

DANCING YOURSELF, DANCING FOR OTHERS: PERFORMING IDENTITY IN A TRANSYLVANIAN-ROMANIAN FOLKDANCE ENSEMBLE

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My interest in *Romanian*-Transylvanian ensembles started, ironically, when I began learning *Hungarian*-Transylvanian dances in high school and college. My mother has been an avid international folk dancer [1] since before I was born, and I was always interested in the hobby. When my mother and stepfather became fascinated by Transylvanian couple dancing in the early 1990s, I started to learn these dances too. We attended monthly practice sessions and special workshops, to learn couple dances which were categorized under the name "Hungarian dancing." The regular dance events were organized by Americans who were not of Hungarian extraction and who attended because they loved the dances and music, while special workshops were usually taught by Hungarians from Budapest. [2] I eventually realized that some of these dances were from Romanian and Romany communities and that much of what American groups referred to as "Hungarian" meant dances from Transylvania. I began to wonder why a dance-event in the United States, involving dances from several ethnic groups within the borders of Romania, would be called "Hungarian dancing."

Since I was studying East European history and politics at the time, I questioned whether my dance experiences were being colored by a Hungarian nationalist point of view. I noticed that some American dancers in the community were concerned about the situation of Hungarians in Transylvania, based on what they had been told by the Hungarian dance teachers, but I rarely heard about Romanian folkways or points of view. My early questions were: Why were Hungarians from Budapest, the capital of Hungary, teaching dances from Transylvania, a region in Romania? What were other Transylvanian-Romanian and Transylvanian-Romany dances like? How were they similar to or different from Transylvanian-Hungarian dances from the same region or village? How did the two populations interact in these villages, particularly in regards to dancing?

I learned answers to the first question through several visits to Eastern Europe, where I learned about a development in Hungary called the *táncház* (dance-house) movement. In Budapest and other Hungarian cities, I discovered recreational dance events where young, urban Hungarians gathered weekly to learn village dances from various regions of Transylvania. [3] These groups were similar to the recreational folk dance clubs I had grown

up with in the United States, so I was not surprised to discover Balkan and Greek dance nights also held in Budapest. I was thrilled at the sight of so many young people doing folk dancing, since this was a rarity in the United States.

It became clear that the *táncház* movement was the source for the material I learned in "Hungarian dancing" clubs in the United States. In the United States, the *táncház* movement fed into Americans' interest in European "peasant" folk dances, although Americans were not always aware that the dances they learned from "real" Hungarians had already been filtered through the recreational dance community in Hungary.

I began to ask myself why the Romanians did not have their own urban, recreational dance movement. I had visited one rehearsal of the ensemble *Someșul-Napoca* in 1995 and was amazed by how energetic and young the dancers were, but it seemed that their participation as dancers was limited to rehearsals and performances. After some consideration, I realized that I had encountered similar situations in most of the other East European countries which I had visited. This appeared to have been the socialist model of folklore performance. I came to the conclusion that the recreational character of the *táncház* movement in Hungary was the exception rather than the rule in Eastern Europe. Perhaps, I was asking the wrong questions.

I started to ask myself why young people became involved in folk dance ensembles, particularly after the end of socialism opened the country to diverse international influences. How is the end of socialist rule affecting how Transylvanian-Romanian folk dance ensembles present themselves? How does being in a performing group affect how ethnic Romanians view their own folklore and how does this affect their sense of identity as Romanians? Is the survival of some of these ensembles likely to become a tool of the growing nationalist tendencies in Romania? Does performing local folklore necessarily mean expressing feelings of anti-minority nationalism?

Folklore and Ethnic Identity in Transylvania

In Transylvania, folk music and dance are often imbued with political meanings because they are used to delimit the cultural boundaries of the Romanian or Hungarian nations. Since the 19th century, folkloric research in

Transylvania has been used by Hungarian and Romanian nationalists to assert their conflicting claims to Transylvania itself. Since Hungary lost Transylvania to Romania in 1919, some Hungarian folklorists have expressed their sense of loss by describing the region as the heartland of pure, uncorrupted Hungarian folklore. [4] Romanian nationalists, on the other hand, have recognized that theirs is a shorter history of elite art and literature, architecture, and political rule, thus they often look to Romanian village and rural tradition for pride and legitimacy.

Under socialism, folklore research and performance was institutionalized across Romania in "Houses of Culture, State Ensembles and obligatory competitive festivals which functioned essentially as vehicles for Party propaganda and social coercion under the banners and slogans of 'worker' emancipation and national pride" (Buckley 1994:32–3). [5] Socialist regimes throughout Eastern Europe saw folklore presentation as a powerful tool in controlling and influencing their populations. On the one hand, rural populations did not fit into the socialist ideal of a worker's state, since they worked for themselves. Thus, the socialists saw fit to centralize village folklore and recast it as the "people's" music. By defining it as national folklore, local identities were de-emphasized and all folklore within a state became the heritage of its citizens. Folklore organizers through the region were taught that the *raison d'être* for creating folk ensembles is to preserve and validate folklore; however, in order to present folklore on stage, they were required to change the village dances and music to accord with socialist ideology.

The Hungarian *táncház* movement emerged as a challenge to socialist-sponsored folklore because its motivations were more individualized and sometimes nationalist. It started as a group of folklore enthusiasts researching ethnic Hungarian dance and music in Transylvania but evolved into both an anti-socialist and a pro-Hungarian movement. The movement focused on public participation at *táncház*es, or dance-houses, where young, urban Hungarians gathered to learn to dance village dances and play village music. Although the movement grew to include dances and music of Transylvanian-Romanians and Roma, its main attraction has been as "a coherent set of ideas offering a sense of national unity and identity to Hungarians" (Kürti 2001:137) based on preserving the "long-lost Hungarian folk music in Transylvania" (Kürti 2001:143). Through this movement, Hungarian minority communities in Romania came to see Hungarian village music and dance as a site of group opposition to the homogenizing, nationalist regime in Romania.

In contrast, many ethnic Romanians relate to folklore as a symbol of village life, thus their response to it depends on how they value their rural roots. Despite the patterns of rapid urbanization in Romania during and after social-

ism, many urban Romanians' lives are still intertwined with village life, particularly because of family connections. Nevertheless, many urbanites, and villagers who want to appear 'modern,' try to distance themselves from village values and habits, often by rejecting local musical and dance traditions in favor of Western popular music. Some Romanians also detest the traditional music and dance because they feel it was forced down their throats by the former regime.

Why do some Romanians continue to be involved in performing folklore after 1989? As a result of the shift from a socialist system to a capitalist one, and from totalitarian rule to a more democratic model, Romania's citizens face a multitude of new situations and challenges in their daily lives. These circumstances create a new milieu in which folklorists and ensemble dancers must reconsider both their individual identities and their motivations for representing village folklore beyond the village context. Like most of their neighbors, they find themselves struggling economically while experiencing the sensation that time is speeding up. As Romania's markets are flooded with economic and cultural influences from beyond its borders, new forms of music are competing with folk music for popularity. Village life continues to be deeply affected by modernization and urbanization trends, although some of these trends seem to be reversing, due to economic troubles. On a national and regional scale, ethno-nationalist issues are being raised in ways forbidden during socialism, sometimes resulting in violence. At the same time, many Romanian citizens profess apathy about politics and distrust of politicians.

Methodology

My research in Transylvania occurred during three visits to Romania, mostly in the city of Cluj-Napoca. [6] From September 1997 until August 1998, I lived in Cluj, supported by a Fulbright Fellowship. In the summer of 1999, I returned to Transylvania for several weeks to visit friends and renew contacts, and, in the winter of 2002, I spent six weeks in Cluj, interviewing dancers and folklore organizers.

I began my year in Transylvania by contacting Zamfir Dejeu, the director of the Transylvanian-Romanian ensemble *Someșul-Napoca*. Dejeu invited me to attend the ensemble rehearsals and became one of my primary sources for understanding how to navigate the world of folklore performance in Cluj. As a folklore researcher, he invited me to accompany him on a number of research trips to Transylvanian villages. Through Dejeu and other contacts, I was able to visit communities throughout Transylvania, where I witnessed folk dancing in various settings: at public folklore festivals and private village celebrations, at stage performances by ensembles and outdoor celebrations of national holidays.

I spent the majority of my time in Cluj, where I attended rehearsals of *Someșul-Napoca* twice a week and tried to attend to as many Hungarian *táncász* events as I could. As a dancer, I never questioned whether I would participate at these activities by learning the dances myself. My foreign status, as an American, was often mitigated by my identity as a dancer. As non-verbal communication, dancing allowed me to make friends even before I was able to express myself with ease in Romanian. Were I not already an able dancer, I doubt that I would have been so easily admitted into the inner circles where I was received.

When I returned to Romania in the winter of 2002, I spent six weeks in Cluj, attending rehearsals of three amateur (i.e., unpaid) folk ensembles and interviewing participants. In this article, I focus primarily on the dancers of ensemble *Someșul-Napoca* and its director, Zamfir Dejeu. Since my focus in this article is on dancers' and folklore organizers' *perceptions* of their own individual and group identities, I have concentrated mostly on the interviews which I conducted in the winter of 2002. In translating and presenting excerpts from these interviews, I have tried to retain the meaning and flavor of the original Romanian in which interviews were conducted. In addition, I have chosen not to cite each quotation—all direct quotations come from the recorded interviews.

This study necessarily falls short of offering a full understanding of changing identities in post-1989 Transylvanian folk dance ensembles for several reasons. First, I do not have or have access to interview data from before 1989, which would allow me to more accurately understand how the regime change has affected dancers' self-perceptions. Further interviews with dancers and former dancers who were members of ensembles during that period would mitigate these problems. I have tried to remedy this by choosing to focus on several dancers who danced in ensembles both before and after 1989. Second, my investigation draws on observations of one amateur dance ensemble in Cluj. Numerous dancers in *Someșul-Napoca* have also belonged to other ensembles in the city, thus I can draw on these experiences as well. While I feel that the dancers' experiences are representative for Cluj, which does not have a professional folk dance ensemble, I cannot speak directly to the experiences of professional ensemble dancers. Third, I lack comparable Hungarian data, due primarily to my inability to speak Hungarian, but also due to time limitations and a concern about how the two ethnic groups might react to my dual participation. I hope to remedy this situation in future research.

Presenting Folk Dance in a Post-1989 World

Zamfir Dejeu, founder and director of *Someșul-Napoca*, first experienced village dance and music styles in the

countryside. He remembered his early love for Romanian folk music and dance as follows:

When I was maybe 4 or 5 years old, I frequently went with my parents to weddings and other village celebrations. I spent the whole time standing near the musicians and dancers. There was this one really good musician who had a nervous tick. He'd play and play on his violin and, from time to time, blink his eye like this (demonstrates). I liked listening to this musician so much that I picked up his tick. My mother had the hardest time, but she finally broke me of the habit!

Raised in the Transylvanian village of Valea Drăganului, he left for Cluj at the age of 14 to pursue higher education, but, unlike many, he never turned his back on his village culture. Born in 1944, Zamfir Dejeu has worked in folklore-related fields for most of his life. While working at the *Casa Creației Populare*, or the "House of Folk Creation," a state-run organization which oversaw the folk performing groups in Cluj county, his work entailed visiting troupes from towns and villages and working with them to present their folklore in state-organized festivals and other venues. He proudly explained to me, "I revitalized a lot of folklore. Wherever I went, I made [folk dance troupes] and where they existed already, I helped them to perfect themselves, so that they could present themselves honorably at festivals and the like."

While organizing dance groups and folk festivals, Dejeu conducted his own research and published several books of music which he collected and transcribed from Transylvanian villagers. Shortly after 1989, he became a researcher at the Romanian Academy's Institute of Folklore and earned his Ph.D. in Folklore in 1997. An energetic, driven man who never seems to stop planning his next performance, research trip, or book, Dr. Dejeu's day job is working as a professional folklore researcher at the Folklore Institute; however, he seems to spend at least as much time organizing and directing *Someșul-Napoca*, which he founded in 1973.

In our interview, I was interested in learning whether Dejeu's motivations for studying folklore and presenting folk dances on stage remained the same as before 1989. When I asked Dejeu whether he still worked in folklore for the same reasons, he responded, "Because I like it? Yes. I've always worked in this field. Although folklore is my vocation, I have always done it with pleasure. For me, coming to work is a pleasure... I never get tired of folklore." I asked him why it is important for folklore to be on stage, and he responded that "people want to see it." I found this answer somewhat problematic, since I had been frequently told that fewer people were attending folk concerts than before 1989. Dejeu expanded on this answer, explaining that the people who come are "people who are already lovers of folklore" and that he was interested in presenting

something that he also loved. He also perceived himself as a knowledgeable source, who can teach others about folklore.

As a field researcher, Dejeu felt that he was presenting a more authentic version of Transylvanian folk dance and music than other ensembles did. He expressed a sense of local pride as another reason for performing Transylvanian folklore:

Our folklore from the region of Cluj is very varied....The most beautiful dances are from the Transylvanian Plain. The most beautiful and the hardest. The most beautiful songs are those from the Apuseni mountains. The best customs are from the Someș River valley...In other countries of Transylvania, there are only one or two folkloric zones, not nearly as many as there are in Cluj county. So, for us, because it's so diverse and beautiful, we enjoy presenting it.

Dejeu prepared many of his choreographies, and all of his new ones, from material which he has personally collected, thus he had the opportunity to present dances and music from regions which he deemed the most interesting.

One of the dancers in Dejeu's ensemble, Adela Oneț Mîrza, added another reason why folklorists and choreographers might justify performing village lore in urban settings. She explained that, "Everyone wants to preserve his own tradition. With the tendency these days towards globalization and total uniformization, it's important not to forget who you are, where you come from, and what your roots are." The implication here is that the city-dwelling populations in Romania come from village origins and that they will not know who they are unless they keep these traditions alive. This argument is selective, however, since it does not argue that city people should work in the fields, make their own wine, or live in small communities, all of which are also village ways. Rather, this comment expressed the belief that traditional folk music and dance belong even to the urban population, and that a part of their Romanianness was expressed in the folklore of their rural relatives or ancestors. Her argument implied that if these folk practices are not continued, the Romanian population, both urban and rural, will have lost something of its soul.

The fear of folklore being "lost" is very real for folklore organizers like Zamfir Dejeu. This concern is based on the notion that "folklore" and "tradition" refer specifically to the ways and art forms of the peasantry. As a corollary, folklorists in Romania, and in much of Europe, believe that folklore can be lost, as a result of urbanization and the disappearance of older ways of village life (Dundes 1969). In contrast, many American folklorists have argued that folklore cannot die because it is a process rather than a product (Ben-Amos 1972; Ben-Amos 1984; Pocius 1995). Romanian, and indeed most East European, folklorists

and folklore organizers rely on a different conception of "tradition." In their eyes, tradition encompasses the values, customs, and meanings of a particular people, from which it defines itself as a culture and even a nation. Based on these different definitions of tradition, folklorists in Transylvania feel that the traditional village ways are being lost, as villagers stop practicing them or remembering them.

When I asked Zamfir Dejeu why he started *Someșul-Napoca*, he responded that it was "to validate the folklore from the villages." [7] Dejeu expressed a common attitude among folklorists and folklore organizers [8] in Transylvania that presenting folklore in performance will teach audiences to value it, and that this, in turn, will help to keep traditions alive. Even in the village context, folklore organizers believe that they can revitalize folk traditions by supporting performing groups.

Dejeu was proud to have started and advised such groups, but he did discuss how villagers themselves might be encouraged to start dancing and playing music again for their own enjoyment. In contrast, the Hungarian *táncház* movement offers an approach to "keeping folklore alive" which emphasizes social dancing rather than performance. Dances and music are done in new contexts and imbued with new meanings in both approaches. The *táncház* approach, however, provides a recreational setting for urban people, in which they attempt to recreate select aspects of the village context. While staged performances of folk music and dance are a part of the movement, the emphasis is on communal dance events. When staged performances do occur, organizers like to invite several of the "real" folk to sing, dance, or play music and show the city people what the "authentic" lore is like. Both the ensemble and the *táncház* approach are similar in that both ignore the possibilities of revitalizing dance and music events in the village context itself. It will be interesting to follow the results of each approach over a longer period of time, in terms of who dances, how the dances change, and how the contexts and meanings of these dances change.

Considering that much of the Romanians' activities to "keep traditions alive" meant organizing performing groups, it is valid to ask what qualified as living folklore. Is it "alive" if it is performed onstage, but few people dance it in the village context? Is it the same folklore if it is danced in the city setting, where people dance it for different reasons? I asked Zamfir Dejeu whether he felt these traditions changed when they get to the city, and he explained that they did, but "Even if you can't necessarily dance in the original style, it's close." Although he argued that the "real" folklore is that which comes from the villages, it appeared that maintaining the dances in their contexts was less important to him than the fact that they continue to be danced by somebody.

Dejeu asserted proudly that Romanian folklore can still be studied because it still exists in its village forms, thus it should be collected and performed. He boasted, "[Our folklore] is still alive. It's still alive in people's memories. The folklore is still oral, it isn't all just written, like it is in the West, for instance. If you want to present folklore there, you have to learn it from books. Here, you don't have to read, you have to go to the villages and film it." Fieldwork is a central part of Dejeu's work, and this has affected his emphasis on authenticity. He believed that many other ensembles were not as responsible about what they present as he was because they do not present dances based on original research in villages.

Both during and after socialism, ensembles such as *Someșul-Napoca* played public roles in presenting folk dance and music to audiences in Romania and beyond. Since 1989, choreographers and folklore organizers enjoy new freedom to structure their performances as they see fit, and the choices which they are making exhibit values they wish to instill in their audiences. They continue to send the socialist era message that folk dance and music are part of a Romanian heritage which must be protected. On the other hand, they assert that individuality and personal creativity play a vital part in these traditions. These new decisions about staging and choreography are affected by audience demand, and all this is happening in a time when audiences for folklore performances are shrinking.

In order to understand how folk dance performances have changed since 1989, it is necessary to consider how they were structured during socialist rule in Romania. The key emphasis for ensembles in all regions of Romania was upon standardization. In Transylvania, this meant that traditionally improvisational couple dances were performed by a large number of couples dancing exactly the same steps at the same time. Many of the choreographies involved two or three lines of couples, facing the audience, with the better dancers in the front line. Choreographies included other geometric configurations, such as diagonal lines or circles, but even in these cases, the vision was of a collective of dancers moving in unison. In Transylvanian choreographies, the women and men would sometimes separate, with all the men doing a series of jumping and slapping moves and all the women doing innumerable turns.

Romi Bucur, a former dancer in *Someșul-Napoca*, remembered that the choreography did not differ much in the eight or more ensembles he danced with:

During Ceaușescu's time, all the ensembles had exactly the same mode of operation. The same technique, the same choreography. Of course, the staging differed, with some different steps, so that one ensemble wouldn't look like another...I think that this was a mode of thinking modeled off Russian ensembles...I think it is a model

for showing communism. Everyone will be the same. Everyone will do the exact same thing equally... We all work the same, shoulder to shoulder... On the other hand, now it's changed and every person is an individual and does what he thinks and what he believes is right, instead of doing the same as his neighbor does.

Romi's analysis emphasizes how the style of performance presents a system of values, albeit indirectly. During the socialist period, village styles of dancing were modified to remove any emphasis on individuality. The public presentation of folklore also became a tool in the regime's attempt to turn peasants into proletariat. In being put on stage, and sometimes on television, these dances became the patrimony of not only the villages from which they came but of the entire Romanian population (Rice 1994; Silverman 1989).

Zamfir Dejeu pointed out that it was difficult to oppose the standardization after *Cîntarea României*. In his own ensemble, Dr. Dejeu tried to create choreographies according to his own standards—with improvisational themes and individualized dancing; however, he found that his ensemble never won first place at the festivals. He explained, "I tried to do something like this, but I wasn't successful because at festivals there was always a competition, and when I used improvisation, we didn't get first place. Those who did the choreographies got first place." He explained to me that, in his heart, he always opposed this standardization because "Folklore should remain diverse, varied, not something you do the same everyday." His position was doubly complicated, as an employee of state institutions like the *Casa Creației Populare*, where he was supposed to supervise village *formații*. He argued that "with my group, I also did like those from Bucharest because I didn't have any other option. I didn't have any success otherwise. But, I left the villagers alone to improvise, like at a village dance." Although he gave in to the pressure from the central government dictates when choreographing for his ensemble, Dejeu used his position to maintain what he felt was "authentic" by imposing these choreographic style on village groups.

Since 1989, Dejeu has taken advantage of the relative creative freedom of the new, less-centralized political climate to break out of the mold of uniform dance choreographies. His innovations have moved in two main directions. First, he has tried to put more improvisational characteristics into his choreographies. This is easier for him to do with his own ensemble than for some ensemble leaders because he has drawn on his own original research for his choreographies: "The choreography is that which I receive from the village, what I have on film. It's done freely. I want for the dances to be danced freely."

Dejeu's newest choreography, for example, was a suite of dances from the village of Fărău, which Dejeu was excited

about because it shows a complex rhythmic relationship between the dance and the music. He bragged that he uses material that is more difficult to learn because it is more authentic and has not been simplified for the ensemble. Despite his emphasis on improvisational dancing, the new Fărău choreography was not entirely free-form. The steps were set, and different couples are told which of several sequences of moves to interchange. Occasionally, a man came forward by himself to show off some fancy moves, but these were also determined beforehand. This staging was supposed to invoke the feeling of a village dance, where everyone is doing something differently, but the underlying level of choreography is still there. Dejeu explained that this effect is not only so that the staging will not look chaotic but also that it has a basis in village dancing. He said, "I want to alternate free dancing with choreography, in the sense that everyone does one or two steps together. That is for the stage effect, but there are also moments in villages where 2 or 3 dancers feel the need to dance the same steps together, and to see who does them more beautifully." In these new choreographies, Dejeu has put a stronger emphasis on designing the choreography based on how dancing was done in village life.

Dejeu's second innovation in staging folk dance and music was his introduction of a new form of performance which brings villagers onstage together with his ensemble to dance and play in a celebration-like atmosphere. From his field research, he has scouted out village bands (*tara-furi*) and dancers whom he believes are exceptionally good. In these performances, which were billed as "*Someșul-Napoca* and its invited guests," his ensemble sat on stage at a table filled with food and drink, as if at a village event. Ensemble choreographies alternated with performances by the village bands, who played while a few couples from the same region demonstrated their local dances. In this context, individual creativity was encouraged. Not only the villagers danced improvisationally, but also the ensemble dancers were encouraged to get up and improvise to the music. Sometimes, audience members even came onstage to join the party.

Dejeu told me that his impetus in creating such performances was to bring the village social dance atmosphere to the stage. He said, "We have to bring the public's attention to the fact that the *real* folklore is what *we* are presenting." He spoke about how these performances have a positive role in protecting authentic folklore because they preserve the sense of celebration and the individualized, improvisational character of the dances—invoking two things which were missing or scarce in the socialist period in Romania: individuality and food. He believed that having the villagers and the ensemble members dance together "...makes a combination which has a positive role in keeping the authenticity."

These changes in how Zamfir Dejeu's folklore performances are structured reflect a number of value conflicts that Romanian citizens are currently facing. With the decrease in the number of ensembles, the surviving ensembles must consider how to continue their own tenuous existence. The loss of most governmental subsidies throws these groups into a competitive system, where they must weather new market mechanisms in order to gain funding. Many ensemble leaders are reacting negatively to the new system, realizing that the repressive socialist system gave more support to cultural organizations than the new system does. Also, while the *Cîntarea României* festivals encouraged competition, the criteria by which groups were judged was centrally determined and uniform. After 1989, being competitive means more than being the best; it means presenting something novel and creative.

Dancing Ourselves while Dancing For Others

The ensemble *Someșul-Napoca* was founded in 1973 by Zamfir Dejeu, through the support of the *Școala Populară de Artă*, or Folk School of the Arts, in Cluj. The name of the ensemble announces to all that this is a *Romanian* performing group. *Someșul* is the Romanian name for the river which flows through Cluj, while *Napoca* is the name for the Roman town which stood approximately where Cluj is. [9] This second reference implies agreement with a Romanian nationalist reading of Transylvania's history. Everyone who currently dances with *Someșul-Napoca* self-identified as Romanian. There is more diversity in the ensemble's orchestra, which sometimes includes Romany (Gypsy) musicians.

Looking at who dances in *Someșul-Napoca* demonstrates some basic aspects of the identity and identification which the group reinforces. First, it is an amateur ensemble, which means that the dancers are unpaid. The dancers are all fairly young, ranging from 14–35. Unlike student ensembles or ensembles affiliated with factories, *Someșul-Napoca* is neither age or occupation-bounded. The ensemble is composed of people from a great variety of backgrounds and occupations. In 1997–98, there were many high school and university students and factory workers in the group, as well as several villagers, [10] two computer technicians, a pharmacist, and a school teacher. The dancers felt that they all belong to the same middle class, despite their different occupations. Most of the dancers were born and raised in Cluj or other Transylvanian towns, but a few grew up in villages and moved to Cluj to pursue better education and work opportunities.

Gender balance is often an issue in the ensemble, as there tend to be more women than men. On my last visit, in winter 2002, this was unexpectedly reversed and almost all of the beginner dancers were male. I was not able to

ascertain why more women get involved than men, or why this situation had changed. Unlike in the United States, it is not a stigma in Romania for men to dance, thus another working explanation needs to be found. Because the ensemble does mostly couple dances, this gender imbalance can cause conflict and competition, usually between the girls who do not yet have dance partners.

In order to discuss how being in a performing group affects multiple aspects of identity, I will consider why these young people chose to participate in folk dance ensembles after 1989. There are many reasons why they might *not* want to be involved. Many people in their parents' generation despise folklore because they feel it was coopted by the Communist Party and forced on them. Meanwhile, the younger generation has many new activities to select from that seem more cosmopolitan and Western. In *Someșul-Napoca*, neither of these issues strongly affected the decisions of the dancers to join a Romanian folk dance ensemble.

Most of the dancers I interviewed had been exposed to folk music while they were young. Some grew up in villages where folk music and dance were still popular at community and family celebrations. Others had relatives who either played folk music or danced in an ensemble or smaller troupe. Many dancers joined the ensemble because a friend or relative encouraged them to come. Ensemble director Zamfir Dejeu explained this phenomenon by making reference to village life: "In villages, there is this criterion of the neighborhood. A group of people living on a street hold a dance at So-and-So's place. In Uncle Ioan's barn...Here [in Cluj], it is a criterion of friendship. Because the city is so big, the members of the ensemble are all friends. And each person brings in someone else."

Personal connections are not the only avenues for new dancers to join the ensemble. Occasionally, Dejeu will put an advertisement in the newspaper, inviting interested people to attend rehearsals and try it out. In 2002, the ensemble's rehearsal director, Lucian Marian, visited a few high schools to advertise the group. In children's groups, parents often make their children attend, either for exercise or because the parents were themselves dancers.

Both before and after 1989, some young people have joined ensembles because it gives them an opportunity to travel. Before 1989, belonging to a dance group was one of few ways to leave Romania. Some took this opportunity to emigrate. Since 1989, ensembles are free from government control in deciding their itineraries, but members are limited by the same Western countries that welcomed them as "defectors" 13 years before. Entry visas have become increasingly difficult to get, as East Europeans have flocked to Western Europe, the United States, and Canada to look for better wages. Nowadays, some young folks join dance ensembles because they seek an opportunity to emigrate in search of work.

Several dancers in *Someșul-Napoca* commented that people who join only for this reason usually do not become good dancers. On the other hand, dedicated dancers also find travel an attractive advantage of belonging to an ensemble. Carmen Camelia Rusu was attracted to join *Someșul-Napoca* partly because the group tours frequently: "I saw that there are many tours abroad, and the possibility to see the world. But, seeing the world didn't attract me as much as the chance to dance, to sing, and to meet with other peoples. To watch how they dance, see what their costumes look like, and listen to their music."

Ensembles also offer a community of potential friends who share an interest. Dancer Marcel Mîrza told me that he dances now for the same reasons that he started. "In the first place, I dance because I love it. For me, dancing doesn't just mean the dancing itself. It also means the chance to get together with people who share in the same passion for folk dancing."

As they become part of the ensemble, dancers find other motivations for their involvement. Adela Oneț Mîrza told me that she gets a thrill from being on stage, "You begin to like the feelings and emotion of it. At a certain point, you begin to long for performances." Camelia valued the opportunity to perform because it shows the audiences how she feels.

When [I] dance for so many people, I sometimes want to transmit to them what I am feeling. I don't know if I can, maybe with my smile or my dancing. I hope to send a message [to them] to never forget folk dance. To not forget it because, in many countries, they're losing the traditions, but in Romania, it is still being preserved.

Her belief that folklore is dying in the villages and is not being passed on to the young people was a common concern for the dancers. By performing, Camelia believed that she could help to carry on the tradition and convince others to do so as well.

Most dancers keep dancing because they love how it feels. Dancing allowed Romulus 'Romi' Bucur to forget about his daily life and attain a different level of awareness. He told me, "I live the dance. There is a small place where I go and I feel wonderful. I completely disconnect, even if I can still see around me. That's where I enjoy myself. I forget everything, total disconnection." Marcel explained, "Frequently, I felt like folk dancing was my refuge. A place where I found a break from daily stress and where I could seek refuge after a hard day." Romi added that dancing "became like a drug. Like food. I had to do more and more of it, and the more I did it, the more I liked it. I couldn't live anymore without dancing."

Contrary to my expectations, nobody explicitly said that they joined the ensemble because it made them feel more Romanian. Some dancers did express a pride in presenting what they felt was their Romanian heritage; however, this

feeling does not appear to have been a motivating factor for dancing. Rather, I would argue that participation in the ensemble subtly reinforced and altered existing ethnic identification.

While I have considered the question of who joins the ensemble, I find that the question of who does *not* join is equally fruitful in understanding how the ensemble presents itself to the public, and how this affects dancers' self-perception. In our interviews, I asked dancers who is allowed to join the ensemble, and whether criteria like age, gender, and nationality mattered. Many times, I was told that "anyone can come," but this response was tempered when I asked who actually does join. Issues like social class or previous experience did not seem to be an issue. Dancers agreed that both beginners and experienced dancers are equally welcome, as are people from any occupation. On the other hand, when we discussed age and ethnicity, it became apparent that the open-door policy included several unspoken assumptions.

The concept of "self-selection" was how most dancers explained the process of deciding who did and did not join. They explained that the doors are open, and anyone can attend rehearsals, without asking permission. Indeed, I never saw any person turned away from the rehearsals. Several dancers differentiated between who could attend rehearsals and who would be allowed to perform with the group. Marcel Mîrza argues that people who are not meant to dance figure it out for themselves: "There aren't any restrictions. Anyone can come. The selection process is natural. Namely, the door is open—Anyone can come, but at the point where someone realizes that he doesn't like it...he doesn't come anymore...self-elimination."

The idea of self-selection made the ensemble appear open-minded while masking certain societal expectations. When asked about age limitations, most dancers responded similarly. As Adela put it, "As far as age, there's no limit. Nobody says that you can come only if you're between 20 and 25. You come whenever you want. But not all ages come to dance." Camelia's comments showed a dissonance between what people say they believe and how they judge others. She said, "It seems that age doesn't matter...I am 33 years old, I am still dancing. But it is good to have younger people, because it's not the same thing to put an 18-year-old next to a 30-year-old...In the long run, it matters whether someone is young. If someone's young, it's not a problem."

When I asked both dancers and folklore organizers which ethnicities were allowed to join, it became clear that both *Someșul-Napoca* and *Mărțișorul* are considered ensembles for Romanians. Again, dancers argued that all ethnicities are welcome. Camelia Rusu explained:

It doesn't matter. Well, they would have to dance Romanian dances, but...nationality doesn't matter. For

us, it doesn't matter if he's German or Hungarian or...If a Hungarian would come and say, "Sir, I want to learn Romanian dances," nobody would have anything against it. He would be received in the ensemble. We even had a Hungarian in the orchestra. So, it's not a problem. Nationality doesn't matter here.

Nationality *does* matter, however. Camelia's response establishes that whoever joins the ensemble must understand that it is a *Romanian* ensemble that does *Romanian* dances. She focused on the possibility of specifically a *Hungarian* coming to join the group. When I asked about nationality or ethnicity, dancers usually interpreted this a question about Hungarian-Romanian relations, an issue which is more visible in the public eye than relations with the Roma or Saxon minorities.

Despite the open-door policy, everyone pointed out that no non-Romanians participate as dancers. There was some question of whether any Hungarians or Gypsies had ever been members of *Someșul-Napoca*, but nobody remembers such a thing. Some dancers in *Someșul-Napoca* argued that Hungarians have their own groups to join. Marcel Mîrza asserted that this was a natural development.

Maybe Hungarians or Germans or Gypsies might come. It is absolutely not a problem, but think about it. That person feels connected to his own nation's folklore. I think they don't come for this reason...Hungarians prefer to go and dance at a Hungarian ensemble. This situation seems natural to me. It's not forced.

Similarly, Marcel feels that it is normal for him to prefer to do Romanian dances because he is Romanian. His insistence on the normalcy of this situation indicates that he feels it is *voluntary* segregation, from both groups' point of view. Since both Romanian ensembles and Hungarian *tâncăz*es present themselves as ethnic institutions, it is not surprising that there is little crossover.

Many of the dancers tried to explain why they believe that Hungarians choose to dance separately. Romi Bucur considered that Hungarians are similar to other minorities in Europe, who feel culturally threatened.

As a minority in Romania, it's normal that...they want to hold onto their religion and their folklore with their teeth...They want to stand their ground, as minorities. It's a basic tenet for international minorities to try to...hold onto their ethnic identity. A Hungarian wouldn't go and dance in a Romanian ensemble...Nor would a Romanian go to a Hungarian ensemble. That's the rule. The rule of ethnicities.

Romi's argument essentializes the relationship between ethnic minorities and the states they live in, arguing that they keep themselves separate as part of a natural "rule of ethnicities." He implicitly rejects the possibility of mixed ensembles, where the dances of multiple ethnicities are performed. In fact, such ensembles were common during

socialism in Yugoslavia, where the variety of ethnic groups made it a useful socialist policy to emphasize the diversity of the country while homogenizing the mode of presentation. This philosophy of “*bratstvo i edinstvo*,” meaning brotherhood and unity, clearly did not survive; however, Yugoslavia’s experiences do not rule out the possibility of multi-ethnic dance groups in Transylvania.

Adela argued that each group wants to protect its own tradition. Through folklore, she contended, people can remember where they come from and who they are, which is important so that they do not lose their identity. Her argument assumes a static ethno-national identity, which folk ensembles play a role in reinforcing. Far from intending this as an intolerant nationalist argument, however, Adela pointed out that such variety in folklore is a good thing because it is more interesting.

Several cultural difficulties between Romanians and Hungarians emerged in these discussions about ethnic segregation. Dancers generally argued that they would accept Hungarians into the group, if they wished to join. Camelia felt that both groups would be accepting and helpful, if dancers decided to cross ethnic lines; “So, it’s their choice. We accept them. If they want to learn Romanian dances, we accept them. And if we wanted to go and learn Hungarian dancing, they would teach us.” Romi was more pessimistic.

If I were to go to a Hungarian ensemble, I think that there are few people who would make an effort to help me... They would speak only Hungarian, so that I couldn’t understand. If a Hungarian were to come to a Romanian ensemble, he would be allowed to come. Romanians are much more easy-going and sociable. On the other hand, they still wouldn’t help him integrate... But it would never happen because neither one nor the other would try.

There are two common stereotypes at work here. First, Romi commented that Hungarians would not be helpful because they would refuse to speak Romanian to him. Second, he argued that Romanians are a more open people.

The first stereotype reflects the flashpoint which is language policy in Transylvania. Many Hungarian political issues center on the right to use Hungarian (Shafir 1994), [11] while Romanian politicians argue that Hungarians should use Romanian because it is the state language. Many ordinary Romanians feel as Camelia did, that the fault lies with the Hungarians,

They isolate themselves. Understand? Nobody isolates them. Romanians have always been an open people... Perhaps you’ve heard in Hungary, or even here in Romania, that the Hungarians have problems. That they are marginalized, that Romanians marginalize them. But no, dear. We let them speak their language, it doesn’t bother us at all. But the problem is that they should have some common sense. If there’s four of us and two of them,

they should speak Romanian, right? So everyone can understand. Because we do this. We don’t hide to talk. We speak in front of them and so that they can understand... But they don’t want us to understand what they’re saying. That’s the problem.

As a member of the majority population in Romania, Camelia has a common response to the linguistic code switching of the minority. She explained to me that *she* is not so bothered when the Hungarians she works with speak in Hungarian, but that other co-workers get upset. She did not mention that Romanians do not have the option to speak in a language which the Hungarians will not understand, since most Hungarians speak Romanian. Thus, Romanians do not have to work as hard to talk to Hungarians as Hungarians do to talk to Romanians.

Despite being aware of major ethnic political issues like language use, some dancers argued that the relationship between ethnicities depends on individual and community attitudes. When I asked Romi whether there was a sense of separatism between Hungarians and Romanians, he responded,

Separatism? But that is only in certain circles. For example, you can enter a social circle in which they will welcome you... You can go places where they say, ‘Welcome. Come in.’ and they will teach you. They won’t speak a different language around you. They will try to speak Romanian. Or you can enter a social circle in which they don’t pay attention to you and will only speak in Hungarian, so that you won’t understand... It depends on the circle which you enter, and how they think there. Everything depends on a person’s mentality. In Frata, there are Hungarians and Romanians, and there are those who get along very well, and there are those who curse that someone is Hungarian or that someone else is Romanian. That’s how people are in rural communities.

With these statements, Romi has allowed the possibility of open-minded Hungarians and proud, stand-offish Romanians, as well as the other way around. He mentioned Frata, [12] the rural community in which he grew up, as an example of how ordinary Romanians and Hungarians choose to get along. Camelia, who is from the same region, expressed a similar thought.

I’ll say this, Amy... When there are two ethnicities in the same country, like in Yugoslavia. There, the government was at fault. It wasn’t the ordinary people. The ordinary people get along... The ordinary person is not to blame for not getting along with his neighbor. Because we get along with all our neighbors. That’s what we believe.

Camelia’s words eerily echoed the sentiments of the Bosnian villagers in the multi-ethnic community described in Tone Bringa’s *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way*. Bringa writes, “I was told by Muslims and Croats alike that ‘We always lived together and got along well; what is

happening now has been created by something stronger than us” (Bringa 1995:4). This community was later torn apart by the war, and neighbor was indeed turned against neighbor.

Perhaps both Romi’s and Camelia’s insistence that ethnic relations depend on individuals is related to their upbringing in communities that are small enough for everyone to know one another. Certainly, in cities like Cluj, some Romanians and some Hungarians socialize and try get along; however, others take advantage of the larger population size by ignoring one another and interacting primarily within separate ethnic spheres. Romi’s and Camelia’s comments expressed the idea that villagers may recognize ethnic differences, but that the good of the community rests on being able to bridge these differences. A similar idea is expressed in both Ivo Andrić’s historical novel, *The Bridge on the Drina* and Katherine Verdery’s ethnography *Transylvanian Villagers*. Verdery found that the German and Romanian neighbors in the southern Transylvanian village of Bințișeni profess that they get along, while maintaining ethnic stereotypes about one another (Verdery 1983). Andrić presented a fictionalized version of Bosnian history through stories about one small town, where different ethnic groups sometimes work together to survive and sometimes work against one another, especially when their religious and cultural identities are manipulated by outside powers (Andrić 1959). Camelia reflected this experience when she argued that governments are to blame, not ordinary people. Unfortunately, she did not express a sense that ordinary people can go against governments and refuse to be used in their political games. Nor did she mention that some “ordinary people” support these divisionary tactics and elect those who are in government.

Dancers in the ensemble want to see themselves as open-minded about ethnic issues, although how they express this attitude demonstrates an awareness that their ensemble has an agenda to strengthen Romanian identification in its participants, as well as its audiences. While in Transylvania, I asked myself whether focusing on the dancers’ ethno-national identity as Romanians meant ignoring other identities. For instance, ensemble leaders like Zamfir Dejeu emphasized that the repertoires of their groups reflect their local pride as Transylvanians.

I wanted to know whether dancers felt that their regional identities were more important than their ethno-national affiliations. Some dancers expressed a sense of local pride, both at community levels and as Transylvanians. Camelia Rusu admired the dances from her region, the Transylvanian Plain, which she feels are the most difficult and beautiful. Adela Oneț Mîrza told me that, although she had never performed in another town, she would be proud to be from Cluj and to show what the dancers from Cluj could do.

Being Transylvanian was often expressed in opposition to being from Moldavia or Wallachia. When I asked them why their ensemble has mostly Transylvanian material, dancers and folklore organizers alike echoed Camelia’s words: “Because we are from Transylvania, we prefer to stay in Transylvania and to dance all the dances which they dance in Transylvania.” She felt that these dances express the Transylvanian soul.

Despite these expressions of regional pride, I did not find what perhaps I had hoped for: a sense of solidarity with Hungarians from Transylvania by virtue of being from the same region and sharing similar folklore traditions. On the other hand, some dancers were adamant that they wanted to have a positive relationship with their Hungarian neighbors. Camelia argued that her upbringing taught her to be tolerant.

I want to get along with everyone, on principle. *Even* with the Gypsies. I don’t make a difference between who is Gypsy, who is Romanian, who is Hungarian, who is German. Because all nations, to me, they’re people and they’re all the same. That’s what I’ve been taught, to respect everyone, and I can’t be another way.

Other dancers emphasized that Hungarians and Romanians will attend one another’s performances, but they have separate ensembles because this allows them to maintain their respective traditions. Camelia explained that this kind of ethnic pride does not have to be exclusionary, asking “What characterizes a people more than its folk music?”

The sense of ethnic segregation did not keep ensemble members from being interested in Hungarian folklore. Marcel told me that, were he living in Hungary and could not find a few Romanians to create an ensemble, he would be interested in learning Hungarian dances. Both Zamfir Dejeu and Neluțu Cocian were impressed by the Hungarian *táncház* movement and the effects that it has had on bringing young people in to learn folk dancing.

Dancers expressed the most openly nationalist pride when they spoke about performing in other countries. “I feel pride to be a dancer from Romania,” Romi told me, “You feel quite proud and you try to show everything you can of what your country has. It’s like a competition. ... You try to show the citizens of other countries that these are your dances. That this is your flag which is waving.” Performing abroad has given dancers an opportunity to be proud of being Romanian, at a time when the economy is not thriving and many other Romanian citizens want to leave the country. They have found joy in their folk heritage, as Adela explained: “You try to show them something beautiful, something Romanian that is beautiful, for there you don’t dance only from your own region. You dance a little Caluș, Banat, Oaș, everything. So, you dance dances from Romania.” This kind of national identification focuses

on Romania's relationship vis-à-vis other countries, not the ethno-national relationship between Romanians and Romania's minority populations. When Zamfir Dejeu takes his ensemble to other countries, he tries to have dances from the entire country because "When we go abroad, we represent Romania. We don't just represent Transylvania. Thus, we have to know dances from other regions."

Conclusions

Throughout this paper, I have analyzed and interpreted my data from the recent anthropological and folklore theoretical perspectives that individuals and communities are in a constant process of negotiating their identities on multiple levels. In fairness, I should point out that my subjects often do not share this concept of identity. Thus, in a sense, I am using one academic tradition to analyze the adherents of another. Folklorists in Eastern Europe, like Zamfir Dejeu, believe that "folklore" and "tradition" denote limited resources which need to be preserved and presented to the public in order for them to be valued. In addition, both folklore organizers and dancers expressed the belief that Romanian folklore is *naturally* a part of who they are as Romanians. This concept of the naturalness of ethno-national identity underlies much of how they explained their regional, ethnic, and national identities. Nevertheless, changes in external circumstances, such as the political, economic, and social upheavals following the anti-communist revolution in 1989, have clearly affected the manner in which folklore is presented, and thus, in how folklorists and folk dancers perform their values and identities.

The new freedoms in post-socialist Romania have allowed choreographers to reassert the idea of personal individuality which was repressed by the socialist system. As Dejeu pointed out, this individuality was a part of the dances and music in their village contexts, thus his choreographies also hark back to a pre-communist ethos. This sense of returning to Romanians' roots reflects both a fear of losing the village folklore and lifestyle and a view towards the future. On the one hand, both the choreographers and the dancers talk about preserving the folklore and keeping it alive. They believe that learning folk dances in an ensemble and presenting them to the general public are an effective way to do this. On the other hand, they are aware that Romania seeks to become part of wider European culture. The drive to join a united Europe, via the European Union, presents a possible threat of losing that individuality so recently gained. In this case, the concern is about losing cultural individuality as Romanians. Perhaps for this reason, folklore organizers like Zamfir Dejeu show a renewed interest in defining what it is to be Transylvanian or Romanian culturally.

By dancing in a consciously Romanian ensemble, dancers reinforce their own self-identifications as ethnic Romanian, while simultaneously expressing pride in their Transylvanian-ness. Their ideological emphasis on the ensemble's open-door policy belies the subtle reality that ensemble members do not feel that Hungarians belong there. They explain this as a natural consequence of both ethnicities' wish to preserve their respective traditions. This manifests itself in conscious mutual segregation in Romanian ensembles and Hungarian *táncház*es. Dancers from rural backgrounds challenge this argument, however, when they explain that Romanians and Hungarians can maintain ethnic diversity even in small communities where they share the same musicians and, sometimes, the same dance events.

While Romanian ensemble members are seemingly oblivious of their privileges as the ethnic majority, they are painfully aware of the challenges of getting along with their non-Romanian neighbors. As did the villagers in Tone Bringa's Bosnian village, they blame inter-ethnic strife on politicians and the government, ignoring the subtler forms of distancing in their own lives. Nevertheless, the notion of having an open-door policy, as well as several dancers' insistence that good relations depend on ordinary people, present some positive possibilities for greater interethnic harmony between Hungarians and Romanians.

Does the renewed emphasis, by both dancers and folklore organizers, on authentic village folklore mean that Romanians are seeking a return to past values? I do not believe that this is quite what is occurring. I argue that, by removing the dances from the village context and placing them in the ensemble context, village value systems are mixed with urban and post-socialist value systems. The ensembles are presenting an idealized version of rural life, in which Romanians are supposed to recognize that village values still have a place in their lives. This rural nostalgia is not designed to convince people to return to the villages but to keep the village ethos alive by appreciating the beautiful parts of it.

ENDNOTES

1 Generally, "international folk dancing," as it exists in the United States, is composed of dances from European countries, with a smattering of dances from other regions of the world.

2 Although Hungarian folklorists studied village dances from Transylvania, much of the village research and teaching in Hungary and abroad was done by members of various folk ensembles from Budapest. While most of the workshops I attended were taught by these dancers, some of the dance teaching at *táncház*es, or recreational dance

clubs, in Hungary is done by dancers who are not ensemble members but recreational dancers who themselves learned in these *táncház*es.

3 By 'recreational,' I mean that the events were held for the sake of socializing and having fun, not for performance or ritual purposes.

4 This is another subject about which I would like to do more research. Apparently, Hungarian politicians had an epiphany after Trianon that Transylvania, which had usually been considered a backwater, had a rich rural heritage which they could use to legitimize claims to the region (Kürti 2001).

5 As I will discuss later, the people who worked within these institutions to promote folklore did not consider everything they did as propaganda.

6 "Cluj-Napoca" is the official name of the town, which is also situated in Cluj county. The "Napoca" part is actually the name of a Roman town which existed in approximately the same place. This was appended to the city's name in the 1980s as part of Ceaușescu's Romanianizing policies. It essentially argues that the ancestors of the Romanians were in Transylvania first. See historical section for details.

7 His response in Romanian was: "De ce ansamblu am înființat...Cu scopul de a valorifica folclorul de la sate."

8 I differentiate between these in a way similar to the American division between academic folklore and public folklore, although, in Romania, folklorists—people who do research in folklore—can also be folklore organizers. Dejeu is a good example of this combination.

9 In fact, the official name of the town is Cluj-Napoca. The second name was added as a part of Ceaușescu's nationalization policy.

10 By "villagers," I mean that, in addition to dancers who come from villages but now live in Cluj, there were some who *lived* in nearby villages and commuted to rehearsals.

11 Such issues include the fight for a Hungarian language university.

12 Romi is actually from the smaller village of Oaș, which is locally administered by Frata. We were in Frata when we conducted the interview.

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