

THE LAST DANCE

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In this article I analyze one area that has for a long time interested anthropologists: the way in which dancing and dancing rituals—part of traditional life-ways—change and eventually disappear. I utilize here the terms “dance” and “dancing” principally to mean not only biologically or psychologically (emotionally?) motivated and combined corporeality and events in society but, together with Foucault, rather as discursively constituted and agency-transformed entities that individuals think and live with in their culture. Recent studies have shown that dance and dancing, in fact movement systems in general, form an integral part of the cultural territory within which the human body is structured and manipulated (Farnell 1999, 2003). For my purpose, however, I view both dance and dancing, here to entail not only structured movement systems and body representations but activities in specific kinetic and space-time dimensions that are culturally controlled, negotiated and constructed. [1] Dance, thus, is not only a formal body language, as Bloch has argued earlier (Bloch 1989), but a politically formalized system that is part of the controlling mechanism of authority. [2] In fact, it is often one of the most revered legitimating forces of authority in uneven power relations. At the same time, dance and dancing activity could be a source of as well as a force for resistance against such legitimacy (Howard 2001). I use here dance to mean a single form of a specific movement system, and dancing as a referent reserved for social events that include various dances. At times, we find that a single dance may be a source of conflict between individuals and the state, or between various ethnic groups. An individual dance may or may not symbolize an ethnic or national group, and dance events could also become a source contestation between majority and minority ethnic relations.

It is a tautological comment that the body is culturally understood, constructed and monitored by individuals and groups but one of the least discussed but, to my mind, most important aspect of the body is its conditioning and the way in which it is anchored to the discursive practices between the state and individuals. [3] The body both a source and an object of control has not been addressed by anthropologists studying Hungary or Hungarian dance. Even though Marcel Mauss has made a rather innocent incursion into Hungarian ethnographic studies, the idea of the technique *du corps* has not, we must admit, gained a sure footing in the anthropological study of dance. With regard to Romania, anthropologists have fared exception-

ally well: folkloric representations (Kligman 1977, 1988), reproduction, sexuality and gender relations (Kligman 1998; Roman 2003), and political forms of funerals and reburials (Verdery 1999) are monographic themes privileging the body, both collective and individual. However, the use and representation of the body in dances and dance events in Hungarian minority culture in Romania, especially as a source of power discourse, has not, we must admit, been attempted by anthropologists. [4] Therefore in this analysis I consider questions of what happens when the state defines the dance event, what, if any, are the differences when it is not the state, or the Romanian majority, but the elite of the minority who defines it. For scholars it is intriguing to ask how symbolic representations, such as dance and dancing, follows various socio-economic transformations from World War II, the various Romanian dictatorships to the multi-party democracy in Romania. Under Ceausescu ethnic dance events were tightly controlled and monitored by the watchful eyes of the state; in fact the secret police were entrusted with watching and reporting on all such events. Most aspects of minority national identity were scrutinized as musicians were requested to offer their repertoire to bureaucrats; many were fined if it contained songs and tunes deemed unfit for “public consumption.” But under the democratic climate such state control has subsided considerably and even though those laws concerning minority language and culture were passed, they leave a lot to be desired as far as their actual implementation on the local level.

Case 1: (1982)

It was an uncomfortably hot Saturday afternoon and we were waiting outside the protestant church for the wedding party to appear. The church bells just started and at the same time the four-man Gypsy orchestra started to play dance tunes. As men and women poured out of the church one-by-one, they shook the hand of the priest. In front of the church there was a fairly large space combining parts of the churchyard. Everyone gathered there in a large circle and it was easy to observe how men and women, young and the elderly, all stuck to their own gender and generations separated not wholly unlike that of the formation inside the church. As soon as there were enough people the young lads with the ritual staff in their hands stood around the newlyweds as if they were ready

to protect them should something unexpected happen. In Zsobok, dancing started as a natural continuation of the church wedding. Middle-aged couples immediately started to dance the local version of the couple *csárdás*. Older ones did the same but a bit slower and in a more take-it-easy manner. Unmarried youth formed a large circle, hands hooked behind their backs and danced the circle-*csárdás*, a form that is not well-known in the region. During the dancing men and women would start yelling spicy, rhymed couplets. Many of these calls (*csujogató*s in local parlance) have double meanings: depending on who does it to whom and with what kind of stress on certain words the poems could turn sexually explicit (Kürti 2003). Men do not shy away from yelling openly obscene verses as [5] good friends egg each other to call dirtier and spicier ones. As the dance goes faster and faster, more and more people join in and soon the entire crowd is whirling in front of the church. Meanwhile the young couple and their ritual masters of ceremony visit the priest to sign the marriage documents. This is the time when gifts of food, wine and a few embroidered pieces of clothes are also offered to the local minister and his family. In addition, the minister and his family are invited to the evening dinner. The dance may last 15–20 minutes. Sometimes people ask the musicians to play a favored dance tune, sometimes they also sing a few verses that others may join in freely. Drinking is not forbidden and there are several young lads whose roles include carrying bottles of brandy offering them to both dancers and onlookers. Dancers and onlookers would perform high-pitched dance-calls (*csujogató*s), an aspect of the wedding rite that is perhaps the most humorous as well as sexually explicit. Some of the calls center on bawdy behavior, sexual prowess, and even mock some characteristics of the priest and his wife. Calls and dancing end abruptly when the best man stops the musicians by announcing the closing of the dancing; he then leads the whole group to the house of the wife for the “asking for the bride” ritual (*menyasszony kikérő*). The dance-calls become even saucier, more open and many are obviously aimed at increasing fertility. In a little while, the entire square is emptied.

Case 2: (1998)

It was my third full day in following the making of hollowed, syrupy oven-baked cakes (*kürtőskalács*, *perec*), the killing of calves, pigs and numberless chickens, fixing up the local cultural center, and the making of the ornamented wooden staff (*vőfélypálca*) young men carry throughout the wedding procession. All aspects seemed smooth and running well. We were standing in front of the local protestant church, hearing well the last lines of the drawn-out and solemn hymns, waiting for the crowds to pour into the street. Cameras were readied and a perfect

place was selected by standing on a large rock placed as a reinforcement of a ditch built to drain water during spring flash-floods. As the beautifully carved church door opened the priest exited first standing halfway in the doorway allowing enough place for the people to pass by him. As the joyous crowd exited the priest shook hands with everyone. The entire crowd waited for the newlyweds, their ritual co-parents and the ceremonial masters (*vőfély*, *násznagy*) to arrive. Everyone was laughing and a few men were holding bottles in their hands. They contained a mixture of home made plum-brandy and mass-produced alcohol bought for the occasion. Young men immediately began to light cigarettes, and young women, many dressed in reconstructed but extremely flashy dresses, hooked their arms and stood in a large semi-circle. The three-man band consisting of an accordion, saxophone, and a small drum, was also waiting on the street—they never go to the church ceremony—and started to play some popular music that had nothing to do with local flavor. The crowd waited for about twenty minutes when all the participants exited the church. At this point a usual ritual took place: the newlyweds and their best men, together with the parents, entered the pastor’s home that was also the rectory, and took care of the official signing ceremony. All the while, the entire group outside just talked and listened to the musicians playing quietly. An occasional holler or two by a few drunken men were heard but all in all it was a surprisingly uneventful quiet event. A little later the young couple came out and the bride was immediately escorted by her best-man to a car and taken to her family home. This ritual escape is a continuation of a former tradition: after the church wedding the entire procession goes to the wife’s parents’ house where a mock battle takes place. When this was done the wedding crowd proceeded to her house in a rather quiet way. There was no dancing and not a single dance call to be heard.

Traditional Dances and Dance Events

The dance occasions described, both connected to wedding rituals in a Hungarian community in the Kalotaszeg region of Transylvania, Romania, highlight the turning point in traditional dance events as they are fundamentally altered by ideological considerations that are not of the same vintage. [6] Since I have discussed my fieldwork in the Transylvanian village of Zsobok (Jebuc in Romania) in my book (Kürti 2001a) here I will only summarize what I have written earlier on this settlement and what is necessary to understand the changing contexts of dance events.

I have conducted research in this region since 1982, a date I first entered Hungarian villages in the Transylvanian part of Romania. I was struck, as I am sure many of my compatriots and tourists were, by the still visible signs of

folk costumes, the uniformed religious life—they almost all belong the protestant faith—ornamented and colorful as the ethnographic descriptions make them to be. [7] The presence of the buffaloes was novel to me, women still used the small meandering stream to wash clothing by hand, and there were vibrant customs and dance performances attached to birth, baptismal, funerals and weddings. Women and men carried large gift-baskets filled with delicious oven-baked cakes (*termőág*), a “tree of plenty” that traditionally women carried on their heads. [8] However, I was looking in vain for the ornate ox-drawn coaches (*ökrösszekér*) traditionally used to carry the bride’s dowry to her new home together with the joyous and singing members of her extended family. As I was assured the “cooperative consumed the oxen” (“*a kollektív megette az ökröket*”), a clear reference to the obvious collectivization by the state which resulted in families losing all their draft animals. But still the whole region has been mentioned for its eccentric and showy dances, especially the bachelor’s dance, the frightening climb on the bride’s tree during the wedding ceremony (*menyasszony fára mászás*), and the rite of “bathing the groom.” [9] These were truly fascinating aspects of a rural complex that anthropologists are so keen to observe and record. I was eager to witness them but Hungarian villagers were equally eager to report their slow death since the 1950s onward.

Such was the context of the presence of the past in the present when I first lived in Zsobok. The village is a protestant rural settlement in the county of Salaj, north-eastern Transylvania in Romania. Zsobok is situated 6–7 miles away from the major high-way connecting Cluj and Huedin, and even the train stop is half an hour walk distance away from the center of the village. Surrounded by gently rolling hills that once provided ample grazing for sheep, cows and buffaloes, the settlement has been part of a region known in history and ethnography as Kalotaszeg in Hungarian or Calata in Romania. Roughly this territory stretches along the number one highway connecting Huedin and Cluj with about two dozen settlements on both sides of the road. The population is mixed but there are strictly Hungarian and Romanian hamlets and a few inhabited by the Gypsy-Roma. In its immediate vicinity there are several Hungarian settlements (for the sake of clarity here I use their Romanian names) Bicalat, Saula and two mixed villages with Romanian majority (Stana, Farnas).

In the minds of the residents, Zsobok is somewhat isolated from the neighboring villages and received paved road and telephone only in the early-to-mid 1990s. Zsobok and its vicinity has been elevated into the limelight of Hungarian ethnographic studies since the late nineteenth century by a certain group of elites who found its “archaic folk culture” to represent the very essence of Hungarian cultural history and identity. Such ideologically charged

discovery of the region and its population leave a lot to be desired. Residents are proud to claim that their village has always been a small, single-street hamlet with mostly Hungarian (Magyar) speakers. In their mental map they separate their village into three equal sections: upper-end, lower-end and a side-street named after the Alder-tree (*Alszeg, Felszeg, Egellő*). Throughout its recorded history, its population reached a little more than 600 inhabitants, but by the 1960s, when industrial jobs forced many to leave, this decreased to below 400. From the early twentieth century records it is obvious that a few Jewish and Gypsy residents were always part of the village inter-ethnic make-up. Occasionally one or two Romanian (formerly referred to as *oláh* in Hungarian parlance) families occupied the position of shepherders in the village. According to elders Gypsies were entrusted with herding pigs and Romanians were always employed as shepherds. [10] These few families added to the local flavor but offered minimal possibilities for interethnic mingling. The Jewish families all disappeared during the mayhem between 1941 and 1944, a period that has been referred to variously as the “Hungarian times” by Hungarians and as the “fascist Hungarian terror” by the Romanians. As workers and farm laborers, Gypsy and Romanian families did not stay too long in the settlement; their huts and houses were always placed on the outskirts of the village. Inter-marriage was almost unknown during the twentieth century. [11] However, there is at least one family considered by denizens to be of Romanian origin but residents do take pride in possessing an ethnic “wholeness,” in other words an ethnically “pure” village. In Hungarian the word pure (*tiszta*) refers to cleanliness, wholeness and purity but also means special (as in *tiszta szoba*, a room in the house kept neat at all times to receive visitors). [12]

Agriculture and animal herding were the two most important sources of making a living. But throughout the centuries, large-scale animal herding (mostly sheep, cattle, buffalo, and goat), coupled with that of already rocky hill-sides did result in extreme soil erosion making wheat and vegetable farming less and less viable. Already after the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, amber mining, a cement factory and the railroad took most of the men away leaving agriculture to women. [13] This did not change considerably after Stalinist reorganization; land and animals were collectivized into state cooperatives, a pattern well-known throughout the entire Soviet bloc. With the establishment of farming cooperatives women and the elderly remained in the village as part of the collective’s labor force. Almost the entire male population, however, found jobs in nearby industries: the cement factory of Aghires, the railroad company, and various factories in the regional center, Huedin, a town that saw an astronomical rise in population as the influx of laborers intensified during the

1960s. For men to be a socialist worker was expressed by the word *novétázik* (commuter, from Romanian *navetă*), a reference to their constant commuting way of life. They spent precious hours on trains and buses traveling to and from work, and as a natural consequence they had very little time for family life and to upkeep friendship.

This resulted in even more losses of population as families began to move to Cluj and Zalău. Since only a small elementary school functioned locally, youth were also required to go to school in these cities. Migration, coupled with the traditionally low birth-rate characteristic to Hungarian protestant families in Romania, resulted in a situation that gave an eerie feeling to anyone entering the village on a regular day of the week. The local school was rather still, the two streets of the village completely empty, and the households were kept up entirely by elderly women. At least this is how I remember entering Zsobok the first time in the early 1980s. My impression was not that different in 1992, the year I started to live there. Closed shutters on windows, tall grass and lifeless courtyards signaled that there were many abandoned homesteads.

Once I started to live there I realized that life has a rhythm of its own in Zsobok. At daybreak whistles indicated that animals, mostly sheep, goat, cattle and buffalo, were going to the hills led by either a Gypsy or a Romanian herder. This was followed by women both young and old heading to the fields carrying suitable tools together with small baskets of food and jugs of water. Only on weekends, when families returned from the cities and children from the boarding schools, did the village start to look more like a real living place. Women were baking bread and cakes in the outdoor fireplaces (*kemence* in Hungarian), many feverishly slaughtering chickens. Men tended the house or worked on the machinery while children were playing on the streets. At springtime, after lambs were separated and the flocks of sheep were split into organized pasturing units (*turma*), slaughtering took on an especially cruel choreography as hundreds of lambs were sold and slaughtered. [14] But before Easter and before Christmas men traditionally slaughtered pigs (*disznóvágás*), family celebrations that were extremely jubilant times for the extended kin to gather and visit each other. Name-days were still held and baptisms and confirmations also provided joyous opportunities for relatives to feast.

A more solemn daily cycle was adhered to as people dressed up and went to church on Sundays. Both during the morning and late afternoon services the small and nicely redecorated and recently restored protestant church was filled by the inhabitants. The elderly generally stayed home to take care of the house and to cook, their service was the one during the latter part of the day.

In Zsobok, like in its immediate vicinity in Cluj and Salaj Counties, dance events were connected to rites

of passage and not to tourism. Together with the various work occasions such as grain harvest, grape harvest, sheep-counting and sheep-milking (*juhmerés*), dances were also held at baptisms and weddings. In winter, the three sections of the village organized their own dances on weekends. At winter during the evenings women and girls were gathering to make embroidery, an important economic activity for maidens to complete their dowries. Only at certain nights men were allowed to visit the spinning houses (*fonóház*, or *varróház*). At this time, however, dancing was not the highlight of the events though a “few turns were made” to singing. Mostly jokes and stories made the rounds but games were also fashionable. During carnival time (*farsang*) special masked groups visited each spinning house and danced with the girls and tried to outwit them. There were no specific dances at this time—aside from the highly erotic fox-dance (*rókatánc*)—but everyone danced the fashionable couple’s dance, the *csárdás*, of which a medium tempo and its faster variation (*ugrálás*) was known.

The other dance well-known in the region is the bachelor’s dance, the *legényes* (literally the “bachelor’s”), or *figurás* (the “figure”) as referred by the locals. [15] This dance form is age and gender-specific for young men of the same age group bond together and ritual male friendship help men to keep close to their age cohorts. These friendships made in their early years (*kom*, *komja*, *keresztkoma*, *sógorkoma*) then followed men throughout their adult and elderly years. [16] Those from the same age-group do tend to learn similar dance steps and code of ethics. Formerly, dances and balls were also made by youngsters belonging to the same age-group. Rituals, such as erecting a may-pole and eastern-sprinkling, were always organized by such age groups together. With such a small community as Zsobok, ritual friendships and god-parenthood do criss-cross kinship and descent resulting in large extended family network that often involved 60–80 people. Boys and girls are also made to go through the protestant church age ritual (*konfirmáció*, confirmation) that gives them an even closer sense of belonging to the same generation.

In the village community of former times, children were socialized into the proper code of conduct that includes dancing as well. During holiday seasons, Christmas, Easter and the harvest (both grain as well as grape) time, organized “dancing of the small ones” (*kistánc*) was put up, an event mimicking that of the bachelors’ (*nagy-tánc*) but led and controlled by the village teachers or the parents. Young men belonging to an age-group often learned dances communally from each other. Most communal work occasions ended with a dance in the barn or in someone’s house. At wintertime the women’s spinning houses (*fonóház*, *varróház*) provided the place for socializing to which young men were allowed to visit once their

work was done. Aside from these, special dance-houses, those selected and decorated strictly for that purpose, were the single most important occasion for youth during the entire winter season to hold dances regularly. The activity and organization of these regular weekend dances were entrusted to the three officials: the master (*gazda*), and the two bailiffs (*pandúr*). [17] These were older bachelors, but still unmarried, who were selected for their trustworthiness, honesty and honorable status in the village. Their tasks included the upkeep of the dance-house, the hiring of the musicians for the whole season, and inviting the eligible young men and women. Their office also involved especially the keeping of order during dances and making sure that guests are treated properly. In addition, women were required to provide food and men to bring alcohol.

In the dance-house, the master may order everyone to stand in a circle and ask the young men to start the evening by introducing the bachelor's dance. At other occasions they would start immediately with the popular couples' dances, both the local versions and the more recent arrivals (tango, waltz). The bachelor's dance is a fancy and highly acrobatic form of dancing requiring stamina and a repertoire of steps (figures) that each dancer may combine at will when performing. Before World War II, young men would wear spurs on their boots when performing the bachelor's dance. This made it even more difficult to execute the jumping and the fancy legwork (*lábfacsaró, cifrázás*). Older descriptions often describe it as a group dance where dozens of men stand in a circle each performing his own figures. Young women would ornament the performance by dancing their own "shuffle" (*csoszogós*), a form that was peppered with dance-calls. One by one each man would enter the center of the dance area and show off his skills and excellence in dancing. By so doing this dance has become a competitive dance form and no-one with knowledge of this movement system wanted to be left out. Men attempted to outdo each other and for this reason invented steps that were hard to copy. A description from the early 1940s presents the performance as follows:

The bachelor's dance of Kalotaszeg is a good example of competitive dance. The performer stands alone, and around him, in a tight circle, forms the 'circle of judges,' others who know the dance just as well. The space is limited; thus the dancer's movements are also limited somewhat. In this way the dance is composed of small and delicate, but at the same time, speedy footwork. This is accompanied by the rhythmical finger snapping (Molnár 1947:343).

In order to be competitive, men did not shy away from utilizing steps they learned from an older more experienced dancer and added them to their own repertoire or changed them at will. It was even to their advantage to invent some figures that elevated them in the eyes of the

locals to the level of an eccentric or noted bachelor. There were some figures that were taught to a group of lads that later became known as the "figure of so-and-so." These have often been remembered and passed down from generation to generation as "the steps of Uncle Steve," "the leg-twist of Pál Varga," or even [the figures of Mr.] Kallós," or "Kosztán's." One favored way for men to proceed to the center, or alternately in front of the musicians, was by performing a Charleston-looking step. I heard this strut referred to as "ducking" (*kacsázás*), a symbolic term recalling perhaps the swaying of the duck's body. At the same time, they usually started strange, but fast finger-snapping with both hands, as they say "to pick up the rhythm" (*felveszi a ritmust*). [18]

During dancing onlookers, especially fellow youth, critically judge the performer's upright posture, seriousness, willingness to dance, and even openly and loudly make comments if these do not follow the popular criteria for strength and power associated with masculinity. If one loses the rhythm or cannot keep the fast pace one hears comments such as "he is too young, he is too weak to dance this dance." Other critical words often are framed with descent and cultural legacy in mind. A phrase such as "he does not have his father's legs" (*nem az apja lába*) is a serious judgment about one's ability of not being capable to live up to his ancestor's skills, not following the proper way as he was taught. Older men would comment on the performance of the younger ones sarcastically: "you have to put your feet where they belong," or "you have two feet, use them." This involves the proper execution of figures with both legs successively. It is not enough to introduce a new step or a combination of new figures. The dancer should be able to execute it properly with both legs.

The dance performance itself had to be brief and fast, ending abruptly. In describing this quality the locals would say that the bachelor's dance is best when performed "short and fancy," or "brief and eccentric" (*kurtán és furcsán*). If one performed the dance too long they would make comments believed to be really embarrassing to dancers: "Why is he repeating himself so much, doesn't he know anything else." Or, "he thinks that he is the only one here who knows how to dance, he is too full of himself." The eccentric and showy figures and especially the shockingly abrupt ending of the dance sometimes elicited a few laughs, and mostly some nodding or comments such as "Yes that is how you do it. Right on." [19] Strange as it may sound, but good dancers are rarely, if ever, given praise in public for their excellent performance. In contrast, negative criticism is immediately forthcoming: "He is not well," or "Maybe he is losing it." As I wrote in an earlier note on the performance:

It is considered a great insult to criticize a dancer like this: "He dances more with his hands than with his legs."

This kind of remark generally is aimed at dancers whose hand movements and gestures overpower the rest of their actions: for example, moving the arms too far from the body, slapping and clapping too loudly" (Kürti 1983b:11).

These are mild but noticeable verbalizations of public humiliation of a dancer who did not live up to the expectation of a masculine code of conduct. Performing the bachelor's dance, and possessing the strength and body for it, is always at the nexus of the ritual and identity. As Marc Augé puts it: "Ritual activity combines the two notions of otherness and identity; it aims at stabilizing the ever-problematic relations between people" (1999:57). Naturally, not all men are knowledgeable in dancing the bachelor's dance. Not many achieve fame and recognition in the community for his excellent dancing skills, body carriage and stamina, let alone outside of it. In conversations it is often stressed that men are supposed to behave as expected, or at least must make every effort to live up to that idealized standard of code and manly behavior. Performing the bachelor's dance well is an obvious proof for this. Masculinity has often been juxtaposed with the ability of excessive libido and drinking but not drunkenness. [20] Men and women often told humorous stories about drunken men attempting to perform the bachelor's dance while falling on their face. But the fact that one does not even try to behave according to this code was tantamount to the loss of virility and honor. "Why are you a bachelor, if you do not know how to perform the bachelor's dance," commented a villager when we were discussing the art of dancing. This is why men felt, and many interviewees admitted to this, the need to prove themselves in front of the community even though their art only consisted of a few well-known figures and steps. "If you have will and power," argued one elderly man in his seventies, "you must reveal it." This is why men go to the extremes to improve their skills learning special figures from each other, sometimes even from fellow bachelors from neighboring villages. They are searching for showy steps and many new combinations are improvised in order not to repeat themselves during the dance performance. Thus, both will and power are connected to the notion of fanciness or eccentricity, categories that all accumulate into having the physical and mental state for dancing as well as the qualities of manliness.

What Marcus has written on eccentricity fits well with the perceived knowledge and having the qualities of the bachelor's dance: "Eccentricity is thus constitutive of received myth of power and wealth" (1995:48). Therefore, being a good *figurás*-dancer is obviously connected to the possibility of one's excellence in work, household tasks and leading an honorable family life. What Stuart has written with regard to honor in the Mediterranean context that "what matters is the possession of a well-developed sense of honor" (1994:47) is close to the code surrounding

the bachelor's dance. Honor thus is connected to diverse elements that range from being a trusted friend, a knowledgeable worker with various tasks around the animals, the house and the field. A man once boasted to me that all night he danced during the evening and, without any sleep, and in the morning he went with his friends to work on meadow gathering hay. "Bachelors at night, bachelors at day," has been the favored local slogan for such youthful behavior.

Traditionally, there were many occasions for men to perform the bachelor's dance: in front of the church at weddings immediately after the religious ceremony finished, and during the wedding procession when the best man invited individual families to the wedding. Both occasions were serious: the air was filled with solemnity and a heightened sense of ceremonialism. All eyes were on the dancers as they were made the center of attention for a short while. Knowing this well, all men who dared to perform the dance had to dress properly for the occasions. Since the 1960s, boots and the baggy breeches and the ornamented jackets were slowly giving away to regular dark suits, white shirts and black shoes as the required dress for men. In front of the church only a few men dared to dance, but according to their admissions, they feverishly practiced the days before to polish their art. Families went to great length to hire a local best man for the wedding who was known as the "dancing best man" (*táncos vőfély*) or the "whistler best man" (*füttyös vőfély*), a reference to his masterful ability in dancing and singing. Customarily, the best man together with the brides man and groomsman (*násznagy*) proceeded noisily with the musicians to each house and ceremoniously invited the whole family to the wedding. [21] In front of each house musicians would play the tune requested by the best man who would then perform the bachelor's dance for a brief period. It was a tiring task and only a few could manage successfully.

Opposing the bachelor's dance, there is only one form of traditional dance for couples, a general term for which is the well-known *csárdás*. It is not fantastically exciting to watch as most of it is limited to couples holding each other and turning together in close proximity. There are minor variations within the Kalotaszeg region but all in all most dances for men and women are of medium and fast tempi with a fairly small repertoire of steps and figures. The way Zsobok couples dance in pairs faithfully resembles what Bernard Lortat-Jacobs writes in *Sardinian Chronicles* (1995:10) about age differences in local dance style: "Whereas the older people elegantly strut along with a most perfect economy of movement, the young dancers always enjoy leaping about and especially love the *passu altu*, which enables them to show off their youthful vigor." This is not that different when men lined up in front of the Gypsy musicians ready to engage in the highly acrobatic,

fast bachelor's dance. Young men always danced longer by using vigorous and fancy footwork (a beloved native term to describe this) and older ones performed few sequences perhaps closing their repertoire with a surprising or funny final move.

During the state socialist period—a period that witnessed fundamental societal change, collectivization of agriculture and massive industrialization—ritual events in the Kalotaszeg region slowly transformed rituals of former times into a recreational activity and symbolic gift-giving. Individual dancing was slowly transformed into a privileged art form of a selected few. Only some learned how to execute it properly, and thus it was elevated into the realm of a folkloric remnant of an extinct culture—the terrain of avid ethnomusicologists and national researchers. In this climate, traditional-looking dancing was foisted into the pedagogical curricula of state education. It became a prerogative of children's ensembles to be watched on the stage but not to be performed by the community as a whole. Thus, stage dancing became a state controlled invention through which village youth, no matter where from, had shared in the ideology of being a good citizen of the socialist Romanian state. What is clear here is that the stage art industry became preoccupied with the seemingly endless production of new ideas, performers, and settings. It is simply sufficient to look at such a newly-invented stage performances of folk dances both for home consumption and for the fashionable world-music scene. At present, Romania engages in this construction of national imagery just as much as Hungary does; Bulgaria and countries of the former Yugoslavia are no exceptions either. What is questionable in this transformation is that while the state and multi-national corporations sponsor such megaproductions, on the village level we may witness the complete abandonment of the once famous and characteristic art forms together with the family-centered way of life.

What happened to the bachelor's dance is a sad story that should have been made part of the UNESCO list of "endangered cultural heritage"; similarly it could have been shown on the "Disappearing World" series. The political reconstruction of the family, as Kligman suggests (1998), was truly a fundamental aspect of socialist transformation. However, while this is certainly true for other regimes as well, what was fundamental to Romania was the deterioration of life, both public and private. With the state actively pursuing an unrealistic dream of communist utopia, poverty, misery and social tension were the order of the day in Romania. This was especially so since 1965 when Nicolae Ceausescu came to power. Hungarian families, similarly to the German and Jewish ones, experienced a double burden: not only to fulfill the desired plans of a megalomaniac ruler, but to maintain their minority identity and culture or face extinction. As soon as young men were required

to leave their community a long process of homelessness, value reorientation and breakdown of individual identity had started. Boys were separated from the household since they entered vocational schools at the age of fourteen, living often in boarding-schools in the cities only visiting their families at weekends and holidays.

This, too, happened with young women but much lower rate since most Hungarian girls only entered high-schools at an alarmingly low rate opting instead for work in the local state farms. As a natural consequence, opportunities to automatically learn household tasks, animal husbandry and farming were diminishing prospects for young men. Together with this, knowledge about local traditions, rituals, songs and dances had also decreased considerably. Boys returning from the cities slowly started to switch to the industrial city life, and as their circle of friends increased in the cities and workplaces former local friendships were abandoned. Customs, such as Easter sprinkling, Christmas and New Year dances, were becoming individual hobbies instead of a communal celebration of an age-group. By the late 1970s, the sole form of village entertainment was the omnipotent disco together with that of state-controlled television. During the last two decades of state socialism private dances were illegalized as permits were not readily available reserved only for weddings. However, these too were becoming a source of conflict between the Romanian state and the Hungarian minority and thus weddings had to be held at the communal cultural center.

Not having will, time and occasions for learning the art of dancing also resulted in the loss of corporeal qualities once associated with the bachelor's dance. Dancing had become such a minor and meaningless activity that the village's name was never mentioned in the region as a "dancing-village." [22] Not having a sizable group, young men could not really perform their coming-of-age ritual in front of their parents, women and their coevals. The bachelor's dance slowly lost its meaning and significance. One man explains the reason for this: "We did not have the willpower to dance anymore." And another remarks: "We were too much involved with making a living, we were too tired, and nobody was home to organize dances." More and more, young men were viewed by the village society as losing complete control over their bodies. They have not been associated anymore with the youthful bravado and masculine stamina needed for the bachelor's dance. Even the dance music itself, played by famous Gypsy bands from nearby settlements, had been forgotten. One of the last persons who knew the bachelor's dance was István Gál Máté (1898–1992), who was also the last mayor in the village before Stalinism was established. At age 90 he was only a shadow of his former self, but still got up and performed several figures to show the steps of the real

bachelor's dance. During the early to the mid-1990s, when I was living in the settlement, seventy- and eighty-year-old men could reminisce about dancing the bachelor's dance after they returned from the war and the Soviet Gulags. This is how one of them remembered:

It was in 1948 when the last great Christmas dance was held. Five of us got up to perform the bachelor's dance. We had the musicians from Váralmás [a small town about 20 miles away] who played the music. First all five of us walked around snapping our fingers and clapping our hands, and slowly one by one we all performed our figures. That was the last dance that me and my buddies performed together since then I have not taught anyone from the younger generation a single figure. No one asked me to teach them. [23]

What is obvious from this is that controlling the body, and its various techniques, is paramount to the education of citizens deemed useful and acceptable by the state. Dances and dance events, thus, always have strange, often contradictory relationships with regimes and state. Monolithic and dictatorial regimes are constantly on alert to controlling expressive culture especially if that culture belongs to a minority group. This is what happened throughout the first half of the twentieth century in Romania. Márta Belényesy produced a marvelous small monograph describing how the Romanian state curbed dancing activities of the Hungarian minority in Romania: "During the 1920s, throughout Transylvania Romanian policy banned the Hungarian csárdás. In Bukovina the system was more open but forced the population to dance the traditional Romanian hora and the sarba." (Belényesy 1958:51). Obviously, there are some dances which regimes always prefer and dancing activities that are essential to their legitimation. [24] At least this is what the Stalinist state, and the fascist one before it, attempted to do when various ministries were deciding on the ideological contents and forms of artistic activities. Cultural events were politically charged, similarly to nationalistic rallies and festivities. Folk festivals and cultural gatherings were filled with official rhetoric and symbolism extolling the virtues of the state and its leaders. The Soviet model was fairly simple, and followed throughout the entire Soviet bloc: refashion local and regional dances into an acceptable dance form that does not have the feeling and symbolism of the national. Thus, regional forms of dances with specific character, were either elevated into the expected national dance style or, alternately, deemed unfit for public consumption. In most Eastern European states and the Soviet Union such directives led to enormous transformations in dances, both on the stage and in the local settings where dance was an important element of the expressive culture (cf. Doi 2002). Village dance forms were reconceptualized as broken or simplistic fragments of high-culture

ballet. For this reason Soviet propagandistic ballet was seen as the prime revolutionary body language to refashion the individuality and collective ethnicity anchored to distant folkloric performances. New songs, themes, costumes and dramatization went hand in hand with the ruling ideology to mobilize the masses to support the revolution (Souritz 1990:320–321).

Such an ideologically charged milieu did achieve its purpose: throughout the entire Soviet bloc dance became a political force of the acceptable stage art while local dancing in communities was devalued as primitive, often as old fashioned recreation of a class unfit to build communism. Thus, the creation of a new official culture was in order in which peasants were required to follow cultural policies made for industrial workers and working-class urbanites. All this was made in the name of socialist progress and modernization where village dances and dancing events slowly became the preserves of folk dance ensembles. But village groups, imitating the state and a few official amateur ensembles, started to look like carbon copies of each other with authenticity and local flavors were becoming more and more oxymoronic.

In Eastern Europe, the backward and wretched states of Europe to utilize two well-known phrases (Kürti 1997), the prevalence of the peasantry has received numerous analyses by historians and ethnographers. The rise of the national states all privileged that social class without regard to their exploited and often misconceived place in the agrarian economies. In Hungary and Romania, for instance, the making of the national movements during the twentieth century show great differences the way in which economic backwardness and social cleavage influenced the rise of the new nation-states. [25] Regardless of their differences, the two states were remarkably similar in one aspect: the objectification of the peasant, their bodies and culture. Peasant bodies became objects of official displays during folkloric festivals where villagers of various regions were made to perform dances and sing songs in their best Sunday's costumes. Such obvious places of official pageantries, immersed as they were in socialist realist ideology, simply did not allow dances reflecting on the life-ways of a by-gone era. But this did not entail the actual representation of life in the rural areas especially not the regime's attempt to forcefully eradicate peasant life-ways. On the contrary, socialist realism did not reveal events and behavior as it really was, but, on the contrary, how it was supposed to be. Anagnost describes this drive with reference to Chinese socialism rather nicely:

As a cultural code, socialist realism transcends its usual characterization as a mere protocol for art and literature and itself becomes a part of lived reality. The representation of society as it is desired to be, rather than as it really is, becomes a means to magically affect one's

sense of reality. It invites one to participate in the play of appearances, which for the moment becomes the reality (1994:147). -

Rural workers rarely, if ever, put up such shows locally; their own festivities were not staged for intellectuals and tourists but included celebrations of harvests, religious holidays or rites of passage of various kinds (birth, baptism, wedding, funeral). As soon as, however, their elevation into the limelight of national culture was achieved, these events became part of the official culture as colorful spectacles representing wishful realities. In Romania, such an elevation took an extreme form. It was called the "Cinterea Romaniei" (Song to Romania), a nation-wide festivals and folklore competitions. These pompous local, regional and national festivities ranked villages ethnographically into acceptable and proper clusters. Groups, performers, singers and musicians were judged by experts, from various institutions in Bucharest, as to their level of authenticity, artistic merit and socially redeeming features. Schools, industrial firms, and agricultural cooperatives were urged to participate in these events to achieve fame and recognition. Most did and a few were recognized. In Hungarian communities in the Kalotaszeg region, teachers were forced to create performing groups and to enter local and regional festivals and dance contests. Suddenly, old costumes were polished or fabricated anew and if there was none, they were invented. Similarly, dances and agricultural rituals were choreographed to reveal artistic flavor and characteristics. At times, teachers went to great lengths to stage something "exciting" and "new." As one local teacher told me, "we could not afford to go to the festival every year with the same program." Thus, new forms were invented or copied from elsewhere. Teachers also watched, however, that their programs did not replicate similar staged performances that were popular between 1933 and 1944, a folkloristic pageantry created under a different ideological banner by the Hungarian state into which most Transylvanian Hungarians were also made to participate. [26]

As far as the socialist state, and in fact as far as the pro-democratic countries of Eastern and Central Europe, are concerned the human body is a proper image of the world (Barkan 1975), but not quite just that: it is a proper image of the state as it is perceived. Since the state is a nation state and since, at least the early 1980s, nationality has created the idea about the reunification of the Hungarian nation, Transylvanian dance and folklore enjoy an immense popularity in Hungary. Hungarian state and national celebrations profusely mix Transylvanian peasant regional dress, music and dance as organically part of Hungarian cultural imagery. Producing a valid and acceptable national imagery is not a joke: regimes spend enormous sums to offer a sanitized and colorful folklore for

both home and international consumption (Kürti 2001). In this nationalist imagery Transylvanian Hungarians and their cultural products fit neatly as the state is bent on producing a valid and acceptable Hungarianness. Transylvanian dance, and through it Hungarian Transylvanian cultural history, is at the heart of this political mythmaking and ideological kinetics of contemporary nation-state ideology. This is by no means unique to Hungary alone as similar mechanisms of elevating past greatness are well-known in modern day politics elsewhere as well (Herzfeld 1987; Nurth 1987).

After 1989, both Romania and Hungary enjoyed a small but intense period of international fame. The former has been hailed for its brief civil war during Christmas of 1989, the latter for its peaceful, or to use the famous expression "velvet," revolution. Both processes have been studied and analyzed in detail and I do not want to consider them here. It will suffice to mention, however briefly, that in both countries the 1990s witnessed similar socio-economic processes; single-party rule gave way to multi-party representative governments, as private property has become the rule rather than an exception, and the states started to limit their presence in all aspects in civic, religious, and cultural life. Obviously there are differences between the way in which Hungary and Romania conduct their economic, financial and international businesses. But even in inter-ethnic relations the two states are rather similar: in Romania it is the Hungarian minority, in Hungary the Gypsy-Roma population which seem to be a source of headache for the regimes.

Romania has enjoyed enormous international reputation in rekindling its Dracula cult by making it into a touristic theme (Kürti 2000a), but for the Hungarians living in Romania tourism has been of a different vintage. Most of the travels back and forth between Hungary and Romania have been part of either visiting the relatives or as an ever growing mass of cultural tourism. This latter included a fair share of adventure seekers ready to experience the wilderness of the Harghita Mountains learned from school textbooks mainly through the novels of József Nyíró and Áron Tamási, and the various Transylvanian regions with Hungarian native populations there. Included in this was also the curiosity to witness the rapid transformation following the disappearance of the hated Ceausescu-clan and its nepotistic version of state communism. Changes were plenty. Aside from the usual touristic venues, Hungarians now started to flock in increasing numbers to those settlements where visible transformations fundamentally altered daily life. These have often made the headlines in Hungary's newspapers and television news.

Since the early-1990s, the transformations in the small settlement of Zsobok has managed to make headlines in both regional as well as in national, at times even interna-

tional, media. This rise to stardom was facilitated by the eager spirit and energetic tempo dictated by the village's new leaders—a husband and wife team, both protestant ministers—to create a model religious settlement. In the spirit of revival the couple decided to completely renovate the small church and the parish house, a feat that mobilized local craftsmen and villagers. The new church was completed in 1992, and on October 15 it started services. It was a communal work and nobody received any money for it. Since then the beautifully carved ceiling (*kazettás menyezet*) has been the center of attention: both tourists from Hungary and those from the west are offered a tour even though the church itself is not of great age since it was completely rebuilt after the 1876 and 1908 fires. The next construction project was to build a paved road with hired hands. With their connections in Germany and Switzerland, help was on its way: machinery and technological know-how came to aid locals in this new Herculean task. Nearby village communities viewed all this with disbelief. Their feeling, however, soon turned to jealousy as in the spring of 1994 the village received a paved road. [27] Expenses were met in a curious way: Zsobok women were required to pay with their embroideries. Those who could not were asked to pay in cash. [28] The next project was the formation of a local cooperative. Following the Romanian land reform law of 1991, [29] the villagers in Zsobok were able to take back their collectivized land. In a few days time the entire collective farm was dismantled and all the animals were divided according to the original number of animals that were collectivized in the early 1960s. The original enthusiasm, however, soon turned sour as villagers realized that they were completely left on their own unaided by the Romanian state. The solution offered itself: to organize and create a mutual assistance cooperative. Machinery, fertilizer and seed were given by the protestant brethren in the West. In return, women did more embroidery. At first it seemed like a wonderful dream come true: the cooperative produced well and individuals started to feel the benefit of organized farming. Soon, however, serious conflicts emerged as some families objected to the strict use of machinery and the uneven allocation of cultivated land monitored by the church leadership. The local engineer, who dared to object, was dismissed and a relative of the leadership was called in to replace him.

Not letting go of the momentum, the leadership invented a new plan: to build an orphanage and boarding school, called Bethesda, on the property immediately next to the church. Again the bulk of the work, from stonemasonry to woodworking, was performed by locals, young and old, men and women. But the strenuous work tempo achieved its aim: by the fall of 1994, the Bethesda home and protestant-school had begun receiving children and started teaching. In 1996, the Bethesda orphanage, school

and kindergarten were working in full swing. From this time, that name slowly became synonymous with Zsobok and outsiders often used them interchangeably. In order to provide the children with daily bread the next large-scale project was the completion of the flour-mill. This was an understandable choice. Bread had been brought to the village from elsewhere and was a constant source of tension between locals and the bakery because of the low quality of bread produced. The Transylvanian Protestant Church also agreed to the building of an old-age home in the nearby visit of Sfăras, a project that was also entrusted to the Bethesda community. With all this economic rejuvenation life seemed to return to a place doomed to become a deserted no-man's land. The settlement was a village where the kindergarten was closed in 1990 due to the lack of children and in the grade-school only four grades could be taught. By 1995, the school yard was noisy with children and teachers had to be hired to meet the increasing demand.

With all these changes protestant ideology has entered into all spheres of educational, political and cultural life. Now, boys and girls are encouraged to dress in native dress during confirmation ritual, an attempt to revitalize local fashion to be used at some key moments in life when such clothing has obviously become part of museum collections. Youth are now encouraged to attend regular church services and lead a modest life as prescribed by the church leadership. As the result, church attendance has been on the rise, an increase due also to the presence of the school children at the orphanage. In addition, the revitalized village started to become a center of religious life (and politics) of the Transylvanian protestant church. Protestant women and youth conferences have been regularly organized events there.

But local leadership was not only controlling political and economic life. In the 1998 issue of the Transylvanian Protestant Calendar (*Erdélyi Református Naptár*) a one-page of text appeared with the title "Order is the soul of all things: Some important information of the ways of protestant communities." The "order" reads like a code of morals and is structured in nine paragraphs offering a thesis-like summary what proper Protestants must and must not do. [30] Among the most important ones are the sanctity of Sunday and Sunday worship; during Lent all revelry is forbidden including weddings, baptisms, and christenings; individuals who committed suicide will not be buried by the church; those living an improper life must follow the code of penitence as specified; godparents must swear that they will educate their godchildren properly; and other restrictions concerning religiousness. However, what is rather striking is the fact that this code specifies that former folk customs had to be abandoned. These included: playing card games and drinking alcohol during wakes, organizing a dinner-dance during a baptismal feast,

and having a wedding lasting two days. Moreover the code specifies that:

At weddings people should not take part in the procession with wine bottles in their hands, singing to the Gypsy music, and executing dance-calls. What should be avoided at any cost is dancing after the church ceremony in front of the church while waiting for the bride. [31]

This code, however, was not only a printed message as the two preachers constantly referred to it during their sermons. As has been customary in their sermons, both the husband and wife took great pleasures in convincing locals about the virtues of religious upbringing, regular church attendance, and the faithful following the New Testament. Their Sunday services have been exceptionally long lasting an hour-and-a-half or even two hours long services were not unknown. This was voiced to me by several informants as they complained about such a prolonged church service.

Yet the leadership did not stop there. In 1994, a young couple had decided to open a small private store and a tavern in the village since the availability of groceries and alcohol was fairly limited. [32] Initially, the store itself was not a source of conflict but soon the sermons were directed towards the proprietors as the place turned into a local disco for village youth. At this time the targets were both the owners and the youngsters themselves—of course implied were the parents as well—who all participated collectively in “sinful” and “aimless” activity. The conflict reached its apex when the proprietor received a letter from the priest to close his store down. Since that did not happen, relationship between the establishment and the family simply stopped. According to one family member this is a disgrace and the whole village is shamed by having such a priest who is constantly trying to control local economic processes. In his words, “we are burning with shame” because of this extreme religious control. [33]

Another, even more serious conflict, arose from the fact that the religious leaders were fairly obvious about controlling production and the economic resources in the village. Following the disbanding of the local state farm, land and animals were returned to their rightful owners. As it was customary, villagers originally established a separate sheep collective for the three sections but engaged in family farming on their land. Soon, however, problems arose. With the lack of shepherds, as well as enough households to keep separate sheep collectives (*turma*) villagers opted for having only a single large collective for grazing and milking sheep. With a general well-being on the increase, cows became more widespread and acceptable by most people, and sheep and goat were less prestigious animals to keep. This was not new, earlier wealthier families also opted for buffaloes and cows, but now the change to the larger animals was widespread. [34] In addition, with the supervision of the local priests one large sheep-collective

was also formed and a farming collective membership encouraged. Most villagers opted for membership in the farming cooperative for two reasons only: first, machinery, seeds and fertilizers were owned by the cooperative, and second, it became obvious soon that family farming was not a viable alternative anymore. All this despite the fact that most people in the entire region abhorred the idea of being in cooperative farming again.

In many ways the new construction plans brought salvation to the villagers they otherwise could not even imagine. A small village was saved from becoming, if not extinct altogether, certainly much smaller, marginal and poverty-ridden. The religious leaders, who were invited by the community, together with their local supporters, embarked on a plan which made Zsobok an ideal community. This was also a community with ideals. But they brought not only positive steps but consequently wrought havoc as well. For the leaders recognition was not far away. This came, however, not from the Romanian but the neighboring Hungarian state. In late 1998, the husband and wife team received the newly created Prize for Minorities from the prime-minister of Hungary. [35] Ironically, when villagers today only reminisce about their old time dancing and naughty wedding-celebrations, the school-dance group—taught by teachers invited from the outside—is involved with learning steps and songs that once were characteristic of their region often taught by teachers from Hungary.

Perhaps one explanation for this fundamentalism in ideals and actions must come from the repoliticized nature of Hungarian religion and social life with which Romania deals with since the early 1990s. [36] With the elevation of László Tőkés, the pastor inciting a popular protest in Romania in 1989, into the national and in fact international limelight, all Hungarian minority politics has received a religious edge. At the same time, all matters deemed religious before have an enormous political overtone. The fusing of the religious and the political makes sense once we see how the new national identity-making have coalesced in Hungary and Romania allowing religious leaders to take an active part in political life. [37] Another explanation could stress the fact that religious fundamentalism has become an accepted force and since 1989 it has been allowed to surface. With this in mind, it is easier to see why a young protestant couple would make Protestantism not only part of villagers’ religious belief but the very cornerstone of the totality of their existence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I must argue that in the community described above there were two processes at work which contributed to the decline of dancing and dance activities in the past fifty years of the twentieth century. The first was a slow intricate development that took minority and

majority groups by surprise: the making of the socialist nation-state of Romania. Following World War II, Romania experienced a shift from a monarchic pseudo-feudalism to a Soviet-led domination of hard-core Stalinism. In this transformation rural areas were extremely hard hit. As the country was bent on industrializing, following the single-party rule in establishing communism, agriculture experienced a downturn in production and technological evolution. This was not that different from that of other Eastern European states experiencing a massive flight of men into industries and contemporaneous with that process was the feminization of poverty and agriculture. In Zsobok, similar to other small hamlets in Transylvania, depopulation, lack of investment funds, and mismanaged agricultural policies were the causes of enormous economic backwardness. This urban-rural divide added more hardships to the already mounting minority Hungarian and majority Romanian friction. In this socio-economic pressure-cooker, villagers were slowly abandoning ancestral life-ways that connected them to agricultural cycles and rites of passage. At first, with modernization and technological development, dancing as an activity took on a more up-to-date look in its form and content. Village musicians, mostly Gypsies, started to play "modern" instruments: the accordion, drum, saxophone, guitar, and electric organ. By the 1980s, electrified musical instruments, microphones and amplification yielded a sound that was more like distorted popular rock music. Balls and dances originally organized for age-group gatherings were fading out only to be replaced by discos with such a modern sound.

By the late 1980s, there were no more Gypsy musicians invited to play at weddings from nearby settlements as custom would have it. With such a distorted modernization, young men—many of whom became mechanics, truck drivers, and factory workers in distant cities only visiting their homes on weekends—did not favor, let alone learn dances deemed old-fashioned in their eyes. Consequently, older men would not dare perform solo in public anymore feeling ridiculed by the younger generations. By the 1980s, there were no more "bachelors" left who could perform the once-so-famous bachelor's dance.

The other process I have analyzed has been equally questionable to say the least. Following the collapse of the much-hated Ceausescu regime in Romania, ethnonational politics has suddenly reinvigorated Hungarian minority identity. In economic, religious and cultural matters Transylvanian Hungarians found themselves engulfed in a new political milieu. With the emergence of new concerns, reinstatement of former religious schools, reprivatization of collectivized land, and formation of a new ethnonational political party, Hungarianness received a hitherto unknown political edge. From 1990, all settlements with Hungarian population

formed a local cell of the leading national party, the RMDSZ (UDMR in Romanian). Politics now has fused interchangeably with economic development and national cultural matters. New leaders came to the fore and Hungarian settlements have begun to create an oppositional national culture against the Romanian state. This re-making of nationality on the local level has witnessed enormous strides in the small village introduced here. The religious leaders transformed the marginal and backward hamlet into a dream come true: a paved road, telephone service, a flour mill, a religious school, an orphanage, and a privately-owned but collectively organized farming cooperative. However, there was a price to be paid for all this. The new protestant spirit pervaded not only the economic and religious spheres but manifested itself in the cultural and educational ones as well. A definite call was made to abandon all practices deemed unfit for a pious and modest protestant community. This effort did not fall on deaf ears as denizens followed their leaders' advice and in the process they were forced to give up some traditions. In no time, collective dancing in the church-yard and amusing dance-calls during the wedding procession had ceased to exist. What all this really seems to support is that peasants, whatever this term really entails (Shanin 1990), are a real enigma to the state and the elites, [38] especially, if these are also peasants who speak a different language, belong to a church other than the state's own, and identify with a national community across the border.

Malcolm Crick states that: "Human action is a semantic fabric, so any social investigation must be a conceptual inquiry" (1976:96). Similarly, anthropologists have long believed "that dance can be an important tool in the analysis of society. If that is so, it is not peripheral, but central to the study of society and the education of its citizens" (Brinson 1985:213). The continual validity of these statements should certainly be demonstrated by scholars in various disciplines. Moreover, and this is what I want to stress here, adequate attention should also be given to the way in which the state performs this task according to overt or muted ideological aims. Thus, state, society and citizens are engaged in interlocking negotiations and constructions that may or may not support harmony or progress. This is what the Transylvanian case amply illustrates here. One of the most important aspects of modern European states is how to inculcate political messages in citizens in order to make them faithful subjects of both the state and the nation and, at the same time, how they live up to the expected level of "European-ness." Songs, dance, rituals, and clothing are all part of the official trappings through which national celebrations and folkloric events achieve their aims to both subjugate and coerce citizens giving them the feeling that they participate in events that offer plenty of possibilities for joy, fun and recreation. In this process, as the story of the bachelor's dance demonstrates, some local traditions face their own death. In

the fall of 2003, all new states entering the European Union were keen in pushing for an extension of the EU Constitution to include Christianity as well as minority rights and culture. Politicians and church leaders, party officials and minority advocates from Romania and Hungary were involved with presenting an “objective” and “sound” claim for the pros and cons. Obviously, the case presented here offers a partial explanation why these neighborly democratic nation-states in the heart of Europe do not quite agree on aspects of religion, education and minority culture.

ENDNOTES

1 Sally Ann Ness has written that “Dance is, for some powerful reasons, the most shallowly interpreted art form in the contemporary United States” (1992:2). I am well aware of the fact that dance scholarship has experienced an invaluable boost in its theoretical orientation in recent years (cf. for example, Farnell 2003; Morris 1998; Washabaugh 1998). Here, however, I cannot really enter into detailed discussion as to where it is heading to, especially in light of the post-modern turn. It could be a novel departure, however, to reveal some of the similarities and key differences between the US and European anthropological understandings of dance.

2 I find it interesting that within the new departures in body and movement studies (Farnell 1999, 2003), the political questions in general, and Bloch in particular do not figure at all.

3 There have been a plethora of recent attempts to describe the body—its use, symbolism and politicization—in various historical and cultural settings, see for example, Butchart (1998); Costlow, Sandler, and Vowles (1993); Featherstone, Hepworth, and Turner (1991); Feher (1989); Ryan and Gordon (1994); Zito and Barlow (1994). However, there are few studies analyzing the body with regard to dance and movement.

4 Here I do not wish to review dance research as has been produced in Hungary in the past decades. I have done that elsewhere (Kürti 2002, 1999) and here I refer to only a few English-language analyses that may aid the reader.

5 Dance and wedding calls are shouted verses, mostly in paired couplets, that end with a high-pitched, rhythmic nonsense syllables shriek. Most calls have banal messages, but could be changed to their shocking opposite. Denizens of the village call this latter category “dirty-ones.” Some may also have magical messages having to do with preserving health, prosperity and fecundity. For texts and analysis of both kinds, see Kürti (2003).

6 Traditional dance events go hand in hand with traditional dance descriptions offered by indigenous scholars and in contrast their adversaries, the other indigenous scholars,

the Romanian researchers (Kürti 1999, 2002). In order to progress with caution I am not eager to describe the specifics of Hungarian dancing and how they “belong” to the functionalist categories of Hungarian “dance culture,” for I have done that elsewhere in more detail and more critically (Kürti 1983a, 1983b, 1987, 1994, 1996).

7 Among the forty or so villages in the region only two adhere to the Roman Catholic faith the rest being all protestant. Protestantism in the Hungarian speaking areas is a special form known as the Reformed Church, a mixture of Calvinism and Lutheranism. For the region see Kürti (2000b).

8 This gift-basket—“the branch of creation” as it is referred to literally by locals—is a large branch completely surrounded by sweets. Cakes and small cookies are hung on the branches in addition to ribbons and scarves. Even in the 1950s, these baskets were carried by women on their heads on their way to the site of a wedding celebration. Since the early 1960s, the baskets grew enormously in size making it impossible for one person to balance it on the top of one’s head. For a description of the wedding and its many-fold variations within the Kalotaszeg region see Vasas and Salamon (1986).

9 In most villages of the region both rituals have been known. In Zsobok, only the tree-climb ritual—during which colorful scarves must be brought down by a bachelor from the groom’s party in order to continue with the bride’s farewell—survived. Elders, however, still recall these as highlights of wedding rites during their youth.

10 This labor segmentation based on ethnicity started with the onslaught of industrialization when men left the village and migrant herders took their jobs mostly tending animals. But already in the early 20th century popular memory mentions only the presence of Romanian shepherds. In nearby villages, however, sheepherding was a regular profession for Hungarian families. I have summarized classic Hungarian ethnohistorical studies on sheepherding in this region see Kürti (1987). For a recent survey see Szabó (2002).

11 Church records are conspicuously silent about intermarriages. Locals only mention one, possibly two marriages between Hungarians and Romanians. Obviously, there were youngsters who married outside their ethnicity but most of these marriage rituals did not take place in the village.

12 A medical doctor living in the village during the early 1940s remarked about the contradictory conditions characteristic of poor families with an inclination toward extravagant lifestyle. She was, for example, appalled by the sight of dirt and the unkept rooms and, at the same time, the plenty of beautiful embroidery and colorful pottery on the walls (G. Czimmer 1944:10–11).

13 Already during the late 19th century, a chalk-pit (gypsum, or calcium sulphate) was opened in the vicinity

and also a mine for the low-quality amber that was found. Although both were mined during the first decades of the twentieth century giving jobs for a few dozen men neither, however, became viable industries.

14 Working rituals connected to sheepherding in this region of Transylvania are described in Kürti (1987) and Szabó (2002). For comparative studies on sheepherding elsewhere in Europe see Campbell (1979), Kavanagh (1994), and Schweizer (1988).

15 I have described the bachelor's dance, its structure and local characteristics earlier (Kürti 1983b).

16 Godparenthood and ritual brotherhood is a complex and intricate network that fundamentally effects kinship and social organization in Europe. A detailed discussion of this would require a separate treatment on its own but for an insightful English-language analysis of a similar, but not identical system among Hungarians in Transylvania, see Vincze (1977).

17 These native terms are obviously heavily loaded words that may mean different things in different contexts. The *gazda* for instance, may refer to a master, head of the household, landlord, proprietor, owner, and so on.

18 According to some historians (Burt 1998:68), the Charleston-type of move first appeared in Europe in 1925 originally introduced by the famous African-American dancer, Josephine Baker, during her first performances in Paris. In light of the fact that Katherine Dunham also found this step in folk dances in Haiti (Burt 1998:70), one should view such introduction-theory with caution.

19 Special and ornate closing figures of bachelor's dances are remembered for generations. A few have been passed down to sons and grandsons as well. Such funny closing figures include shoving one hand between the legs from behind, simulating a penis; salutation like in the military; or performing difficult moves such as jumping up high and then immediately kneeling to the ground.

20 Connected to this as well is the belief that young men show their best masculine characteristic when they have plenty of sexual experiences with women. The fairly open relationships in the small village community, however, prove it beyond the shadow of doubt that most of the youthful talk about having many lovers is part of men's folkloric wishful thinking.

21 There are some early descriptions of traditional village weddings from this region, see Gyarmathy (1896), and Jankó (1993).

22 This label has a curious history. It first refers to the native knowledge that prestigious and excellent dancers are known to live in the village. Secondly, a "dancing-village" label was attached to those Transylvanian communities who in the late 1930s and early 1940s entered into the national competition and participated in the Pearly Bouquet movement.

23 Interview with Sándor Bódizs 1992, 1994, 1998. -

24 See the discussion on historical ballet and choreographic works by Mark Franko (1993:4). -

25 The comparison of the two neighbouring states is not without its benefits as I have tried to show in my book (Kürti 2001a). For another, though rather different, attempt see Barkey (2000).

26 This was the Pearly Bouquet folkloristic movement that I have discussed elsewhere in more detail (Kürti 2001a, 2002).

27 The organic connection between religious fundamentalism and the construction projects may be seen in the small English-language brochure published locally: "The visitor who arrives to the village on the newly built road, before he can be amazed at what people have built, first meets the stone on which is written: "Soli Deo Gloria" and also the words of the Scripture: "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:6).

28 In this context it should be mentioned that the region of Kalotaszeg has been known for its ornateness in embroideries and woodcarving. The local saying illustrates this well but it does also reflect gender division of labor as well: "Men do woodcarving, women embroidery." At present, the famous Zsobok embroidery is not the colorful needlework so well known in Kalotaszeg but the completely white fine needlework.

29 Decollectivization has received a fairly large share in the anthropological attention of post-communist Eastern Europe. For recent analyses on the Transylvanian situation see Cartwright (2000a, 2000b).

30 I am in no way representing this case as a judgment of all protestant communities or how ministers attempt to control and regulate traditional practices. It is also far from me to argue that all protestant leaders behave in such a strict manner. I have known others who have themselves enjoyed village traditions as they were and never attempted to influence the way in which locals organized their rituals and dances.

31 The Code of Morals was printed by the editors of the Transylvanian Protestant Calendar (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, 1998, 28). The Calendar is published yearly by the Transylvanian Protestant Bishopry, with the assistance of the Protestant College of Theology in Kolozsvár.

32 This is not to say that there is no home-made alcohol available. There is and plenty of it. However, household consumption is one thing, and visiting the local tavern and disco is quite another because for young people, meeting and carousing had largely stopped once they finished school.

33 The word "burning" here is also a reference to sad previous events in the community's history: the village

was burned completely to the ground in 1876, 1908, and 1911 due to carelessness as well as the straw used for roofs. Since then there is the saying in the village: "burned like Zsobok three times in its history."

34 Interestingly, Kavanagh (1994:127) also describes this shift in central Spain among cattle and goat herders following the country's admittance into the European Community.

35 The ceremony, with a picture of the leaders and the prime-minister, did make the headlines in Hungary's dailies, see, *Népszabadság*, 1998, December 19, p. 5. It should be added here that Viktor Orbán, prime-minister of Hungary between 1998 and 2002, is also a devout protestant.

36 For the connection between religion and the emergence of new nation-states see the chapters in Wolf (1991).

37 For those interested in the political role of the protestant leaders in Hungarian national politics I recommend Pungur (1994, 1999).

38 Monique Nuijten (2003:196), in the Mexican context writes similarly: "peasants have a complicated and contradictory relation with the Mexican state."

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