romanians, we still are the majority in the country"*.

In this case, refusing to recognize the minority condition comes from its understanding as a degradation of one's own ethnic group position. Being in the majority means also having a superior status. It results from the refusal to concede to a supposed "inferiority of Romanians". On the other hand, translating the situation of Romanians from Szeklerland in terms of a majority-minority relationship means implicitly accepting a differentiated policy towards any kind of minorities. It also means implicitly accepting the Hungarian minority rhetoric and strategy. Pride and prejudice! There is a masochist impulse in refusing to recognize the minority topic as legitimate - and consequently this leads to depriving one's own group of a useful defensive tool. Rather than accepting the minority's point of view, the priest prefers to accept a prejudice for his community. This is a consequence of applying the "neighbor's goat" principle - a resentful logic that rules the relationship with the rivaling group of the others.

Finally, the Romanian minority tends to state the same things as minority Hungarians placed in a similar position: they are more likely to claim that the relations between Romanians and Hungarians are worse after 1989 than they were before. Like the Hungarians that live as a minority, the minority Romanians believe that when one applies for a job or does business, the members of the majority group are privileged. The members of the majority, however, - whether Romanian or Hungarian - tend to declare that nationality does not matter and the social order they represent (which makes them implicitly responsible as they are the majority) is fair enough - and that in this order they offer equal opportunities for the others to assert themselves. The majority discourse is, in essence, the same; it is assigned to a social role, not to a particular ethnic group.

Ethnicized perceptions and segregated groups have become the common consequence of this imposed logic. Mutual exclusion functions as a conflict- avoiding spontaneous group regulation, the reality of segregation coming to be perceived as a "normal" one. This is because, in a micro-level interactive approach, conflict-avoiding behavior manages to make a distinction between the ethnic traits and the personal traits of the interacting agents. Through this distinction ethnic traits are deliberately ignored and discussions about ethnic differences are avoided. There is a gap between tacit monitoring of the Other and conversational interaction which gives the measure of the duplicity involved in such encounters (this is why they are resented as tiring on both sides) - between silent behavior and speech.

Of course, the most affected would be, here, the "minority intruders". They are always the first to pay the cost of overall tensions.

Again, extracts from an interview with the same former Romanian teacher (female) in Sfintu Gheorghe, between 1985 and 1989 provide a good example. The subject proved to be a good observer and sensibly influenced by the status of an interviewee, which made her observation in a sense very co-operative and "anthropologically" orientated, i.e. informed about what anthropology should be about:

*/( interviewer) : Your first impression, once you arrived in the region...*

*S (subject): My first impression... It was strange... The staff room was as big as a hangar, there were about 130 members in the teaching staff, because the school included the primary level too, so there were educators and evening courses - so courses started with the 1<sup>st</sup> grade and ended with the 13<sup>th</sup> . So, there were about 130 teachers of whom Romanians were about 18*

*and they had a separate desk. My colleague and I - now he is teaching at the Language Department at the Romanian Faculty -we were very intrigued to find that there is a desk only for Romanians, that big, and — I don't know — 15 other desks used only by Magyar teachers. And we were surprised about that. Of course, everywhere people were speaking Hungarian...*

*I: Could you eventually account for why there was a separate desk?*

*S: I don't know, that was something we found on arriving there. It was the way they aggregated. I was happy with any desk, and finally, V. my colleague, I think he found another desk, but this took two years. It was hard to change the place, this was interesting: how people were distributed from an anthropological point of view, see?*

Isolation was another consequence of exclusion, applied to the "intruders" by local majority members:

Another subject, a male worker, 39 years old, coming from Moldavia 20 years before the interview experienced the same feeling of isolation as he did at the beginning:

*Q (uestion): How has your life changed since you came here?*

*A (nswer): Here I married, I started a family. We have a child. But social life is limited. It feels like being in another country. At my workplace I am the only Romanian. My colleagues knowing Romanian hardly want to speak to me and those that might want to, do not know Romanian. Anyway, there are no conflicts [...] In my place, where I come from, what can you do? Life is harder there. Here I got a repartition, I got accommodation, a place to work. Financially it is better. [...] Hungarians are individualist, but I had never had troubles or conflicts with them. However, they isolate us if we don't speak Hungarian and this makes us live apart.*

*Q: So what does it mean for you to be one of the Romanians in the region?*

*A: / feel like being an alien [he clearly looks discontent]. Social life is hard everywhere, because of lack of money, but here it is harder because we are isolated ex officio.*

Isolation has consequences for in-group self-perception: *""Here the Romanians are less communicative. Because they have no choice. If you do not speak Hungarian you have poor chances to integrate."*

As one can see, linguistic markers tend to become the most important tool of inclusion-exclusion everyday life techniques. Assimilating the local language implies also a change of optics - and attitudes become less reluctant, up to a certain asserted tolerance, openness to other values and ethnic "de-centration". Integration may even produce a very comprehensive appropriation of the values and perspective of the Hungarian locals, as in the case of another interviewed subject (male, 35 years old, teacher and also a Baptist priest coming to the region from another Transylvanian county after finishing studies, integrated):

*"Here I received the repartition, I got accommodation, I started my career. Everything went well. My relations with Hungarians are very good. I was frustrated a little at he beginning, because I didn't understand Hungarian, but we got used to it, it didn't take me long to accommodate... I understand very well Hungarian and I can speak enough to shift for myself" [...]*

*The Hungarian colleagues "are very special people — and I want to say not only they are different compared to us or to other Hungarians, but I refer to their high cultural level. I appreciate them very much [...] To be a Hungarian and to live in a Romanian community you need something extra, as well as, to be a Romanian and*

*live and integrate normally in a Hungarian community you need also something more. I think I came to this conclusion while trying to stay close to their cultural level. I respect them. I respect their will, their culture. This is why we ought not to generalize. There are problems, on the one side or the other. \When it comes to people, there are no Hungarians and Romanians, but good and bad people. I consider this town a civilized one, with respectable people who have common sense".*

*Being a Romanian in the region means "being an active witness of the local events. We are important as a cultural knot. Hungarians need us to tell to the other Romanians, who do not know what is happening here, to tell the truth, make them believe we are not oppressed". The subject is proud saying that. Then he returns reflexively: "Living in a different cultural environment, it is normal to encounter difficulties generated by cultural differences. These are inherent to the life of a Romanian assuming the risk to migrate to a zone dominated by Hungarians, by their culture, language and their customs. "*

In this openly expressed good will, one can find the traces of a desired "political correctness". Certainly, educated subjects have politically biased attitudes -and ways of socializing that are politically conditioned. By contrast, a small number of Romanian nationalist activists give a totally different picture of "integration":

The next subject is one of the prominent representatives of the Romanian community in Sfintu Gheorghe, leader of a cultural association aiming to emancipate the Romanians in the area and fight against the "denationalizing process", which, in his opinion, still continues in a hidden way. Primordialist arguments and legitimizing appeals to history and ancient origins will be invoked in reacting to an oppressive perceived presence of the local Hungarian population:

*"Occasions when, more or less intentionally, Hungarians act so as to humiliate the Romanians and to make them feel they live in a place where the Hungarians are the masters are frequent. [...] Hungarians have a relatively good opinion about Romanians when those are living across the Carpathians, or, anyway, in other zones of Transylvania. But not here, where they spoil their "ethnic composition"! At the level of neighborhood or friendship based relations, life together is rather normal. At the top - among the elite - things turn more complicated. In an excessive and absurd manner, the Hungarians evoke all the time the Szekler's past of the region, forgetting that he history of this place does not begin with the Szeklers' history and it does not mean only the history of Szeklers. In the region, not the Romanian - considered as a biological entity - is doing badly (if he knows Hungarian, he is doing quite well), but rather Romanian-ness, as a symbolic value, a cultural and spiritual reality"*

*After 1989 — "God forbid to be seen as a «Romanian nationalist»)! All your chances in public life are blocked. To be a «patriot» in Miercurea Ciuc is means attracting to yourself all the disapproval, disrespect and even the hate of the Hungarian population ".*

Finally, there can be found the elements of a "strategic game" involved in the complex Romanian- Hungarian / majority minority relationship. But this is a non-cooperative game in which the opponents do not invest in trust. There is a certain predictability about everyone's behavior; however, this does not follow from a mutual compromise, but from a mutual fear.

Of course, lack of communication between the members of the two competing groups has a preventive function, but the tacit ban on speaking about controversial matters in face to face relations leaves the conflict unresolved, in a latency that prolongs the tension for an undefined term. The conflict might not be confessed, but this does not mean that it is denied. By keeping silent on it, local people make the inter-community dialogue space even narrower. The appearance of tolerance is equivalent, in fact, to an undefined delay of the major confrontation. The conflict is not really avoided, but suspended.