



Devotions of Desire: Changing Gods, Changing People at a Transylvanian Pilgrimage Site

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Devotions of Desire:
Changing Gods, Changing People at a Transylvanian Pilgrimage Site

A dissertation presented
By

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To

The Faculty of Harvard Divinity School

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Abstract

This dissertation describes how desiring subjects make devotional worlds in times of radical change. I argue that what is centrally at stake for people who pass through the Șumuleu Ciuc (Hungarian: Csíksomlyó) pilgrimage site in Transylvania, Romania is the question of what makes a good Catholic in relation to the Virgin Mary. Disputes about this question revolve around notions of the desiring subject: What role should forms of sexual, material, and affective self-interest – or lack thereof – play in the life of Mary’s devotees and the life of the Mother of God herself? This formulation of desire and change as intersubjective and relational processes involving divine and human beings breaks new ground among dominantly sociological and symbolic studies of religious change in contemporary Eastern Europe.

Chapter One broadly outlines 20th and 21st century social transformations in the Ciuc valley. Chapter Two explores the annual Pentecost pilgrimage event as a ritual intricately caught up in everyday processes of emerging post-socialist masculine subject formation. Chapter Three tells the story of a young woman’s vision of the Virgin Mary that resulted in the installation of a new statue and shrine at the pilgrimage site. Where other scholars have treated similar events in terms of abstract political processes of resacralizing and nationalizing post-socialist space and time, I seek to re-site the “politics” of the shrine in the tension between religious experience and semiotic form. Chapter Four blends phenomenological and pragmatist theories of materiality to address recent infrastructural transformations to the pilgrimage site as efforts to “remodel Mary’s

home.” One set of new structures outside at the shrine materialize and enact the ambivalent search for a post-socialist lay Catholic leading class that I introduced in Chapter One. Chapter Five takes up my previous concern with gender in order to examine women’s Marian healing practices in secular post-socialist hospitals. Chapter Six begins with a consideration of the intersubjective politics of storytelling and the new role played at Csíksomlyó by the global Catholic radio network, The World Family of Radio Maria.

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Note on Orthography

All translations are by the author. I follow standard conventions for Hungarian and Romanian orthography, omitting regional dialects.

I. Introduction: Devotions of Desire

The world a miracle makes is both past and present, neither gone nor coming. I sensed this seeming paradox the first time I heard my friends Szilveszter and Ibolya talk about their miracle – an intervention performed by the Virgin Mary, the Roman Catholic holy figure and frequent intercessor. Szilveszter and Ibolya are a middle-aged married couple living in the Ciuc valley in eastern Transylvania. They already had two children when Ibolya made a pilgrimage to the nearby Marian shrine at Csíksomlyó in 1991. The annual Pentecost procession to Csíksomlyó had recently become a public event again after the fall of socialism, although Ibolya’s decision to attend was personal: Ibolya carried anxieties about her faltering marriage as she entered the Csíksomlyó church and approached the statue of Mary to which many devotees pray when they ask for a miracle. She knelt down, began reciting a memorized prayer, and then offered a spontaneous request that, in her words, “bubbled up from the soul” (*lélekből fakadó ima*). She asked Mary, “for love. I asked to have more love in my life.” Soon after the pilgrimage, Mary granted Ibolya’s request: Szilveszter explained that Mary led him to renew his faith and recommit himself to the family.

Several months after hearing this story, early in the summer of 2012, Ibolya and Szilveszter invited me to come over for a Rosary prayer session at their house. In attendance were several of their elderly widowed neighbors, women wearing the signature floral-printed headscarves of the rural “auntie” (*néni*). Two other couples cast a very different impression, arriving in their own cars dressed in middle-class attire of slacks and button-down shirts. And three of Szilveszter and Ibolya’s high-school-aged children, home from boarding school in a nearby city, rounded out the group. As we settled in, Szilveszter began by announcing that we would pray one round of the “Mysteries of the Rosary.” A Rosary is divided into five “Decades”

of ten prayers, and the Mysteries, or pieces of text describing an event in the life of Christ, can be inserted into each of these prayers, with each Mystery changing after each Decade. Reciting the Mysteries, however, is no easy feat; recalling these elaborate texts and reciting them in the correct order requires years of habitual practice. That evening, although Szilveszter and Ibolya demonstrated their regular practice of praying the Rosary by seamlessly reciting the Mysteries, the other younger women and men stumbled repeatedly. The older women, who likewise had no trouble with the Mysteries, corrected these mistakes, which prompted embarrassed grimaces from some of the young couples. Szilveszter then announced that we would each say petitionary prayers “bubbling up from the soul.” For a while, it seemed as if the roles were reversed: The women and men of the Transylvanian Catholic bourgeoisie used the format of the petitionary prayer to smoothly offer up a list of their innermost requests, desires, and longings. In contrast, the older women began weeping so strongly – each breaking into tears precisely when they came to the word “to ask” (*kérni*) – that they could barely speak. But just like when Szilveszter and Ibolya flawlessly recited the Mysteries, my initial impression of diametrically contrasting generational approaches to prayer, Mary, and desire was once again shattered as this couple was able to call on Mary for help and support in the voice of petition and longing.

This dissertation describes how desiring subjects make devotional worlds in times of radical change. Among the transformations that have engulfed Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics in the years since 1989, one of the most pervasive and contested has centered on the creation of proper religious subjects. The question of what makes a good Catholic in relation to the Virgin Mary as the foremost figure of Catholic distinctiveness is disputed with notions of the desiring subject at its core: What role should forms of sexual, material, and affective self-interest – or lack thereof – play in the life of Mary’s devotees and the life of the Mother of God herself? I

use the term “desire” to gloss a heterogeneous and “nomadic” suite of aspirations, needs, wants, and longings – not simply the experience of a lack, but rather a *productive* moment of the subject’s turning toward and inhabitation of the world. In Transylvania Hungarian Catholic communities today, desire is a key intersubjective practice in which Catholic elites, ordinary devotees, the Virgin Mary, and a wide panoply of other human and divine figures reconfigure themselves in their relationships to a changing post-socialist world. One of the primary ways in which desire becomes a contested practice is through petitionary prayer, as during the gathering in Szilveszter and Ibolya’s living room that evening in the summer of 2012. Throughout this dissertation, I understand prayer to be a *relational* practice whose key mediating term is desire. Petitionary prayer directed towards Mary is a difficult and contested practice in Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic communities, precisely because it so deeply focuses attention on desiring subjects who want and yearn, and then turn their attention onto those yearnings using a seemingly banal, but actually profoundly destabilizing word: “to ask” (*kérni*).

The Csíksomlyó Pilgrimage Site and Marian Shrine

The interaction among the devotees at Szilveszter and Ibolya’s prayer group that evening in the summer of 2012 conveyed a sense of just how much Catholicism in Transylvania and at the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage site was changing and had already changed since the fall of socialism. In a sense, Csíksomlyó has always been changing, and itself has always been an object of desire. It is located at the center of the north-south running Ciuc valley in central Romania at the eastern edge of the region of Transylvania. Sixty kilometers long and ten kilometers at its widest point, the Ciuc valley is formed by the south-flowing Olt River in the midst of the 600-700 meter high Eastern Carpathian mountain range. Since 1968, Csíksomlyó has been administratively included in Miercurea Ciuc, a city with a population of approximately 30,000

and the county seat of Harghita County.¹ Over 90% of the valley's total population of 109,478 identified themselves as Hungarian on the 2011 census, with the vast majority of the remaining 10% identifying as Romanian and resident in the valley's two cities of Bălan in the north and Miercurea Ciuc.² The Ciuc valley lies at the far eastern edge of the region of Transylvania. To say that the valley lies in Transylvania is to index a partly political designation that dates to the period when this area was an integral part of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. How and when the Ciuc valley as well as the entire region of Transylvania were either "occupied" or "conquered" by Hungarians remains highly controversial. The former verb corresponds to a prevailing "Hungarian" view that Hungarians settled an unpopulated region and then integrated it into the Kingdom of Hungary in the 12th century. The latter refers to a "Romanian" view that Romanians were conquered and forced into the hills after living in this region since the days of the Roman Empire as the descendants of Dacians and Roman soldiers.³ While these claims continue to inform nationalist politics and almost every new acquaintance felt the obligation to inform me as to why there were Hungarians living in Romania, ethnogenesis and settlement patterns rarely came up in the realms of everyday life beyond elite-level disputation and first introductions.

Transylvania was a border region of medieval Hungary, and it was settled with colonists who enjoyed extensive privileges and autonomy. The "Szeklers," German-speaking Saxons, and the nobility were the three recognized *nationes* of Transylvania – a term that meant something

¹ Those who know Transylvania may raise their eyes at my use of "city" to describe Miercurea Ciuc, especially since one of the best recent ethnographic studies of the region, Rogers Brubaker, et. al.'s *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* uses the designation "town" to refer to Cluj, with a population of over 200,000. I call Miercurea Ciuc a "city" for one primary reason: This is what my acquaintances called it, both Hungarians (*város*) and Romanians (*oraș*). Neither Romanian nor Hungarian has a commonly used in-between term that would correspond to "town."

² 232 residents identified as Roma on the 2011 census, although this number surely does not take into account factors such as a migratory population.

³ For an excellent introduction to this tangled and contested history, see Brubaker, et. al., 2007: 56-73.

significantly different than contemporary “nations” – each of whom enjoyed collective political rights, liberties, and immunities as colonists and border guards for the kingdom.⁴ My acquaintances often cited these special privileges and the border guard way of life as the roots of Szekler distinctiveness.⁵ However, historical documents suggest that by the 16th century Szeklers had linguistically assimilated into the wider Hungarian-speaking population of Transylvania. My acquaintances around Csíksomlyó were inclined to identify as Szekler as the occasion warranted; they also tended to recognize a “Szekler region” (*Székelyföld*) – a region demographically dominated by Hungarian-speakers – that includes the Ciuc valley. The Ciuc valley is distinctive for being a bastion of Catholicism within a religiously diverse Transylvanian Hungarian population divided among Catholic, Calvinist, and Unitarian churches.⁶ Nearly 95% of Ciuc’s population is Catholic, and all villages in the valley are homogeneously Catholic, although after I began encountering a number of Romanian-speaking Roman Catholics in Miercurea Ciuc and Bălan I began studying Romanian in order to include this population in my research.

The earliest documentary reference to the shrine is a papal tax record dating to the mid-15th century offering praise for the Franciscan Order, its church, and monastery at Csíksomlyó. It remains a point of contention among historians if the text refers to an annual pilgrimage, although there is evidence of a Marian devotional cult at Csíksomlyó from this period. A statue of the Virgin Mary with Child, dating from the late 16th century is a focus of everyday devotional activity at the shrine and the annual procession today. There is more certain evidence for an

⁴ See Verdery 1983: 83-101. See also Brubaker, et. al., 2007: 57.

⁵ Ethnicity is less likely as a factor leading to this sense of identity, even though the origins of the Szeklers as a distinctive ethnic group have prompted a number of floridly imaginative projects among intellectuals since 1989.

⁶ Alongside the Saxon (Lutheran) church, Transylvania’s “Hungarian” churches were officially recognized as the “received” churches of the land, their clergies benefiting from full and equal rights and privileges. Romanians, who constituted a majority of Transylvania’s entire population by the mid-18th century, had no equivalent rights and the “Romanian” denominations (Orthodox, Greek-Catholic) remained “tolerated” rather than “received.” Transylvanian Hungarian outsiders to the Ciuc valley sometimes remarked on the militaresque demeanor and attitudes of people (especially men) from this region.

annual procession to Csíksomlyó on the Saturday before Pentecost Sunday from the late 17th century. From that point forward, there appears to have been an annual gathering of some kind at Csíksomlyó on the Saturday before Pentecost, with occasional breaks during wartime and changes in format. First-hand accounts from the interwar period describe crowds of 60,000 at the pilgrimage site. The last public procession to Csíksomlyó after the close of World War II took place at Pentecost 1949, and not long after the new Romanian socialist government arrested the Bishop of the Transylvanian Archdiocese who spoke at the pilgrimage along with a number of other Catholic priests. For the next forty one years, there was no public procession to Csíksomlyó, and the government organized cultural festivals and other events to prevent the population from gathering at the pilgrimage site, although the church remained open and operational throughout this period.

This dissertation is primarily concerned with the period after 1989, when the annual pilgrimage event was renovated beginning in 1990. While the initial gatherings at Csíksomlyó appear to have attracted participants from the Ciuc valley and surrounding areas, the event quickly grew to include crowds of 100,000 or more, most of whom arrive from Hungary and Hungarian minority communities in Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine, as well as from European, Canadian, and American Hungarian emigre populations. Csíksomlyó remains an active shrine throughout the year, and devotees line up before Mary's statue to petition her for assistance after every Mass and throughout the day.

The Study of Religion after Socialism: New Openings for a Critical Phenomenology

The last decade has seen an explosion of anthropological studies about post-socialist religious phenomena such as the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage and the cult of devotion to the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó. Early agenda-setting contributions to this literature adopted Durkheimian

theoretical frameworks that have limited the scope of questions asked of such phenomena. In general, religion was seen to “point beyond itself” to underlying social structures or to provide functional services in building social solidarity and integration (Rogers 2005: 344). The prominence of such Durkheimian approaches in the study of religion after socialism was helped along by the timing of the first studies of religion under socialism that coincided with a burst of interest in ritual analysis (Kligman 1988; Balzer 1980; 1981; 1983; Dragazde 1993; Humphrey 1983). Katherine Verdery’s (1999) *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* and Caroline Humphrey’s (1998) *Marx Went Away, but Karl Stayed Behind* invoked Durkheim to understand religion’s role in shaping emerging post-socialist power structures, but it was not until several years later that scholars began systematically adopting Durkheimian approaches that treat religion as a moral or ethical system and “belief” as distinct from “practice” as points of theoretical guidance. Douglas Rogers’ (2009) *The Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals* approaches the history of religious life in Russian Old Believer religious communities in terms of orientations towards conceptions of what is good, proper, or virtuous (Rogers 2009: 158). Catherine Wanner’s *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (2007), focuses on religion’s role in establishing a “moral community” after socialism, providing “shared understandings of morality and the project of realizing a moral existence” in order to sustain community solidarity (Wanner 2007: 11; see also Wanner and Steinberg 2008; Wanner 2012; 2013). In ritual studies, Gerald Creed’s (2011) *Masquerade and Postsocialism: Ritual and Cultural Dispossession in Bulgaria* follows Durkheim in assuming that beliefs emerge from *shared* sociological forms: The fact that his Bulgarian informants’ were divided about the “supernatural efficacy” of their rituals, he argues, requires looking past belief to achieve understanding (Creed 2011: 13). These and

other studies are interesting and important work, but they all address religion after socialism in sociological terms, drawing attention away from questions that were most pressing for my acquaintances as they prayed to Mary in various ways, at various times, and among various people who may or may not have construed Mary in the same way:⁷ How can human and divine desires shape relationships between self and world in Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic religious communities?

Something similar can be said in regards to a question that appears frequently in such studies of religion after socialism and which has seemed to demand an answer: How were religious sensibilities “kept alive” despite atheist and scientific propaganda, and why was there a “resurgence of organized religion” after socialism? Various forms of the “socialist irony narrative” have emerged to offer answers to these questions: Religion was “sequestered” into the domestic and sustained by women (Dragadze 1993). Church-based life-cycle rituals continued to be performed under socialism (Luehrmann 2011; Fosztó 2010). Internally divided anti-religious state institutions undermined their own efforts (Chumachenko 2002; Froese 2008). States transformed but also supported religion by making it into ritual or “national/cultural festivals” (Kligman 1988). Minority communities are loyal to religion today because these institutions helped them preserve their identities. Religion satisfies the need for an existential desire for utopia that, ironically, socialism kept alive (Wanner 2007).

Genealogical studies of religion provide valuable understandings of the structures of power that subjects are at grips with in their everyday lives. However, I part ways from the way

⁷ Although Sonja Luehrmann (2011) critiques Durkheim’s link between beliefs and socially dominant groups, her concept of “didactic religion” captures the sense in which teachers and activists adapted their attitudes toward moral instruction developed during the Soviet era in their post-Soviet religious leadership. In Bulgaria, Kristen Ghodsee explores the roles of global and local forces in pushing and pulling Bulgarian Muslims towards “new beliefs and practices.” Elizabeth Dunn’s (2004) work among Polish working class women is more neo-Marxist in orientation, arguing that women’s higher levels of employment can be explained by their use of essentializing Roman Catholic models of personhood and human dignity to blunt some of the harsher aspects of their new place in the post-socialist labor force.

such studies handle the history of religion under socialism for two reasons. First, the religious worlds of Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics are not the outcome or meeting point of numerous causal agencies that determine them in their nature as moral, ritual, and national systems, but rather take shape in a dialectical process that includes subjects moving out towards and sustaining these worlds, for historical conditions that constitute a world are only relevant to the degree that subjects (are obliged to) bring these traditions into being for themselves and carry them on. Such an understanding shifts the actions of history in the study of religion after socialism in a phenomenological direction: If there is ever the possibility of an explanation for why people in Transylvania are “still” religious, there are also real concrete individuals who live their lives at grips with that same question in their everyday interactions. My second objection is epistemological: I am set on edge by such explanations because they draw attention away from what the people who are “still” religious feel about their worlds. Asking the question that lies behind the socialist irony narrative allows scholars to affect a distance from religious people that I have tried to destabilize by placing myself in the midst of their struggles to find some tolerable orientation toward the worlds.

An Intersubjective Theory of Desire in History

As the devotees in Szilveszter and Ibolya’s living room surely sensed that night in 2012, desire is a precarious project and caught up in the most intricate of relational dynamics. In order to describe desire as it takes shape in these conditions, I turn to the sketch that Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s provides for an embodied and intersubjective theory of desire from *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962: 193-5). For Merleau-Ponty, desire is an intersubjective process that begins from the understanding that I am fundamentally open to an Other and enmeshed in the problems of balancing autonomy and dependence that lie at the heart of this experience. In a

characteristically paradoxical formulation, Merleau-Ponty affirms that to be a subject is to be fundamentally displaced even as I sense that my subjectivity is dependent on its own independence (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 164). Recast in terms of desire, when an Other desires me, the experience opens me to the risk that I may be made a patient of the Other's desire. Conversely, to be desired by an Other is also to invite the Other into the position of patient as the Other becomes delivered up to desire, unmoored and in servitude to me as the object of desire. Desire therefore takes its place in a dialectic of self and Other that mirrors G. W. F. Hegel's dialectic of the Master and Slave: Insofar as I am desired, I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the gaze of another person; insofar as I myself desire, the Other may also become an object for me as I gaze at this Other in the mode of Master (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 194).⁸ But this mastery is self-defeating since, when my value is recognized through the Other's desire, the Other is no longer the one by whom I wished to be recognized, but a being lost to its own fascination (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 194). The moment that appears to the desiring subject as fruition is, in fact, frustration. For Merleau-Ponty, the critical point is that an object of desire must be animated by a consciousness, and therefore recalcitrance, vis-à-vis the desiring subject if desire as intersubjectivity is to maintain balance in a fluid process (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 195). The embeddedness of desire in the dialectic of life and world requires attention to the *embodied*

⁸ Hegel's classic account of the subject's self-formation in the dialectic of Master and Slave from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* begins with an account of the subject in and for itself caught in the constitutive and inescapable movement of engagement with another subject that is simultaneously independent from and also the mirror image of the first. In the Master/Slave dialectic, although the Master constructs the act of recognition from and through the Slave in coming into the relationship of recognition with the Slave, this recognition cannot amount to an object mirroring of the Master's desire; that is, it cannot appear to the Master as if the Slave sets aside his independence in order to recognize the Master. For if the Slave were to be unfree in the Slave's recognition of the Master, the Slave would be radically other and not the Master's subjectivity reflected outwards: "What now really confronts him is not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one. He is, therefore, not certain of *being-for-self* as the truth of himself. On the contrary, his truth is in reality the unessential consciousness and its unessential action" (Hegel [1807] 1977: 117). Hegel refracts this process in regards to desire in a later passage from the section on the Master/Slave dialectic: "Desire has reserved to itself the pure negating of the object and thereby its unalloyed feeling of self. But that is the reason why this satisfaction is itself only a fleeting one, for it lacks the side of objectivity and permanence" (Hegel [1807] 1977: 118).

and materialized dynamics of autonomy and dependence, emergence and loss of selfhood (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 195).

An objection frequently raised against such an intersubjective theory of desire is that it is insensitive to power's role in shaping subjectivity. Phenomenology overemphasizes individual spontaneity and self-knowledge at the expense of political economy, history, and institutional socialization are given short shrift in processes by which desire is "produced." Placing desire within post-socialism would seem to demand a fulsome treatment of desire's history.⁹ But the very conditions of an intersubjective theory of desire provide such an account insofar as subjects are always already inhabiting worlds through which they have recognized others' desires in relation to their own previous pragmatic orientations of desire. History and social conditions play critical roles in shaping, for instance, very basic questions such as how a subject pragmatically recognizes desire *qua* desire in self and Other. To tell a story about Szilveszter and Ibolya making themselves into certain kinds of desiring subjects through Mary's interventions in their lives and vis-à-vis their friends, family, and fellow Catholics *requires* such an account of history; in the following chapters, I strive always understand the social conditions that shape everyday encounters between devotees and the gods they use to work on their worlds.

Intersubjectivity and Theories of Change

⁹ I am highly sympathetic and heavily indebted to my reading of such accounts of consumer desire and the "authoritarian personality" in the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. When drawn in the direction of examining social problems by Horkheimer, Adorno offered powerful critical sociological readings of Freud's theory of narcissistic desire and the abdication of subjectivity to the world. See, for instance, Adorno's essays on *The Culture Industry* (1991), *Minima Moralia* (1951), and *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). The work of Michel Foucault is another touchstone for critical histories and sociologies of desire. For Foucault, desire is that site through which individuals make themselves subjects of specific regimes of power and knowledge. In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Part I*, he uses the genealogical method to trace how people came to search for the truth of their being in desire at different historical moments. Foucault was particularly interested in why the activities and pleasures associated with sexual conduct became an object of concern, concluding that they served as channels for power in its capillary forms "to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behavior" in everyday life (Foucault 1978: 12). His goal is to "bring out the 'will to knowledge' that serves as both their support and their instrument" (Foucault 1978: 13). For other works that track the production of desire ethnographically in post-socialist contexts, see Lisa Rofel's *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (2007).

The other constellation of questions addressed by this dissertation concerns change: How do people change? How do divine beings change? How do they change together? My theoretical touchstone for addressing these questions is British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's writings about change. Winnicott describes a central intersubjective dynamic of change rooted in children's discovery of their mothers' caretaking. In the early stages of infants' development, children do not distinguish subjective experience from their experience of the world. Mothers' attentiveness – which Winnicott describes as the way mothers “bring the world to the child” – seems to be infants' own creations. At this stage, infants construct a purely subjective world as if they were hallucinating, for instance by imagining that their own desiring invents the breast that mothers provide.¹⁰ The process that Freud termed “the reality principle” takes shape in this nexus of the subject's relational movements vis-à-vis its environment and human others. According to Winnicott, the primary experience of change occurs as infants encounter limitations and resistances to their narcissistic acts of inventing the world. In relational terms, mothers instigate change as they withdraw from constant preoccupation with infants' needs; the child is forced to confront a receding omnipotence amid unmet desires. Because the continuity of subjective experience is dependent on subjects' ability to create the world according to their own needs, they experience a recalcitrant world as a threat to their very selfhood. Winnicott's describes the changed world “impinging” on the self, not only calling into question the subject's foundation but seemingly attacking it by forcing the self to live according to the world's conditions. Infants react to the world that has become recalcitrant with aggression and “hatred,” just as the wholly

¹⁰ Freud calls this condition a kind of “megalomania:” “[It is] an overestimation of the power of their wishes and mental acts, the ‘omnipotence of thoughts’...” (Freud [1914] 1989: 547). Likewise, Winnicott speaks of “omnipotence.” However, domination is not the only element that defines this process, which Winnicott was equally inclined to describe as the development of a “sense of contact” with the world (Winnicott 1971: 24, 132, 143).

created object was loved.¹¹ Winnicott returned repeatedly to the labile nature of love and hate in his writings on clinical process (Winnicott 1951). This hatred, however, is necessary for subjective development and separation, and the subject must come to terms with the other in a way that establishes a middle ground between them.

What emerges as a solution to this experience is the realm of play and “transitional phenomena.” Transitional objects are primary cultural objects drawn from the objective world – pieces of string, teddy bears, and blankets are Winnicott’s favorite examples. However, these objects are grasped by the subject as narcissistic creations. These objects can only play the role of facilitating a transition between states – between narcissistic self-preoccupation and engagement with the unresponsive world – because there exists a paradoxical agreement between infants and those who constitute their worlds *not* to insist on finding a singular place for the transitional object. The object can only be transitional if there is a pact to avoid settling the question of whether it is of the child’s subjectivity and the past *or* of the world and the future. “Of the transitional object,” Winnicott writes in *Playing and Reality*, “it can be said that it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: ‘Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?’ (Winnicott 1971: 17). The transitional object is neither under wholly subjective control nor outside control as a semiotic form; it is somewhere in between, and as such it establishes a world within which the subject can pass from narcissism to balanced engagement with an Other. Finally, this description of the psychic development of the subject is fundamentally intersubjective as Winnicott lays emphasis on the profound level at which subjectivity is, from the first moment, both independent of and

¹¹ Winnicott also calls this attitude “ruthless love,” a distinction that reflects the fact that what appears as hate to the mother cannot be hate to the subject, since the subject remains in the narcissistic mode and is not acting on the other, but rather on the self.

dependent on others' subjectivity, while the mature psychic attitude shifts between living in a world of one's creation and accommodating to the world as it is given.¹²

Recent Discussions of Change in the Anthropology of Religion

Situating Marian devotionism in Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic communities within Winnicott's theoretical descriptions of transitional objects opens new pathways to understanding religious change more broadly. Societies undergoing mass religious conversion have recently become a touchstone for significant theoretical reflection in the anthropology of religion. Change is often portrayed in such contexts as taking shape along a binary divide between relatively distinguishable regimes of "new" and "old."¹³ While I agree that scholars of post-socialism as contexts characterized by rapid change must contend with habits of binary thinking, I disagree with the particularization of this attitude to the post-socialist context. I am inclined to find an inclination to dichotomizing in a number of recent influential studies of religious and social change.¹⁴ One prominent example that shows signs of this habit of thought is Webb Keane's *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (2007), and a close look at this text is warranted as a nuanced and highly effective representative of this trend in theorizing religious change.

The "mission encounter" Keane is most concerned with is the one between ritual traditionalism and Calvinism on the Indonesian island of Sumba, and one of Keane's central

¹² Winnicott's typically dialectical understanding of self and world together and apart is captured in his characterization of this process of "creative looking:" "When I look I am seen, so I exist" (Winnicott 1971: 154). Winnicott's ideas about transitional objects were taken up by several scholars working in post-Soviet communities in the 1990s (Ries 1997; Oushakine 2000; see also Wanner 2007).

¹³ These binaries appear as leitmotifs in many studies of change in post-socialist societies: Sharp generational splits divide Ukrainian Protestant congregations; Ukrainian Orthodox believers "subscribe to an entirely different moral code" than Protestants and the latter are further split by "diametrically opposed understandings" of money; Bulgarian Muslim women who practice new and traditional forms of Islam seem to be from "different worlds" (Wanner 2007: 194: 188-200; 2013: 376, 378; Ghodsee 2009: 133).¹³ Krisztina Fehérváry, following Katherine Verdery, argues that, "scholars of socialist Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union find they have to contend with numerous binary oppositions that are unavoidable in this region," attributed to the socialist state's cognitive organization of the world as a face-off against bourgeois capitalism (Fehérváry 2013: 13; Verdery 1996: 4).

¹⁴ See, for instance, Robbins 2007.

questions is “[W]hat does it mean to say that the same spirit is still there once its name has been translated into a new language and used in new ways of speaking” (Keane 2007: 174). Religious change in this mode emerges through three key notions: “purification,” “semiotic ideology,” and “economy of representation.” The first term serves as a way of reimagining the modern project in terms of materiality, borrowing from Bruno Latour the notion that Protestant-influenced modernity is an effort to “purify” human subjects of their entanglements with material objects (Keane 2007: 200; Latour 1999). The second key idea is an extension and elaboration of Michael Silverstein’s concept of “language ideology.” The central phenomenon described here is that of language users’ pragmatic self-awareness about language, expanded to include material signs’ roles in such pragmatic reflections (Keane 2007: 17-8). Taken together, purification and semiotic ideology train our attention on twinned phenomena in situations of religious change: taking religion as an object of reflection and problematizing materiality. Finally, an economy of representation describes a larger field or world in which semiotic ideologies interact dynamically on each other (Keane 2007: 19).

The story that Keane tells about change as a process of pragmatic self-awareness about religion is primarily organized using the concept of semiotic ideology. As systems that rationalize and order everyday experience, semiotic ideologies account for the necessary patterns and abiding structures that organize, pattern, and provide for regularity in the experience of religious change.¹⁵ While semiotic forms are durable and this durability allows them to enter into circulation, why a particular semiotic form becomes a bone of contention or what affective reactions these contentions spark are contingent upon such ideologies: “Although the risk of semiotic form is inherent, it is only troubling, and liable to provoke reactions, when viewed

¹⁵ Keane does not name Max Weber as an influence in *Christian Moderns*, but in other publications he has invoked the Weberian idea of rationalization to describe this effect of a semiotic ideology. Weber appears as an influence in Keane’s earlier discussions of recognition and power in *Signs of Recognition* (1997).

within the values and ideas of certain semiotic ideologies” (2007: 79).¹⁶ Semiotic forms are consequential as a general rule, Keane argues, but what kinds of consequences will happen is a matter of determined by semiotic ideologies (Keane 2007: 70).

Keane’s primary ethnographic illustration of these ideas involves a ritual performance that accompanied the conversion of a prominent Sumbanese political figure. This ritual performance demonstrates the convert’s pragmatic deployment of semiotic form within a complex mix of ideas drawn from co-present Calvinist and ritual traditionalist semiotic ideologies about the past, present, and future. Drawing on the ritual traditionalist semiotic ideology’s conceptualization of ritual speech, the convert used ritual traditionalist semiotic forms to signal the persistence of the past in the present. The convert casts his foundational act of conversion as an event that replicated ancestors’ founding acts, thus claiming that the new epoch of Christianity grew out of the old ritual traditionalism according to the ritual traditionalist mode of conceiving breaks in time. At the same time, drawing on Calvinism’s semiotic ideology, he eliminated certain ritual obligations from the performance and, despite using ritual speech, used it in accord with Calvinist ideas about language as a storehouse of knowledge and culture. Thus, he was innovating at precisely the point that he was appearing to speak in a conservative manner. Keane’s critical observation drawn from this semiotic analysis of the conversion ritual circles back to his claim concerning rationalization and the durability of semiotic forms. Ritual language persists as a semiotic form in the everyday lives and relationships of converts on Sumba, but Calvinism’s semiotic ideology organizes the way they apprehend this form – as a symbolic system of meaning, not a pragmatic way of acting on the world. Semiotic ideology thus shapes processes of turning pragmatic focused attention to religion by playing “a crucial role in

¹⁶ See also this statement: “[W]e cannot fully understand the particular issues that provoked the Dutch missionaries and their Sumbanese interlocutors, or the passion with which the issues were fought, without a grasp of the semiotic ideologies involved on both sides” (59) “In the second half of the book (59).

determining what counts as significant continuity and how people will experience it as real continuity” (2007: 174).

At this point, it becomes possible to point out the significant similarities and differences between Keane’s semiotic and Winnicott’s intersubjective theories of change. Where Winnicott has a tendency to describe the transitional object as an empty vessel wholly constructed by narcissistic subjectivity, Keane’s account is intentionally semiotic. I am deeply sympathetic to a semiotic critique of Winnicott’s argument as perhaps going too far in mitigating the significance of materiality as well as occasionally positing too sharp a distinction between subject and object. Keane is right to draw our attention to the ubiquity of discourse about the fetish under conditions of religious change, and to point out as a result that the proper relationship between subjects and material objects are frequently central concerns at such times. I am drawn to Merleau-Ponty’s writings precisely because of his sensitivity to detailed description of materiality on its own terms in his account of being-in-the-world and intersubjectivity, some of the implications of which I draw out in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

However, Keane’s account of religious change to stray into problematic formulations to the degree that it loses sight of the dialectical character of cultural analysis. While Keane is right to emphasize the significance of rationalization, abiding patterns, and necessary structures in his concept of semiotic ideology, he leans so far in this direction that it becomes the lens through which he encounters the actual experience of individuals in the everyday world and their efforts to hold the past and present together and apart in the midst of those conditions. In contrast, partly as a result of his background in clinical psychology, Winnicott’s interest is in the child’s personal development and relational processes of contact and differentiation with other concrete subjects. He is oriented towards the lived world of contingent experience: illness and health, love, desire,

and grief, and death, dying and crisis. Winnicott does consider stable cultural patterns and formal “encounters” of the kind that provide Keane’s primary ethnographic grist, but always in a tense relationship with the former. The two are inseparable if distinguishable, in a pairing that Michael Jackson has called the dialectic at the heart of cultural analysis between the ideational order, or *Weltanschauung*, and the human project, or *Bildung* (Jackson 1989: 34).¹⁷ Keane’s preference for the former is perhaps most evident when he shifts gears from genealogy to ethnographic description. Keane’s convert’s experience of becoming a Calvinist loses its significance in terms of this man’s human project, instead becoming a refraction of the “clashes” between semiotic ideologies: “We will see that in his oratorical performance denotations pull in one direction, pragmatic entailments in another, semiotic ideologies clash, and his creative intentionality is divided between them” (2007: 150).¹⁸ Keane’s summary of the convert’s experience in this moment and the overall thrust of his theoretical formulations in *Christian Moderns* folds the project of *Bildung* into the ideational order of semiotic ideologies such that what emerges of this man’s life is the work that semiotic ideologies are making of his experience – his creative intentionality is divided between semiotic ideologies rather than a lifeworld to be described on its own terms. While semiotic ideologies and stable structures are no doubt profoundly significant, what is lost is the equally significant moment in which these systems become part of the man’s own human project, for, as the phenomenological tradition has continually reaffirmed, the

¹⁷ The necessary materiality of social life suggests that “ideational” might not be the best gloss for this phenomenon, but it remains the case that accounting for abstract, supra-subjective orders, rationalities, systems, predictabilities, and stable structures of experience take precedence in these approaches.

¹⁸ The metaphor of “clash” appears repeatedly in Keane’s writings on semiotic ideologies. These clashes sit awkwardly against numerous caveats to the effect that semiotic ideologies are abstractions from fluid social processes: Social alliances and identifications shift depending on context (178). The missionary encounter, “is complex, and the people involved could take quite different positions toward one another depending on circumstances” (10). Keane also notes that, “In this respect, I am also working along the lines by which they themselves tended to simplify their own perceptions of the encounter” (8). Finally, Keane offers a third qualification “from another angle, suggesting that insofar as both sides of the encounter are responding to similar semiotic possibilities, each is vulnerable to the other’s accusation of fetishism” (178).

experience of change is not entirely captured in being thrown into an unfamiliar world; it is also the subject's turning towards and seeking out this givenness – what Merleau-Ponty refers to as “being at grips with the world” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 352-3).

In this dissertation, I do not turn away from approaching religious change in terms of semiotic forms or systems, rationalities, and predictabilities. But I am also concerned to tell an equally and irreducibly *human* story about religious change in Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic communities. That night in Szilveszter and Ibolya's home, there were phenomena at work in the scene between the prayer group members that could be abstracted from these interactions as ideologies, ideational organizations, or systems. But these interactions were defined equally by dynamics that refuse to situate the action of social process in such abstractions, pointing us back to this relational and human element: The women and men prayed the Mysteries of Rosary imperfectly still felt strongly obliged to do so, and were open to shame at their difficulties. Understanding why they felt this way requires not only an account of the rationalization of social life, but also how, in the human moments of crisis and victory, grief and regret these devotees were at grips with the world as it had been rationalized for them.

Other Key Concepts: World, Lifeworld, Catholic World, Devotional World

Besides desire and change, I use the concept of “world” throughout this dissertation, including variations such “lifeworld,” “Catholic world,” and “devotional world.” I understand this term through one of Merleau-Ponty's most enduring illustrations from *The Phenomenology of Perception*: the experience of the “phantom limb.” Merleau-Ponty argues that this experience, in which subjects insist on the presence of amputated limbs, draws attention to the world as a “pre-personal” dimension of existence. Adapting a concept from Husserl, Merleau-Ponty describes how patients' experience limbs as tied by “intentional threads” to those aspects of the

world that gesturally evoke and pragmatically call to these body parts. Patients are able to evade the absence of their limbs because they know, although not in a discursive manner, precisely how and where they will encounter objects, actions, people, and processes that require these limbs (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 93). When patients reorient their worlds in such a manner that everything they encounter and engage no longer gestures back and calls to their limbs as “lost,” then this particular mode of experiencing them is successfully repressed.

According to Merleau-Ponty, that which demands the presence of an absent limb is the “lifeworld,” “being-in-the-world,” or “habituated body” that has been built up over a lifetime and maintains a momentum within us that throws us into our tasks, cares, situations, and environments (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 94). We persist in pre-discursive habituated forms of pragmatic gesturing towards the world that are deeply sedimented in our bodies, and the world flows back towards us with similarly sedimented pragmatic movements and demands:

Thus there appears round our personal existence a margin of *almost* impersonal existence, which can be practically taken for granted, and which I rely on to keep me alive; round the human world which each of us has made for himself is a world in general terms to which one must first of all belong in order to be able to enclose oneself in the particular context of a love or an ambition (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 96-7).

Round about the projects with which we concern our lives stands a primordially acquired “atmosphere of generality,” which is just as much reality as our focused pragmatic efforts that constitute our sense of having a “human world.”

For Merleau-Ponty, such a phenomenological account of a world requires telling of its emergence in historical and social terms. A critical phenomenology cannot ignore history, but rather considers positions within political economic structures and processes of production as akin to institutions that subjects carry around within themselves and experience; they are part of subjects’ pragmatic engagements – their “way of being in the world within this institutional

framework” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 515). Like desire, the concept of “world” is intentionally chosen as a way to situate my argument in the existential-phenomenological philosophical school, and especially those thinkers who sought a synthesis between this tradition and mid-20th century revisions of Marxian thought.

When I speak of a “devotional world,” I sometimes refer to the way Catholic elites imagine the Virgin Mary and her relationships with devotees, bringing their own agendas, experiences, stresses, and anxieties to this effort to define how ordinary Catholics should feel, desire, work, love, and pray. However, most often I use “devotional world” to refer to the acts by which devotees invoke Mary into their lives and relationships: At another point in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty compares the “atmosphere of generality” to the light cast from a lamp that is invisible to us as we train our pragmatic focus on the illuminated picture on the wall. But this atmosphere can become an object of pragmatic attention if another object is inserted into the world, such as a piece of paper thrust before the light bulb that brings our attention to the action and character of the light itself. I believe that this act of reorientation in a world is something that Mary’s devotees would intuitively understand: In the language of the devotion, this is what happens when the Virgin Mother “casts her mantle” around them (*takarni a palástjával*). Introducing the presence of Mary into a crisis is an act of invoking another element into a world that is bearing down in an unforgiving way. The material presented in the following chapters is, in one way or another, a description of how it feels when Mary’s mantle falls about your shoulders.

Pilgrimage: Place, Text, and Movement, but Less Often People

For a long while now, Eastern Europe has been the place people go to study nationalism, ethnic identity, and belonging. Studying religion in this region has therefore meant examining

nationalism's secularizing influence on religion or religion's role in legitimating or sacralizing such loyalties. A number of historical and anthropological studies of Eastern European communities have debated nationalism alongside and within its relation to religion, amassing an impressive pile of scholarship, most of it focusing on the role of intellectuals in this social formation.¹⁹ This tendency is also evident among groups of anthropologists who have sought to define nationalism, secularism, and place-making as the specific problems to be addressed by studying contemporary pilgrimage in Eastern Europe (Eade and Katic 2014; Margry 2008; Niedźwiedz 2009, 2010; Hayden 2002; Bringa 1995). My theoretical interests in intersubjectivity, desire, and change guides my approach to these topics. Nationalism appears most clearly in this dissertation in Chapters Two and Six, and I approach belonging through face-to-face interactions between those who feel entitled to speak on behalf of the nation and those who do not, thus re-siting questions of secularism and national loyalty within processes of social mobility whose stakes are highest in intimate family relationships.

For over twenty years, scholars of pilgrimage have debated how they should approach this phenomenon and what key topics must be addressed in a fulsome account of shrine culture. The current state of this discussion has settled on the terms, "person, place, text, and movement" as indispensable aspects of pilgrimage (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Eade and Katic 2014; Coleman 2002). The first term in this constellation, however, has routinely proven difficult to explore for scholars of pilgrimage due to the problematic logistics of studying mobile populations (Fedele 2013: 21). In preparing this dissertation, the studies of shrine culture that I found the most

¹⁹ This bibliography would be too long to include even if I selected just for studies of Eastern European nationalisms. Rogers cites ethnicity, nationalism, and religion as one of the primary themes of the study of religion after socialism (2005: 14-6). For some prominent contributions, see Brubaker, et., al 2007; Verdery 1983, 1991; Kligman 1988: 250-65; Bringa 1995; Goluboff 2001; Hann 1997; Lankauskas 2009; Creed 2011: 150-70; Wanner 2013; Luehrmann 2011. For historical studies of nationalism and religion (sometimes considered together) under socialism, see Ramet 1989, 1998; Miner 2003; Boia 2001; Mevius 2005. Hirsch 2005 Brandenberger 2002; Young 1997; Husband 2000; Peris 1998; Froese 2008; Miner 2003.

inspiring based their discussion of “person” – by which I mean the constellation of relationships, longings, values, ambivalences, frustrations, and aspirations that consume pilgrims in their everyday lives and may or may not bear on their visits to the shrine – on deep and repeated engagements with the everyday lives of pilgrims, not isolated quotations from pilgrims.²⁰ Unfortunately, such approaches to the “person” of the pilgrimage abound as a result of the logistical difficulties of tracking down and gaining access to the everyday lives of populations that become highly dispersed after appearing together at the shrine. Under such difficult methodological circumstances, “place, text, and movement” are easier to talk about, partly because they are more easily apprehended from a distance as processes that exist as abstractions from persons in their deepest longings and particular aspirations. Discussions of the “politics of pilgrimage” and shrines’ ineluctable polyvocality often lack illuminating discussions of these dimensions of human experience. Pilgrimages’ polyvocality appears most often in terms of various *Weltanschauung* that cohabit (in conflict or tolerance) a shrine or the struggle for the power to give and enact the meaning of what a pilgrimage site is, not in the guise of lives in the dialectical interaction of ideational orders and human *Bildung* (Bowman 2014). While I glance at questions concerning the meaning and significance of Csíksomlyó *qua* pilgrimage site from various angles in the course of this dissertation, the objective that I aim towards is this latter dialectical process.

Doing Fieldwork in Mary’s Lifeworld

This approach and my interests – pragmatic interaction over post-hoc evaluation, description of a lifeworld over genealogy, processes of backgrounding and foregrounding over boundary-making – are partly a matter of how and where I did my fieldwork. It was serendipity

²⁰ For exemplary studies of shrine culture that adopt this approach in various ways, see Orsi 2002 [1985], 1996; Frey 1998; Tserkassova 2014.

that my arrival at Csíksomlyó coincided with my renting a room in a Miercurea Ciuc apartment building. The city provided my base of operation during my first year of fieldwork; as urban areas go, it felt comparable to other cities that have been the subject of ethnographic research of life after socialism. It took about forty minutes to walk from the Miercurea Ciuc city center to the shrine, and from the first, I noticed that I was joined on my trips to the shrine by other urban devotees.²¹ When I bought a bicycle and started riding over to Csíksomlyó, I noticed that there were others too who chose this way of making a path to the pilgrimage site. And when I decided to move to a village, I followed my urban social networks into this new location and then back to the shrine. From my first moments at the pilgrimage site, I was gripped by the ways in which city, village, suburb, and shrine came together by these intentional threads of purposeful action. When I began reading archival sources from the socialist era, I discovered that people had been moving back and forth from village to city for decades before I took up these same routes. Although I would tell people I was doing fieldwork about Marian devotionism “at Csíksomlyó,” I always felt like I was not only doing fieldwork in a “place,” but also trying to reconstruct in my own life the sometimes tense, sometimes loose flow of a world that Mary constituted through her intercessions. In a sense, I was doing fieldwork in Mary’s lifeworld.

My first visit to Romania was in the summer of 2005 with a return visit in the summer of 2008. I moved to Transylvania permanently in September 2009, staying until January 2012. I returned for the summer of 2012 and for four brief visits while in residence at Central European University in early 2013. I conducted archival research in the National Archives of Hungary in Budapest as well as archdiocesan archives in Transylvania. I read newspapers, watched television, exchanged emails, talked on Skype, read web sites, followed blogs, listened to the

²¹ See Feherváry’s description of the city of Dunaújváros that took “forty minutes” to walk across (Feherváry 2013: 36).

radio, and heard homilies during countless Masses at Csíksomlyó and elsewhere. I ended up conducting approximately fifty formal interviews with government employees, elected officials, teachers, archdiocesan leaders and priests, and so on.

The bulk of my research work, however, was spent being with people doing everyday things and chatting about ordinary events. Where possible, in this dissertation I have preferred to use such conversations *among* acquaintances, since such exchanges better revealed the pragmatic flexibility of everyday life, whereas talk addressed directly to me often focused on evaluation and boundary-making. Ordinary conversations took place most often at home in the flow of everyday efforts to get on with life, so I made it a point of living with families throughout my time in Romania. Four families welcomed me into their homes for durations as short as two months and as long as sixteen. Sixteen families hosted me for stays that lasted as long as three weeks. It is hard to say how many homes I visited without spending the night – a very rough estimate would be two hundred fifty.

But most of all, my ethnographic method involved praying with people. I spent two weeks in the monastery at Csíksomlyó keeping the daily round of prayer and worship with the monks. I learned the Rosary in both Romanian and Hungarian, and began exchanging secrets in several urban and village Rosary circles. I became a regular at various weekly prayer circles that met in devotees' homes. I went to charismatic movement summer camps and bike tours organized by the Franciscan Order. I visited acquaintances in hospitals and prayed with them. I went to graveyards and joined friends as they said prayers for deceased relatives. And so on.

As is evident from my description of my experience in the prayer group, talk about petitions and miracles was not at all easy and thus precluded me from conducting formal interviews. No devotee ever told me about praying to Mary or receiving her intercession if I had

not already been introduced to them by a trusted intermediary. Even then, devotees were reluctant to tell me about their experiences if I did not first describe my childhood memories of female relatives' devotions to Mary. I gradually came to sense that it was critically important to devotees that our conversations involved *exchanges* of stories about Mary's intercession. "Now I know who I'm talking with," was one relieved devotee's reaction to such an exchange, after which she told me about how Mary had once healed her mother during an illness.

Those who were willing to open up after just one or two visits tended to be participants in groups like Szilveszter and Ibolya's that encouraged public recitation of petitions. Others had commissioned *ex voto* plaques displayed in the Csíksomlyó church giving thanks for a miracle. But even those devotees who were practiced in public recitation of petitions and who could be reasonably confident about me by virtue of having been introduced by a trusted confidante were always still anxious storytellers. In every other case, it took at least several months of regular contact before a devotee was willing to tell me about praying to Mary. Embedded as they were within exchanges of stories about Mary and months of praying together before that, even those conversations that I recorded took on the feel of something other than a "formal" interview.

There are no case studies of devotees in this dissertation for both methodological and theoretical reasons. Which units would best open a window onto the shrine? Individual devotees? Families? Households? Villages? Nations? Something else? The social transformations that led devotees to develop routes in-between these units – routes that simultaneously allowed for them to remain distinct and apart – made such things seem simultaneously relevant and irrelevant to life at Csíksomlyó. Intersubjectivity as a theoretical orientation also made me suspicious of the position vis-à-vis my acquaintances that case studies put me into. When I attempted to arrange lives as units before me for the purpose of comparing class backgrounds, resources, genders, etc.,

I kept rebelling against myself out of a sense that I was trying to achieve a mastery over my acquaintances, as if I could move their lives around for the best vantage like so many puzzle shapes arrayed before me on a table. Instead, I have preferred a mode of representation that Michael Jackson has called “parataxis,” or “writing intersubjectivity,” that “interleaves story and essay, strikes a balance between the voice of the author and the voices of his or her interlocutors, and leaves space for the reader to rethink whatever is being said or shown” (Jackson 2011: 174). When I relate devotees’ stories, I present them in this paratactic mode. The narratives appear as a mix of direct quotations of their words and a summary of what they told me in my own words. My interpretations focus on situating these stories in relation to the years I spent working, eating, celebrating, relaxing, and traveling alongside the devotees who told them. The goal throughout was to maintain enough of devotees’ own words to allow for my readers to inhabit these lifeworlds for themselves and enough of my words to convey my interpretation.

Desire and the Pragmatics of the Anthropologist’s Position

If my primary interest during my fieldwork became desire in its polymorphous entanglements, I was by no means able to keep my own position out of such a project. One evening, after an evening church choir rehearsal, I arrived back to the home of the family that I had been with for almost a year and sat down at the kitchen table for a snack. The father of the family stepped in with something he wanted to talk about, broaching the topic with a telling phrase, “You know, by now you are a family member.” Then he proceeded to stumble over himself for several minutes, speaking with such unusual indirectness that he left me befuddled. Finally, I grasped what he was trying to say, and I asked, “Wait, are you asking if I have slept with my girlfriend?” Although I used a delicate phrase to refer to sexual intercourse, my host still winced. The rest of the conversation later brought to my mind my host’s his eldest daughter, then

eighteen years old, who was in a serious relationship with a young man, although I never witnessed the parents address the topic of sexual desire with her. Finally, he concluded by telling me that, again as a “family member” (*családtag*), I was by no means to have sex in the house, and that he would be disappointed in me if my partner and I had sex elsewhere, as well.

I tell this story to illustrate my approach to the issue of scholarly position in this dissertation. First, I was always aware that desire was a significant factor in pragmatically and contextually shaping who I was and what kinds of claims my acquaintances could make on me. I was a family member when my host felt the need to exert authority in his home and threatened by forms of sexual desire. At other times I was a researcher, for instance when he wanted to introduce me to powerful potential allies. Second, just as desire is intersubjectively and pragmatically oriented and best represented conveyed in descriptions of everyday life, so my position as a white, upper middle class, educated, urban American Protestant with a Catholic background became a focused topic of concern only in the give-and-take of everyday interactions. If my desire became problematic in relation to someone else’s problematic desire, then being an anthropologist was likewise significant in relation to someone else’s position within Transylvanian Hungarian pathways of social mobility. Since these considerations never left the intimate and global frames within which they were used to engage these worlds, I urge my readers to dive deeply into my descriptions of these worlds in the following chapters if they want to explore the pragmatics of my scholarly position.

Plan of This Dissertation

The outline of chapters in this dissertation is an outgrowth of my overarching goal of carrying my readers into the religious worlds of contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics.

The first four parts of Chapter One use broad outlines to trace 20th and 21st century social transformations in the Ciuc valley. I begin with a description of the pre-World War II rural householder system through socialist-era collectivization, urbanization, and industrialization, and conclude with post-socialism as neo-liberal political economics. Part Five turns to an examination of Catholic intellectuals writing popular devotional literature after 1989. I argue that Catholic elites writing for ordinary Catholics during this period of radical social transformation were largely concerned with five problems, each of which touches on desire in some fashion: Catholic visionaries and tourism, labor migration, post-socialist entrepreneurs, prayer, and family structure. I do not organize these messages into fixed camps or ideologies. My fieldwork was at a time when factions within the archdiocese were in flux, largely because of the archdiocese's piecemeal efforts to consolidate its authority that I describe in Chapter Three. Over time, I came to the conviction that any attempt at organizing popular messages about post-socialist Catholic life into ideological camps would be a problematic post-hoc rationalization of pragmatic and ad hoc associations among elites.

Chapter Two explores the annual Pentecost pilgrimage event as a ritual intricately caught up in everyday processes of post-socialist masculine subject formation. I focus on the intimate, domestic relationships through which men's subjectivities are fashioned, especially men's desire to achieve social mobility for themselves and their sons in the midst of rapidly changing circumstances. The Pentecost pilgrimage offers various venues for men to come face to face with people who have achieved an elite status that is the object of their ambition. Both this desire and their participation in the annual pilgrimage are mediated through men's dueling conviction that their physical labor is meaningful even as it must be renounced if elites are to take them seriously. Thus, I understand the pilgrimage event and men's intimate lives through the same

phenomenological theoretical lens – as semiotic forms filled with their own significance and taking shape within a larger Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic world.

Chapter Three tells the story of a young woman’s vision of the Virgin Mary that resulted in the installation of a new statue and shrine at the pilgrimage site. Where other scholars have treated similar events in terms of abstract political processes of resacralizing and nationalizing post-socialist space and time, I seek to re-site the “politics” of the shrine in the tension between religious experience and semiotic form. This chapter is also a study of intersubjectivity and desire. Not only the young visionary’s subjectivity, but also the subjectivities of many involved in this affair took shape in precarious articulations between Mary’s desires, the visionary’s desires, and others’ desires for her and the Mother of God.

Chapter Four blends phenomenological and pragmatist theories of materiality to address recent infrastructural transformations to the pilgrimage site as efforts to “remodel Mary’s home.” One set of new structures outside at the shrine materialize and enact the ambivalent search for a post-socialist lay Catholic leading class that I introduced in Chapter One. For a group of all-male security guards inside the shrine church, a change from using a series of ropes to a group of metal gates works on their subjectivity in the context of their own efforts to work on a Catholic world defined by precarious processes of social mobility, much like the men I describe in Chapter Two. For one of Mary’s devotees, however, the flexible materiality of the ropes orients her subjective openness to Mary’s “call” that leads her to disregard these guards’ demands for order in the church.

Chapter Five takes up my previous concern with gender in order to examine women’s Marian healing practices in secular post-socialist hospitals. In the pre-collectivization period, women healers occupied positions of respect and authority in village society. Beginning in the

late 1960s, professionalized medical care in hospitals radically reorganized the space and time of healing. Today, women call friends and relatives in these hospitals to pray with them or they carry objects touched to Mary's statue to heal them. These practices and the ways that women speak about them are best understood by comparison to Szilveszter and Ibolya's attitude towards prayer: Mary serves as a transitional object as devotees hold past and present together and apart in their relationships.

Chapter Six begins with a consideration of the intersubjective politics of storytelling and the new role played at Csíksomlyó by the global Catholic radio network, Radio Maria. However, my discussion quickly steps back from the Ciuc valley to look at devotional life in light of global labor migration from this region. Radio Maria's web site publishes petitions to Mary and a weekly radio call-in program broadcasts similar prayers. I argue that these venues provide a critical means for devotees working abroad to be at grips with their changing worlds. I also renew my argument that devotees are not mingling their biographies with national histories and narratives, but rather Radio Maria constitutes a *public* best compared to a devotional body defined by existential concerns of healing and mourning.

Chapter One: Desiring Gods, Desiring People

I. Introduction: Desire, Mary, and the Meaning of the Csíksomlyó Pilgrimage Site

The preacher at the 2005 Pentecost pilgrimage was Father István Hajdó, a prominent Transylvanian Catholic priest serving nearby Csíksomlyó.²² Hajdó began his homily by describing an encounter several years ago with an elderly woman – part of a group that gather at the shrine each year to see the Virgin Mary in the rising sun. Hajdó’s encounter was before this group’s visionary ritual had attracted the attention of large numbers of other pilgrims, who began crowding around them to photograph their ecstasies; it is to these camera-wielding pilgrims that Hajdó addresses himself. Hajdó describes how, like them, one year he had heard tell of the ritual and decided to see it for himself. He was standing on the hillside at Csíksomlyó alongside her when an elderly woman visionary shouts in ecstasy, “I saw the Virgin Mother!” However, Hajdó reports that their exchange then took a turn for the strange: “Did you also see the Virgin Mother,” she asks. As if overcome by some involuntary desire, he replies: “Yes, I also saw her.” Just a few moments later, as he is leaving the hillside, Hajdó begins berating himself lying: “But on the way down I gave myself a good tongue lashing,” Hajdó confesses, ““What are you talking about?! How could *you* have seen the Virgin Mother?!””²³ Just then, a disembodied voice calls out to him in the midst of his self-chastising: “You also met the Virgin Mother!” And Hajdó confesses he felt a profound sense of relief as the voice tells him, “You are here because she has been the protector of your nation and your people for a thousand years.”

²² This vignette was cut from the abbreviated version of the homily Hajdó delivered at the pilgrimage Mass, but appears in multiple collections of Pentecost pilgrimage sermons.

²³ This is a relatively free translation of the Hungarian text. A more literal translation would be: “How did you see the Virgin Mother?” In Hungarian: “Hogy láttad te a Szűanyát?” Since Hungarian verbs are conjugated, rendering use of pronouns unnecessary, insertion of the pronoun *te* (you) in this sentence adds emphasis and draws a contrast between subjects. How did you (as opposed to the old woman) see the Virgin Mother? A tone of incredulity is further implied by the fact that the question is part of an act of self-criticism. To make these two meanings clear, I have included the phrase: “What are you talking about?!”

Hajdó's narrative of this moment of self-discovery is remarkable and revealing for the way it shows how Catholic semiotic forms such as visions of the Virgin Mary provide media for a labile dialectic of desire and self-loathing in the post-socialist period. By lying to the visionary, Hajdó reveals the desire he shares with camera-wielding pilgrims: to see Mary. However, Hajdó tells them that they are all alienated from the elderly visionary's lifeworld; they are not capable of being open to Mary's intervention in visions. The combination of desire and denial causes him to react in self-loathing recriminations. And this internalized conflict is only resolved by the comfort of the disembodied voice. If his fellow moderns are disappointed by their unfulfilled desires, they can take comfort in developing a close relationship with Mary as Hungarians.

This chapter introduces the major shapes and movements of desire in contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic lifeworlds through a historical review of the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage site in the context of the Ciuc valley. I argue that desire provides a critical medium for the dialectical construction of subjectivity in the midst of a world in process and the emergence of a world through subjects' coming to grips with it. In Part Two, I use the framework of desire to describe the broad outlines of the household system of social and economic organization in the pre-collectivization period. In Part Three, this review shifts to an account of sex and desire in the socialist state's collectivization of rural property and attendant state campaigns against the Roman Catholic Church. This section also features a description of the post-1968 processes of industrialization and urbanization as processes that were caught up in orienting desire and consumption in particular directions. I turn to the post-1989 period in Part Four, focusing on desire in the formation of a suburban entrepreneurial leading class. Part Five puts these political economic transformations into the eyes of Transylvanian Catholic elites through a description of their popular writings about visions, prayer, icons and statues, and Mary.

My focus in this section is on their ambivalent reactions – combining both attraction and repulsion – to the emergence of a post-socialist entrepreneurial class, and the way these ambivalences are translated into Catholic writings about desire. Ultimately, these sketches provide the ground for my more detailed descriptions of ordinary Catholic lives in the area around Csíksomlyó in the following chapters. I transition to this material focusing on concrete subjects at grips with their everyday worlds by concluding with a coda featuring an account of one of Mary’s miracles.

I learned early on that any study of Eastern European cultures that relies, as I do, on the writings of elites must grapple with the extensive historical and anthropological literature on intellectuals in this region. I have selected my sources intentionally out of a sense of dissatisfaction with scholarship on Eastern European intellectuals that too often rest on two faulty presumptions: First, the topics that consume intellectuals in professional journals, such as national belonging and loyalty, also consume them when they craft messages for broader audiences. Second, that these professional journals constitute everyday “capillary” means of subjectification such that a study of these sources would allow scholars access into how, for instance, elites have secured the population’s loyalty to a religious institution. It was my conviction, in contrast, that while ordinary Catholics were mostly oblivious to such publications, they enthusiastically engaged with homilies they heard during Mass, moral instructional manuals, blog postings, television programs, newspaper columns, and memoirs.

Studies of intellectuals also employ a typical strategy of dividing writers into factions, generations, political orientations, and so on. While such groupings may be useful for the purpose of post-hoc analysis, I was led away from representing elites’ as inhabiting everyday worlds through such schema, primarily because of the historical idiosyncrasies of the time when

I was doing fieldwork: The mid- to late-2000s was a period that saw high levels of variability in intellectuals' engagements with each other at a time of shifting alliances between ethnologists, historians, the Franciscan Order, the archdiocesan hierarchy, and entrepreneurial elites. But what played a more decisive role in my shaping this chapter's organization was a sense that ordinary Catholics did not judge the messages they heard according to whether the person delivering it fit into this or that faction, but rather according to subjectification processes and situational pragmatic judgments oriented towards the goal of being at grips with everyday religious worlds. It is out of respect for this process that I treat Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals' writings not as a study of debates among factions, but rather as a debate about topics of particular concern to Catholics in their efforts to form themselves into Catholic subjects.

II. Social and Economic Reproduction in the Pre-Collectivization Period

Social Reproduction in the Pre-Collectivization Household

In the period before collectivization in the Ciuc valley, most aspects of everyday life, including formulations of desire, were defined within the social parameters set by the household system of social reproduction (Kligman 1988; Kligman and Verdery 2011; Bodó 2004). Labor-intensive cultivation of scattered small plots was organized along household lines, defined as loose kinship groups enacted through the practices of reciprocity that were required for this type of agricultural production (Kligman and Verdery 2011: 90-3). In the Ciuc valley, genealogical backgrounds in the pre-collectivization period were reckoned bilaterally, with relatives counted as coming from both a mother's and a father's lineage, while the practice of establishing ties of *komaság* (ritual god-parenthood) provided means by which a male household head could create links with prestigious villagers.²⁴ A prestigious family was one whose male head of household

²⁴ Keith Hitchins provides a list of the various census-defined types of peasants, based on land-ownership, used during the inter-war period, including rich peasants with 50-500 hectares, well-off peasants with 10-50 hectares,

controlled his own labor process such that he could determine when he wanted to work and for how long (Kligman and Verdery 2011: 94). Families with more property were regarded as possessing more prestige, but wealth was counted not just in terms of land but also in terms of “people.” People were the primary means of reckoning social space in the household, and the household was a primary context for socialization (Kligman 1988: 29). The household system guaranteed dense levels of everyday interactions between children and older generations. Younger children remained in the household courtyard, while older children labored together with peers and elders in the fields. There were high levels of village endogamy in the valley through the 1950s, with children from the same rural neighborhood or village finding marital partners from within these social groups (Gagyí 1996a: 100-103; see also Gagyí 1996b). Given that the system of formal education in rural areas of the Ciuc valley was weak until the 1950s, this type of household system routinely served as the primary context for socialization in the pre-collectivization period (Laki and Bíró 2001: 227).

In the household system, social reproduction over time was ensured through marriages organized according to a preferentially patrilocal system. Anthropologists of rural Eastern Europe have argued that patrilocality in patriarchal household systems produces distinctive psycho-social dynamics constituting bonds between generations and genders. In the first place, marriage in this system is a far more thoroughgoing social disruption for a bride than for a groom (Kligman 1988: 74-6; Simić 1983). Marriage was a disruption for a woman because, as an institution within a patriarchal social order, it was conceived as uniting two distinct social units. A woman moved into her husband’s household as a social outsider from a separate household such that she was perceived as needing to gain a different social persona and set of

smallholders with 3-10 hectares, dependent smallholders, and so on (1994: 339-40). An extensive discussion of categorization of the various and changing ways of categorizing rural populations in Romania is beyond the scope of this chapter.

responsibilities within this unfamiliar lifeworld (Kligman 1988: 75). If a woman married the youngest son of the family, the practice of ultimogeniture meant that this son inherited the family home. The in-marrying wife and her husband then lived alongside his parents while she tended to their everyday needs in their dotage (Kligman 1988: 38). Perceived as an interloper and a threat to an established intra-familial social order, young women who moved into unfamiliar households were said to have suffered under the domination of their mothers-in-law, who were the central intra-familial authority figures, until they were able to establish her own power in the household after the mother-in-law's passing. In contrast, young men enjoyed an especially close, affectionate, and loving relationship with their mothers throughout their lives (Kligman 1988: 44-7).

Sex and Desire in the Private Matriarchy of the Household

Conditions supporting small-scale agriculture were undermined by land reforms instituted after the valley's integration into the centralizing Dualist Austro-Hungarian Empire as part of the 1867 *Ausgleich*. The reform, in particular, redistributed land by having the landless pay for the land on which they resided, exacerbating long-term indebtedness such that over 70% in the Szekler region had less than two hectares of land by the turn of 20th century (Oláh 1996: 17).²⁵ At the same time, the population of the Szekler region was growing rapidly, even though this region had long been over-populated and unable to sustain the numbers of people who were already living there (Oláh 1996: 18). As a result, large numbers of men began looking for work in distant locales across the Carpathian mountain range in the Old Kingdom of Romania, a trend that continued through World War II (Hitchins 1994: 340-1). When at home during the

²⁵ Changes in the administration of villages' collectively-owned pastureland, beginning in the 1870s, further eroded the basis for household agricultural production, since rights to usage of such property came to favor larger landowners. Agricultural production was further hampered by the system of crop rotation that rendered a third of the arable land in the Szekler region unused each year (Oláh 1996: 17).

summertime months, men continued to be isolated from goings-on in the village while they were laboring in fields oftentimes at a great distance from the house or away performing compulsory military service.²⁶ In the absence of male kin, mothers and grandmothers were informally but intimately involved in assessing potential marital partners, since they were well acquainted with the village and local social dynamics.²⁷

While men were often away from the village, mothers and grandmothers were able to remain active in these primary social contexts on a more consistent basis. As an expression of women's centrality to village moral lifeworlds and communication networks, women during the pre-collectivization period were often called "the mouth of the village" (*a falu szája*) (Balázs 2009: 176-80).²⁸ Such information laid the groundwork for what scholars have variously called the "private matriarchy" or "crypto-matriarchy" embedded within the public patriarchy of such rural societies (Simić 1983). The arenas of moral socialization, domestic religious practice, propriety, and sexuality were the purview of these women. If a young man joked with his age-mates about having sex, he worried first about whether older women in the village would find out about his ribald boasting (Balázs 2009: 93). Shame before one's female relatives carried more power to determine one's social reputation than the consequences of "sinning" against the church (Balázs 2009: 123). Well-established roles such as healers, midwives, and *jósnők* (soothsayers) were reserved for mothers and grandmothers (Kligman 1988: 62; Gagyí 2001). Mothers dominated during the *fonó* (spinning parties), and if young men came to court the young

²⁶ Women also engaged in agricultural labor migration, albeit in smaller numbers. They left during corn husking season, since this was work conventionally gendered as female. They also worked as household servants for wealthy families in cities. In some families, multiple generations of women spent a large part of their childhood in such work (Oláh 1996: 22; Gagyí 1996).

²⁷ See this quotation cited in a monograph by a Ciuc-based ethnologist: [T]he mother of the young man had and still today has the primary word, even when they were both ambivalent about the choice, since 'she knows the village and the locals better than her husband' (Balázs 1994: 22). Of course, men filled many roles in formal negotiations between families in advance of a wedding as well as ritual roles in the wedding itself (see Kligman 1988: 77-9).

²⁸ Gail Kligman records the same term in Romanian referring to villages in the Maramureş region, reflecting a general sense of rural social spaces as feminized in relation to urban space (Kligman 1988).

women at such events they could be turned away without repercussion.²⁹ Funerals and end-of-life-rituals also provided forums for such women to take positions at the center of the community.³⁰ For weeks, months, and years afterwards, they continued to dress in black and refused to dance at weddings thereby enforcing their power to arbitrate moral conventions and the formation of proper social relationships.

These conventions and mores convey the fact that, in the pre-collectivization village social system, a mother's private power was real and profoundly felt. However, a description of everyday strategies for finding marital partners for female children reveal that a mother's power was also deeply flawed. On the one hand, a mother's power was necessary because so much depended on it. On the other hand, it was impossible because so much conspired to undermine it. This fundamental contradiction emerged from the fact that the occasions of the exercise a mother's power were defined and framed by public acts of male hostility. While mothers and grandmothers might respond using the idiom of the private exercise of moral sanction, the very privacy, surreptitiousness, and furtive character of this power sowed the seeds for its own undermining, for instance by sparking daughters' resentment and rebelliousness.

This dynamic of necessity and impossibility was established by the fact that the system of private matriarchy organized a mother's relationship with her daughters differently than her relationship with her sons, due primarily to the greater burden placed on daughters to uphold a family's honor and reputation by marrying well. Parents were certainly vigilant concerning a son's sexual partners. Wealthier or more respected families might chastise their son for a sexual

²⁹ For a description of the fonó, in Romanian, șezătoare, from the village of Ieud in Maramureș, see Kligman 1988: 59-63.

³⁰ During my fieldwork, I observed women tending to the bodies of the deceased, standing guard over the corpse in the living rooms of village houses. They took charge of ushering the deceased into the community of ancestors by leading the praying of the Rosary during the all-night vigil the night before the formal funeral rites and at the community meal after the funeral Mass. For a description of funerary practices in a Ciuc valley village, see Balázs 1995.

relationship with a young woman of lesser standing. Likewise, a family lower down on the social hierarchy might encourage a relationship between their female child and a wealthier young man. However, mothers and grandmothers, regardless of social position, were keenly aware of the consequences to a family's reputation if such a relationship did not end in marriage or resulted in a pre-marital pregnancy. A young man might face informal social sanctions in such circumstances, but the danger to a family's position if a daughter were to become pregnant before marriage was far greater. This greater danger was evident in mothers' and grandmothers' responses when a daughter began to be courted. Courtship inaugurated a series of anxious and almost desperate attempts to supervise daughters' whereabouts, relationships, and activities (see Balázs 2009: 64, 87). Transylvanian Hungarian ethnological recollections capture the way conflicting pressures in the matrix of sexual desire and desire for social mobility combined to produce a welter of veiled warnings, obscure prohibitions, and unelaborated threats from mothers toward their adolescent daughters.³¹

However much a mother sought to discipline her daughter, she was countered by the resistance it sparked in these young women. Accounts of social life in the pre-collectivization village describe occasionally bitter conflicts that pitted adolescent daughters against mothers (Balázs 2009: 149). Just the same, women could also feel proud if their sons and daughters married well or achieved success in the various avenues of life. Women experienced a mixture of reward, local prestige, punishment, and shame as a result of and in their relationships with their children (Balázs 2009: 163). Still, the fact that a mother's desire and power was instigated by male sexual aggression and desire was a sign that it was fundamentally conditioned by the patriarchal system of the pre-collectivization village, rendering it both necessary in order to

³¹ Just to cite one example, mothers' and grandmothers' attended village dances, a primary courtship venue, as "watchers," but they could not intervene if men threatened their female kin with humiliation or worse (Balázs 2009: 65).

protect the family's honor and impossible because of the resentment it called forth in the children on whom it was exercised.

World War I and the Inter-War Period in the Ciuc Valley

The household system was not fundamentally dismantled, as it was during collectivization, by the redrawing of political boundaries in Eastern Europe following the Central Powers' defeat in World War I. After the dissolution of the Dualist regime, Romanian soldiers occupied Transylvania early in 1919 preceding the formal transfer of sovereignty in the Treaty of Trianon in June 1920 (Livizeanu 1995: 8-10, 130). The Romanian state into which the Ciuc valley and the rest of the Szekler region was integrated, to use Rogers Brubaker's term, was a "nationalizing" state. It sought to create the same kind of unitary, culturally homogenous nation-state that the previous Hungarian state had aimed for during the Dualist regime (Brubaker, et. al, 2007: 68). Towns throughout Transylvania were targeted for the creation of a Romanian administrative and economic bourgeoisie to replace a largely Hungarian, German, and Jewish urban population, a process helped along by a mass exodus to Hungary of Transylvanian Hungarian former government employees now out of work (Brubaker, et. al, 2007: 70-2).³² In the Szekler region, special initiatives were mounted to "renationalize" Romanians who had assimilated into the Hungarian community during the Dualist period and before (Brubaker, et. al, 2007: 73; Livizeanu 1995: 139-42). There had been a recorded Hungarian-speaking Jewish population in Miercurea Ciuc and nearby towns already in the second half of the 19th century, many of whom then served as Hungarian soldiers during World War I. The Second Vienna Agreement of 1940 with Germany divided Transylvania into Southern and Northern halves, with the Hungarian state receiving sovereignty of Northern Transylvania, including the Ciuc valley.

³² The land reforms that shifted property from mostly Hungarian large landowners to a Romanian rural peasantry did not significantly affect the Szekler region because of low levels of large landownership (Brubaker, et. al, 2007: 70; Oláh 1996: 17).

After Germany occupied Hungary in March 1944, the vast majority of Northern Transylvania's Jewish population was deported, with many victims brought to Miercurea Ciuc before boarding trains to Auschwitz (Tibori 2004).

Today, the Ciuc valley is almost entirely Catholic and Hungarian, especially in rural areas. However, the insular world of the pre-collectivization household system was fundamentally altered by the post-World War II socialist state's collectivization of rural property. The next section sketches the history of the valley from World War II until 1968, focusing on the beginnings of the specific processes of social change – urbanization and industrialization – within which the current residents of the Ciuc valley now live.

III. From Collectivization to Urban Industrialization in the Ciuc Valley: 1949-1989

Collectivization, Labor Migration, and Social Mobility

Beginning in 1949, the establishment of collective farms through the elimination of most forms of rural private property brought about radical changes to the household system of social and economic reproduction.³³ During this decade, the Ciuc valley was incorporated into a new political entity: A “Hungarian Autonomous Region” (HAR) with an administrative center in Târgu Mureș was formed in 1952 (Bottoni 2008: 46; Brubaker, et. al. 2007: 82-3). The HAR administration directly oversaw the establishment of a new economic and social system.³⁴

Between 1948 and 1962, several interlocking processes sought to dismantle the household

³³ Historians who have studied collectivization in Romania and in the Ciuc valley, in particular, describe it as a long but punctuated process – triple the duration of collectivization in the Soviet Union – which began in the late 1940s, proceeded through several shorter periods, and came to a close in early 1962. For a full summary of these various periods of collectivization throughout Romania, see Kligman and Verdery 2011: 83-87.

³⁴ According to Bottoni, the HAR was appealing to Transylvanian Hungarian elites as a way to build “socialism in the Hungarian language” (Bottoni 2008: 6). Collectivization was among the projects undertaken under the auspices of the HAR's largely Hungarian-speaking administration. Bottoni argues that there is little evidence that ethnic considerations played a major factor in the vacillation between persuasion and force in the collectivization effort, since Hungarian-speakers played most primary roles at all administrative levels within the HAR and enthusiastically instituted collectivization directives (Kligman and Verdery 2009: 14; Bottoni 2008: 68). The historical literature on national policy in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries is voluminous, with some volumes focusing on religion primarily in terms of state power securing legitimacy and loyalty. See, for instance, Miner 2003; Mevius 2005; Palmowski 2009; Froese 2008; Bjork 2008.

system of property, now seen as a capitalist and bourgeois: the system of agricultural quotas and taxes; the process of *kulakization* administratively identifying wealthy villagers as “class enemies;” propaganda promoting collectivization; and the establishment of “agricultural associations” that were later converted – often without notification or consent – into formal collective farms (Bodó 2004: 13, 24-53).³⁵ Expanding urban areas and industrial production that provided opportunities for swift social mobility drew young people to relocate from villages, although they sustained relationships with rural family members through fellow villagers and relatives who were in the city already or working in the same factories.³⁶ Miercurea Ciuc, however, was not a target for industrialization during this period, with the result that it had roughly the same number of inhabitants in 1968 that it had in 1948 (Laki and Biró 2001: 174).

Sexual Desire and the Anti-Catholic Campaigns of the 1950s

Sexual desire played a key role in this attack on the household system during campaigns against alleged class enemies and opponents of collectivization in the Roman Catholic Church. The socialist government identified the continuing popularity of the Roman Catholic Church as a chief hindrance to collectivization, making various efforts to undermine the Church throughout this period (Bottoni 2008: 322). The Romanian state adopted a law in 1948 depriving churches of institutions such as schools and other forms of properties, including properties owned by the Franciscan Order. Members of the Franciscan Order were interned in various monasteries and arrested on various charges throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Ordained monks were eventually consolidated into the diocese as parish priests while non-ordained monks served in

³⁵ Preceding land reforms had not significantly impacted the livelihoods of small landowners, due to the absence of large estates in this part of Transylvania and the slow process of requisition and redistribution (Hitchins 1994: 349-52). In fact, stratification in land ownership increased in the inter-war period as a result of pressures brought on by the global economic depression (Hitchins 1994: 353).

³⁶ The agricultural population of the HAR remained largely the same in this period (Bottoni 2008: 219). Rates of permanent migration from rural area of the HAR rose, with villagers leaving during the most severe efforts to collectivize (Bottoni 2008: 219). Gagyí argues that patrilocal marriage patterns shaped relocation strategies, as well (Gagyí 1996: 96).

positions such as sacristan, although no men were allowed to join the Order until after 1989. Early direct attacks on rural social structures and religious elites coincided with a rash of women claiming to have had visions of the Virgin Mary, miraculous events, and other religious phenomena (Gagyí 2002: 235-55). Articles appearing in state newspapers justifying detaining these women in urban mental hospitals because their visions were in fact untreated mental illnesses caused by poverty and lack of education. The state was now prepared to provide treatment to these women, while socialist economic policies would rectify rural impoverishment and educational inequality in general (Gagyí 2004: 239-41).

Compared to the Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic Church, Hungarian Protestant leaders more easily recognized the state and received small, but regular state financial support (Bottoni 2008: 313). The Greek-Catholic Church, whose priests celebrated the eastern Rite but were under the supervision of the Pope, was entirely liquidated with its properties given to the Romanian Orthodox Church and its priests forced to convert or executed.³⁷ The Transylvanian Roman Catholic Church was never attacked in so decisive a fashion, but it was the target of severe sanctions. The Bishop of the Transylvanian diocese, Áron Márton, who was born in the upper Ciuc valley, was arrested in 1949 along with a number of priests from areas closer to the Hungarian border, with Márton receiving a life sentence in 1951 (Bottoni 2008: 314). After Márton was released in 1955, he conducted a tour of Catholic communities in the diocese, which sparked efforts from government officials to organize scientific propaganda lectures, film nights, and sporting competitions that coincided with Márton's appearances (Bottoni 2008: 315). During the years of Márton's imprisonment, HAR government officials had been anxious about an effort to organize a public procession to Csíksomlyó at Pentecost, organizing similar events to prevent people from visiting the pilgrimage site on Pentecost (Bottoni 2008: 90-5). Reports about these

³⁷ See Verdery 1999; also see Wanner 2007 for a discussion of the Greek-Catholic Church's fate in the Ukraine.

efforts in the early 1950s declare that attendance was limited to participation in Mass inside the pilgrimage site church, with only “170 local peasant ladies” taking part (Bottoni 2008: 94).

Márton’s tour of the Szekler region was eventually cut short and he was placed under house arrest in the diocese headquarters in Alba Iulia (Bottoni 2008: 320).

Rural collectivization and antagonism toward the Roman Catholic Church were linked to state efforts to instrumentalize desire during a prominent show trial against a young parish priest, Antal Sántha.³⁸ Sántha was targeted as one of the priests serving Márton’s home village, and he was arrested in the summer of 1958 on accusations from women that he had “raped their daughters” (*nemi erőszakot követett el a lányaik ellen*) during afternoon catechism classes. In an attempt to sever the tie of loyalty that bound mothers to the Roman Catholic Church, the government targeted this population specifically: Print propaganda concerning the trial exploited the idea that several “mothers” from the village had accused the Sántha and were showing the greatest outrage against the offender (Bottoni 2008: 325).³⁹ Young women from the village and the girls who were said to be the priest’s victims testified. The newspaper reports carried descriptions of women interrupting the proceedings to humiliate the priest “who disrespects young girls” (*gyermeklányokat megbecstelenítő*). At the trial’s end, they broke into applause when it was announced that the priest had received a twelve year sentence (Bottoni 2008: 326).⁴⁰

One possible interpretation of the public role that sexual desire played in the trial and Antal

³⁸ Instrumentalizing desire was no means a new phenomenon, since the inter-war Romanian state used court cases to intervene in the intimate marital lives of its subjects, which Holly Case interprets as an instance of Foucaultian subjectification (Case 2009: 114).

³⁹ Prior to the beginning of the proceedings in Miercurea Ciuc, a Securitate instructional report concerning the event urged, “20 people from Gyergyószentmiklós, 15 from Kézdivásárhely, and 10 from the Udvarhely region have to be present at the trial, among them mainly the mothers of small children. The women’s committee should mobilize these young women so that they should attend the trial out of their own spontaneous will [*akarat*]” (quoted in Bottoni 2008: 325).

⁴⁰ The Antal Sántha affair also drew on a trope that was widespread among Soviet and Eastern European efforts to “modernize” rural populations of women. It expressed the Party administration’s conviction that rural women were “backwards,” “overly impressionable” and “under the influence” of the priesthood (Bottoni 2008: 326; see also Wanner 2008; Brown 2004: 104-8).

Sántha was part of a process of public pedagogical instruction in the moral system of “socialist puritanism” variations of which were taking place in other socialist countries at the same time (Kligman 1998: 144; see Wanner 2007: 69-71). Whatever else can be said about this particularly gruesome episode in the history of the Ciuc valley, it conveyed messages linking the Catholic Church and improper forms of sexual desire, and exploiting rural social structures that had given mothers the responsibility of policing sexual desire.

Urbanization and Industrialization in the New Harghita County: 1968-1980

The most aggressive campaigns against the Roman Catholic Church had waned by the time the oldest women and men whom I got to know during my fieldwork were coming of age in the mid- to late-1960s. 1968 marked a turning point for these Ciuc valley residents and their children. An administrative reorganization resulted in the Hungarian Autonomous Region being replaced with several smaller counties, including the current Harghita County in which Csíksomlyó is currently located.⁴¹ These counties were the media for a country-wide program of urbanization and industrialization that flowed through county seats, and the new county seat of Miercurea Ciuc became a locus of social mobility and changing patterns of consumption and desire.⁴² Among the new and expanding factories in Miercurea Ciuc were two tractor factories that employed more than 3,000 people, mostly men (2009: 81).⁴³ The county seat saw the

⁴¹ Bottoni speaks of the “withering” of the HAR in 1959-60 such that it existed in name only by the time of the county reorganization in 1968 (Bottoni 2008: 333-7).

⁴² This was only the latest in a series of seven different alterations to political boundaries that had changed the administrative boundaries within which the Ciuc valley was incorporated throughout the twentieth century (Bottoni 2008: 205-8). The stated goal of these twinned transformations was to establish the new counties as “complex socio-cultural and economic units” including cities, industrial and commercial centers, cultural institutions, and transportation routes (Demeter 2009: 35-40, 105). Demeter also cites the rationale provided to the population at this time as greater administrative efficiency, the creation of local industry, and closer ties between cities and rural consumers (Demeter 2009: 37).

⁴³ Those settlements that were designated “cities” were marked out for this administrative categorization not by virtue of the lower limit of their population size, but rather insofar as they possessed political-economic, industrial, commercial, and social-cultural potential and could exert influence on surrounding villages within these designated areas. Thus, today in the Ciuc valley there are “cities” with smaller populations than neighboring villages – the city of Bălan has almost the same number of residents as the neighboring village of Sândominic Ciuc (Demeter 2009:

creation of several knitwear, ready-made clothing, and textile factories, employing women on the shop floor and men in supervisory positions. Miercurea Ciuc's governmental bureaucratic and clerical workforce also grew (Demeter 2009: 50-5, 59).

Miercurea Ciuc expanded to include several surrounding villages, including Csíksomlyó. Resident also moved into the city from Hungarian-speaking villages in the valley or adjacent valleys and towns to the north and west. I met a number of children of *kulak* parents in Miercurea Ciuc and Bălan who were able to overcome severe limitations placed on their social mobility – for instance by being barred from higher education – by taking advantage of the need for industrial labor in such urban areas (Fehérváry: 2013: 57-8). The populations of these cities remained Hungarian because the county's new industrial labor force was drawn from the surrounding villages; there were few positions technical experts who might have moved from distant locales, and those who did receive such training tended to learn their skills on the job (Gagyí 1996: 56-9; Brubaker, et. al. 2007: 56-9).

Although apartment buildings in cities were sometimes apportioned by industry or profession, such that those with whom one lived tended to be co-workers and colleagues, continued reciprocities among family members were facilitated by constant urban housing shortages.⁴⁴ Young married couples sometimes lived in the same apartments as parents or other relatives for years before moving into their own home (Gal and Kligman 2000: 49; Demeter 2009: 195-8).⁴⁵ Still, these apartment buildings also made neighbors out of strangers since the

90). Demeter refers to a state plan to increase the number of cities that was abandoned in the early 1970s, leaving most investment centered in already designated urban areas (2009: 102).

⁴⁴ For a discussion of this egalitarian principle and the spatial organization of urban space in a new socialist city in Hungary, see Fehérváry 2013: 70-75.

⁴⁵ To cite one example along these lines, a Miercurea Ciuc acquaintance remembered that she had spent the first years of her marriage living with her husband's parents. Her husband was able to get them into an apartment after he heard from a co-worker that its former resident had died. Her husband then went to his cousin who was good friends with an official at the housing authority. Together they paid a visit to his office and arranged, with a bribe, for the apartment to be assigned to them.

new industries in Miercurea Ciuc were attracting employees from across the valley and beyond.⁴⁶ Instead of interacting in courtyards with households composed of multiple generations, new urbanites shared basements and hallways with families who came from villages 60 kilometers away at the southern side of the valley.⁴⁷

The city also provided opportunities for social mobility, especially through academic achievement. Miercurea Ciuc hosted the most prestigious educational institutions in Harghita County, which, in turn, provided means for improving one's position by obtaining political capital vis-à-vis the Party (Kligman 1998: 75). After the extension of compulsory education in the 1980s and the expansion of professional schooling in Miercurea Ciuc – especially for women – gaining access to urban educational institutions became a widespread desire among both rural and urban residents. Transportation infrastructure was a key factor in fostering patterns of movement between village and city after 1968. In addition to tripling in size, Miercurea Ciuc expanded each day with the arrival of large numbers of commuters from the surrounding villages.⁴⁸ Opportunities for commuting were guaranteed for rural workers in industries – especially male-dominated heavy industries such as mining and construction – earmarked for growth (Demeter 2010: 97). I encountered a number of women who also commuted to work during this time period. These women who traveled back and forth between village and city were married and had husbands who also commuted. Women tended to commute because they lived close to their urban workplaces or had access to transportation infrastructure. One of my

⁴⁶ In Transylvania, urban areas have often served as the primary sites for assimilation of minority populations. See Hitchins 1994: 222-3; Brubaker, et. al., 2007.

⁴⁷ Party propaganda of the time recognized two kinds of families: the traditional rural peasant family and the family of the nation-state. These families shared the characteristic of being “the family with many children,” which was a primary concern for the socialist state in the 1980s as it strove to reverse a decline in the overall population (Kligman 1998: 136-7).

⁴⁸ There are conflicting reports concerning the number of commuters into Miercurea Ciuc in the 1990s, with some reporting as many as 30,000 daily commuters (Laki and Bíró 2001: 174). A study of commuting patterns from villages surrounding Márosvásárhely set the percentage of rural residents traveling into the city on a daily basis at between 6 and 19 percent (Demeter 2009: 141).

acquaintances in a village near Bălan commuted to her job as a server at restaurant in the city in the 70s and 80s. Another woman traveled by bus and train to a meat-processing shop making sausage in the 80s.⁴⁹ Still, since the upper echelons of socialist industry and government demonstrated their privilege by living in the cities where they worked, commuting was associated with lower-level workers.

Consumption in the 1970s and Shortages in the '80s

While most forms of personal wealth had to be concealed – a family could only own one car or apartment and jewelry was acquired only in secret – beginning in the late 1960s state institutions began to integrate the valley into an emerging socialist consumer culture.⁵⁰

Advertising about consumption was focused on domestic contexts such as interior decoration and the purchase of home electronic equipment - radios, record players, and televisions – as they became more broadly available. Consumer objects were also meaningful as politicized symbols of one's elite-status and ability to mobilize connections that were especially treasured if they stretched across borders to the West.⁵¹ As Krisztina Fehérváry has documented for urban

⁴⁹ All of these women reported that they were already married and had also spent some time working in the collective farm before taking up work in the city. Newspaper reports from the time also register the presence of women commuting to work: Although these reports focus on young single women commuting back and forth to their rural homes and describe this phenomenon as a problem to be resolved by investment in dormitories for women, the presence of these articles suggests that women were commuting more frequently in this period. See Demeter 2009: 139. See also articles in the *Dolgozó Nő (Woman Worker)* magazine from September 1974, p. 14-5; November 1975, p. 8 about clubs for commuting women so that they can pursue professional training; and February 1987, p. 4.

⁵⁰ There is a burgeoning literature on consumption practices under socialism. As in other socialist societies, there are limitations to understanding consumption as a form of resistance. As Alexei Yurchak argues, consuming Western music and fashion in the Soviet Union did not necessarily mean a lack of commitment to socialism (Yurchak 2006: 158-62; see also Bren and Neuberger 2012). In the case of Hungarians in Transylvania, consumption that blurred the lines between primary and secondary economies or was confined to domestic spaces could be interpreted rather as a form of “duplicity” (Kligman 1998) or “ambivalent discourse” (Bottoni 2008: 163-4). Greater access to economic resources and more leisure time also meant that men had more opportunities to display wealth through the consumption and sharing of homemade or purchased liquor with friends, acquaintances, and powerful superiors (Tulbure 2012: 259).

⁵¹ One acquaintance proudly recounted a story about her efforts to procure a precious-stone ring through German tourists visiting a Black Sea resort where she worked in the 1970s. Her friends mocked her for giving them her cash in return for a ring they promised to send. She remembered their stunned expressions when she received some chocolates in the mail inside of which was embedded the ring. According to Bren and Neuberger, in this period

Hungary, this process facilitated forms of consumer subject-formation for urbanites as magazines promoted an unspoken ideal model of adopting European bourgeois manners and cultured lifestyles. Hungarian-language magazines in Transylvania also featured many articles discussing the need for demanding material “needs” or “standards” (*igények*) (2013: 39-50).⁵²

The tide of centrally directed investment that drove the development of the Ciuc valley’s urban and industrial infrastructure sharply receded beginning in the early 1980s (Demeter 2009: 83).⁵³ The new political economic policy contributed to multiple overlapping consequences that ramified throughout everyday life. For instance, basic foodstuffs became increasingly difficult to obtain in urban stores. Securing food via ration vouchers posed a significant everyday problem and waiting in long lines for irregularly available basic goods was a drain on urban family resources.⁵⁴ Like many whose jobs gave them access to food, my acquaintance who commuted to a Miercurea Ciuc sausage-processing shop sold this meat via informal consumer networks of “friends” (see Sampson 1987). The state’s promises concerning comprehensive childcare provision also became increasingly unrealistic (Kligman 1998: 138-9). The power outages and rationing of gas supplies that affected the entire country were felt in the Ciuc valley, too. Whereas state propaganda had previously defined domestic consumption as a sign of progress and modernization, now it became a patriotic duty to do the same work by hand since there was

socialist states struggled against economic pressures brought on by their guarantee of meeting consumers’ basic needs at low cost while expanding opportunities for luxury consumption (2012: 13). This interpretation is indebted to Fehérváry’s discussion of mid-century Hungarian consumer cultural propaganda (2013: 86-88, 129).

⁵² See, for instance, page 5 of the December 1974 issue of *Dolgozó Nő* featured a three-quarters page length photograph of a young woman being kissed on the cheek by a young man while holding champagne glasses in front of a well-apportioned table complete with lit candles. See also page 5 of the October 1975 issue featuring the article, “Contemporary Commerce.” A series of pictures of a newly opened department store in Braşov accompanies this comment: “By all means it would be useful to more thoroughly get to know the shoppers’ needs [*igény*] and complaints...”

⁵³ Historians have attributed this country-wide shift to various factors. An extended discussion of the causes of the severe shortages in the 1980s is beyond the scope of this chapter, but discussions of this question can be found in Demeter 2009: 84-5, Fox 2011: 58-60; Verdery 1991; and Kligman 1998.

⁵⁴ People used various strategies for negotiating these lines. In most cases, the elderly and the very young were assigned the task of waiting (Verdery 1996: 33-55). See Massino 2012: 239-40 for similar accounts.

no electricity to run these machines.⁵⁵ The exterior walls of many Bălan apartment blocks still bear the circular scars and black smoke stains where residents punched holes to ventilate wood-burning stoves that they used to heat their apartments after gas supplies ceased.

Patterns of donations from Hungarians from Hungary and a widespread sense that Transylvanian Hungarians are poor developed were exacerbated during this time. Urban acquaintances reported that Catholic priests were conduits for donations of basics like milk powder brought to them by visiting Hungarians from Hungary. Recent transplants to Miercurea Ciuc, unlike long-term residents of larger cities, also had access to the produce of parents' rural usufruct plots.⁵⁶ One of the ironies of life in the 1980s in the Ciuc valley – as in many other areas of Romania with high numbers of commuters or first generation urbanites – was that some of the very efforts that the state used to undermine forms of dependency rooted in household forms of production, in the end, reinforced the same kinship networks as people turned to these networks to get by in everyday life (Tulbure 2012: 271; Massino 2012: 239).

While the multigenerational rural household no longer defined children's socialization in the way it once had, multigenerational reciprocities continued during this period, with family networks now stretching across rural and urban spaces. Daycare and kindergarten services in the city were constantly inadequate, making childcare a significant problem for families in which both parents worked (Demeter 2011: 66).⁵⁷ To ease the burden of working parents, children often spent summer vacations from school with grandparents. If families could not place their children

⁵⁵ Sampson refers to the way such shortages had a collective and shared effect on the population (1987, quoted in Kligman 1998: 274).

⁵⁶ During socialism, it was possible to have small pieces of land – usufruct plots – which were directly connected to the courtyard of the house in which a family lived, while other plots were assigned for cultivation to different people from year to year, discouraging efforts to improve production through fertilization (see Verdery 2003).

⁵⁷ Childcare was free and funded through the same fund that controlled investment in industry, since childcare facilities were generally attached to workplaces. Parents were required to contribute to these expenses beginning in 1982. Kligman estimates that, in 1985, 8.7% of the total population children between ages 1 and 3 were accommodated by childcare facilities, dropping to 7.4% in 1989 (Kligman 1998: 82-5).

in state-run nurseries or kindergartens, they permanently moved them into their grandparents' homes once their mothers returned to work from maternity leave. They often remained there until the children were old enough to go to school at which point they moved back. At other times, retired grandmothers moved into the city – if their children had room for them – in order to contribute to childcare duties.⁵⁸ Multi-generational families thus provided critical childcare resources for urban families, allowing urban children to retain formative relationships with their rural grandparents and extended family that last into the present.

During my fieldwork, I often heard messages concerning the radical otherness of village and city life that belied such accounts of persisting family reciprocities. It was my impression that those who had for various reasons submitted themselves to the state's efforts to the official "simple geography" of socialism – I heard this message articulated with particular stridency by Transylvanian Hungarian university ethnologists (Lampland 1995: 273; Fehérvári 2013: 15-18). If these invocations of strict binaries were relevant to some in certain circumstances, it was also apparent to me during my fieldwork in Ciuc that the personal habits and pragmatic existential orientations of many devotees continued to bring these worlds together even if such orientations were pushed to the background by official messages of privileged elites.

IV. In Neo-Liberalism's Shadow: Refractions of Global Processes After 1989

Rural Privatization: Family Reciprocities Strained

The collapse of the socialist government headed by Nicolae Ceaușescu in December 1989 brought a welter of radical transformations to the Ciuc valley, amounting to a second great transfer of wealth within a forty-year span. Most accounts of these transformations follow Katherine Verdery's work in describing post-socialist subjects grappling with change along four

⁵⁸ Other couples were able to arrange childcare because parents worked opposite shifts – one spouse was at work during the day and the other at night.

axes: New forms of property; the loss of taken-for-granted social benefits; new ways to lose and make money; and changing understandings of money itself (Verdery 1996: 163-203; Verdery 2001; Fehérváry 2013: 164).

In the case of the first of these transformations – the privatization of agricultural property – the dissolution of collective farms constituted one of earliest efforts to remake the economic structure of the valley. Committees were formed in each of the valley’s villages to negotiate the redistribution of collectivized property. As was the case in other areas of Romania, my acquaintances spoke of this process as highly contested. Anthropological studies have noted the way plots expanded or shrank and members of redistribution committees solidified their powerful positions by rewarding their allies. To this day, many are influential but controversial figures in local communities (Laki and Bíró 2001: 185).⁵⁹ What is less noted, however, but seemed to cause the most consternation for many acquaintances, was the way the privatization process created new or exacerbated old divisions among family members. For instance, one acquaintance named Gyöngyvér described a conflict between her and her step-siblings over her stepmother’s property:

I was embittered a lot because of the injustice, because I was taking care of my stepmother. She was sick. We buried her. [People told me], “Take it! Take it!” If I... But I wasn’t going to sue. I could have been able to sue. They took from me a strip of land. They said, “Take it! Take it! Sue!” But I didn’t want to. The lawyer’s office had to be financed. It requires money. I had kids and a family. And what will I get to throw money at lawyers?

Gyöngyvér’s stepsiblings had not wanted to distribute a portion of her stepmother’s property to her, which they could get away with because she was not entitled to it by law; her stepmother had never legally formalized their relationship. The consequences of these conflicts often reappeared when property-owning families tried to assemble labor for planting or harvest. Close

⁵⁹ The literature on post-socialist privatization is voluminous. For ethnographically rich studies of Romanian villages and the privatization of collective rural property, see Verdery 2003; Cartwright 2001.

family members were often good candidates for helping out and receiving help in return, but lingering resentments about privatization prevented the maintenance of such reciprocities. Not only a rural phenomenon, the children of *kulak* families now living in Miercurea Ciuc reported feelings of being isolated from family that resulted from their decision to sue rural family members to force them to share state benefits provided to those who had suffered the injustice of being declared class enemies.

Despite, or perhaps because of, these everyday conflicts, this period is remembered as a time of high expectations for the possibility of recreating an idealized pre-collectivization rural economy and society. Intellectual and religious elites still praise models of agricultural production using methods reliant on access to cheap labor. The reality, however, is less sanguine: Three primary groups of agricultural producers emerged from this crisis, sometimes dependent on the ability to pool labor and cash resources of multi-generational family groups. The first group of families engage in subsistence agricultural work to meet a portion of their basic needs; the second group tries to find a market for small amounts of agricultural production as complements to other income; the third and smallest group is attempting to make a go at living as professional agricultural producers, using a mix of unpaid familial labor, cash inputs from informal sales of milk products, European Union subsidies, and the retirement benefits of elderly family members.⁶⁰ Thus, messages about the value of agricultural practices and “traditional culture” take shape against the background reality that, for many, agricultural production had become unfeasible by the mid-90s as the price of potatoes and milk dropped and the cost of agricultural inputs like fertilizer rose (Laki and Bíró 2001: 186).

Urban Labor Markets, Industrialization, and Ethnicized History

⁶⁰ For historical information about agricultural subsidies in the interwar period, see Hitchins 1994: 366-70. For information about the three categories of agricultural producers, see Laki and Bíró 2001: 186-7. For contemporary accounts, see Fox 2010; Verdery 2003.

1997 marked a turning point for industrial employment in the valley, as well as in Romania as a whole. The center-right government elected the previous year instituted policies that led to significant reductions in state-run enterprises, especially in heavy industry and mining. In Miercurea Ciuc, several hundred workers were laid off simultaneously alongside significant numbers of miners in Bălan. The Miercurea Ciuc economy remains bolstered by the county government bureaucracy, but Bălan's reliance on the mine as its sole major employer resulted in a near-total economic collapse after the shuttering of the mine in the 2000s that coincided with decreases in medical and infrastructural investments, as well. One of the results was urban industrial employment and residence suddenly became devalued after two decades during which it had been associated with various privileges. The state's privatization of industrial investment also produced a widespread sense of employment insecurity and uncertainty as unfamiliar factors began to shape life trajectories in the valley. Under socialism, conditions such as membership in the Party, educational level, and integration into state-supported industries fundamentally shaped life trajectories.⁶¹ Now, a market whose machinations, logic, and reasoning were unfamiliar and thus difficult to predict began playing a critical role in shaping life trajectories. Even those employed in sectors such as mining and the railroad that had once received the highest levels of investment as crown jewels of socialist industry were not immune. Where previously the state had decisively shaped life trajectories, now *official* state-supported work retraining programs were largely unsuccessful in providing opportunities for everyday laborers to get ahead in the emerging labor market, although *informal* connections with politicians distributing

⁶¹ The severance payments offered to workers in major industries came from the state by way of the World Bank and associated programs (Laki and Bíró 2001: 201).

infrastructural investment funds provided a powerful means by which successful construction entrepreneurs achieved success in this period (Laki and Bíró 2001: 189, 195).⁶²

Responses to urban and rural social transformations have taken place within the context of ethnicized memories and changing evaluations of socialist-era industrialization and urbanization. While national politics within the late Romanian socialist state shaped social mobility in the Ciuc valley after a “compromise” between Hungarian elites and the Ceaușescu-led government opened up opportunities for Harghita county elites to organize state-sponsored festivals for the preservation of dance, music, and ritual as national “tradition,” my Hungarian acquaintances tend not to remember the late socialist-era provenance of these urban institutions that helped the social reproduction of the Transylvanian Hungarian minority at this time. They were more likely to discredit urbanization and industrialization as a whole by identifying these social transformations with the period of the 1980s as the time “Romanians” began appearing in the city, placed in managerial positions in industry, government, and receiving special state benefits. In contrast, my Romanian-speaking acquaintances remember their relocation to Miercurea Ciuc in terms of good jobs, good wages, and educational opportunities for their children, without finding cause to mention ethnic identity. Still, if it appears at first that, for my Transylvanian Hungarian acquaintances, industrialization and urbanization are synonymous with an ethnicized narrative that centers on unjust and reviled state efforts to enforce ethnic homogenization, when approached in context any such enunciation of this discourse contains multiple meanings not all of which bear on ethnic identity.⁶³ Thus, when an acquaintance proud

⁶² A 1998 retraining initiative organized by the county government featured 41 different classes that retrained 1013 individuals. Among those who participated, only 93 people found work after the completion of the training (Laki and Bíró 2001: 203). Those programs that did enjoy success tended to be organized by employers themselves for the purpose of retraining existing employees (Laki and Bíró 2001: 202).

⁶³ This impression matches Rogers Brubaker’s argument that Cluj’s Hungarian residents are more likely than their Romanian counterparts to remember urbanization and industrialization in ethnic terms (Brubaker, et. al., 2007: 115).

of her entrepreneurial efforts that set her apart from her unenterprising former colleagues who stayed in the knitwear factory reminded me of the knitwear factories new “Romanian” factory administrators in the 1980s, this effort to wash the history of industrialization together with reviled state ethnic policies also served her purpose of isolating herself from any appearance that experiences under socialism, as an economic system, may have helped prepare her for her later entrepreneurial efforts.

Men who worked in the Bălan mines are also prone to discrediting socialist-era industry in ethnicized terms, claiming that the mine was expanded solely for the purpose of bringing Romanian workers into the area, since, in Harghita County, Bălan was the only city to see a large influx of Romanian-speaking workers during the socialist period such that it now has a Romanian-majority population.⁶⁴ These efforts to discredit mining were powerfully informed by the negative public perception of miners that emerged after the three *mineriade*, or miner uprisings, when miners primarily from the coal-mining areas of southern Transylvania engaged in violent protests in Bucharest (Kideckel 2008: 56-90). Since then, miners have been the subject of harsh stereotypes labeling them as rough, backwards, naturally aggressive, and socially and politically regressive (Kideckel 2008: 111). While Romanian miners proudly discussed their participation in the *mineriade*, Transylvanian Hungarian men were reluctant to admit that they had taken part. When in the mood to distance themselves from industrialization, Transylvanian Hungarian men also spoke in non-ethnicized terms about their efforts to avoid work, layabout, and cheat production quotas. However, such comments were primarily about avoiding the taint of having contributing to “building socialism,” and rarely explicitly about ethnicity.

Gender and Post-Socialist Entrepreneurialism

⁶⁴ For the 2012 census statistics on the ethnic composition of Bălan, see several articles published in Harghita county newspapers, including Kozán 2013.

My acquaintances described various attempts to establish themselves within the circulation of commodities facilitated by the emerging labor market. Urban residents recounted attempts to hastily improvise small businesses and family enterprises in order to increase income in the 1990s and early 2000s. I gathered the impression that entrepreneurialism meant something different for women than for men.⁶⁵ Many women took pride in their entrepreneurial efforts as a mark of their ability to remake themselves and adapt to the altered circumstances of getting by after socialism; there was also a persistent undercurrent of conversation about the way the labor market made women the target of male sexual aggression. One night, I got a ride to Csíksomlyó in the car of a female acquaintance who stopped to pick up several other friends along the way. When I mentioned that I had just had massage therapy for a shoulder injury, our driver launched into a story about a recently retired neighbor who signed up for a massage class and then began advertising her services in the newspaper. The woman sitting next to me jumped in with the comment that she had been in the same class. They both explained that massage was appealing because it is “a true profession” (*szak*) involving “skill” and “technique” (*technika*). The driver continued her story by telling us how the neighbor’s advertisement caught the attention of several male callers who inquired about an “all around” (*teljes körűli*) massage. My seatmate then said, in a surprised voice, “I got the same call! I said, ‘My dear sir, I am over fifty years of age.’ And he said, ‘That doesn’t matter to me.’ So I hung up.” By this point the entire car was rocking with laughter. My seatmate’s reproduction of her dignified response to the man’s lewd suggestion played on the ignominies of an older generation trying to uphold their self-respect after being cast into reduced circumstances. But, in the process, it also pointed to the way gender refracts such efforts to make do in everyday life (Gal and Kligman 2000). And while some

⁶⁵ See Brubaker’s discussion of entrepreneurialism and “getting ahead” in post-socialist Cluj (Brubaker, et. al., 2007: 200-5).

women took pride in their entrepreneurial efforts, their pleasure were tempered by the reality that most of these enterprises had not produced the profits they had expected and some had even failed, resulting in significant losses.

Leisure, Desire, and Consumption in the New Suburbs

Some early entrepreneurs did manage to make it in the post-socialist economy – often taking advantage of political connections – and many of these entrepreneurs constitute a cultural and economic elite in the valley, although Hungarians from Hungary who visit as tourists or relocated kin are more distant models of the ideal post-socialist consumer. These elites enact and embody desire through consumption of private houses, private tutoring and English-language lessons for themselves and their children, cars, clothing, and leisure travel. Housing consumption, in particular, has remade the valley’s social and topographical landscape. Post-socialism saw the creation of suburban housing developments filled with new single-family garden houses (*kertes ház*) or near-urban villages where individual families raze and rebuild older homes one-by-one.⁶⁶ Urban women often commute to work as house cleaners in suburban homes, while men make a similar commute for occasional construction work in new developments or on private summer cottages (*nyaraló* or *vikend ház*).⁶⁷ Labor migration often finances the construction of primary homes in villages or the renovation of urban apartments, with this largely off-the-books type of employment going to the owner’s friends and family. EU-financed public works construction projects are filtered through the county government and also tend to employ those who are well-connected. Certain rural locales have become destinations of choice for the economically successful in post-socialist Miercurea Ciuc, remaking the spatial

⁶⁶ See Fehérváry 2013: 189-93 for a discussion of the Hungarian version of suburban “garden houses.”

⁶⁷ Opportunities for owning one’s own summer cottages were severely curtailed under socialism, with most forms of summer leisure taking place in state-sanctioned summer resorts such as the nearby Tuşnad. Socialist-era publications featured article promoting vacations in such settings . For a comparative case from Hungary, see Fehérváry 2013: 139.

imaginaries of desire to include devalued urban centers and isolated rural locales, desired suburbs and commuter villages, and tourist-oriented rural areas.

As the phenomenon of “weekend houses” attests, tourism has been a factor in various forms of post-socialist transformation in the valley. The 1970s folk revival in Hungary brought many across the border into Transylvania desiring an experience of “authentic” Hungarian culture (see Losonczy 2009). The desires associated with these visitors have critically reshaped the pilgrimage event, especially the ritual Pentecost daybreak mountaintop vigil during which participants stare into the sun to see visions of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. The participants who are said to have these visions are “the Csángó,” groups of Roman Catholics living in a series of villages on the eastern side of the Carpathian Mountains. The Csángó have long held quasi-mythological status in Szekler and Hungarian intellectual circles as “lost Hungarians” whose isolation rendered them remnants of a pre-modern, pure, unspoiled, and rural religious worldview (Kürti 2001; Peti and Tánzos 2012).

By the mid-1990s, the ritual visions at Pentecost had become one of the main focal points for the play of desire among both visiting Hungarians from Hungary and local intellectuals. On my first visit to the daybreak vigil in 2010, a middle-aged nursery school teacher from Miercurea Ciuc who had invited herself to be my escort as a fellow ethnologist fell into a panic when she could not find any Csángó to show me. They were not on the side of the hill, so she called me down to another location. I stayed at the base of the hill as she raced up and down for fifteen minutes. Finally, she returned breathless and filled with urgency: “I’ve caught a Csángó” (*kaptam egy Csángót!*) I trailed behind my acquaintance as she darted off again, pulled out a recording device, thrust it into the face of a startled middle-aged woman, and addressed her with several rapid-fire questions about seeing the Holy Spirit in the rising sun.

During this encounter, I was surprised not so much by the power of my acquaintance's desire, but rather by how closely her behavior mirrored what I had come to expect from Hungarians from Hungary. As an urban-born intellectual now living in a suburban village, her desires for a taste of authentic Hungarian culture seemed quite similar to those of the tourists I had met during their brief visits to the area.

Movement and Changing Family Reciprocities

Where socialism linked employment in state-favored industries to one's ability to commute regularly between city and village – for instance by encouraging mass commuting for heavy industrial workers – today, movement across this altered social topography has become increasingly linked to a middle class with economic access to consumer goods such as private cars (Fehérváry 2013: 192). Gender and movement were often linked in everyday talk, and it quickly became clear to me that rural and working class women were forced to grapple with these changes in distinctive ways. In 2010 and 2011, newspapers carried a series of articles featuring angry complaints after bus routes to outlying villages were suspended for a period of time due to the collapse of the private company that ran the busses as part of a county government contract. Informally, complaints about transportation often came with gendered overtones. I was once visiting an acquaintance when a conversation among several women turned on a dime from the frequent practice of leaving the city for gynecological care to the recent closing of the bus station information booth by the cash-strapped private company that ran it via a government contract. The schedule outside had also been covered over. One woman illustrated the pitiful condition of the travelers by imagining how an “old women” would be lost and helpless in the current condition of the bus station: “An old lady wouldn't be able to find out, if she's traveling somewhere, where she needs to go. There's nothing! The only people around

are the ones in the bar!” Their seamless transition between discussing travel for gynecological care and the state of bus transit suggested that women associate travel by public transportation with women. There remains in place a system of informal taxis.

Beginning in the early 1990s, transnational labor migration also influenced valley social dynamics, with working class men leaving for manual labor jobs in the Hungarian construction industry constituting the majority of early labor migrants (Bodó 2008: 44-48). Recollections of early labor migrants reflect a sense that they were casting their fates to the wind and consigning their lives by crossing the border (Bodó 2008: 53). They often without information or money, sometimes knowing just a single distant relative in Budapest who might find them a job or heading to public squares in Budapest where they could connect with employers looking for day-laborers (Bodó 2008: 54). Many responded to declining production in Miercurea Ciuc factories by taking vacations lasting several months, which they spent working in Hungary. Others negotiated with doctors to classify them as disabled and thus eligible to work abroad while still collecting state benefits. Many others left in order to escape difficult familial conflicts as the emotional cost of not being able to make ends meet and the humiliation of unemployment produced desperate conflicts between spouses (Bodó 2008: 75). Since 2000, larger numbers of younger, highly-educated women are engaging in domestic homecare while working class married couples work side-by-side picking vegetables; in both cases, labor migrants are now traveling further afield to Europe, Israel, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada (Bodó 2008: 42-4). The stories that returning labor migrants used to tell in the 1990s often reflected on differences between Hungary and the Szekler region, especially on the greater array of store offerings and the “colorfulness” of the consumerist atmosphere in Budapest (Bodó 2008: 63). This “colorfulness” often appeared less than sanguine in my acquaintances’ recollections.

One woman recalled that she was often treated rudely by Budapest store employees as she went door to door selling trinkets in the mid-1990s. Budapest's consumer worlds were not welcoming, but rather were a source of discomfort that underwrote a sense that my acquaintances should act deferentially and obsequiously rather than freely and authoritatively in such environments. Today, my acquaintances' stories do not compare Budapest to the Szekler region so much as New York, Rome, London, Vienna, and Zurich.

Transnational labor migration puts pressures on familial reciprocities as urban or emigrated children manage the burdens of caring for elderly parents and maintaining reciprocities with rural kin. Many of my acquaintances speak about the difficulties of tending to their aging village-based parents from distant urban locales. According to the pre-collectivization rural convention of virilocal residence, it was ideally the responsibility of the youngest husband's wife to take care of the daily needs of his aging parents. However, in practice, these tasks were always shared among children. Today, it often falls to daughters to take care of their aging parents, especially since it was more common in the 1990s for their male siblings to move abroad for work. For instance, an acquaintance named Beáta made frequent trips from Miercurea Ciuc to her mother's village to help around the house and organize kin to work in the family's fields during the harvest and planting seasons. Beáta and her mother enjoy a close and affectionate relationship, but Beáta's ties to her mother can also be a source of tension when the obligations through which this relationship is enacted conflict with Beáta's commitments to her family and friends in Miercurea Ciuc. For instance, it falls to Beáta to tend to her mother's needs because her younger brother now lives in Hungary where he runs a lucrative business selling produce to restaurants. Beáta described her frustrations when on several occasions she was required to be in two places at once. On one occasion, she had agreed to help her mother's kin in

her natal village with the harvest but this interfered with meeting her obligations to her friends and fulfilling her desires for social autonomy by working volunteer shifts at the Csíksomlyó branch of the Mary Radio station. On another occasion, the same obligation at the radio station got in the way of her promise to her mother to help her cook for visiting guests from Hungary. Whereas, in the 1980s, relatives in rural areas and retired parents were valued as sources of desperately needed foodstuffs and compensatory childcare, Beáta's case shows that this trend has reversed in the post-socialist period. Elderly parents with pensions that have declined in value are now dependent on children, a situation that can add resentment to the flow of everyday life.⁶⁸

Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic elites play a crucial role in fashioning Catholic worlds around the pilgrimage site by framing the various meanings of these social, economic and political changes and appropriate ways to live in and through them. In Part Five, I examine Catholic elites' contributions to a variety of popular media venues as a way of exploring their responses to these transformations.

V. Changing Gods, Changing People in Post-Socialist Catholic Worlds

Catholic Elites on the Lookout for a Leading Class

A foremost concern for contemporary Catholic elites is whether and how to cultivate relationships with the rising post-socialist entrepreneurial leading class. Their responses to these questions are highly ambivalent. In part, this is because the people who were leading entrepreneurs in Miercurea Ciuc during my fieldwork sought out Church involvements from a position of having few long-term relationships with Church elites to build on, and vice versa. For instance, many urban and suburban entrepreneurs had moved to Miercurea Ciuc from outside the valley and they described sporadic, at best, church attendance during their twenties and thirties

⁶⁸ See Berdahl 1999: 185-7 for a comparison case involving tensions between Eastern and Western Germans exacerbated and clarified by the burdens of caring for aging parents.

under socialism.⁶⁹ Since many entrepreneurs achieved success by exploiting informal political connections, Catholic elites' anxieties about becoming too comfortably close with political leaders also animate their interactions with these figures. Still, Catholic leaders cannot afford to ignore these figures. Entrepreneurs' financial resources make them attractive figures to ecclesiastical leaders and members of the Franciscan Order; the latter, in particular, was keenly aware of their need for monetary resources as they engaged in reconstructing a depleted Order after 1989.⁷⁰ Moreover, Church elites are aware that these figures provide powerful models of desiring subjects for ordinary devotees. There was also a widespread sense that the self-aggrandizing character traits necessary to be a successful entrepreneur are inimical to an attitude of Catholic humility, and thus disordered and problematic. I often heard Catholic elites criticize entrepreneurs for being impatient, consumed by an "itching" (*viszketés*) for self-aggrandizement and self-promotion.

I was given an object lesson in the way Catholic elites are both attracted to and repelled by the rising bourgeoisie when I moved into the monastery at Csíksomlyó during my fieldwork. I was joined for a time by a man in his mid-40s – he was married with five children I learned later – who proudly and extensively recounted his business success during our first encounter. We were in the monastery during the high summer and the monks had opened the door to the never-used high pulpit to increase circulation. The entrepreneur appeared for morning Mass alone sitting alone in the pulpit, clearly visible to all. After his second appearance in the pulpit for noon Mass, one of the monks chastised him in the hallway afterwards and directed him to sit

⁶⁹ In contrast, Transylvanian Hungarian ethnologists had been able to cultivate relationships with Franciscan priests into "rural traditional culture" after new opportunities opened up for such projects in the post-1968 period.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, a 2004 interview with the director of the Transylvanian Franciscan Order describing these conditions. He notes that the Order entered the post-socialist period in a depleted state, with only a few elderly monks left in active service. The Order was unable to educate the waves of young men who sought to join the order in the early 1990s, and their continuing dependence on the financially stronger Franciscan Order in Hungary for this and other basic services (Jakab 2009: 167-70).

somewhere else. He called further attention to himself on Sunday by stiffly refusing the food that the monks were eating before Mass. One Franciscan even offered him something to eat, but the man stiffly reminded him that it was not proper to eat before taking communion. The visitor concluded his stay by awkwardly interrupting lunch conversation to ask the head of the Transylvanian Franciscan Order, at the monastery for a brief visit, if he could spend a week at the monastery each month “to give thanks for my family.” The monk initially demurred, but the visitor pressed him for an answer. The man’s insistence and his refusal to “take a hint” were clearly causing discomfort around the table. Finally, the monk responded that he should give thanks for his family by being at home with them. Another young monk at the table whispered a one word derisive comment after the man left the table: “entrepreneurs” (*vállalkozók*). The man’s pushy, overly pious, and showboaty behavior allowed him to be categorized among the ascendant post-socialist leading classes. And the young Franciscan derogatory tone gave voice the impression that this man’s desires, strongly associated with his entrepreneurial activities, were a poor match for life as a virtuous Catholic.

But what was remarkable was that the man had been welcomed into the monastery in the first place. This gesture seemed to reflect not just a policy of accepting all those curious about the monastic life – since this married man was disqualified from entering monastic life – but rather the fact that the Franciscans’ saw some benefit from opening themselves up to the post-socialist nouveau riche. In the end, however, this man sparked obvious discomfort among his Franciscan hosts. The impression that I carried with me on leaving the monastery was how entrepreneurs are profoundly attractive to people both within and without the Church, but also

repellant in equal measure – a self-contradiction surfaces repeatedly in contemporary Catholic popular literature.⁷¹

The Problem of Tourists and Visionaries at the Csíksomlyó Pilgrimage

Two years before Father Hajdó preached about tourists' disruptive desires and visions of the Virgin Mary, Judit Ozsváth, a professor of Catholic theology in Cluj, contributed a column to the weekly Catholic magazine *Vasárnap* (Sunday) detailing her troubling experience of witnessing “the unsettlingly close presence of photographers seeking ethnological spectacles” around these visionaries during the pilgrimage (Ozsváth 2003). After the crowd dissipates from the around the old women visionaries Ozsváth strolls down the hillside with them as they collect flowers that, Ozsváth explains, they will later use in magical herbal healing practices. Despite this moment of informal intimacy, the women's experience of seeing the Virgin Mary marks them as foreign and unfamiliar to Ozsváth. “I sensed that this is something I am not nor cannot be ‘initiated’ into,” she observes while the women are sharing with each other what they saw in the sun. Still, Ozsváth offers a gesture of consolation both to herself and to the tourists seeking ethnological thrills: “If it isn't possible to see it in the sun, then I did indeed see the Spirit shining in the faces of these simple people.”⁷²

Like Hajdó after her, Ozsváth exhorts her readers to put aside disruptive cravings for ethnological spectacles of religious visions and choose to be content with their inability to have visions. Those who share her modern sensibility should encounter divinity in inner peace and contentment since their modern condition has prevented them from being initiated into a world in which one can have visions of Mary and the Holy Spirit. If her readers still want to encounter

⁷¹ There is a voluminous literature on discourses about consumption and pilgrimage considered through the lens of heritage or ethnological tourism. For a few examples, see Dubisch 1996: 33-5, Kaufman 2005; and Pusztai 2004.

⁷² The association between “simplicity” and visionary experience is not at all isolated to this social context. Blackbourn notes the model that emerged in the 19th century dictating the poverty, vulnerability, and simplicity of Catholic visionaries who were inevitably young, female, uneducated, and impoverished (Blackbourn 1993: 21-3).

these religious visionaries during the pilgrimage, they should seek them out primarily in order to discover living models of properly humbled and simple desire. But for all their criticisms of tourists and others whose desires they find so disturbing, Catholic elites like Hajdó and Ozsváth do not outright declare that the entrepreneurial and bourgeois middle classes have no place in Catholic culture. Rather, they try to find a middle way that preserves a position for the entrepreneurial elite in Transylvanian Catholic culture while still keeping its perceived dangerous desires at arm's length.

Tourism, desire, and embodiment merged together in a slang term that I first heard used at the shrine during the 2010 pilgrimage event, in a joke that Franciscan monk and priest Father Csaba Bőjte used to open his homily: “Back in the day, during my childhood in Csík [Ro.: *Ciuc*], I heard that there is no bad weather for a pilgrimage, at most there are only weak people. I'm glad that we haven't become *tápos*.”⁷³ Since seriousness is a pervasive virtue among Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals and the style and content of homilies are set apart from such instances of “everyday” vernaculars, this off-color caught many off guard.⁷⁴ The crowd broke into laughter at the use of this slang term, although my acquaintance standing beside me glanced at me with a wide-eyed smile that combined scandal, amusement, and shock. One monk told me afterwards that Bőjte's joke had been a sign of weakness and insecurity due to his nervousness at having to speak before such a large crowd. The shockingly insulting and informal term in question, *tápos*, is best translated into English as “doped,”⁷⁵ and is generally applied to Hungarians from Hungary. The root of the term is shared with many words relating to sustenance

⁷³ Although it is not clear from this quotation, *tápos* refers both to the physical and the subjective results of a materially comfortable lifestyle. An acquaintance emphasized this dual meaning when she responded to my complaint that I had proven myself to be *tápos* because I had not been able to walk the whole way to Csíksomlyó when I processed with a village *keresztalja* group in 2012. If I were really *tápos*, she said, then the thought would never have occurred to me to walk in the first place.

⁷⁴ My acquaintances often felt obliged to comment on priests who used „everyday” (*hétköznapi*) language in their sermons as remarkable instances set apart from usual homiletic practices.

⁷⁵ I am grateful to Zsuzsanna Magdó for this translation.

for animal and vegetable produce. It describes the condition of the *tápos* person, and Hungarians from Hungary in general, as materially and subjectively “doped” by a life of easily and quickly gratified desires. The term is used to suggest that they have embraced sedentary lifestyles and stuffed themselves on fast food in the same way that industrially farmed animals are caged and artificially fattened.

Many Transylvanian Hungarian acquaintances claimed that they could identify Hungarians from Hungary just by their bodily comportment: Once, as I was sitting with a monk in the monastery office, he pointed out a group of Hungarians from Hungary who had just appeared on the screen of the closed circuit television that keeps watch over the Csíksomlyó church interior. When I asked him how he could tell they were Hungarians from Hungary, he pointed to the screen and explained that their bodies showed them to have become “coddled” (*el van kényesedve*). The comparison underlying this term again relies on an unflattering analogy with animals: As one acquaintance explained, a dog would become coddled and thus not want to sleep outside in the cold – dogs in rural Transylvanian areas rarely come inside the house – having gotten used to a comfortable lifestyle of sleeping with his owners indoors.

As Bőjte suggested with his joke, the world in which the *tápos* feel comfortable and confirmed is, in many ways, the world against which Catholics in the Ciuc valley are told to define themselves, primarily because it is the world that is so attractive to so many of them.⁷⁶

The “outsiders” my acquaintances encountered most often in everyday life were tourists, the *tápos* Hungarians from Hungary. When ordinary Catholics hear Bőjte speak about what people

⁷⁶ I was initially surprised by this, since I was expecting that, in an ethnic minority community, most anxieties would be aimed at ethnic assimilation into the Romanian majority. However, as Rogers Brubaker notes, elites are aware that both assimilation and emigration to Hungary constitute the foremost causes of the demographic decline of Transylvanian Hungarians (Brubaker, et. al., 2007: 371-2). The former is less of a concern for residents of the Szekler region than for Transylvanian Hungarians in Cluj since this area has few Romanian residents, few Romanian government officials, and even fewer mixed ethnic marriages. As a result, when elites seek to counteract emigration they place emphasis on differences with *tápos* Hungarians from Hungary.

should be and how they should desire, they hear him “thank God” that they do not look like *tápos* people, do not think like them, do not feel like them, and most of all do not desire like them, although by no means does he or any other Catholic elite clearly or uncomplicatedly deliver this message.

National Geographic Comes to Ciuc: Desire and the Globalization of Magic

If worries about desire contributed to the socialist state’s anti-Catholic Church propaganda of the 1950s and post-socialist Catholic discourses about tourism, one of the ways desire continues to structure Transylvanian Hungarian intellectual production today is visible in efforts to construct a powerfully normative Hungarian national/cultural “magical” religious tradition. During my fieldwork, the Pagan Snow-Cap Microregional Association, a non-governmental organization whose headquarters are across the street from the pilgrimage site, achieved special prominence promoting “traditional religion” under the auspices of its work on behalf of local biodiversity.⁷⁷ A July 2013 *National Geographic Magazine* (NG) article about the Microregional Association’s work, jauntily titled, “Hay. Beautiful,” represented one of their greatest public relations coups.⁷⁸ The Microregional Association prepared for NG’s visit first by using the Skype internet communication program to get in touch with the photographer assigned to the project. The photographer is a citizen of Azerbaijan but based in Egypt, and had never been to Romania before, which she admitted to the British expatriate in their initial Skype conversation.⁷⁹ She explained to them that she would need their help in “gaining contacts” and

⁷⁷ See the Microregional Association’s haymeadows project web site for these quotations and more information: <http://mountainhaymeadows.eu/home.html>.

⁷⁸ The visit of Charles, Prince of Wales, to several sites in the Microregional Association’s territory in 2011 is a close second. Prince Charles is well-known for his support of Transylvanian agriculture. For more information, see the NGO’s web site about the visit <http://www.poganyhavas.hu/menu.php?menu=aktualis&almenu=9>.

⁷⁹ During my fieldwork, I volunteered at some of the Microregional Association’s programs, and got to know the staff. The Microregional Association’s staff and the NG photographer allowed me to observe their work; the NGO employees also provided me copies of their correspondence with the National Geographic writer and photographer as they prepared for the visit and then edited the article afterwards.

the “trust of the communities,” since, she explained, “it's all about breaking the barriers of communication with the people there.” The photographer then asked a series of questions, including, “How pristine is the place,” and, “Does it still look very medieval?” She requested that the Microregional Association show her, “some small, local festivities, weddings and family and farming rituals, once again, very local and unspoiled, without any outsiders and visitors in T-shirts with cameras.” Finally, the photographer acknowledged that she had heard that “religion plays a big role there,” so she hoped that the Microregional Association could provide her with “religious holidays” to photograph, events that would be full of “musicians,” “weddings and family rituals,” “funerals,” and “small, local festivities.” Finally, she proposed a schedule in which she would “do one village a week” for the duration of her five-week stay in Romania. The Microregional Association responded eagerly to these requests, writing that, “this is a great opportunity for us and we will give you what you need.” Still, the photographer seemed unsure that the Microregional Association was really clear about her goals and the requirements for completing an assignment for *NG*, so she sent a follow-up email that included her “task summary” from *NG*, explaining, “Now you can understand even more what I'm supposed to be doing here and what I should deliver to them.”

I accompanied the photographer during her work, traveling around the area in the private car of the NGO's president. Many missteps complicated the NGO's efforts to provide the photographer with the kind of religion and family rituals she was looking for. For instance, the NGO president first took her to a high school graduation ceremony. It was clear from the photographer's demeanor that the graduation ceremony was not what she had in mind when she spoke of “beautiful village communities.” First of all, the ceremony took place in the asphalt basketball court behind the high school. The families arrived by car, not horse cart. The school is

at the corner of a major intersection in the midst of the city and traffic kept flowing by in the background. Many of the families had cameras themselves and were avidly competing with the photographer for good positions to take pictures of the graduating children. When I later noted these problems to the Microregional Association's staff, they complained that they had tried to persuade the photographer to arrive several weeks earlier in order to photograph the pilgrimage event; this struck them as the kind of "religious holiday" that she had asked them to provide for her. However, according to the Microregional Association's staff, she had complained that there were too many tourists with cameras at the event; it was too much of a "spectacle" to be suitable for *NG*.

The article that appeared in *NG* prominently featured the Ciuc valley and surrounding areas, and it had a lot to say about "local spirituality" that helped promote agriculture and biodiversity. The Budapest-born wife of one of the Microregional Association's employees adopts a tone of awe and wonder as she gazes up and admires the haymeadows from a distance: "She could not believe," the *NG* writer records, "how 'people would only ever walk in single file through the meadows.' It was as if, she says, 'the meadows were holy ground. As though these Transylvanians were living in a world dedicated to St. Grass.'" However, the Microregional Association ended up with little to show for their work with the photographer. The Microregional Association's president contacted *NG* editors in Washington, DC when he heard that none of the photographs featured in the article were going to come from the region in which the Association does its work. "This would have a very contraversive effect among the local population," he argued.

In our perspective this should be a very important role of an article in a high ranked magazine like *NG*....Actually it's not only about our farmers (and the population in general) having a hurt self-confidence but also it might decrease the magazine's – as well as our organization's respect in the area.

Three critical observations emerge from this description of the production of a significant constitutive element of contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic worlds. First, this process is quite different from the typical genealogical accounts of religion in Eastern Europe that often describe the “purification” of magic and culture from official religion through tense encounters between two groups – state-sponsored professors building the nation and church-employed priests answering to a “higher power.” However, the production of an eco-friendly magical religion, in this instance, is not driven by two groups enmeshed in asymmetrical power relations, but rather by a loose concatenation of *transnational* actors, including British funders, Azerbaijani photographers flying in from Egypt, editors emailing from Washington, DC, and a Budapest-born NGO administrator. Before the Microregional Association was ever able to promote this particular instantiation of traditional religion to Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics as essential to preserving the value of their agricultural practices, it had been taken up and altered by multiple parties as it circulated far beyond the confines of national or transnational universities that scholars have typically understood to incubate such Eastern European magical religion.⁸⁰

Second, these parties collaborated not across well-established battle lines but *precariously* in a series of impromptu experiments amid a welter of unclear motivations and unpredicted outcomes. The Microregional Association was eager to work with NG, but apparently they were not clear about what NG’s goals would be in producing an article about this region. They only gained clarity about the photographer’s objectives after a misunderstanding prompted her to send them her task summary from the NG editors. Further misunderstandings prevented the photographer from getting the images NG requested from her, which then

⁸⁰ For an argument that situates Eastern European magical religion, both genealogically and in the contemporary period, in the tension between national/state and religious institutions, see Kapaló 2011.

prompted the Microregional Association to impute a certain mission to the magazine. Based on the Microregional Association's lack of success in telling *NG* what their objectives should be, it seems that *NG* did not agree with this assessment of the magazine's mission. Throughout this process of creating traditional magical religion, a number of fundamental questions, such as who wanted to accomplish what, were unclear and inchoate, leaving motivations and objectives open to interpretation in ways that contradict the some portrayals of magic as a phenomenon emerging at the intersection of clear battle lines separating state-sponsored professors from priests.

Finally, one of the unintended consequences of demands that traditional religion be free from the consumer desire of "tourists in t-shirts" is the excision of Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics who use consumer objects touched to the statue of the Virgin Mary for a variety of purposes, including healing sick relatives. I describe the ways in which devotees use these t-shirts in being at grips with religious worlds later in Chapter Five in my discussion of miraculous healings in the secular hospital. For the time being, however, I merely note that such religious world-gripping efforts that involve consumer goods cannot be easily understood within a nation-religion dichotomy, since it is the subject of avoidance and critique by leading figures in both the Catholic Church and transnational cadres undertaking a canonical traditional religion for the purpose of ecological preservation.

The categories of "tourists" (*turista*) and "entrepreneurs" (*vállalkozó*) often overlap in everyday conversation in the Ciuc valley, since the tourism industry has been a major venue for entrepreneurial profit-making and it is entrepreneurs who engage in the most leisure travel. If Father Hajdó and Judit Ozsváth appear anxious about crafting relationships with these figures, the most prominent Transylvanian Franciscan monk active today, Father Csaba Bőjte – the same priest who delivered the 2010 Pentecost homily – has actively cultivated relationships with

entrepreneurs through his work on behalf of his network of orphanages. For Bőjte, the saints should serve as role models who teach the pious values of determination, perseverance, and dedication in the face of trials. This is the counsel he offers to a gathering of Transylvanian Hungarian entrepreneurs in March 2014, using Mary's own stick-to-itiveness as an example:

Money is not always the most important thing, but rather the [most important thing is the] task that we have to complete, which is *good* to complete. Mary could have complained, too, that she doesn't have anywhere to give birth to her child. [She might have said,] 'There's no cold water. No hot water. This isn't going to work at all!' But then she would not be the Lady Queen of the Heavens today (Nagyálmos 2014).

Bőjte seeks to exploit entrepreneurs' desire for attention and glory: Mary is a natural role model for this group that desires positions of power and prominence. And he does not categorically fault entrepreneur for their desire to make money. Rather, he counsels them to relativize their desire for money; it should not *always* be the most important thing. They can achieve their goal of prominence and glory without money by focusing on tasks benefiting the collective good that require the "power of positive thinking" in the face of inevitable difficulties. In general, Bőjte's sermons are filled with exhortations to bourgeois values of hard work, continence, dedication, simplicity, and stick-to-itiveness. These are the values that inter-war Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals cited in their calls to young people in "service of the people" (*népszólgálat*), which, at this time, became a concerted ideology focused on encouraging young people to give up urban aspirations for a life dedicated to community uplift in impoverished villages (Bárdi 2004: 51-58).

Prayer Practices of the Catholic Entrepreneurial Elite

Bőjte's efforts to cultivate relationships with entrepreneurs extends to an interest in disciplining their desires by encouraging them to pray in a certain fashion and cultivate distinctive types of relationships with divine figures. He delivers these messages as a frequent preacher at the Csíksomlyó shrine, and I had numerous occasions to hear him deliver homilies

during Mass. In 2012 he was the invited speaker for the second largest annual event at the shrine: the dance festival aimed at young people called, “The Reunion of a Thousand Szekler Girls.”⁸¹

He organized this sermon around a story about a recent encounter with an old woman who asked him to pray for her grandson:

Recently, an old woman came to me, and she told me to say a Mass so that her grandson will get a job in Canada. Well, I said to her, that’s not something I’m going to pray for! She said, ‘I’ll pay for it!’ Well, I told her, you couldn’t pay me all the money in the world. You’ve offended me to ask God for this kind of thing for you. She just looked at me all agog. So I said to her, ‘I will kneel at the altar beside you all day long to pray for your grandson to come home from Canada. But [to ask] for him to plant roots out there in the wild world, [to ask] that you never again in your whole bloody life will be able to take your grandson into your embrace, to caress him... Well, I’m not going to pray for that!’ The old lady just looked at me all agog. And she said, ‘You know what, Father, you are right. I’m not going to pray for that any more either.’

Böjte’s anecdote makes two points simultaneously. First, he paints the old lady with harsh hues because of her collusion with her grandson’s avarice. He does not explicitly call her greedy, but implies as much by refusing to take her money, thus claiming to be above material concerns while she believes that divine beings can be persuaded to do her bidding so long as she pays. Nor does he state outright that the grandson wants to stay in Canada so that he can continue to draw a better salary than he could ever expect to earn in Transylvania. However, everyone in Böjte’s audience would have understood that this was not only the young man’s wish, but also the old lady’s intention in invoking the help of divine powers to help her grandson get a job. If the grandmother and the grandson foster these desires, the result will be the displacement of household-type grandmother/mother-son affective reciprocities. The son may be able to be

⁸¹ Begun in the early 1930s as a response to increasing numbers of young women leaving the valley to work as home servants, it was designed as a way to counter this trend by strengthening them in their Szekler Hungarian national identity. A recording of this sermon is published on Böjte’s web site. I have already pointed to my approach to such events that focuses on intersubjective encounters in which intellectual elites provide idealized models of social mobility and community leadership.

caressed by a wife if he “plant roots” in Canada, but he will no longer be “entwined” by his grandmother’s arms.

Second, Bőjte is placing himself alongside advocates of reforms instituted by the Second Vatican Council to promote friendly, less hierarchical and distant relationships between priests and laity.⁸² His allegiance to the Second Vatican Council’s ideas includes promoting post-Conciliar “modern” forms of prayer that foster direct relationships with divine beings. The contrast Bőjte offers between the old woman’s request that he communicate with divine beings in her place by saying Mass on her behalf and his suggestion that they kneel side-by-side in prayer illustrates his affinity for the post-Conciliar emphasis on egalitarianism. Her request is reprehensible because it shows her assumption that she is unworthy of petitioning divine powers herself. Bőjte’s suggestion also opposes memorized forms of prayer to friendly conversation with divine beings. Saying a Mass on the grandmother’s behalf would involve reciting a series of rote prayers; Bőjte instead recommends that they offer a spontaneous and sincere prayer for her son’s speedy return.

Finally, it is no accident that Bőjte selects an old woman to serve as his negative illustration. Both Hungarian-language socialist-era propaganda in Transylvania and the leaders of post-Conciliar reform-minded Catholic groups frequently used old women to exemplify backwards attitudes that socialism and post-Conciliar Catholicism were leaving behind.⁸³ In a

⁸² Bőjte explicitly draws on the Second Vatican Council to support this egalitarian ideal. His clerical motto is from a Council publication: “God wants humanity to form a great family and for us to be brothers, each to the other” (Bőjte 2010).

⁸³ See, for instance, an article from the June 1975 edition of the Hungarian-language magazine published by the Romanian Communist Party, *Dolgozó Nő*: The piece is titled, “The small bench and the old lady.” It is a negative portrait of an old woman who spends her days sitting alone on a same bench in an urban neighborhood. This neighborhood had once been part of a village, but the city then grew and assimilated it. Despite these changes, Lászlóffy writes, “the mistrustful-natured old lady still sat, unchanging, on the little bench.” This pitiful figure only exists because the Party failed to come to train her properly when her father died, thus leaving her to be socialized by her backwards mother. See also the article from February 1987, “Love’s Ravages;” September 1987, “Being Humiliated.”

similar vein, Bøjte suggests that this old woman's attitude towards divine powers must be discarded if she wants to belong to the future of the Transylvanian Hungarian community. He argues that the problem of labor migration is symptomatic of a faulty worldview. The old woman's greed has been passed on to her grandson which led him to move to Canada in search of more money. This greed leads to an improperly submissive attitude toward both priests and divine beings that is manifest in the inability to pray in the correct manner: She chooses memorized prayers and intercessory requests for material benefit over friendly relationships with the clergy.

Pouring Your Heart Out in Conversational Prayers

Although in this vignette Bøjte praises clerical humility and equality with laypeople, how this relates to his vision for how Catholics should relate to divine beings in prayer is left implicit in the encounter with the old woman. In contrast, Bøjte's opinions on these topics come to the foreground in the first of a series of best-selling books on Catholic spirituality, *Window onto the Eternal*. His text begins with a personal description of his relationship with God (Bøjte 2013). Bøjte recounts that he was five and a half years old when his father passed away in the early 1960s. He went out to his father's graveside where his conversation with his father quickly turned into a conversation with God:

I poured out my heart at his graveside, like a son to his father. Very quickly I realized that I was speaking not with an earthly, but rather with a heavenly Father. These experiences were very strong. I sensed that Someone hears me, listens to me, understands me, and is even responding to my prayer (2013: 16).

A little later, Bøjte portrays his first mature interaction with God in the same vein: as a series of questions and answers between equals seeking a direct and intimate relationship. Finally, Bøjte recalls, "in the end, He wanted us to chat. A dialogue bubbling up from faith got started between me and God" (2013: 17). God's questions about Bøjte's everyday life and the divine being's

desire to speak as a friend with the young man draw a picture of a God who is personally interested in the intimate aspects of one's everyday affairs. One's relationship with should also be affectively-rich – Bőjte pours out his heart to God – but primarily internalized. His affectively-rich experience of encountering God in conversation takes place through an interior and silent conversation undertaken in solitude.

The bulk of Bőjte's statements concerning attitudes toward the saints accentuate the distinctively "friendly" style that such interactions should take. Bőjte's interviewer questions Catholic practices of asking for intercessory help by offering the critique that praying to Mary is like praying to one of God's subordinates – in this case, a "secretary" (*titkárnő*). Bőjte responds by describing the proper relationship with heavenly beings should not be such a hierarchically-organized bureaucratic organization – a statement that his readers would also hear as a rejection of socialism and its bureaucracies (Fehérváry 2013: 198). Instead, he revels in the fact that there are so many wonderful people living alongside God:

But it makes me so happy that heaven is chock full, that it's not just going to be me and God living there, but rather the community of saints is waiting for me in the afterlife....The Church has always looked on the Virgin Mother as the best role model. I love my mother the most of all, but this doesn't mean that I don't have other friends and co-workers with whom I am happy to sit down, drink a beer, and belt out a good one (Bőjte 2013: 192).

Bőjte argues that the purpose of the community of saints is not to encourage the believer to cultivate a subordinate relationship with God; the saints are our friends, chums gathered in a bar to offer us friendship and relaxation. The monk also imagines these heavenly friends to be distinctly *male* companions. Singing ballads while drinking with friends is a distinctly masculine activity that I observed men engage in typically during outdoor cookouts at cultural preservation festivals and weddings. For Bőjte, heaven seems to be like one big cultural preservation festival. While anthropologists have analyzed Hungarian cultural preservation festivals such as the Dance

House movement in terms of processes of cultural management and globalization, in this case, such events provide a screen for the projection of male fantasies about the pleasures and satisfactions that they imagined to have experienced during the rural sojourns of their childhood (Quigley 2013; Taylor 2008).

“Sure, I Used to Say a Rosary or Two...”

This emphasis on this-worldly action for the purpose of social amelioration and intimate conversation with divine beings does not leave much room in Bøjte’s Catholic practice for either intercessory requests for divine intervention or memorized prayer. Although, in *Window onto the Eternal*, he compares asking for Mary’s intercession with asking for grandmother’s help, Bøjte spends the bulk of his discussion of Mary’s role reinterpreting intercession in terms of his overall message of moral uplift: Mary provides a model for how humans should intercede on each other’s behalf (Bøjte 2013: 195). Bøjte only mentions the Rosary once in his book, which prompts another reflection on his mother’s influence in his life. “My mother prays one or two Rosaries a day. I don’t know what kinds of fruit will come from this, or how this will happen. [I don’t know] how it gives us wings. But I’m sure that it will look good and kind in God’s eyes if people bear each other in their souls.”

It took me a while to recognize the tone of derogatory condescension that Bøjte adopts in this statement for the damning criticism of Marian devotionism that ordinary Catholics took it to be. Accounts of post-Vatican II efforts to modernize the Catholic Church in the United States often describe these pro-Vatican II modernizers as advocates of ridding Catholicism of Marian devotionism altogether. Some clerical elites adopted this kind of tone, but most damned Mary with faint praise like Bøjte does in this passage. A typical sentiment would begin with a subtly sarcastic and minimalizing statement that pretended to preserve a place for Marian devotionism

in Catholic life, such as, “Sure, I used to say a Rosary or two, but...” or, “I am devoted to Mary like anybody, but...” These “but”s would inevitably be followed by a statement like Bőjte’s, favoring a more developed or mature religious attitude of ethical caretaking and solidarity.

The Bishop of the Transylvanian Satu Mare Diocese, Jenő Schönberger, delivered a homily at the 2008 Pentecost Mass that presents an exemplary instance of this rhetorical move against Marian devotionism. Quoting a prayer that Mary’s devotees often use as a petition in desperate times, Schönberger offers the typical minimizing statement: “She will surely not reprimand us for neglecting to pray with sufficient enthusiasm and frequency, ‘Help me! Show me that you are our mother!’” It is okay to petition Mary for help, Schönberger insists, but it is surely not a necessary part of Catholic life. And then comes the typical “but” clause: But it *is* necessary, and Mary even demands, that her devotees behave morally towards each other. Adopting the voice of the Virgin, Schönberger tells his audience that, “‘Show that you are my children! Where is there togetherness, love, forgiveness, and the search for common goals among you, my children?’”

Stuffed Chicken or the Eucharist, “Itching” or Holy Satisfaction

Other religious commentators in the Ciuc valley also find ways to champion these post-Conciliar perspectives in a variety of media. András Elekes, for instance, a former priest who left the priesthood in the mid-2000s, is a newspaper columnist, television commentator, and blogger based in a suburban village near Miercurea Ciuc. I often overheard my acquaintances discussing his weekly column and I sometimes sat down with acquaintances to watch his television show at night. Elekes’ perspective is similar to Bőjte’s insofar as he frequently urges his readers to place an emphasis on morality instead of intercessory prayer; on work instead of devotional practices that have the tendency to lead to immodesty. In a February 7, 2014 editorial in a Miercurea Ciuc

newspaper, “Ad-Faces” (*Reklámarcok*), he complains that too often the “choreography” of the altar and those who crowd around it “better resembles the stage of an opera house than the event that offers the divine essence” (Elekes 2014). Even though, Elekes concedes, the liturgy must be precisely executed, still the sign of heaven on earth is not a “show” (*rendezvény*), but rather moral behavior such as humility and mutual concern.

During my fieldwork, Elekes offered remarks on several editions of his television programs in which he singled out for censure the practice of keeping relics of saints that perform miracles after a devotee’s intercessory prayers. In his May 4, 2012 commentary, Elekes unflatteringly compares superfluous practices of devotion to saints’ relics to the critically important practice of sharing in the Eucharist: “It’s not possible to place Christ’s ‘relic’ in a metal reliquary, to hide it away by covering it in gold, later to take it out and process it around only to put it away again” (Elekes 2012a). Instead of devoting themselves to such relics, which he fears might lead to such immodest and exhibitionist behavior, he argues that Jesus wanted Catholics to work hard and act morally by sacrificing for each other (Elekes 2012a).

This unflattering comparison dovetails with Elekes’ generally critical attitude toward any devotional practice that is not directly part of the liturgy of the Mass. In a December 2012 article, he derides any devotion that would distract the faithful from the “mystery of God” and Jesus (Elekes 2012b). The faithful, however, want to pretend that they grasp this mystery; they serve this desire by “decorating” churches with devotional objects, relics, statues, and other symbols, which they find attractive for the same debauched reasons that they like “stuffed chicken and good times on the beach” (Elekes 2012b). He asks his readers to imagine what it would be like if they “cast out every decorative element from the churches...and worship would be ‘just’ a quiet Mass, in which, holding our breath, we whispered the only true desire: ‘Let your will be done’”

(Elekes 2012b). At other times, Elekes admits that, as a Catholic, he cannot dispense with ritual, but his opinions suggest a clear suspicion of certain aspects of devotional life. His consistent message is that believers should dispense with their desires to pray in this way in favor of a more proper devotion to the “true” relics: the sacraments and especially the Eucharist.

Elekes never lampoons Mary’s devotees, although he takes on a generally cynical stance towards collective devotional practices and a favorable one towards quiet contemplation. Still, this attitude can easily become ammunition in the service of anti-devotional persiflage that adopts a similarly “civilized,” “modern,” and “urbane” perspective. A June 2010 post to a blog on the *Transindex.ro* web site highly popular among Transylvanian Hungarians offers a lampooning critique of uncouth behavior by devotees at Csíksomlyó (Anonymous 2010). In the anonymous posting, titled “The Balkan of Csík [Ro. *Ciuc*],” the author signals his status as a cultured sophisticate by setting up a stark contrast in his introductory description of a visit to the shrine church: The church is filled with objects that would interest a *jó hívő* (good believer) – a slyly derogatory and condescending term indicating overly-strong religious enthusiasm indicative of converts to Protestantism. Among the objects that catch his eye are pews, candles, altar, and Mary’s statue. However, as a musical aficionado, he cannot be counted among the good believers, because he is most interested in the organ.

The author’s send-up reaches high gear as he describes how he came to the church to hear a world-renowned organist from an unnamed Western European country perform, but the performance was waylaid by, among others, Mary’s devotees:

In the meantime, some kind of children’s program is happening. You can’t say, but it’s a fact that from every direction there are whoops and hollers, the sound of cell phone ringers, and conversations. The atmosphere is like a marketplace. There’s a line of devotion-minded believers in front of the altar [and statue].

The line of devotees is unmoved by the sight of the quietly patient audience in the pews “hanging their heads in embarrassment.” On the way out from the concert, the author spies a banner hanging from the church’s facade bearing the first line from the same intercessory prayer that Schönberger quoted in order to criticize Marian devotionism: “Help me now, Mary!” The blogger twists the line to demonstrate his disdain: “Help me now, Mary. [Help] *these* people? For what?”

An anonymous blog post on a minor web site would not merit inclusion alongside the writings of luminaries like Bőjte if the Franciscan priest and director of the shrine had not denounced this piece from the pulpit at Csíksomlyó. His denunciation indicates how figures like Bőjte and Elekes feel obliged to avoid the appearance of lampooning devotionism lest they be seen as in league with Mary’s harshest critics. Their criticisms of petitionary and memorized prayer hides behind faint praise. However, there are similarities in the attitudes and behavioral modes they are promoting as appropriate for a church setting. Both Elekes and the blogger would agree that the behavior of an individual sitting and praying quietly in the pew needs to be praised. Standing before the statue while engaging in conversation, in contrast, is disrespectful and, at least from the blogger’s perspective, uncultured and unfit for a country that would be part of Western Europe.

Conversation and Magical Prayer

If Csaba Bőjte, András Elekes, and others advocate prayer as conversation, one impetus for this advocacy is the perception that conversational prayer takes shape as the inverse of another kind of intercourse with divine beings: memorized prayer associated with magical practices. Memorized prayer finds a prominent advocate in the Franciscan priest and author Árpád Daczó, whose celebrity is second only to Bőjte’s among Transylvanian Franciscans today.

Daczó survived internment in the 1950s to take advantage of the 1968 compromise between Transylvanian Hungarian elites and the Ceaușescu government that opened new avenues for ethnological research in the Szekler region. His half-devotional, half-ethnological monograph *The Secret of Csíksomlyó* (Daczó 2000) is partly the result of this part-time research. Daczó describes one such magical practice involving memorized Marian prayer in a recollection of an overheard conversation between two elderly peasant women about how they pray to Mary for help in assisting a sow to give birth to piglets (Daczó 1999: 35). The most prominent currently active Transylvanian Hungarian ethnologist and occasional collaborator with Daczó, Vilmos Tánzos, records similar magical prayers in his 2008 memoir of growing up in the Ciuc valley: The memoir features a story about his mother, whom Tánzos describes as a woman whose rural milieu gave her a “totally mystical worldview,” healing a stricken cow by rubbing its spine with holy water while reciting the same Marian prayer that Schönberger dismisses (Tánzos 2008: 56).⁸⁴ Tánzos also offers his father’s recollection that, as a child, his parents would point to the full moon and call it Mary (Tánzos 2008: 65).⁸⁵ They would then scold the child with the warning that if he used language in an untoward manner – cursing, for instance – it would awaken Mary’s anger, leading to dangerous storms. Memorized prayers to Mary are fascinating to these ethnologists precisely insofar as they constitute a kind of speech that differs from spontaneous conversational dialogue that provides a venue not for controlling the weather, but for “pouring out your heart” like Bőjte did with his father. To use a term from philosopher C. S. Peirce’s semiotic theory of language, ethnologists have carved out a niche for themselves by

⁸⁴ Galina Lindquist offers a succinct description of the model of rural woman healer called *babka* that Tánzos is exploiting in this vignette: “[Babka] is also a popular term for the old wise women who have always operated in Russian villages, healing humans and cattle and offering magical services to neighbors for a small fee” (2006: 28).

⁸⁵ The idea of Mary as a repository for myths and cults of pagan goddesses influenced early 20th century Romanian scholars of religion including Mircea Eliade and Simon Florin Marian. For a review, see Kapaló 2011: 274-7.

studying prayers to Mary that are magical insofar as they constitute “indexical” speech forms that can institute its own effects in the world (Lindquist 2006: 80-2; Kapaló 2011; Keane 2007).

Memorized prayers used for healing, like herbal healing practices, are said to belong to a religious world occupied by old women in isolated rural hamlets, a world that is so foreign to modernity one must be, in Ozsváth’s words, “initiated” into it. Daczó extolls the virtues of a female acquaintance who represents the “eternal ideal of the Szekler mother” in just these terms (Daczó 2000: 259). During his time at Csíksomlyó, this woman lived with her eight children in a forest hovel far from the nearest church. She was so consumed by domestic tasks that she could only manage to get to church once a year when she visited Csíksomlyó for the annual pilgrimage.⁸⁶ Every week, however, she turned her home into a sacred space: “In the evening, but in particular on Sundays, she made her home into a true church. She knew many hymns....She sang them until her children learned them, as well. It was a true storehouse of tradition” (2000: 259-60)!⁸⁷ Daczó includes the practice of using memorized forms of prayer such as the Rosary within the repertoire of this rural religious ideal. He concludes by noting that in their roles as healers – much like Tánzos’ mother as she healed the cow – older rural women like this provide an ideal for Mary’s devotees today.

The Guilt of a Lost Religious World

I frequently heard my acquaintances who came of age after the 1970s lament that, “unfortunately,” the residents of the valley were no longer religious due to various causes all related to the socialist period. “There was a collective here,” was one refrain, which stood in for a host of state efforts to transform society. Such comments evoked the specter of factories that

⁸⁶ While I am focusing on Daczó’s valorization of memorized prayer, it is also clear that he is concerned with normative gender categories, offering gendered public and private spatial divisions as part of his religious ideal (see Gal and Kligman 2000).

⁸⁷ Daczó identifies his interest in such semiotic forms as a fascination with “tradition” most likely because, unlike Tánzos, he is ordained and therefore subject to the Church’s disapproval of magic.

required work on Sundays and schools that replaced religious and familial socialization with exposure to scientific atheistic propaganda. I was left befuddled by these comments since the acquaintances who offered them were often dedicated churchgoers, parish leaders, and participants in Catholic renewal groups. My confusion reached its greatest height on one particular occasion when I was visiting a husband and wife who had prepared testimony concerning the Virgin Mary's miraculous intercession in the healing of their desperately ill son. They felt so confident in the reality of this miracle that they had allowed this event to be reported on the radio and subsequently forwarded physicians' reports, along with their own account, to archdiocesan officials. As I was chatting with the husband, however, he urged me to move away from the valley; I should settle in the Csángó villages because there they are "truly" devoted to Mary.

That my acquaintances were negatively comparing themselves to the images of authentic religiosity offered by commentators like Tánzos, Daczó, and others became clear to me after hearing a joke that was making the rounds among groups of participants in Catholic renewal movements in the valley. According to the joke, a male enthusiast of Catholic renewal movements began cultivating the habit of spending every free moment in constant prayer. For instance, he tried for a while to pray the Rosary while milking his cow. He could only get through, "Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee," when he would interrupt himself with curses and hollers. "Waaah," he would involuntarily shout at his cow as it moved around in the stall bothered by the man's grip on its teats.

This joke is first a commentary on the guilt that residents in the valley feel when they compare their religious sensibility to the normative conception of religion offered by traditionalizing Hungarian Catholic elites. The man wants to have his world be filled with

prayer; he desires an everyday attitude that takes divine presence for granted, which he equates with a constantly contemplative manner. He undertakes a conscious effort to cultivate the ideal religious worldview longed for by Tánčzos and others. He intentionally tries to create the “mystical outlook” in his “entire thought process” that Tánčzos attributes to his mother and father. But the man betrays his socialization into a worldview that sets religion apart from everyday life. He involuntarily curses at his cow when he should be deep in contemplation.⁸⁸ For the last decade, scholars of religion in the Eastern European countryside have been sounding calls to move beyond the panoply of stereotypes that inform the traditionalizers’ worldview and constitute the background for this joke (Rogers 2009: 51; Burbank 2004: 10-14). Such calls to leave behind these stereotypes overlook the fact that no matter how much they might not reflect the lived practice of religion in such areas, these portrayals still constitute a normative image of what it means to “be religious,” defined by the iconic image of old, rural women engaging in magical healing practices by reciting rote memorized prayers such as the Rosary. The power to define “being religious” in this way helps explain the joke’s force in allowing my acquaintances to confess their frustration in the face of the impossibility of recreating the image of a traditional, encompassing, holistic, and mystical religious worldview that they nonetheless aspire to create. Whether or not women who invoke Mary’s healing power into the lives of ill family members today - women who are similarly aware of their alienation from the rural religious world posited as an ideal by some Catholic writers – are also hampered by this guilt is an open question that I will address in Chapter Five.

⁸⁸ I repeated this joke on a number of occasions each time eliciting peals of laughter. This anecdote operates on a number of levels at once. For instance, it is a commentary on gender and religion insofar as female renewal participants tend to competitively play up their piety while men defensively claim that their lives of labor do not allow them to immerse themselves in otherworldly contemplation in this way.

Böjte and Elekes often included forms of petitionary prayer alongside such memorized prayers, extending their critical attitude to this way of relating to the saints. And many of acquaintances who were part of or aspired to the post-socialist entrepreneurial leading classes mirrored these views. I often heard them speak of their stronger inclination toward quiet, internal, and conversational prayer that they lauded as appropriate to the new Catholic leading class. In the end, the appeal of this form of prayer made complete sense to me. The Catholic bourgeoisie had gained their position in the thick of a precarious process that saw many others fall into poverty or forced into labor migration. Miracles and petitionary prayer did not appeal to these figures who had no interest in getting out on those margins of the Catholic Church already occupied by people perceived to be poor, rural, illiterate old ladies. But this is not to say that my acquaintances who read András Elekes or admired Csaba Böjte had banished petitionary prayer from their lives or did not identify experiences that they considered to be moments of Mary's divine intercession. I was confounded again and again by acquaintances whose perspective on devotional matters I thought I could predict based on their social position and theological inclinations. Urban, entrepreneurial, and bourgeois Catholics sometimes told me stories about miracles when I was least expecting it. They faced certain moral and relational challenges in transforming the experience of prayer into a story they could use for particular purposes, which I will describe in the context of men's petitions to Mary in Chapter Two and the work of Transylvanian Radio Maria, a global Catholic radio network promoting Marian devotionism, in Chapter Six. In both cases, but always for various reasons, stories about prayer were highly private, told in an attitude of embarrassment and shame. Objects associated with these experiences – statues and pictures of Mary to which they appealed in the midst of these crises –

were kept hidden away in drawers, much like the stories they harbored deep in the background and far at the periphery of their everyday pragmatic movement through life.

Sobs of Joy and Sorrow at Mary's Feet

Catholic elites are by no means consistent in their portrayals of the proper way to embody and express desire in one's relationship with divine beings. Bőjte seems to advocate an attitude of self-controlled, quiet, solitary, and internalized affective experience in *Window onto the Eternal*. At the same time, he portrays voluble demonstrations of weeping and sobbing in his description of the young man returning home to meet his grandmother. Bőjte is joined by many other Catholic elites – young and old alike – in using this soldier ballad motif to idealize such overt displays of emotion when they feel called to make certain rhetorical points. And they offer this as ideal behavior to all men, using in their writings characters that fit the profile of both urban entrepreneurs and rural peasants.

Árpád Daczó seems almost constantly to be weeping as he conveys his desire for Mary, and the men who appear in his writings share his tendency to burst into uncontrollable bouts of tears in their desire for Mary. For instance, Daczó describes one "worldly" man – he had worked for the Hungarian government and traveled the whole of Europe – who, after stepping into the church sanctuary, immediately fell into Daczó's arms. "Without a word or a sound," Daczó recalls, "he flung his arms around my neck and sobbed so much that it was shaking from inside him" (106). Daczó explains this man's experience of praying to Mary as the experience of being a child: "The smallest child, if it wants to express something, starts to cry. The child still doesn't have the words. How should it make known what is inside? How should the adult, as well, express what is inside ...?" (106).⁸⁹ Continuing in this childlike vein, he begins to speak in the

⁸⁹ Daczó refers to his own experience of being brought to an infantilized state of wordless weeping in the presence of Mary in this way: "And, today, why is the beautiful Virgin Mary the most truly beautiful? Because she was a

first person, asking rhetorically, “Why shouldn’t I yearn to go there? Why shouldn’t I allow her [Mary] to nestle me into her motherly bosom” (105)? These portrayals of men driven to visible, outward expressions of emotion as a result of their desire for Mary provide a stark contrast to the idealized image András Elekes offers of worshippers immersed in quiet and self-controlled internal conversations with God. Daczó seems to want to emphasize this contrast insofar as the man who is made mute by his desire for Mary shares the same type of “worldly” profile as the anonymous blogger’s sophisticates who are embarrassed by the behavior of Mary’s devotees as they wait quietly for the concert to start in the Csíksomlyó church. However, as I argue in Chapter Six, the breadth of affective experience and expression made possible when one mediates one’s desires through the Mother of God far exceeds this opposition.

“My Mother is Calling Me Home:” Catholic Elites Remember the Rural Household

For Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic elite commentators of all stripes, the pattern of regular emotional and material exchanges typical of the pre-collectivization grandmother/mother-son relationship comes to symbolize an alternative to morally problematic forms of nuclear family reciprocity that are characteristic of entrepreneurs’ suburban lifestyles. This critique of the nuclear family linked to an idealization of the rural household is evident in Bőjte’s homily illustration of the old woman praying for her grandson. The vignette not only serves as a polemic against “old” prayer practices; it is a critique of the nuclear family. In his sermon, before introducing the grandmother as the negative example, Bőjte spends time rhapsodizing on Saint Anna’s experience of seeing her grandson, Jesus, returning home from fleeing Herod’s persecution:

Let’s picture before us how beautiful that scene would have been when the little Jesus arrives into Nazareth and Saint Anna, in front of her house among the flowers, Saint

mother! I cannot write anything more beautiful about Mary, because anything more beautiful than this can only be said by my tears [that fell] while I was writing these lines” (286).

Anna, Jesus' grandmother, entwines [*átölelni*] her arms around her dear grandson. What a touching, beautiful moment. The little old woman's tears are gushing [*csorogni*]. Day after day, she prayed...for her dear grandson to come home from the wild, wild world [*ezer idegen földről*].

Böjte uses the highly romanticized and emotive tone that characterizes the folk genre of *katona ballada* (soldier ballad) depicting young men returning home from military service to their mothers.⁹⁰ In this genre, young men return home from their service in the army to the waiting embraces of their mothers who have waited patiently for them while they were away. Both Böjte's sermon and this popular genre focus primarily on the emotional dynamics between a mother and her son, exploring the psychological dimensions of this relationship in terms of longing, love, sacrifice, pride, and worry. Böjte's own memories of his childhood preserve this idealized model when he described frequently running to his grandmother to ask for her intervention whenever his mother punished him, thus suggesting that his grandmother was present on a daily basis to attend to such needs. In the case of his 2012 homily, Böjte uses the ideal of the multigenerational household to criticize the grandson for starting a new family far from his extended kin network and the grandmother for encouraging him.

Other Catholic writers share Böjte's desire to preserve or recreate the multi-generational household; they also imagine that the greatest threat to the multi-generational household is the nuclear family model associated with transnational labor migration and suburban and urban lifestyles.⁹¹ For instance, in a New Year's Day article from *Vasárnap*, Father József Tamás

⁹⁰ Since this genre usually portrays the son coming home alone from military service, it makes sense that Joseph and Mary seem to disappear in this intimate moment shared between an adult female relative and a young man. Rogers (2009: 6) also refers to a similar genre of soldier ballads in Russia, identifying their contemporary significance in similar terms as vehicles for commentaries on social change.

⁹¹ Poetry is a frequent vehicle for the expression of such psychological satisfactions. Daczó cites a poem by Sándor Petőfi titled "Plan Gone Up in Smoke;" he uses it to compare the wordlessness caused by being emotionally overcome in Mary's presence to Petőfi's own inability to speak on seeing his mother after returning home (Daczó 2000 145-6). In the January 27, 2012 edition of *Vasárnap*, Father Dénes Incze offers a selection of his favorite poems in honor of the theme: "Our Parents are Our Greatest Help." Despite stating at the beginning of this piece that he wants to show "how our Hungarian poets recall parental love," Incze includes among his five selections four

draws on a memory of returning home to his mother to describe how the Virgin Mary will never abandon those who pray to her:

Many years ago, when I went home to my parents' home, my good mother waited at the most dangerous corner of the bridge with a portable lamp. She wanted to protect me with the lamp, with her loving heart, since the bridge was [in] bad [condition]. Our heavenly mother, Mary, guards us amidst the dangers of life with the lantern of love.

Roman Catholic popular literature in Transylvania finds many occasions to explore these emotional dynamics embedded in the gestures that constitute the mother-son relationship, including sacrifice, gratitude, joy, worry, and protection. The dominant message of these idealistic and sentimental portrayals is that multi-generational families characterized by regular contact between adult sons and their mothers and grandmothers constitute the bedrock of a peaceful and harmonious domestic life. Any brief perusal of this literature will yield pieces by men giving free play for the construction of memories that are intended for their own satisfaction, delight, and vindication based on their experiences of the psycho-relational dynamics of the pre-collectivization rural household.

The angry, bitter, and vindictive tone that Bőjte strikes in his homily is rooted in a sense that men like him will soon be unable to share these cherished memories as more young men embrace the Western nuclear family by leaving to work in the city or abroad. His homily is a stark example of the way Catholic elites finely interweave seemingly contradictory affective experiences as they come to grips with social change. They often switch on a dime between plaintive longing for the comforts of a grandmother's love and sour resentment aimed at those who they feel have rejected this love. Catholic elites thus express both their sense that young

poems that describe parenthood as mediated through the mother-son relationship, one poem featuring a father-son interaction, and no poems describing a young woman's experience in the family. The tone of these poems is just as sentimental as Bőjte's homily. Here is one example, the Franciscan monk László Mécs's poem titled, "The Prince's Three Sorrows:" "When I was born, there was no big sign/messiah-manifesting stars/only my mother knew that I am a prince.../the others saw a crying mite/but my mother wrapped me in the swaddling clothes/as if she were coddling the sun's beautiful corona." After his mother passes away, the narrator mourns the loss of her "sweetness" and is sorrowful at the knowledge that "no one will know that I was a prince."

people are betraying an experience that shaped them as Catholics and the imminent loss of the most cherished memory of their childhoods.

Incze offers this unflattering portrayal of a nuclear family in his October 12, 2011 column. “Contemporary life and experience,” he observes, “indicate that, in many new young families, mothers are paying attention to their young child’s spiritual or religious upbringing either not at all or only a little bit.” The pace and hectic nature of contemporary life in nuclear families is the cause for such neglect: “Rising early, setting out for work, returning home late at night, with the children being the constant resident of some nursery school or daycare....” If urbanization and labor migration result in such problematic nuclear families, ecclesiastical writers also cast these changes in a negative light using anecdotes of debauched women in urban settings. In the first case, Daczó singles out “the Western sex-wave” in his indictment of contemporary society in *The Secret of Csíksomlyó*, and he offers this example of those whom it affects:

As is appropriate to the Western sex-wave, a good number of our university students have sex-partners and I know of one such girl who is thinking that she also should choose one. I know, for sure, that there is a superficially Catholic girl who commutes into Csíkszereda [Ro.: *Miercurea Ciuc*] from the upper part of the Csík [Ro.: Ciuc] valley carrying condoms. My Lord! How debauched even the Szekler woman has become... (Daczó 2000: 318)!

Scholars have noted that motherly love has long been portrayed as a paradigm for all kinds of love throughout Eastern Europe; others note, as I have argued, that it is not motherly love in general but rather a mother’s love for her son that serves this purpose (Lindquist 2006: 88-9; Kligman 1988). However, these examples drawn from contemporary Catholic popular literature show that this paradigm is being reworked and reinvigorated with new meaning in the context of the construction of labor migration as a crisis rooted in changing family structures. Catholic elites react to the increasing popularity of the nuclear family by setting up a stark

contrast with an idealized multi-generational household. The rural household is set apart as if they are separate worlds. The multi-generational household, deemed to be more authentically Szekler, should be cultivated with dedication and attention by devotees in light of the fact that it is under threat. Young people must understand themselves as putting themselves and their families at risk when they choose to embrace nuclear family reciprocities.

VI. Coda: Changing Subjects and Worlds in Marian Devotionalism

What are Mary's devotees doing with the Virgin Mother when they call her down into their lives and worlds in a contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic milieu defined by elites' efforts to distinguish and isolate old from new? To foreshadow my way of approaching this question, which appears repeatedly in the following chapters and constitutes a central preoccupation of this study of religion after socialism, I want to share a brief story from two devotees about a time they asked Mary for help.

One Saturday afternoon during my fieldwork, I got on a bus from a northern Ciuc village to Miercurea Ciuc to visit a married couple, István and Mária, for lunch. István was in his mid-40s and retired from the Bălan copper mines, while Mária was younger and worked on the line at a clothing factory in Miercurea Ciuc. They had just relocated into a city apartment, a move so recent that I caught the faint smell of fresh paint as I was walked through their front door. They were proud of their investment, and discussed the details of the mortgage that had financed the new home. They had been living in the cramped village home of István's widowed mother, Kincső, and it was there that I had first met István one weekend on a return visit to take care of some chores. Subsequently, Kincső recommended I seek out István because something "special" had happened to him during the annual pilgrimage to Csíksomlyó. After eating and then chatting for a while, I inquired about this experience, but István dodged my inquiries, explaining that

young people like him were not as religious as his mother's generation. This comment drew a very slight grimace from Mária, but she remained silent as István returned to talking about his work in the mine.

During a later lull in the conversation, I again broached the topic of asking Mary for help, this time addressing both István and Mária together. István began to repeat his earlier comment when Mária interrupted him: "When was it again," she began, "Last year. It's for sure that...last year...last year, I, I, I...a lot." Over the next ten minutes, a story about one of Mary's miracles spilled out in a tense contrapuntal exchange. István and Mária described a series of marital conflicts prompted by tensions between Mária and her mother-in-law. István described it as a "falling out" [*haragban lenni*], while Mária was more extreme in her characterization: It was so bad that, "we almost got divorced," she insisted. In the midst of this horrible time, they stopped by Csíkсомlyó after visiting a former classmate's home. István recalled, "We said, 'let's go out to the Virgin Mother.' So we went up to the statue and with a handkerchief or something. It doesn't matter. We stroked it on her feet. And we asked her to help us so that we can buy the apartment." Mária then continued, "I asked that if I can survive to see us move into the city, then I will, for sure, give thanks to the Virgin Mother."

The play of old and new in the miracle that has shaped Mária, István, and Kincsó's lifeworlds opens up to us as a story that begins with the lives, relationships, desires, and fears of real people like Mária, István, and Kincsó. A second guiding understanding follows from this primary focus on religious subjects inhabiting historically and socially constituted worlds: Everyday religious people are not primarily concerned with whether their practices *fit* across abstract schema of "emic" or "etic" categories, but rather Mária and István's story describes primarily an act of *self- and world-transformation*. Beginning with the pragmatic interplay of

subject and world in processes of religious change leads me to place emphasis on the following themes present in this story about petitioning the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó for help: This act of prayer introduces several aspects of the way Marian devotional worlds constitute change by both confounding and keeping apart the old and the new: kneeling before the statue; wiping a handkerchief on Mary's feet; and petitioning Mary for help. But it is precisely this act of drawing on what is imagined to be conventional and associated with the past that allows István and Mária to make their way forward in a life that is also partly new. Asking Mary for help in front of an icon in a fashion that Elekes derides as old fashioned allows István and Mária to adopt a new Western nuclear family lifestyle in an urban single-family apartment. The way István and Mária's relationship with Mary unfolds suggests that positing the emergence of "different religious worlds" obfuscates Mary's devotees' pragmatic insistence on *both* the continuity *and* the incompatibility of what they have experienced as the new and the old.

This experience undoubtedly also shapes Kincső's engagements with the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó, since Kincső now must contend with the fact that Mary helped her son and daughter-in-law change their lives by moving to the city. For Kincső, to experience "religious change" is to ask: Why did my son move away? And for a woman living in contemporary Transylvania to ask this question is to dive deeply into a welter of conflicting affective experiences that do not arrange generations into opposed worldviews, but rather describe enduring ties and binds between parents and children, including pride in seeing her son improve his material conditions, regret about the conflicts that drove her family apart, and anxiety about her waning influence on his life.⁹²

⁹² The consensus that socialism institutionalized dichotomous moral thought patterns dividing us from them, commonly applied to describe differences between generations, has been questioned recently by, among others, Alexei Yurchak, who argues, "This relationship [with Soviet socialism] was characterized not by binary oppositions of 'us' (common people) versus 'them' (the party, the state), but by a seemingly paradoxical coexistence of affinities

This chapter has traced the contours of desire in contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic worlds, exploring recent major social and political transformations at Csíksomlyó and around the Ciuc valley. A review of these political economic transformations through the eyes of post-socialist Transylvanian Catholic elites reveals the aspects of everyday life most bitterly contested after 1989. These contested topics overlap with anxieties about the emergence of a post-socialist entrepreneurial class, with desire playing an especially critical role in contests about the proper role of this emergent and influential group. Major alliances among Catholic elites were up in the air during the period I have focused on; new global players were coming onto the scene offering normative conceptions of “traditional” magical religion. These considerations as well as the conviction that the writings that constituted capillary patterns of subjectification for ordinary Catholics were apprehended according to debates first and foremost about pragmatic concerns, such as how to pray, led me to abjure my review according to themes rather than coherent ideological schools of thought. Knowing the pathways that ordinary Catholics take between villages, cities, suburbs, regions, states, and continents, as well as the global journeys that constitute normative conceptions of religion, is a key to understanding the worlds that Mary’s devotees are at grips with in their everyday lives in the wake of socialism.

and affiliations, belonging and estrangement, meaningful work and pure formality that were indivisible and constitutive of the forms of life that were ‘normal,’ creative, ethical, engaged, and worth being involved in” (2006: 98).

Chapter Two: “At Grips with the World:” Ritual and the Intimate Formation of Masculine Subjectivities

In so far as I know the relation of appearances to the kinaesthetic situation, this is not in virtue of any law or in terms of any formula, but to the extent that I have a body, and that through that body I am at grips with the world.

- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Pp. 352-3.

I. Introduction: Social Mobility in Pilgrimage and Masculinity Studies

I made the journey to Csíksomlyó for the 2011 Pentecost pilgrimage on foot, rising in the early morning darkness to join a village group setting out from the northern part of the valley. A little ways out from the village, I found my pace next to two young acquaintances – male college students who had come back for the event from university in the city of Cluj. The first was specializing in violin performance, but he was always eager to talk about playing guitar in his burgeoning Christian rock band. The other had aspirations to be a journalist. Our group stopped singing after we left the village, opening up space for conversation. As we walked along, the violinist commented to his friend about the darkness and how early it was. But, he continued, “My Dad is used to it. He works from 5AM until late at night every day.” He then launched into a description of his father’s daily routine performed in these early morning hours: “He gets up at 4AM, shaves, drinks coffee, and then leaves to drive to Madaras [about ten kilometers away]. He does this *every day*,” he emphasized. When I broke in to ask what his father does, he said he drove a milk truck to small stores for a private company. He also noted that his father was not going to Csíksomlyó because they were hosting paying guests from Budapest who had come for the pilgrimage. The final note to this brief exchange came from my journalist acquaintance who confirmed that his father was also staying home. I had a chance later to ask what kind of work his father did. Much like the violinist, the aspiring journalist told me about an early morning routine of leaving home for the first shift at the Bălan copper mines.

This chapter intertwines a description of the annual Pentecost pilgrimage with an account of the intersubjective formation of desire among working class Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic men. I consider changing notions of desire within the context of changing patterns and pathways of social mobility. As the social valuation of industrial labor has changed, working class men and their sons have been forced to engage with desire in different ways as they seek positions alongside prominent intellectuals, Catholic elites, and entrepreneurs at the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage site. On the one hand, desire has thus become a powerful way by which structures of power move out in capillary and productive flows in order to enmesh working class men in thoroughgoing subjectification processes. Desire, however, is not only the way subjects become patients of the world of post-socialist consumer-driven capitalism. In fact, as I argued in the introduction, desire takes shape in a dialectic of subject and world in which subjects' desires are dependent on an external viewpoint of seeing their desire through the experience of an Other. This dependence is not a collapse of self into the Other, which would result in the frustrating satisfaction of desire. The external viewpoint must remain unquestioned as both external and assimilated into subjective experience, for desire is viable only when self and world remain in tension such that neither become completely at the service of the other.

Keeping this formulation in mind, I focus on desire within the context of the *Bildung* self-formation of concrete subjects, never leaving behind nor straying too far from my acquaintances' own engagements with desire – their attempts to cultivate certain kinds of desire, their frustrations when these attempts are thwarted, their hopes that their sons will feel comfortable embodying certain kinds of desire, and working class fathers' anxieties about how their sons will turn around and evaluate their fathers' desires from positions of social dominance. Situating desire as a process by which subjects move out towards inherited worlds in order to take them up

for their own purposes thus carries on my interest in the intersubjective dynamics of desire outlined in the Introduction.

As this description suggests, I consider the role of desire in intersubjective formation primarily in the context of *intimate* relationships between fathers and sons. I draw on anthropologist Michael Herzfeld's theoretical writings to outline the concept of intimate worlds and intimacy, paying special attention to the way these concepts have later been taken up by scholars of religion such as Constance Furey. According to Herzfeld, "cultural intimacy" expresses those aspects of social experience that lie across the divide between the demotic and the discursive: Demotic relations may provide a sense of comfort, understanding, security, but they also become a source of embarrassment when refracted through practices of external self-presentation (Herzfeld 1987; 1992; 1997 [2005]). Constance Furey calls for a change of focus in Religious Studies to these demotic, concrete, and "intimate" realms of social interplay – what she calls the "problems and pleasures of kinship, friendship, patronage, marriage, and other relationships less easily named" – as a counterpoint to the dominant mode of studying individuals in their atomistic relationships with discourses, states, religious institutions, and other abstract subjects (Furey 2012: 10; see also Dole 2012).¹

Typical anthropological portrayals of working class men's subjectivities under neo-liberal political economic conditions, whether in post-socialist contexts or elsewhere, focus on men's subjectivities as determined in encounters with these abstract subjects rather than relations of intimacy. In the case of working class men's experience after socialism, this general neglect of

¹ For a selection of studies that approach Eastern European men's and workers' subjectivities primarily through such contexts, see Varga 2014; Kideckel 2008; Creed 2011; Tereskinas 2009; Ghodsee 2009. Some scholars have thrown glances at the topic of masculinity, suggesting that the rise of militarism in the former Yugoslavia (Munn 2006; Zhivkovic 2006), the attraction of nationalist politics elsewhere (Gal and Kligman 2000: 26; Rivkin-Fish 2006), and even the popularity of Buddhist religious calisthenics in Russian Buryatia share roots in a crisis of masculinity (Bernstein 2013: 35).

intimacy has led scholars to caricature men's domestic lives: Men appear to be detached and inactive, passively slumped in living room chairs as they watch television (Gal and Kligman 2000: 54; Creed 2011: 73). One way to understand the specific dynamics of men's intimate relations can be found in Merleau-Ponty's embodied and phenomenological reinterpretation of psychological resistance and repression. I argue that fathers' labor occupies a repressed or forgotten position in men's intimate worlds: The reality of a father's labor is only grasped and recognized insofar as it adheres to that area of a world to which it is relevant. The paradox of men's intimate worlds is captured in the fact that this labor defines how sons experience their lives even as they are kept from having real knowledge of labor and apprehending on a daily basis its formative role in constituting their sense of self.² Complicating the caricatures of men's domestic lives through the concepts of "intimacy" and "world" thus helps us better understand the powerfully subjectifying relationships between younger and older men I met around the pilgrimage site, men like my two upwardly mobile young acquaintances discussing with astonishment their fathers' everyday routines of labor and self-denial.

On a certain level, one might argue that focusing on intimacy and the role of working class sacrifice in constructing a religious world might amount to just another description of the typical dynamics of working class men's self-sacrifice made meaningful by Catholic ritual and religious narrative. However, what makes Transylvanian Hungarian young men's intimate relationships with their fathers distinctive is the way in which the typical pathways of working class social mobility have recently undergone rapid changes. The working class jobs occupied by

² For Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the concept of "world," "background," and "foreground" and other concepts related to this analysis of repression, see Merleau-Ponty 1945 [1962]: 114-7, 122-8, 184-194. In addition to Herzfeld's studies of masculine performativity and cultural intimacy and Merleau-Ponty's works on the body, the approach in this chapter was also inspired by several historical studies that direct attention away from working class men's subjectivities as shaped in labor union activism or revolutionary mobilization: While being attentive to the distinctive aspects of Transylvanian Hungarian working class men's experience, Robert Orsi's (2010) essay, "Theorizing Closer to Home," and Sennet and Cobb's (1972) *The Hidden Injuries of Class* provided continuous inspiration to get as close as possible to men's lives, relationships, and feelings.

the fathers of my young acquaintances – local delivery truck driver and electrician – used to provide men with salaries that allowed them to invest in their children’s education and social mobility. However, as I illustrated in Chapter One, this is not the case now that industrial jobs are politically devalued and associated with the “failed” system of socialism. Today, young men might choose labor migration as a means of getting ahead, seemingly rejecting the educational credentials and opportunities for self-cultivation that their fathers see as the proper means to achieve social mobility. And this rejection cuts close to the bone for these older men, since it is their self-sacrifice that has makes such education and self-cultivation possible. Thus, men’s subjectivities formed within the intimacies of fathers’ love and suffering on behalf of their sons sheds light on the newly precarious and uncertain dynamics of social mobility within contemporary global neo-liberalism.

Beyond this insight into changing patterns of social mobility, the theoretical yield of studying working class men’s subject formation in intimacy emerges in relation to the concepts of “crisis of masculinity” or “cultural dispossession” that have guided the study of men after socialism (Creed 2011: 55; Kideckel 2008; Ghodsee 2009). Where the latter term is recommended because place the burden on men to account for their experience of gender dysphoria, it also shifts subjective experience onto the field of social structural changes that constitute the “transition” to neo-liberalism after socialism. Thus, this solution to identifying the site of men’s subject formation under neo-liberalism tacks from one pole of an opposition to another: from an overly-subjective account to one that transforms subjectivity into a world process. As I argued in the Introduction, D. W. Winnicott’s conception of the “transitional object” as a way of describing change in its experiential dimensions as an intersubjective dialectic of life and world recommends itself as a way of synthesizing these theoretical polemics.

As a figure with one foot in memories of the rural past and one foot pointing towards an imagined future “out there” in transnational flows mediated by global Catholicism, calling the Virgin Mary down into everyday spaces through petitionary prayer allows men to pragmatically reorient their attention to their lives and worlds in the gaps opened up between the new and the old. These relationships with the Virgin Mary are also part of the same worlds in which men work on their relationships with their sons. An account of men, their sons, and Mary together describes the process I have called, “being at grips with the world.”

Finally, this chapter is also an account of the annual Pentecost procession to Csíksomlyó *qua* ritual. I turn once again to the concept of world to explain what I take to be the central paradox of this ritual: the absence of older men from the Pentecost pilgrimage event. The young men with whom I was walking to Csíksomlyó mentioned that they had left their fathers at home that morning. During my fieldwork there was a general sense that older men were no longer making the pilgrimage journey which these men often explained by referring to labor-related chronic or acute injuries. I argue that while this paradox is left unresolved in interpretive and social structural theories of ritual, it is given a fully intensive accounting in a semiotic approach that simultaneously builds on aspects of the existential/phenomenological concept of world. Following Webb Keane, I maintain that the observable elements of the world of the pilgrimage ritual are semiotic signs constituting in their material form what they signify (Keane 2007). Where semiotic theories of ritual often place an emphasis on strategy in relation to semiotic forms, men’s intimate worlds and the world of the pilgrimage event do not direct men to turn their attention toward this particular kind of masculine suffering in order to exclude it through processes of explicit contestation. Rather, these worlds are pre-discursively organized with attention to men’s suffering such that they are then able to preclude discursive attention to it.

I forge ahead with this exploration of ritual, subjectivity, and desire through four additional sections. In Part Two, I describe the Pentecost procession as I experienced it as a participant on four occasions between 2010 and 2013. In Part Three, I narrate five men's stories about petitioning the Virgin Mary of Csíksomlyó for help. Part Four uses ethnographic material to disentangle the dynamics of "cultural intimacy" that define Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic men's worlds: solidarity, concealment, shame, and pride; anxieties about being humiliated by elites; commiserating in maligned pride; and the link between sacrifice, love, and authority (Herzfeld 1987; 1997 [2005]). Finally, Part Five explores the explicit and implicit meanings of features of the post-socialist Pentecost pilgrimage as a refraction of the role of suffering and labor in constituting men's everyday intimate worlds.

II. Pilgrimage, Masculinity, and Coming of Age

Masculinity and Coming-of-Age in the Pilgrimage Procession

Both popular and professional Hungarian-language publications about the pilgrimage prominently link the motif of men coming-of-age by participating in the Pentecost event to the reproduction of the ranks of local, regional, and national intellectual, religious, political, and economic elites. The pilgrimage as a male coming of age rite is made explicit in some villages where the task of carrying the village banners at the head of the village procession group, called the *keresztalja*, changes each year. Village banners are made of a tripod of stout wooden poles from which hang thick cloth drapes bearing the picture of the village patron saint. The weight is either split between three men or sometimes one man bears it alone. In Sâncrăieni, in the southern part of the valley, residents told me that village "intellectuals" (*értelmiségiek*) – meaning the priest and local teachers – grant the task of carrying the banners to three male students preparing for graduation as an honor for keeping to a high standard in morality, faith,

and academic achievement. In other villages, teachers and cultural organizers give roles to participants and lead the group singing during the procession.³ Before 1948, many young men honored with the task of carrying village banners went on to attend university or theological seminaries, preparing themselves to step into these roles (Mohay 2008: 45). When I made the pilgrimage with the village group from Sâncrăieni in 2013, one young woman explained that the heaviness of the banner symbolized the young man's preparedness to bear the weight of responsibility for the community.⁴ In general, village procession groups tend to be loosely organized by gender, with young men at the lead and adult women and children walking in the back.⁵

As suggested by my acquaintance's observation that bearing a village's banner is like bearing the weight of being responsible for a community, the pilgrimage ritual's role as a rite of manhood is also tied to the virtues of strength and perseverance in the face of physical trials. This is an especially prominent theme in media representations and popular literature about Csíksomlyó. For instance, each year the annual *Csíksomlyó* magazine, published by a Budapest-based editor and sold at the event since the early 2000s, finds space to feature pictures of young men in the midst of acts that demonstrate their physical abilities and character. Photographs

³ Many articles and monographs have been published on the phenomenon of "cultural management" and government-sponsored festivals in post-socialist countries. One of the points often debated in this literature is whether local artists, musicians, and activists contribute to these cultural forms or if they are alienated inventions of political elites. The construction of national identity, loyalty, and elites' social legitimacy is also a foremost concern in this literature. See, for instance, Kligman 1988; Creed 2011; Luehrmann 2011; Taylor 2008; Quigley 2013. My approach is different insofar as I begin with the concerns that emerge from face-to-face interactions between participants and cultural managers, arguing that the latter constitute objects of desire in the form of authoritative and socially mobile community leaders who demand respect.

⁴ Not quite a "native theory," since there is no doubt that the young woman was repeating what her ethnologist cousin had told her, this interpretation bore some significance for her since she spent the next few minutes complaining to a female friend that she did not remember the banners they had carried to be terribly light.

⁵ The gendered organization of the procession mirrors that of the traditional funeral processions still practiced in those Ciuc villages without mortuaries. See Balázs 1994: 56-9 for a description of pre-collectivization funerary practices. In her study of Romanian funeral practices, Gail Kligman sees this gendered arrangement as a symbolic enactment of the structural organization of household production. Much as in Herzfeld's concept of cultural intimacy, the boundary between the demotic and the official is policed by men who represent their families before outsiders: the community and God (Kligman 1988: 59-61; see also Herzfeld 1987).

convey the physical exertion the procession requires by drawing attention to sweating and tired men who nonetheless appear to persevere. Men are routinely portrayed standing strong and tall, exuding the foremost masculine virtues of dignity or respect (*becsület*) and seriousness (*komoly*).

Young men who carry village banners are not only tested by the difficulty of bearing their weight, but they also face the challenge of adroitly maneuvering these objects. If the tripod is split among three men, carrying the banner requires coordination, since the three men must step together, which, according to Hungarian-language ethnologists, inculcates togetherness and strength as masculine virtues. Flags will also be lowered any time a group encounters a cross along the road, and these objects are finally bowed in order to greet Mary when they reach the Csíksomlyó church. All this is frequently done under adverse weather conditions; at such times the task can be made more difficult not only by rain, but also by dank cold and harsh winds.

The emphasis on bearing difficult tasks with dignity was impressed upon me in an exchange with an acquaintance while I was walking with a village group during the 2011 pilgrimage. This acquaintance was a prominent community leader, although he had been born into a working class family. His father was a retired miner who now was primarily engaged in un-mechanized agricultural production using horse-drawn carts. His son, in contrast, had married a teacher and he himself had held a series of prestigious and demanding professional positions. Most recently, he had been chief administrator of Csaba Bőjte's orphanage network before returning to his natal village, at which point he was elected vice-mayor. We were walking alongside each other when I momentarily bent down to stretch my aching legs, which then prompted a stiff rebuke from my acquaintance. "That's not allowed," he chastened me. Walking in a fashion other than upright and dignified was a violation of this man's embodied sense of propriety. Later, I saw him complaining in the same way to two others who were also stretching

their legs. Maintaining proper posture in the face of physical hardship was of critical importance to this community leader whose life offered an ideal portrait of social mobility and who had spent many years seeking to instill and demonstrate proper bodily orientations towards the world.

The *Labarum* and Initiation into Elite Status

In addition to the village banners, the other major ritual element that demonstrates the pilgrimage's role in making men and community elites is the procession of symbolic objects to the amphitheater for the Mass. Each year, a Miercurea Ciuc newspaper, *Csiki hírlap* (The Ciuc Daily News), publishes the names of the students who have received the honor of bearing the Csíksomlyó church banner and the *labarum* – a type of military flag wound round a circular metal frame. These young men are “marked out” or “appointed” (*kijelölni*) from the graduating class of the Catholic *gimnázium* in Miercurea Ciuc.⁶ Only those who have “offered a good example before their schoolmates” by virtue of their educational advancement (*tanulmányi előmenetel*), morality and faith (*hitérkölcsei magaviselet*), and general behavior (*magaviselet*) are selected.⁷ If these young men needed any stronger sense of the social roles they destined for, they are shown this fate in the person of the school director who selects these students and himself had the honor of once carrying the *labarum*. In 2008, the director offered these reflections about the pilgrimage:

Levente Tamás, the director of the Mary, Help of Christians [*Segítő Mária*] Gimnázium, when he was a student at the Áron Márton Gimnázium, was able to carry the *labarum* during the pilgrimage procession in 1992. ‘I experienced this opportunity as a privilege. First, because it strengthened me in my faith. Second, in my attitude toward the tradition of the pilgrimage and Csíksomlyó.’

The 2011 version of this article reminds readers that *labarum*, “desires physical strength from its bearer, since it is more than twenty kilograms in weight” (Kiss 2011). In 2014, one of the young

⁶ See Kiss 2011; Kiss 2013; Kiss 2014.

⁷ The 2011, 2013, and 2014 newspaper articles about the students assigned to carry the *labarum* all used this verb to describe the honor of this selection.

men makes the meaning of this act clear as a process of bearing the community's responsibilities: "It is also a responsibility that does not end at the close of the pilgrimage. The meaning of this task is that, later on, you have to carry the extra burden [*többlet*] that we have now received in school. This task is about one's whole life."

The young men carrying the *labarum* and church banners stand in the middle of the "cordon" (*kordon*) of rope and iron carried by another group of specially-selected exemplary students. The students carrying the cordon are also marked out for their exemplary academic and moral performance. They are awarded the privilege of serving important community leaders by standing guard beside the cordon, meeting important figures such as the Franciscan monks, clergy, ecclesiastical officials like the Archbishop and Papal Nuncio to Romania. The cordon forms a protective barrier for these luminaries as the students escort them to the amphitheater and stage. Once in the amphitheater, these young people take positions serving the various groups and individuals on the large main altar. This stage is occupied not only by clergy and Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchs, but also very often by prominent Hungarian and Transylvanian Hungarian politicians.⁸ Since 2009, members of "Knighthood Orders" (*lovagrend*) have also appeared on stage at the pilgrimage; these Orders attract members of the entrepreneurial classes and their mission of promoting knowledge of Mary's interventions in Hungarian history in a right-wing nationalistic vein appears to fulfill István Hajdó's call that proper bourgeois desire should be oriented towards apprehending Mary's role in this history.

The Origin Narrative Controversy and the Search for a Post-Socialist Bourgeoisie

⁸ I observed other students from Miercurea Ciuc *gimnáziums* given opportunities to encounter such elites by performing a concert for the Transylvanian Archbishop which included the offering of his blessing, serving at Mary's statue helping pilgrims touch objects to Mary's feet for her blessing, registering and directing pilgrim groups arriving at the stage in the amphitheater, and, of course, processing to Csíksomlyó with their village groups. See the list of duties performed by students of the Mary, Help of Christians Gimnázium published in a local newspaper article (Kiss 2014).

One of the ways in which people sought to demonstrate their comfort moving within the world of these various intellectuals and elites was by weighing in on debates about the history and meaning of the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage. Several monographs served as touchstones for these pronouncements, but one common foil was Budapest-based historian Tamás Mohay's 2008 history of the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage questions its status as a historical commemoration. Mohay argues that there is no objective and documentary historical basis to the "Battle of Hargita [Ro.: *Harghita*]," the 16th century conflict that the Pentecost pilgrimage is supposed to commemorate.⁹ Local Catholic Szeklers are supposed to have marched out from Csíksomlyó to counter the aggressive incursion of the forces of a Unitarian nobleman and ruler of Transylvania, Zsigmond János, who was trying to convert Ciuc valley Catholics to Unitarianism. The soldiers who mustered for battle gathered first in the pilgrimage site church to pray.¹⁰ They defeated the invaders and on the way back decorated their weapons with birch branches that signified victory. Finally, they gathered again at Csíksomlyó to give thanks to Mary for her help in their victory. Because Mohay could not locate any historical documentation for these events, he was led to adapt Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) term to describe the Pentecost pilgrimage as an "invented tradition" (*kitalált hagyomány*) (Mohay 2008: 119). This reassessment, he argued, ought not to be upsetting to pilgrimage participants; the pilgrimage's meanings have always changed with the times.¹¹ Instead, the pilgrimage should now be a celebration of Ciuc valley communities' loyalty to the Catholic faith, to the Franciscan Order, and to Franciscans'

⁹ See Mohay 2008: 106-33 for a brief history of his publications about the pilgrimage origin narrative.

¹⁰ Today, this group of pilgrims are given a special position directly in front of the stage to honor their role in the origin narrative. Before 1949, this group was given first position in the procession at the pilgrimage site.

¹¹ For instance, Mohay argues that in the post-World War I era when the Transylvanian Hungarian community was struggling with its new status as an ethnic minority in Romania, everyone knew Zsigmond János stood for the new "outsider" Romanian state "invading" Transylvania (2008: 133). See Christian and Krasznai's similar analysis which cites Tánzos (2009: 235).

contributions to culture and education. All this is especially worth honoring, Mohay concludes, at a time of weakening religiosity in Europe (133).

The ethnologist Vilmos Tánczos, however, was unmoved by this exhortation. In several reviews of Mohay's book, he sought to defend the historical authenticity of the origin narrative and, as a result, the claim that, "the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage therefore by all means can be included in the category of historical commemoration pilgrimages" (Tánczos 2008). At a 2010 conference at the pilgrimage site, Tánczos urged the Transylvanian Franciscan Order to marginalize institutions that would change the pilgrimage's meaning and type by offering venues for sharpening consumer desire. Notably, the institutions he named all cultivate the desires of the Transylvanian Hungarian bourgeoisie – those whom András Elekes denounced for spending time on the beach eating stuffed chicken – including practitioners of New Age religions and nature cults, devotees of right-wing nationalism, sports enthusiasts who pay to hang glide from the top of a mountain forming the amphitheater, and the crowds who flock to stalls selling "religious kitsch." Tánczos finished his lecture by defending the meaning of the pilgrimage as a historical commemoration, a celebration of regional Szekler ethnic identity, and a way to honor one of Mary's miracles.

Ritual and Socialist and Post-Socialist Attacks on Male Authority and Power

The motifs that lie at the heart of men's experiences at the Pentecost pilgrimage –coming-of-age and social mobility – are not the unique concern of Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics. Many anthropologists of post-socialism have noted the significance of these issues in other post-socialist contexts. David Kideckel's 2008 monograph on Romanian miners, *Getting By in Post-Socialist Romania: Labor, the Body, Working-Class Culture* was one of the first studies to make post-socialist masculinity a central concern, using a Gramscian theory of hegemony to describe a

“crisis of masculinity” among these urban workers. According to Kideckel, although collectivization set the stage for the experience of gender dysphoria by taking away men’s ability to turn their position as householders into political prominence, it did not amount to a crisis of masculinity because venues such as heavy industry still provided opportunities masculine performance. After socialism, however, there was a violent upheaval in the existing system of gender relations stemming from the “effects of the forced diet of [post-socialist] neo-liberalism” (Kideckel 2008: 8).¹² While privatization took away industrial labor as a way of performing the masculine breadwinner role, the consumerist masculinity that replaced it as an object of hegemonic desire was unattainable for newly impoverished men.¹³ Today, men place even greater value on the remaining idioms for the performance of masculine acts that, borrowing Michael Herzfeld’s phrase, are so excellent they “speak for themselves” (Herzfeld 1985; Creed 2011: 81).

Gerald Creed’s (2011) analysis of masculinity and Bulgarian mumming rituals – rituals that resemble the Pentecost pilgrimage insofar as they are also annual events that feature costumed men performing feats of physical endurance – uses the concept of “cultural dispossession” to further develop this conversation about post-socialist masculinity. Creed uses a Durkheimian symbolic ritual analysis to argue that changes in the mumming ritual reflect changes in the social structure of rural Bulgaria as it becomes assimilated into global neo-liberalism. According to his analysis, the ritual act of sexually accosting men dressed as

¹² Kideckel’s argument is a refraction of Verdery and Burawoy’s earlier observation: “We challenge those analyses that account for the confusions and shortcomings of the transition process as ‘socialist legacies’ or ‘culture.’ Repeatedly, we find that what may appear as ‘restorations’ of patterns familiar from socialism are something quite different: direct responses to the new market initiatives, produced by them, rather than remnants of an older mentality” (1999: 5).

¹³ The typical post-socialist urban models of proper masculinity were embodied by the gangsters and politicians, positions that required amounts of capital that were out of reach for unemployed miners and impoverished rural men. For a more detailed account of this process of the construction of “hegemonic masculinity” in relation to other alternative forms of masculinity that men are unable to construct as hegemonic due to the absence of social, political, economic, and other forms of capital (Connell 2000; Kideckel 2008: 153-182; Creed 2011: 66-8).

“transvestite brides” once signified a flexible essentializing conception of masculinity, which made this gesture a reflection of sublimated homoerotic desire. New and hegemonic Western “gender continuum” ideologies forced men to reinterpret and reorganize this ritual element as an act of homophobic aggression. Creed thus takes Kideckel and others to task for formulating men’s gender dysphoria as a “crisis of masculinity,” arguing that this emphasis places the blame on men for refusing to adapt to new gender regimes when, in fact, the cause is “cultural dispossession” rooted in changing objective material conditions.

The social transformations taking place in the Ciuc valley that I described in Chapter One have placed men under conditions similar to those besetting Kideckel’s miners and Creed’s mummets, but the transition from the concept of “crisis of masculinity” to “cultural dispossession” does not help us understand subjectivity as it takes shape in everyday ways of being at grips with the world. If the idea of “crisis of masculinity” seemed to blame men for problems of a social origin, the solution Creed proposes places experience too deeply in the world by situating it within historical processes that constitute hegemonic forms of masculinity. Concepts such as intersubjectivity and “cultural intimacy” emphasize the precarious braiding of the demotic and the external, the subjective and the objective. Irony and the labile movements of shame and pride mediate such braiding processes, further accentuating the dialectic of inside and outside that characterizes men’s intimate worlds. Using these concepts to describe masculine subjectivities can help us correct the over-reaction in the direction of objectivity that is evident in terms such as “cultural dispossession.” However we might characterize the desires of older men who lived through the social transformations of the 1990s and 2000s, we should understand them as constitutive elements of their relationships with their sons, indistinguishable from the tension between who their sons are and who they want them to be – a tension completely caught up in

both subjectivity and social and historical conditions. I turn now to a series of men's stories about petitioning Mary that begin to cast light on contemporary Catholic masculinity in the Ciuc valley.

III. Subjectivity Formed in Prayer: Men's Miracle Narratives from the Csíkсомlyó Shrine

Attila: "He always needed money; I don't know what he did with it."

Attila and his wife Mária live in a village in the southern part of the valley with their three teenage children. Attila is in his late forties and works as a long-haul truck driver, spending three months on the road followed by one month at home. Attila had graduated from high school and was in his late teens when socialism collapsed in 1989. He tried to make a go at farming, but he abandoned it for a job as a driver when agriculture became a drain on his family's finances. He started by shipping potatoes locally, driving for a man in Miercurea Ciuc. The occasion that he narrated as an instance of a miracle began when his boss told him to take a load of potatoes to southern Romania. Attila was reluctant to make the trip because the truck had been acting up. "I sensed it beforehand that there's something going on with the brake. That it's no good. But he said, 'Come on, somehow, let's make this one trip.'" At that time, Attila's boss was often pushing him to work under dangerous conditions, which Attila attributed to the supervisor's shady dealings. "He had already taken the money for the price of the trip," Attila explained, "He always needed money; I don't know what he did with it. But he never had money." Attila also felt obliged to carry this load, since he admitted that, "They not only paid my boss for the ride; they paid me, too." Still, Attila was hesitant, and he conveyed the supervisor's aggressive demeanor by mimicking his demands: "Do this! Like this! Like that!"

Attila's brakes failed all of a sudden on a sharp turn coming down a steep incline. He remembered that he first tried the floor pedal but got no response; then he jammed the hand brake also without success. He continued his story,

If we had smacked into a fir tree, or any kind of tree or whatever, if we had gone a little bit further that way or this way. Well... You have to imagine the way the truck tipped over. It fell over towards a tree. Picture that it fell over like this, like this, all the way over coming to rest right next to a tree. That is to say, we could have died. All of us. Many other people have flipped their cars right there in the years since.

After Attila got out of the truck and sensed that he was uninjured, he was nearly overcome by fear. He remembered that his legs started shaking violently, which took him back to another nearly fatal accident that affected him similarly: "I got so scared. Afterwards, I asked others if their legs start shaking a lot when they get scared. Really, my whole body was shaking." Attila commissioned an *ex voto* plaque for the Csíkksomlyó church that reads, "Out of Thanks to the Virgin Mother" with the date of Attila's accident as an expression of gratitude for his survival.

Szilveszter: "What if I didn't have an arm from here on down?"

Szilveszter, who is now in his early fifties, used to commute to the Bălan mine from a village in the northern part of the valley. Others describe him as one of the "lucky ones," since he was able to reach retirement age right before the mine shut down and now receives a substantial monthly pension. Szilveszter began his story about Mary's help in surviving an accident in the shafts by describing the dangerous conditions in the mine as it was being closed. In particular, staffing was being decreased without a proportional decline in production quotas. In Szilveszter's words, "Usually, if we had to go to that location, there should have been at least three of us, but there were two of us that morning, which was because they were closing the mine." Right after he got to work, a conveyor belt carrying ore clogged and stopped running. Szilveszter blamed the clog on inattentive workers in the previous shift, but he was still afraid

that the mine management would chastise him for causing this stoppage. All the same, Szilveszter was also convinced that the accident was caused by his own irresponsible behavior: “Maybe...no, for sure, I was reckless [*figyelmetlen*],” he insisted. He grabbed a hose and tried to fix the problem himself by washing the belt off with water. But the belt suddenly started again while he was holding his arm out over it. His sleeve got caught, and he was jerked forward. “This is what, *I* can’t even figure out, to this very day, when I think back – it’s possible that I’m shaking from the cold right now...but I couldn’t do anything else but think, ‘My God, my arm. Help me, Virgin Mother!’”

After struggling with the machine for several seconds, he freed his arm. Szilveszter managed to climb out of the area into a mine elevator, and then into a waiting ambulance that had been called by a co-worker. They stopped at his house, since it was on the way into Miercurea Ciuc, where they picked up his wife, Ibolya. Szilveszter asked her how much money she had brought for the customary “tip” for the doctor in case they needed to operate on his arm. Ibolya had only brought a fraction of the appropriate amount, which was all the cash they had available. Szilveszter remembered reacting with indignation: “What?! Is my arm only worth that much?!” He also recalled another upsetting experience at the hospital when he encountered a rude X-Ray technician: “They say that a miner’s clothes are never clean. There’s always a dirty, sweaty smell. I stank. And so he looked at me like a piece of shit. And it was really humiliating.” At the end of our interview, Szilveszter showed me the physical therapy exercise of opening and closing his hand into a fist that he had used to regain arm strength. Nevertheless, this hand remains weaker than the other and a thick upraised scar runs around his bicep as a reminder of the accident.

Hugó: “Because Work Presses Down on You.”

Hugó is in his early forties and lives in an apartment with his wife and two young children in Miercurea Ciuc. He studied automobile repair at a technical high school, but when he was preparing for graduation his father came to him and offered to arrange a job at the mill where he worked. Hugó called his father a working man (*munkásember*), which meant that he was not in the upper-level managerial class. But his good reputation carried influence such that the director was well-disposed to the request: “If he has a diploma,” the director replied, “then there will certainly be a job for him.” It was the guaranteed salary and the secure job that attracted Hugó to the mill: “It’ll be good to make some money,” he told me, “This is a good opportunity.” So Hugó went straight from his graduation on Saturday to the mill on Monday.

Due to his lack of seniority, his boss initially assigned Hugó to the most physically difficult job at the mill – carrying heavy sacks of flour back and forth to storage areas – but after a time his back and waist began to give him pain. When he was inspected by doctors, they could not find anything wrong with him. Then his legs started to hurt, as well. But no one could pinpoint a cause. He tried to return to work, but he could not continue with the physical labor he had been doing. He was transferred to another section where he could do lighter work, but he was not able to do even the lightest of jobs. He then entered a long period during which he was repeatedly in and out of the hospital, suffering from chronic back and leg pain.

When he finally found out that he was suffering from a spinal injury, Hugó traced the etiology of his injury back to his age when he started working. He had, in his words, “a young spine:” “If I had taken on this work a few years later, then my spine would have taken it better, because it would have been stronger. It’s like it made me into a midget...they are short and they haven’t grown because their work [*munka*] had pressed down on them.” A doctor recommended an immediate operation to repair his spinal damage, but Hugó was terrified. He had images that

he would end up bedridden for the rest of his life, but the physician warned him that an operation was the only way to avoid certain paralysis. Hugó returned home in a quandary, unable to make a decision regarding surgery due to his debilitating fear. One evening, he went out to Csíksomlyó, knelt before the statue, and made a promise to Mary: “I was so afraid. I asked, ‘If you want to heal me, I will have an *ex voto* plaque prepared....’ I will make a sacrifice [*áldozat*]. That is, I will make an offering to her by buying a plaque.” Having offered this prayer, Hugó decided to undergo the operation. While his legs and back still give him pain, he is able to walk and work today.

Benjámín: “I’ve had my share of suffering.”

Benjámín was raised in Miercurea Ciuc after his parents relocated in the 1970s from a nearby village to work for the railway. After finishing school, he and each of his brothers and sisters spent their twenties as labor migrants in urban Budapest. Benjámín worked in construction, and he remembered that the pay was good. Yet, he was often worried about getting cheated by his employers or being harassed by the police for signs of an accent or poor clothing that might mark him as a Transylvanian Hungarian working illegally in Hungary. Benjámín had to go back and forth between Hungary and Romania frequently to renew his temporary Hungarian visa – to “get a stamp.” On the day of his accident, he was in a hurry to get back across the border because he was worried about losing his job. While he had a good relationship with his boss, which provided a measure of security, he told me that, still, “you never knew.” One of the many Transylvanian Hungarians looking for work could take his spot, and there would have been nothing to do about it.

That night, he had taken the last seat on the minibus – a middle seat opening out into the aisle. Benjámín, who has a tall frame, was grateful for the opportunity to stretch out his long

legs. It was past midnight by the time they reached the crossing into Romania. The driver had turned around in Budapest without any rest, Benjámín explained, and he fell asleep as they neared the border. They slammed into a line of cars in front of the border crossing going full speed. Only Benjámín and one young woman survived from among the dozen passengers. The bus was in such bad shape that Benjámín had to yell out to the firemen in order to alert them that anyone inside was still alive, after which they began to cut him out of the wreckage. He was rushed to a hospital in Hungary with life-threatening injuries. During his time in a second hospital in Târgu Mureș, Benjámín experienced not only physical suffering, but also emotional despair. The doctors told him, “You’ll never walk. You’ll be in a wheelchair from now on,” and he began to contemplate suicide. But Benjámín knew his sister and mother were offering prayers to Mary for his recovery, and offered his own prayer, too. He pleaded, “If I can get up, if I can walk again, I asked the Virgin Mother, please.” Benjámín’s mother and older sister felt great joy when he returned to work, walking with only a minor limp while delivering mail for the postal service. He now works on a construction crew in London, and when we first met during a return trip to Miercurea Ciuc, he began his story by saying, “I’ve had my share of suffering.”

Lóránd: “The slavery to alcohol.”

Lóránd worked as a machinist in Bălan until he took the first round of early retirement packages in 1997. One of the ever-expanding ways Lóránd currently makes a living is by selling pancake desserts during the Pentecost pilgrimage out of the back of a retooled RV. But Lóránd’s entrepreneurial skills did not come easy. Lóránd used his early retirement package to set up his first business after he was approached by his godson with the idea of setting up a bakery. The godson did not have any capital of his own, promising to meet Lóránd’s investment with labor. They did not make a contract, Lóránd recalled, but this seemed natural since this was how he had

managed exchanges with family members. Lóránd now rues this decision. “I worked three years for free,” he told me bitterly. Lóránd finally gave up on this losing enterprise after the store was broken into. I asked him what happened to his godson, but he claimed that they had cut off contact. Still, Lóránd implied that the godson had somehow gotten the better end of the bargain: “He’s doing well; he’s doing fine,” he noted sarcastically.

The worst part of the whole affair, Lóránd recalled, was that he was left without a penny two weeks before Christmas. Facing expenses such as his sons’ school tuition, he took a job at a local distillery run by a notorious area gangster. He kept the cookers going while his co-workers and family members were at home for the holiday. “They paid me well, that’s for sure,” was his glowering recollection of this time. Furthermore, Lóránd’s economic difficulties exacerbated existing conflicts with his wife. He referred to *veszekedések* (quarrels) and *problémák* (problems) that were disrupting his marriage. He insisted that these fights never escalated to physical confrontations, but these difficulties weighed on him such that he started consuming even more alcohol than usual. He went to a relative’s wedding and drank until sunrise, at which time he continued with some friends. Although such extensive celebrating and drinking are not unusual at village weddings, Lóránd felt the effects severely the next day: “I was so sick. My blood was filled with such nastiness. And I was sweating. The sweat was just pouring off me.” When it came time to make the pilgrimage to Csíksomlyó, Lóránd was barely speaking to his wife. He packed his things at night and set off without a word. He had an ecstatic experience during the Mass in the amphitheater. “I met the Virgin Mother up there. I didn’t think that I could ever meet her in such a crowd, but we met.” He described this moment as a kind of conversion experience. Lóránd placed himself under Mary’s guidance. With her help, he repaired his relationship with his wife. Not long after, he found a job in Hungary on a construction team and during my

fieldwork he traveled to Switzerland to do similar work. “You know what they say,” he finished one of our conversations, “They pray to be freed from the slavery to alcohol. I believe that I have to behave as if I owed Mary, owed her many things.”

IV. Themes in the Men’s Stories

The Anxieties of Post-Socialist Success

There is a profound contradiction at the heart of Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic men’s subjectivities that becomes apparent when one hears stories like these. Although men like Szilveszter, Lóránd, Húgó, and others identify themselves as the “winners” of the post-socialist “transition,” they still harbor powerful fears about their lives and conditions. These men were no different than many of Mary’s male devotees, who tend to be employed, entrepreneurs, or receive social benefits that support lifestyles of relative comfort. They were eager to show me signs of this success in the form of renovated kitchens, cars, new home appliances, livestock, and full larders. In contrast, it took months for men like the former miners with whom I collected scrap metal for resale from abandoned Bălan mine buildings to invite me to their urban apartments. Nevertheless, when “successful” men tell stories about Mary, they still dwell on and return again and again to experiences of humiliation, mortification, and disgrace. Moreover, my acquaintances did not tell these stories as though the conditions that resulted in such experiences had been banished to the past; they felt they could easily be brought low once again, and this feeling remained with them to infect their everyday quality of existence with formicating insecurities. To cite one example, Lóránd’s story focused on his failed efforts to provide for his sons’ education. This obligation remained with him and surfaced in his repeated references to his plans for building them houses when they marry.

More than anything, I gathered the strong impression from my interactions with Mary's male devotees that they wished to use their stories to justify themselves to outside observers and thus avert their harsh judgment. As Michael Jackson notes in his study of the politics of storytelling, "every story blends a desire to do justice to experience and a calculated interest in producing effects that will improve the storyteller's lot" (Jackson 2002: 54). But in these instances, self-justification took a particular form: Men felt that an educated, Western, English-speaking person able to indulge in ethnographic fieldwork – which looked to them like overseas leisure travel – was in a position to judge them, and my judgment would be that they were not worthy of my respect. Even though they were proud of their success, as they sat down to talk with me about their relationship with Mary, they were still anxious to explain to someone the circumstances that had conspired to prevent them from being even better off. How can we account for apparently successful working class men's fear of elite judgment and opprobrium? How is it that men who seem to be having some success are also beset by these profound and corrosive anxieties?

If we look closely at men's stories about Mary, we see that they express a general expectation that intellectuals will be personally unfamiliar with manual labor as the physical, brutal, and most of all *everyday* experience of bodily stress, insecurity, toil, pain, dirt, and humiliation.¹⁴ For instance, during my fieldwork I was constantly greeted by my working class neighbors with the question, "Your vacation [*szabadság*] hasn't ended yet?" What so confused me about this question was that almost everyone in the Ciuc valley knew at least one ethnologist;

¹⁴ I stress "everyday" in this formulation in order to take into account intellectuals' varied social backgrounds. Some Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals active in the Ciuc valley come from rural and working class backgrounds. Some established urban intellectuals and young people destined for this status continue to participate in occasional rural family work parties. My point is rather that the pathways of social mobility into elite ranks through urban educational institutions and lifelong efforts at self-cultivation isolate this population from the *existential condition* of working class laborers.

many of my working class acquaintances could easily provide a brief description of ethnologists' research work. It slowly dawned on me that this question did not reflect ignorance about intellectuals and their work, but rather the conviction that the work of an intellectual was not "real" labor and thus must be "vacation."¹⁵

It was commonplace for even my urban professional acquaintances to joke about their sense of the strange and unfamiliar world of intellectuals, many of whom had been their teachers in school. A bookkeeper in the Miercurea Ciuc post office once told me that he had recently tried to watch a television program in which two ethnologists spoke about their research. He watched for fifteen minutes, he explained, but eventually switched the channel. Their speech was "at such a level" (*olyan szinten*), meaning at such *high* a level, that he could not understand a word they were saying. "And this was in Hungarian," he exclaimed at the end, making his exasperation even more amusing by comparing what these intellectuals were saying to an incomprehensible foreign language.

Such commentaries on intellectuals' production and the general belief that the research work that lay behind it was somehow unreal often lurked behind my working class acquaintances' everyday talk about relatives or friends who had risen into the ranks of the elite. I was having lunch one Sunday with three adult siblings – one worked as a truck driver and the

¹⁵ It is no doubt true that, as observers of post-socialist Hungary have argued, this kind of anxiety among the seemingly successful is due to habits of calculating losses and gains not in relation to the economic hierarchy of their own society but "in comparison to the state of the developed West" (Róna-Tás 1996: 41, quoted in Fehérváry 2013: 249). However, to seek an explanation solely in global imaginaries would be to overlook the fact that my male acquaintances did not cite the "developed West," either as an abstraction or in terms of actual interactions with its concrete representatives, as the source of their humiliation, but rather mine bosses, doctors, teachers, and so on. Nor was naming these figures a way of expressing a suppressed desire to criticize the West, suppressed because they did not want to offend me as a Western anthropologist. These men did not hold themselves back from criticizing the "developed West" in front of me on many other occasions. It was also my general impression that Hungarian-language intellectuals and members of the rising bourgeoisie were most interested in pressing this case. While their experience of marginalization in broader global circulations of value is no doubt real, one reason for this emphasis is that it allows them to obscure their own role in setting standards of propriety for the working class in everyday interactions.

other two had not gone to college – when the conversation turned to the siblings’ cousin who was now a university ethnologist. When one of the brothers noted that this cousin was due to return to their village next month to conduct research, the sister replied to this seemingly neutral comment with a defense of the cousin’s research: “But this isn’t some kind of idiotic thing [*hülyeség*],” she interjected sharply, seemingly preempting an unvoiced criticism that such work was, in fact, idiotic. The first brother then complimented the ethnologist for his informal manner despite his status as an intellectual: “He’s a good guy (*jó fejű*),” he insisted, because he knows how to joke around. In the context of a lunch conversation that had been filled with raucous laughter, the implication was that he could have fit into this group and acted just like one of them. The sister then returned to her vindication of the ethnologist’s character, again responding to a tacit criticism that she had clearly heard before: “He’s also absent-minded (*feledékeny*),” she insisted, “just like you or like me.” She vouched for the ethnologists’ continued belonging to this group by insisting that his memory was no more finely-tuned than theirs.

And yet, despite the ethnologist’s cousins’ efforts to describe him as a regular guy, a few minutes later one of the brothers told a story that betrayed a lingering sense that the ethnologist was taken seriously in a way that he was not. “Do you remember,” the brother began, “when we were with him at Mass? He said that there are a bunch of plaques up on the wall, but the most famous one of all is missing.” After a discussion of the historical figure in question, the man continued his narrative, “I said, ‘Well, it’s probably worthwhile for you to tell this to the priest, no?’ But he said, ‘Nah, that ship’s already sailed.’ He does his research about this stuff seriously [*komolyan utánnanézni*].” Two assumptions lay behind this vignette in which the ethnologist instructed one of the brothers at the table about their village’s history. First, the brother was noting the ethnologist’s ability to cultivate a “serious” interest in history that was seemingly

absent in his own life, since he had been ignorant about the missing plaque. Second, no one in the room questioned the assumption that the ethnologist, not the brother himself, would be taken seriously by the priest in making a case for a new plaque. Transylvanian Hungarian historians have argued that such praise indicates the operation of an “ambivalent discourse” in Transylvanian Hungarian society dating back to the 1950s; intellectuals legitimated their participation in structures of power – such as university ethnology departments – by claiming that they were serving national or community interests (Bottoni 2008: 160-5; see also Lőrincz 2001). Not only do the imagined criticisms to which the ethnologists’ family responded undermine historians’ assessments that intellectuals have completely established the effectiveness of these claims to legitimacy, but the concept of ambivalent discourse in general tells us very little about how working class men feel about intellectuals’ messages that they will not be taken seriously if they try to use such semiotic forms.¹⁶

Despite my acquaintances’ expectation that intellectuals would not take them seriously, it often seemed that they felt an obligation to at least make sure elites would understand the conditions of their experience. And this obligation was felt to be highly *personal* in nature. It was men’s individual responsibility to overcome potential harsh judgments. My acquaintances restlessly interrupted themselves as they were telling stories about praying to Mary, often in order to provide detailed information explaining the conditions of their work that caused them to be so humiliated. I was struck by Szilveszter’s drive to exactly describe the conveyor belt

¹⁶ Another joking recollection of their cousin recommends caution to scholars who would offer sanguine reports concerning durable “friendships” between urban folklorists and local religious practitioners (Rogers 2009: 160-70). The cousins humorously remembered the ethnologist’s story about an old village woman tell a story about an embarrassing story involving a sexual peccadillo. He came back the next year with a group of students to record the story. The woman scolded him by saying, “Now don’t go and act like that young man from last year!” The ethnologist replied, “I am that young man from last year.” What is significant about this anecdote is not only the inequalities of gender that structure this interaction, but also the fact that the interaction between the intellectual and this woman was so fleeting – and yet still disturbing for the old woman – that she could not recognize him by sight.

machine – particularly how much force it placed on his arm – complete with elaborate mathematical calculations and hand gestures, all designed for an audience who would have never encountered such conditions. He also spent another span of time helping me visualize the entire extent of its functions leading from the depths of the shaft all the way to the surface. Another devotee, an electrician named Mátyás, told me a similar story about Mary’s intercession relating to a work accident, and he too launched into an extensive excursus detailing the height of the roof that he had been ordered to work on, the shape and vertical position of the pipe he landed on, the extent of his injuries, and so on. While scholars of social memory argue that such narrative detail serves the purpose of fixing traumatic memories, rendering them persuasive for the listener and experientially vivid for the speaker, for my acquaintances there seemed to be an analogy between elites’ alienation from their everyday lives and their own anxious sense that it was their personal responsibility to use narrative to overcome such alienation.¹⁷

Social Causes and the Humiliation of Personal Judgments

If Mary’s devotees feared elite judgments and the harsh verdict of not being taken seriously, feeling it to be their individual responsibility to make me understand their lives, these personal explanations were set against an equally powerful conviction that their suffering had social causes. My acquaintances were very aware that the lack of respect they felt from people they judged to be elites was the result of impersonal social factors that affected not just them, but whole classes of people. Szilveszter described his apparel as the cause of the doctor’s sneer, even referring to the uniform not as “my clothes,” but “a miner’s clothes,” further accentuating his sense that the doctor had lumped him together with this group. His disbelief that Ibolya did not

¹⁷ Capelleto describes the mnemonic function of oral “elaborations[s] of people, places, and visually based ‘crystallizations’ of traumatic episodes,” in addition to typical focus on the abstract memory of meanings (2003: 243). See also Fentress and Wickham 2003; van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 172; van der Kolk 1987. Kligman and Verdery (2011: 35) write about the preservation of traumatic memories of Romanian collectivization.

have enough money to pay for his operation also expresses an awareness of the way miners as a class were punished by post-socialist political economic changes. Not having enough money to pay for the operation was not a sign of profligacy or another personal flaw, but rather it was an effect of the social class of miners' generally-distributed declining social value. Attila is equally aware of the broader political economic processes that drove him from his farm into wage labor. During our conversations, he was not shy about explaining his belief that the state and the European Union needs to provide more support for agricultural producers, expressing a conviction that it was neglect felt by this class as a whole that led not only him, but also many others to take wage labor jobs.

By pinning the causes of this lack of respect on objective conditions such as an unresponsive state or global inequalities, my acquaintances seemed to be placing themselves squarely in the mainstream of the post-socialist reactions to global neo-liberalism (Fehérváry 2013: 28-31). As Fehérváry has argued for the case of the contemporary Hungarian bourgeoisie, her acquaintances *externalized* the responsibility for “normalization;” that is, for creating a society that reflects normative bourgeois ideals. In contrast, in the West *subjects* are expected to *internalize* the responsibility to create normalcy in everyday life.¹⁸ However, scholars of contemporary Eastern Europe must balance an awareness of how our informants draw such contrasts with an ethnographic flexibility that allows people to embrace contradictory or fluctuating attitudes toward their worlds. In my experience, men externalized the causes of their suffering, but their stories also showed an inclination to internalize them. Time and again, they took the judgments of state-authorized intellectuals and authorities *personally* as commentaries on themselves, their habits, attitudes, aspirations, and self-worth. Szilveszter called the accident

¹⁸ Fehérváry 2013: 39, citing Warner 1999: 52-60, 69, who is, in turn, building on Foucault's concept of “normalization.”

the result of his own reckless (*figyelmetlen*) character. The police fined Attila for driving in an unsafe automobile, and he accepted the penalty without question in part because it was his fault: “I *knew* that the truck had problems,” he said, “I shouldn’t have set out.”

Another male devotee named Lajos shared a story with me about praying to Mary during a stay in the hospital. Lajos spoke of becoming desperate because his doctor was refusing to release him after he had already recovered. His suffering was the fault of system-wide poor hospital facilities, he maintained, but his illness was initially caused by being impatient (*türelmetlen*) when he hastily ate some unwashed grapes so that he could get back to work. “I was thirsty. I want everything all at once. At once. Always,” he explained. There was a marked tendency in my acquaintances’ interactions with elites of all kinds to personalize, internalize, and subjectify judgments that were levied at them by virtue of their inclusion in a class: Thus, although Szilveszter’s clothes marked him as a miner, he took the doctor’s judgment as a personal slight: “He looked at me like a piece of shit. It was humiliating [*megalázó*].” He spat these sentences from his mouth, conveying the depth to which such interactions cut into his subjective sense of self.

Maligned Pride and Making Solidarity from Memories of Judgment

Another miner who had suffered a serious accident when he was almost crushed by one of the cages that lowered men into the shafts once recounted how he had met another injured colleague during a follow-up hospital visit. He remembered that they went out for a drink afterwards and “cried a big one” as they talked about their experiences. These stories were quite somber, but I also saw men tell more humorous anecdotes that served a similar purpose. Szilveszter’s brother and two brothers-in-law, also retired miners, saw each other at least several times a week and frequently helped each other out on various projects in a non-monetized system

of favors. During breaks, I often heard Szilveszter talking with his friends about what it was like to be a miner. They once remembered how a supervisor angrily chastised a coworker for showing up to work drunk; they laughed as they recounted how this man had told a joke at the supervisor's expense by intentionally misunderstanding his demand to know where he had gotten his liquor. Szilveszter insisted that these kinds of reproaches were unfair, because the mine bosses always drank more than anyone else on their name days when it was customary to establish relationships with such powerful figures by offering them a drink. Szilveszter's brothers-in-law once reminded him that one of the mine bosses had been nicknamed "exact" (*pontos*) because of his penchant for requiring unreasonable precision from ordinary workers. One afternoon sitting in Szilveszter's courtyard, they joked about the time when they were forced to evacuate the shafts because workers had pilfered parts off the ventilation system, causing it to fail and flood the shafts with fumes. Szilveszter's brothers-in-law included him in these stories as someone like them. All these anecdotes reminded Szilveszter that he too been under the thumb of powerful mine bosses, humiliated by their reprimands, and vulnerable to their accusations of laziness or drunkenness; he too had had to work underground and thus was unable avoid the experience of victimization by vandals. Szilveszter's brothers-in-law were reminding him of experiences that affected him not personally but rather by virtue of his membership in the class of miners. These stories conveyed a sense that as working class men they felt unfree, but they retained a dignity, a maligned pride, in that collective experience because they had each other to swap stories and jokes with.

The Contradictions of Cultivation

Although Mary's male devotees took pleasure in such moments of solidarity, these commiserations were awkwardly balanced against an equally powerful conviction. The respect

that they craved depended on a lifetime of experience in educational and other institutions; here is where a man could develop himself, thus achieving a means to set himself apart from other working class men. During my fieldwork, it took me some time to adapt myself to the way words related to education and “cultivation” could carry deeply affecting positive and negative connotations depending on use and context. Whereas in English I was used to thinking about “learning a language,” in Hungarian either one’s language knowledge “develops” (*fejlődni*) or one “develops knowledge of a language” (*a nyelv tudását fejleszteni*). Likewise, to be cultivated (*művelt*) is a great compliment that speaks to a lifetime of such development. *Műveletlen* means uncultivated, while *bunkó* is literally a rough-hewn wooden club used in rural areas, but the person to whom it refers is supposed to be as rough as the object itself. *Neveletlen*, or boorish, combines the word “raise” or “bring up” with the negative suffix, suggesting that such a person was not provided with the right upbringing to become cultivated. These terms often have aesthetic refractions, especially when used in reference to speech. Doctors might reveal that they do not deserve respect due to their station when they speak in an “ugly” (*csunyán*) manner, while a child is directed to ask for something “politely” using the adverb form of “pretty” (*szépen*).¹⁹ But while “clever” (*okos*) and “wise” (*bölcs*) were often used positively, they could just as well be synonyms for condescending haughtiness. “Clever” formed the root of the pejorative verb “to talk like a know-it-all” (*okoskodni*). And once when one of my acquaintances was complaining about a rude neighbor, she used the following sarcastic attack: “So, look now, look how she’s just walking down the street, not looking at anyone else. She just walks right by the gate [without

¹⁹ Katy Fox argues that these terms map onto socio-spatial distinctions between nature and culture (Fox 2011: 132-5). However, in my experience, cultural elites like local teachers who sought to commodify traditional culture for the purpose of promoting tourism were the quickest to offer me such explanations rooted in rural “worldviews” dating back to the medieval period. Working class men who had received the tutoring of such intellectuals in school associated these distinctions with their experience in such institutions, as well as with shifting educational and class hierarchies.

stopping to talk]. Look how arrogant [*öntelt*]! Look how wise [*bölcs*] Look how vain [*beképzelt*]!” In the end, one of the greatest challenges for me in learning Hungarian was getting used to the fact that using words like *bunkó* to refer to people could produce greater insults than I ever expected given both its typical English translations and the fact that my position as an intellectual was seen to be already well established.

The desire to be cultivated put Mary’s male devotees under various pressures that I caught glimpses of from time to time, but one occasion in particular brought these demands into especially clear relief. About halfway through my fieldwork, I was invited to give a lecture in Hungarian at a university in Budapest, and I asked Szilveszter if I could use his story in the presentation. I wrote out the talk and carried it with me on a visit to his home so that he could offer comments. When he finished reading it, he challenged a brief comment I had included about the historical veracity of the Battle of Hargita. And later I noticed that he had found a pen after I had left him to read and he had used it to alter the text. He had cut some of the Romanian versions of terms describing mining tools and changed several phrases to make them less rough (*darabos*) and colloquial. Both gestures indicated his interest in being taken seriously by Hungarian intellectuals as a peer.

As Szilveszter’s efforts to alter his rough language suggests, this inclination led him to distance himself from his background as a miner, even though he was also reluctant to completely dissociate himself from his story that so thoroughly linked him to other manual laborers. When I interrupted our debate about the historicity of the origin narrative to ask why he was interested in this topic, which took up a single sentence in a ten page lecture, and not his own story, his response was sharp: “That’s your business. It doesn’t concern me,” he declared. His declaration, delivered in a conclusive tone that brooked no dispute, suggested that he felt he

had to detach himself from his story about being a manual laborer if he was to be taken seriously as someone with a valuable opinion about the meaning of the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage. But, paradoxically, Szilveszter was also reluctant to dispense with this story altogether. In a private moment after my return from Budapest, he asked whether the professors had believed (*elhinni*) his experience and accepted it as a miracle. This same concern had come up the night he told me this story as he complained that his supervisors and the mine's accident investigation team had disputed his account. Throughout these interactions with Szilveszter, I was struck by his eagerness to contribute to debates about the origin of the pilgrimage event, which seemed to require that he alienating himself from formative and meaningful experiences dating from his days as a miner.

The Cultivated Son

The Catholic men I got to know at the pilgrimage site not only pursued their own self-development, but they also desired this for their children and especially their sons. Among other strategies for assisting their children, my male acquaintances provided opportunities for social mobility through the institution of godparenthood. Godparenthood among Szekler Hungarians in the Ciuc valley is a form of ritual kinship that unites the baptism sponsor and the baptized child's parents in a relationship called *komaság* (Kligman 1988; Kligman and Verdery 2012: 423-4). My acquaintances, who spoke of both the affective and instrumental bonds between the parents and their *koma*, tended to invite powerful and influential people to become godparents to their children, and I came to expect encounters with the Catholic bourgeoisie when they invited me over for special events.²⁰

²⁰ Under socialism, rural aspirants to social mobility or those who simply wanted to get a leg up in the daily struggle for material provisioning began establishing godparenthood relationships with the Party officials who had come into the village as outsiders, which was a change from the general contours of pre-collectivization practice of inviting influential locals, such as household heads, to become godparents (Kligman and Verdery 2012: 423-4). The role of

For Mary's male devotees this conviction that their children must learn to cultivate bourgeois entrepreneurial desires was often braided with gestures of resentment and envy. Indeed, desire became quite closely intertwined in interactions between fathers and sons, which is one of the key reasons I have drawn heavily on intersubjective theories of desire that situate this phenomenon in the tension between self and world enacted in intimate familial relations. Szilveszter's eldest son, Mózes, had risen to the ranks of intellectuals as a television journalist. Szilveszter and others in the family recognized his social distance by humorously comparing my inept first attempt at milking the family cows to the way Mózes used to produce similarly inadequate results. Despite his ineptitude in agricultural tasks, Mózes had gained many other consumerist, cultural, and social opportunities: a company car, professional collaborations with native English-speakers, trips to villages to make ethnological films, and so on. The latter seemed to strike a particularly envious chord in his father. One of Mózes' visits home in his company car, a quick stopover on a trip to make an ethnological television documentary, had a pronounced effect on his father. Szilveszter was always inclined to deliver authoritative speeches to me about village traditions in a variety of area locales; now he became preoccupied with the practices preserved in the particular village where Mózes had gone to film. Curious about this new focus, I asked Szilveszter if he had ever been there: He had not, he replied, but he watched television programs about it. On another of Mózes' trips home, I was sitting in the kitchen when Szilveszter declared that Hungarian was a much richer language than English. He cited several instances of single words in English that have multiple synonyms in Hungarian. The

godparent can extend beyond providing a proper social network in the childhood years to include material assistance with a child's education. On the occasion of Szilveszter's daughter's graduation, I observed him awkwardly asking his *koma* about scholarship opportunities to assist with her college education. And Szilveszter had arranged for free college accommodations for his elder sons through his church contacts.

conversation went on for ten minutes, retaining a serious and weighty tone throughout, as each man tried to show whose knowledge about the English language was the best.

In his study of various forms of agonistic interchange among men on the Greek island of Crete, Michael Herzfeld argues that this kind of banter is a way of *creating*, not severing a relationship; it is also a medium for the poetic play of structure and variation that constitute performances of masculinity that “speak for themselves” (Herzfeld 1985).²¹ This instance of bantering about English can also be understood as an instance of intersubjectivity and a moment of relational work on a lifeworld between father and son. Approached from this angle, a description of the experience of banter toggles between an intimate *life* and an abstract *world*. The latter is given to subjects through political economic dynamics in which, for instance, knowledge of English signals privileged position within the transnational labor market. The former constitutes the relational bonds between father and son that make up their lives together and apart through often contradictory psycho-social dynamics: a father’s desire for his son to be socially mobile followed by the father’s anxiety that his life will be found wanting by that son; a son’s obligation to live up to his father’s desires tinged with discomfort at the distance that has opened between them. Such moments of agonism between fathers and sons serve to tighten relational knots of desire, fear, anxiety, love, pride, and regret: In these moments, I felt keenly the labile contradictions that oriented father and son in their relationship with each other. I witnessed a father’s desire for his son to be socially mobile that was simultaneously the father’s anxiety that his life will be found wanting by that son; and a son’s obligation to live up to his father’s desires tinged with discomfort at the distance that has opened between them.

Sacrifice, Love, and the Breadwinner Role

²¹ Both Creed (2011: 75) and Kideckel (2008: 173) cite Herzfeld’s groundbreaking work on the poetics of manhood in their studies of post-socialist masculinities.

Hearing men's stories about Mary, one is also struck by their efforts to describe how frequently and thoroughly they sacrificed themselves to pain in order to provide for their families. Their love for their wives and children gives meaning to their suffering, which adds an important nuance to our understanding of masculine subjectivity. My acquaintance Lajos, who shared a story about praying to Mary while in the Csíksomlyó hospital, had worked as a miner like Szilveszter and Lóránd. He closed a long litany about the physical dangers of his work with this statement: "I slept until 10PM, and then took off for work. At ten, I kissed my entire family. I kissed them! I put on the dirty [miner's] clothes and helmet, and I left." A little later he returned to this image of working on behalf of his family, remembering that, "at that time, my youngest child hadn't been born yet. Marc, it was an unspeakably [*kibeszélhetetlen*] bad feeling to leave home." Once, when I bought pancakes from Lóránd during the pilgrimage, he initially refused payment. He accepted my bill only after calling one of his son's over and ostentatiously placing the money in his son's hand, thus signaling his sense that his current work, much like his former job at the distillery, was an act of self-denial on behalf of his sons. Hugó was not married when he had his surgery, but he still described both the plaque and his entire experience of suffering as a "sacrifice" (*áldozat*) on behalf of his family: Although the initial meaning that he attributed to the plaque may have been different, in his later retelling for me, his wife and children had become the beneficiaries of his ordeal.

Szilveszter explained that in the moment after his arm was released from the conveyor, he had the sensation of having his life run like a film in front of his eyes. But then he contradicted himself, "But no, it wasn't my life that ran [like a film], but rather my family. That it is there [*ott van*], and first and most importantly Ibolya." His faltering attempt to describe this as a sacrifice on his family's behalf indicates that this inflection of the meaning of men's roles as

family breadwinners is a new introduction to Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic culture – new and therefore something that Szilveszter needs to consciously remind himself of. Its appearance could be rooted in the prominence of Catholic discourses about men’s roles in the family that I described in Chapter One, although socialist-era magazines also carried plenty of messages encouraging men to invest themselves in the family by performing domestic household chores.²² Regardless, it remains the case that, while anthropologists working in various East/Central European locales have noted the expectation that fathers should be marginal figures in family life and uninvolved beyond establishing its material basis as “breadwinners,” the idea of sacrifice is absent from such discussions of men’s subjectivities.²³

One consequence of this Catholic permutation of the breadwinner idea can be found in the shape it gives to the way men imagine their authority in the family in contrast to their lack of authority in other contexts. If the post-socialist social order repeatedly puts men in situations where they feel out of control and humiliated, they can still retain and even take back some respect through acts of self-sacrifice. They redeem their social victimization through “personal” gestures of sacrifice, transferring this expectation onto their sons when these young men are victimized themselves. Fathers’ personal self-blame becomes blame directed at the persons of young men when they see them unable to construe humiliation at school or work as something to suffer with dignity and respect. And because Catholic men are taught over and over again to be authority figures in their families, this dynamic of self-denial and blame becomes mixed up with their ability to be taken seriously when they make demands on these sons.

²² For a description of socialist-era propaganda about men’s roles in the family, see Kligman 1998. For examples in Hungarian-language socialist publications, see *Working Woman*, January 1985, p. 15, June 1985, p. 18.

²³ The literature about “separate spheres” gender ideologies and the male breadwinner role is voluminous: Brajdić-Vuković, et. al. 2007: 35; Pfau-Effinger 2004; Zimmerman 2010: 12; Fehérváry 2013: 136-7; Gal and Kligman 2000; Municio-Larsen 2012; Keough 2006; Kligman 1988: 48-54; Kligman and Verdery 2011: 179-80.

Often this is manifested in fathers' belief that sons must do all they can so that elites recognize them as equals. This means cultivating all the social skills required to be a member of the elite, including doing well in school, speaking English, adopting a cultivated demeanor, being musically proficient, diligently attending Mass, and so on. This sense of self-sacrifice on behalf of the family is also what gives force to the anger that men feel when their children drift away from the Church or do not perform well in school, for this amounts to a denial of the meaning of a father's physical and emotional sacrifice. Szilveszter expressed this bitterness one night as we were seated in his living room watching television: "And this is the biggest dilemma with my eldest two children. Because Töhötöm does this. In practice, he is an atheist. And what can *I* do about it? Nothing. He has turned against religion. At least that's how I see it. I don't know what's going to happen now." But Szilveszter never showed this helplessness to his sons; to do so would have meant also showing his vulnerability and his worries about being unable to make the demands that made him feel like a father. Instead, he took his son Töhötöm's doubts about Catholicism as a personal threat. Szilveszter parried his son's doubts with an attitude of absolute certainty, as well as a condescension that could shade into meanness and ridicule. One evening at dinner, I observed Töhötöm's sister, who had just then returned from the Mejugorje pilgrimage site, regale her family with stories about seeing visionaries in ecstasy. Töhötöm wanted to offer some skeptical questions about Satan's potential interest in such experiences, but he initially stumbled over his words: "I know. So. Whatchamacallit. For me, this thing, that. I don't know. Uh, uh, uh. It's so good, or it's not. I don't know what. Just that, Satan. Is it Satan?" Szilveszter did not even bother trying to take Töhötöm's question seriously. He laughed in his face and retorted, "What that hell are you talking about" (*micsoda*)?

If it were not enough that Töhötöm was expressing religious doubt and refusing to attend Mass, he had also left college after two years without finishing a degree. Szilveszter had pulled strings through his connections in the Catholic Church to arrange a place in a dormitory, but Töhötöm had only felt demeaned by the other students and judged by the priest who ran the house. We were sitting on chairs in the upstairs hallway of their home when he expressed his grievance that the priest, “didn’t say a single word to me, not once,” using a phrase that echoed the conventional criticism of intellectual arrogance manifested in the refusal to exchange basic verbal pleasantries. Later, it struck me as significant that Töhötöm chose to have this conversation with me while we were seated upstairs, the area of the house for the children’s bedrooms that Szilveszter rarely entered. Our position seemed to embody the multiple contradictions in which Töhötöm was enmeshed: He was trying to act as a host as his father had already done, but he had to find a location to do this in which he did not ostentatiously displace Szilveszter. He was expressing disdain for his father’s social aspirations, while also acknowledging that he felt unworthy of the respect of those who embodied them.

After leaving college, instead of moving to a city and working with technology as his brother had, Töhötöm returned home and found a job on a construction crew. During my fieldwork, the crew began a job that involved digging ditches on the side of the road. I got a sense for the negative reputation of this kind of labor when it came out one evening that the crew had given this task to him and several others. Töhötöm confessed this to his mother while they were standing in the kitchen. Töhötöm’s eldest sister overheard and indulged in a brief moment of commentary in a half-mocking tone: “Töhötöm is digging ditches,” she said with a laugh before quickly stifling herself in response to her mother’s quick glance and grimace.

Things finally came to a head when Töhötöm started coming home drunk from after-work trips to a local bar. One night he appeared at home with a shiner from a fistfight. The ensuing furious row between father and son had already become village gossip by the weekend. Family members tiptoed around each other in the following days; Szilveszter was holed up in his workshed, while Töhötöm remained upstairs in a bedroom. Szilveszter still tried to make demands on his son, however: “We eat dinner at the table in this family,” he announced when he saw that Töhötöm was taking his meal up to his room. Töhötöm pretended not to hear and just kept going. Ibolya was chagrined by these sniping comments and the entire affair, suggesting to me at this time that I would be better off getting to know other families. Still, she confessed that she hoped things would get better in a month when Töhötöm left to pick vegetables in Slovakia for the summer. Before he left, I asked Töhötöm if he would have gone to work at the mine if it had not closed. He said that he surely would have, and when I think back, the core problem between father and son was that Töhötöm was beginning more and more to resemble Szilveszter’s brothers-in-law, and even certain aspects of Szilveszter himself.

What Do Sons Who Do Not Labor Know about Labor?

If fathers’ sacrifices provide them with the authority to demand that their sons cultivate themselves to become elites who do not need to suffer, fathers still want their children to understand the way work has shaped their lives, if only in a shadowy, distant, and obscure way that preserves their children’s true alienation from the indignities of everyday labor. The two young men discussing their fathers’ daily routines on the way to Csíksomlyó became acquainted with these habits not because their fathers had sat them down and told them about it in the form of an explicit act of discursive narration, but because their worlds had been constituted by commonsensical routines such as rising from bed in the morning darkness, drinking coffee,

shaving, and stepping out the door for work. But these routines were made anything but commonsensical for these young men by virtue of the fact that their fathers' core desire was that their sons should *not* be shaped by these rituals. The surest sign that their fathers had fulfilled their desire for their sons was the fact that the real experience of their labor was like a penumbral shadow on the edge of their sons' everyday consciousness, only becoming a focus of attention and conversation under remarkable circumstances when their everyday worlds were disrupted, as on the special occasion of a once-a-year holiday.

One day, I stopped by Szilveszter's house and discovered that his second youngest son had been bitten by the family dog. I was in the kitchen, and seated across from me the table was the young Ignác, gingerly holding his arm out in front of him. Szilveszter stopped to Ignác on his way through to the backyard. He instructed his son to hold his arm out palm up on the table. He then showed Ignác how to squeeze his hand into a fist in precisely the same manner as he had shown me when explaining how he had exercised his arm after the accident. "Move your arm like this," he told the intently concentrating Ignác, "because if you don't, then the arm will forget how to move and you will have to teach it to move again from the start." Szilveszter then proceeded to show Ignác his various scars. He pointed to the meaty part of his hand under the thumb. "This is where I nearly cut off my thumb," he said. He held his pointer finger straight out from his closed fist: "It doesn't point straight. Do you see? I almost cut that off, as well. With a chainsaw." He pointed down at his shoe. "And I've got a toe missing." Szilveszter got up and left Ignác after completing this litany, but Ignác stayed at the kitchen table for another twenty minutes squeezing his hand into a fist over and over again. The somewhat explicit way in which Szilveszter taught his son to recognize the signs of manual labor on a man's body made this exchange between father and son stand out from among my observations of everyday life among

Mary's devotees. Szilveszter *wanted* his son to know how he experienced masculine subjectivity through and in labor and physical pain. He took the occasion of an act that disrupted his family's routines – the dog attack – to make sure his son knew this.

But this exchange also illustrates the way fathers strive to organize their worlds so that the real experience of labor as suffering remains only at the peripheries of their sons' everyday focus and attention. For Ignác, his father's labor is just the way his father's body exists in and moves through their world. It is the scar on Szilveszter's arm that he does not notice as it reaches out for a glass sitting in front of him at dinner; it is the missing toe on the foot that he plays beside while wrestling with his older sister on the floor during evening television; it is the crooked finger that points at him and tells him to do his English homework. Szilveszter's suffering is, in this way, just as constitutive of his son's life, but also just as unremarkable, as the fathers' daily routines described by my fellow pilgrims that morning on the way to Csíksomlyó.

V. Changing Paths of Social Mobility through Csíksomlyó

The *Tápos* Discourse and the Post-Socialist Bourgeoisie

In Chapter One, I described Catholic elites' faltering search for a post-socialist Catholic leading class that would embody properly desire. Encounters between tourists and visionaries at the pilgrimage event provided venues for asking who should become these exemplars. From the early 1990s, the pilgrimage event has brought tourists and locals together for these and other kinds of face-to-face interactions. Changes to the event dating to the late 2000s provided additional new opportunities for Ciuc valley residents to interact with Hungarians from Hungary during Pentecost, this time through the venue of home hospitality. Since 2008, villages along the main north-south running train line into the valley have been able to host guests arriving from

Budapest on a chartered train called the *Székely Gyors* (Szekler Express).²⁴ A few days before Pentecost weekend, I attended a meeting in the village house of culture for those hosting travelers from the chartered train. The two women who presided offered a great deal of advice about the kind of world Hungarians from Hungary were used to living in and that locals should seek to accommodate – everything from everything from how to make beds to varieties of toilet etiquette. But one suggestion that stuck in my mind was the recommendation that hosts should wear Szekler national costumes to the train station where they were to meet their disembarking guests. When it came time to go to the train station, I noticed that none of my acquaintances had taken this advice. Even as they arrived riding horse-carts, they were dressed in casual formal attire closely mirroring their guests' clothes: dress denim jeans for women, along with comfortable but not very worn sneakers, blouses, earrings and modest accessories. Button-down shirts, slacks, and dress shoes for men. The straw hats that some men sported were in better shape than the ones they wore for work. The only people wearing their ethnic costumes were the two women who had offered the recommendation at the organizational meeting. To me, it seemed that my acquaintances in the village were striving to interact with their guests as peers and participants in the same urban bourgeois lifeworld.

If these sartorial choices provided a way for my acquaintances to feel their bodies make and move through a world that would appeal to Hungarians from Hungary as both charmingly rural and comfortably bourgeois, an exchange between several men during lunch break from building an addition to a neighbor's house helped me gain an explicit sense for how my acquaintances felt about, and treated as an object of desire, the kind of leisure travel undertaken by visitors coming to the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage. The neighbors whose house we were working

²⁴ The popularity of traveling to the pilgrimage in this way led to the addition of an extra train, the "Csíksomlyó Express" (*Csíksomlyó Expressz*), in 2010. The Catholic Church organized its own special train in 2012 to counter the perceived tourism-centered orientation of the Szekler Express and Csíksomlyó Express.

on were not actually present; the married couple had already departed to work during the harvest season, leaving their two young children with their grandparents. When this situation came up during the lunchtime conversation, one of the men muttered a derisive comment, noting that although he had worked abroad, he had not left his children with grandparents. This couple's brother-in-law was present for this comment, and he was put in an awkward position as a result. He seemed to want to defend his relatives, but I had heard him make similar critical comments on other occasions. His response was to hold himself above the fray by noting that he was better for having never even had to face this choice. He had gone abroad, he declared, "but I didn't go for work. I went on pilgrimage to Medjugorje."

Many of my acquaintances – in this case not only men – worried that consumerist elites would find reason to judge them. I once introduced a middle-aged woman from Miercurea Ciuc to another acquaintance, a man from Budapest in his thirties. My acquaintance was looking for an apartment in the city and began peppering the woman with questions about her home – its size, number of rooms, location, and so on. He also asked when the building was built, and then seemed to offer a negative evaluation of her home in some later comments. She later told me that she found his questions offensive and rude. In a telling rhetorical move, she refused to use his name, just referring to him as "the *tápos*." *Tápos* seemed appropriate in this situation to express her offense at his judgmental behavior; the conditions of her domestic materialities may have made her feel vulnerable to this man's appraisal, but she also strove to meet, control, and strike a balance with this sense of being invaded by material forms.

It is not as if my acquaintances did not want to cultivate the touristic desires for leisure travel or domestic comfort that might have made their acquaintances from Hungary *tápos*. My acquaintances' clothes and conversational strategies suggested that they wanted their visitors to

take them seriously as peers. Still, the dynamic of desire and judgment is the same across men's encounters with consumerist elites and mine bosses, teachers, and doctors. And calling Hungarians from Hungary *tápos* allowed them to take maligned pride in the kind of lifestyle they were forced into by virtue of not having the same resources.

Knighthood Orders at the Pentecost Pilgrimage

Since 2009, Transylvanian members of the Knighthood Order of the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen have displayed a copy of Saint Stephen's crown on the stage during and after the Pentecost Mass. The members of this Order are thus some of the newest additions to the cadre whose place on stage marks them, to use the pilgrimage organizer's term, as "intellectuals." However, none of the Order's members are attached to churches, schools, or universities. The members I met during my fieldwork were employed as freelance computer specialists, international import/export entrepreneurs, and retired small business owners. And although their explicit mission was religio-nationalistic, they demonstrated to many the kind of life that is possible with entry into the post-socialist Catholic leading classes – a life filled with abundant time to engage in self-cultivation, the means to travel in one's own private car, and the resources to inhabit the various venues of consumer culture comfortably and confidently. Judged by these criteria, the Order members cut a social profile similar to that of the tourists from Hungary who come on the charter train from Budapest.

Despite their lack of educational credentials, members sometimes delivered historical lectures about the Crown at various events, and it was their ability to command the respect of such crowds that was a major reason why Szilveszter jumped at the opportunity to join the Order about half-way through my fieldwork. During the 2012 pilgrimage, I saw him standing alongside the Crown with other Order members, acquitting himself with appropriately severe seriousness

and dignity. But unlike the other members who could walk back to their urban apartments in Miercurea Ciuc or traveled in their own cars to more distant cities, Szilveszter had to arrange his own transportation home. That year I had arrived by the *Székely Gyors* train from Budapest, and when I visited him on the stage he took me aside and shyly asked if anyone was going to stop him if he hopped on the train back to his village. As we walked back to the train station together, I was reminded of a story told by the two women while they were instructing village hosts expecting guests from the *Székely Gyors*: They joked about people from Budapest who occasionally got on the train at the Budapest station without a reservation. One of her messages seemed to be the strangeness, but also perhaps the attractiveness, of people who felt so entitled to this milieu; they stepped right onto the train, confident they would be able to commandingly predict and handle how they would be treated there. When I compared Szilveszter's uneasiness with the tourist train and the urban Budapest residents' assumption that they could navigate the same context, I noticed not only Szilveszter's relative lack of resources compared to the other Order members, but also his desire to reach a level of comfort that such consumerist elites had already achieved in the spaces of post-socialist consumer culture.

A month after the pilgrimage, I was having lunch with Szilveszter and his brothers-in-law following some work in the fields when I asked Szilveszter if he wanted to give lectures for the Order. "Oh, I'm not going to be giving lectures," he demurred. Szilveszter's brothers-in-law left not long after this exchange, which prompted Szilveszter to return to this topic. This time he gave full voice to his ambition: "Later when I am going to lecture at the events..." he confidently began a long talk about the distinctive aspects of Hungarian national identity. This exchange as well as the others I have described turns a spotlight onto the precarious position aspiring working class men feel themselves to occupy in post-socialist pathways of social

mobility. Figures with well-established intellectual criteria may legitimate themselves with “ambivalent discourses” and references to their service on behalf of the nation, but if Szilveszter were to offer such gestures then he might risk setting himself apart from his working class kin whose labor he depends on. Rather than an admired university ethnologist, Szilveszter might appear as the mine bosses who used to order him and his brothers-in-law around.

As a result, Szilveszter embraced this desire with ambivalence, no matter how deep his desire was to be counted among the post-socialist Catholic leading class. Once, at a New Year’s party we both attended, Szilveszter got to joking with a few of the men. He suddenly darted away to the adjacent food table with a gleam in his eye, and reappeared with a cabbage platter a guest had brought – an appetizer of bite-size vegetables on toothpicks stuck into the cabbage head. Bending over in a mock gesture of respect, Szilveszter presented it to us: “Look, it’s the Crown of Saint Stephen,” he shouted with a large smile on his face. I heard other jokes about the Order from time to time that also played on the way members’ over-the-top seriousness undermined their claims to be elites whose embodied attitudes were, in contrast, seemingly effortlessly oriented towards their worlds. But every joke is simultaneously about self and other, and Szilveszter was also disparaging both his own ambition and one of the few avenues into the Transylvanian Hungarian intellectual elite that was open to him. It seemed that he was distancing himself from his desire to be marked out from among this group of male friends.

Finally, desire is a medium through which fathers and sons reharmonize their relationships with each other and thus reorient their selves vis-à-vis their worlds. The labile fluctuation of desire and resentment in fathers’ relationships with their sons also shades into these men’s relationships with the world, providing men with a way to make their surroundings both tolerable and malleable. As Ibolya had expected, Töhötöm did leave to pick vegetables in

Slovakia, and this put on hold some of the antagonism between him and Szilveszter. But these tensions soon resumed when Töhötöm returned a few months later from Slovakia flush with amounts of cash that his father could not imagine earning in a year. He immediately used it to buy a car, a consumer luxury that Szilveszter could not afford. And Töhötöm liberally provided his sisters and mother with rides. Szilveszter mostly kept his resentment of his son's consumerist prowess to himself, but he gave voice to sour complaints when he felt that Töhötöm was showing signs of having been changed by his new lifestyle. Just as before Töhötöm's departure, Szilveszter depended on his son for help with agricultural chores such as milking the cows, which Töhötöm was increasingly reluctant to do. One morning, after Szilveszter had yelled angrily up the stairs for his son to get out of bed for this task, he muttered as he turned back into the kitchen, "He's so coddled now," (*el van kényesedve, na*)! Notably, Szilveszter used the phrase commonly applied to *tápos* Hungarians from Hungary to describe them as "doped." In the context of Töhötöm's recent return from working abroad and his new embrace of consumerist practices, both of which are set against his father's desire to associate with those who have access to a similar lifestyle, the phrase took on a particular meaning beyond a universal complaint of a father complaining about a lazy son balking at his chores. By comparing his son to a *tápos* Hungarian from Hungary, Szilveszter showed just how a father's desire for his son's social mobility can quickly become bitterness.

VI. Meanings of the Pilgrimage in Light of Men's Lives

Only after we have gone this far towards shedding light on the intimate meanings of men's lives and ambitions can we undertake an analysis of the Csíksomlyó Pentecost pilgrimage as ritual in the context of social change. First, the ritual recreates characteristic modes of relationship between ordinary men and human vehicles of unseen and capillary historical forces

of power. In the pilgrimage, priests, politicians, and the entrepreneurial Catholic leading class are given various opportunities to enact their sense of themselves and their place in the world. The intellectual classes and clergy are given positions set apart from the masses which demonstrate and confirm their lifetime of self-cultivation. Venues during the event and all throughout the year allow them to command attention and respect by offering opinions about the meaning of the pilgrimage and its role in society. Their embodied attitudes of authority confirmed on such occasions make their ability to command respect a seemingly natural course of affairs. The pilgrimage also allows priests and intellectuals to embody their comfort on stage and in other literal and symbolic positions of prominence. And for entrepreneurial elites like the Knighthood Order members and tourists from Hungary, the pilgrimage holds an attraction as a means to a feeling of entitlement not only to these spaces, but also to the various contexts of leisure and consumer culture.

The pilgrimage event also reproduces those elites whose bodies, attitudes, subjectivities, and materialities seem naturally to occupy these various spaces of intellectual and entrepreneurial command. Young men are raised up, marked out, and recognized as being a select group apart their peers. They carry the weight of the *labarum* and the community, and they carry it both by virtue of their eminently personal achievements and their families' support and sacrifice. The pilgrimage ritual also preserves a sense in which these young men will face power that acts on them universally as a group, regardless of who they are and feel themselves to be. Unpredictable and distant powers can suddenly make the future a precarious one for these young men as community leaders, such as during the transfer of sovereignties after World War I or today when a distant government does little to prop up a collapsing agricultural lifeworld. Just as these young men may need later as community leaders to persevere in their leadership against

such arbitrary power, they need now to persevere against unpredictable and inclement weather during the procession. Finally, this embodied process of self-cultivation brings them face-to-face with respected elites, most prominently and poignantly as they carry banners to the stage and at the front of village procession groups. These young men thus make themselves and are made to, at the depths of their bodies and subjectivities, expect that others will take what they have to say seriously, and this naturally as a matter of due course.

Transylvanian Hungarian working class fathers of these select youth know that there is nothing natural about their sons' necessary preparation to join the ranks of community elites. Cultivation takes a lifetime spent in Church, English lessons, classrooms, and informal socializing, just as it takes time spent confidently inhabiting new consumer venues as do confident entrepreneurs. Participation in the pilgrimage event itself provides a wide variety of these kinds of contexts for young men to inhabit. But working class fathers know that inhabiting such spaces is a fraught process, whether it is undertaken by them in everyday life or by their sons during the pilgrimage. On both accounts, working class men risk the humiliation of not being taken seriously and the fear that their sons will have to face this same experience. When working class men's sons thus show themselves to be truly cultivated – during the pilgrimage and at other times – it is always on the backs of their fathers' physical and emotional self-giving that made this self-development possible to begin with. And if the weight of community leadership is a symbolic burden, these young men have been prepared for it by bearing the very real weight of their fathers' desire, love, sacrifice, and demanding authority.

While the pilgrimage is thus a way of confirming present and making future elites – a ritual process given strength by its participation in the world of men's intimate relationships – it also serves the needs of young men who have not been “marked out” for this status. For these

young men, the procession may be viewed as *their* sacrifice to be at grips with a post-socialist world that required their fathers to make a far greater sacrifice. Also, their participation might anticipate their need to petition Mary, a powerful figure equal to if not greater than the implacable, unreasonable, punishing, and arbitrary authority figures that could lay them low. Sons may sense that their fathers felt profoundly embarrassed to ask Mary for help, but they also know that this embarrassment is nothing compared to the terror of losing grip with their worlds. Thus, the banners they see lowered before the Mother of God allow them to recognize her power over all, a power that they can grapple with in ways that the other powers they will surely encounter do not allow. There is also a kind of maligned pride that passes back and forth between working class young men as they joke and josh on the way to and from the shrine the pilgrimage site, a form of conversation that perhaps resembles men's intimate acts of swapping stories about being subordinated to implacable authority figures. Perhaps in these moments, they are learning to partake of the solidarity of those who feel themselves to be subject to intellectuals' and entrepreneurs' harsh judgments.

The contradictions and ambivalences that emerge through a description of men's experience of manual labor also helps resolve the paradox with which I began this chapter: older men's absence from the pilgrimage event. The surface meaning of their decision to avoid the Pentecost procession is that they are recreating the events of the Battle of Harghita as the young men processed out while the elderly prayed in the shrine church. But this phenomenon admits a deeper explanation. As indicated in working class men's stories, these men know that the experience of power under post-socialist neo-liberalism feels like a very possible, arbitrary, and implacable pressure that bears down on their bodies as suffering or their subjectivities as humiliation. For those sons who are not set apart, the likelihood that they could have such

experiences poses a difficult problem. Neither fathers nor young men can regularly think about this aspect of their fathers' experience; they cannot dwell on it or make it a focus of their everyday awareness, for if they did, they would be paralyzed and prevented from setting to the tasks of surviving, coping, or even getting ahead in the world. For young men, the only way to get ahead in the world is to inhabit it knowing so well its power to break them down that the world does not appear to have this power. If their fathers who bear the very real signs of such suffering were a prominent focus of the pilgrimage procession and event, they would serve as a reminder of the physical costs of being working class in post-socialist Transylvania, costs that young men must confidently be able to ignore if they are to set to the task of walking to Csíksomlyó as much as the full panoply of their everyday tasks.

Some twenty five years after the collapse of socialism in Romania, the problems, anxieties, and precariousness of contemporary masculine subjectivity seems to dominate at the Csíksomlyó Pentecost pilgrimage, one of the largest annual events within the Hungarian cultural sphere. Key ritual elements of the pilgrimage combine masculine coming-of-age rites focused on bearing various burdens with processes that reproduce community elites. Other aspects of the pilgrimage have become embroiled in a distinctively post-socialist conflict over the role of the rising post-socialist entrepreneurial class in the Catholic Church. I have also shown that the precarious and changing routes of social mobility in Transylvanian Hungarian communities and their role in setting the stage for men's subjective "being at grips with the world" are intricately intertwined with men's bonds with their sons, a complex and dense relational nexus that I have explored initially through a description of men's narratives about Mary's interventions in their lives and then their intimate domestic worlds. In the next chapter, I investigate another case of Mary intervening in the lives of her devotees: a young woman's vision of the Virgin Mother that

then set off a chain of events whereby relationships, material forms, and subjectivities at the pilgrimage site were made and remade in a tense and contested process.

Chapter Three: The Statue Affair

I. Introduction: The Missing Religious Intimacies in the Politics of Ethno-National Autonomy

On my first trip to Csíksomlyó for the annual Pentecost pilgrimage event, I observed a group gathered on the hillside below the amphitheater engaged in erecting a large cupola shaped like the Hungarian crown of Saint Stephen, a widely recognized religio-national symbol, over a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary (Hanebrink 2006; see Image 1 and 2). I immediately recognized this event as something akin to the public installation of a physical monument of national and religious iconography that is a well-documented feature of processes of sacralizing space and time after decades of official state atheism.¹ This site's role in sacralizing space was the focus of a speech that the local architect who designed the structure delivered while standing beside the statue during the 2013 pilgrimage. The architect Ápor began his talk about the shrine's broader significance by quoting one of its organizers, a former Catholic priest and prominent figure community leader named Father Pál: "Father Pál said that this whole stone flew down from heaven," Ápor explained, "It plopped down from heaven. Just plopped down right from heaven. All of it all together here."

At first glance, based on this official story told to those who made brief pit-stops at the new hillside shrine, it would seem obvious that this affair is an example of a trend that has swept across formerly state-socialist countries: Where national minorities have sought to promote new political claims to political, geographical, or cultural autonomy after the fall of socialism, they have often used new religious shrines to construct new geospatial and temporal narratives as acts

¹ For studies of post-socialist shrines, some with histories that date back to the socialist-era and before, see Grant 2011; Zubrzycki 2008; Bernstein 2013; selections from Margry 2008; Hayden 2002; Bringa 1995. Losonczy's (2009) article situates the entire significance of the renovated Csíksomlyó shrine within processes of the creation of new Hungarian national imaginaries. Other studies of religion and politics also reference political claims and spatial and temporal imaginaries as the key outcome of interactions between religion and politics. See, for instance, Tweed 1997.

of “religious cartography” and historiography (Coleman 2002: 363).² Outside of the context of ethnic minority politics and religion, new shrines have been interpreted alongside the phenomenon of post-socialist reburials as vehicles by which competing elite groups legitimate claims to authority.³

However, by the time of this speech at the hillside shrine in 2013, I had already learned that this public narrative was, in fact, an appropriation of a divine message that had come in a dream to one of Father Pál’s former catechism students. Father Pál had early on told me that the Virgin Mary appeared to this young woman named Erika and demanded a new shrine on this location. When I met with Erika, although she was open to talking about other such visions dreams, she turned reticent concerning the shrine. What is more, some of Erika’s acquaintances believed that her dream-vision had called for the statue to be located elsewhere on private property, but Father Pál had recast Erika’s experience in order to justify placing it on the hillside. By the time I had dug just a little bit deeper into what an acquaintance called “the statue affair” (*a szobor-ügy*), I had already uncovered indications that the public religious narratives substantiating claims to ethno-national autonomy and sovereignty in this case were preceded by multiple contested pragmatic applications of Erika’s subjective encounters with divine beings. Despite the fact that these contestations concerning the interpretation of religious experience were an essential aspect of the hillside shrine’s emergence, I was hard pressed to find such phenomena in studies of the role of shrines in constituting ethno-national politics.⁴ How can scholars imagine the relationship between the experience of receiving messages that

² Studies of dead body politics are too numerous to cite exhaustively. Seminal works that continue to exert a profound influence on the field by turning attention to spatial and temporal imaginaries include Verdery 1999 and Gal 1991.

³ This is the primary theoretical thrust of Verdery’s (1999) seminal study of post-socialist necropolitics, but it is by no means an innovative approach to the role of new shrines or necropolitics in the formation of political discourse. For an example of such functionalist explanations of new shrines in terms of geospatial imaginaries in a more distant context, see Bhardwaj’s (1973) study of Hindu shrines in India.

⁴ See, for instance, studies of sovereignty by Bernstein 2013 and Grant 2011.

communicate the will of a divine being and narratives that support political claims to autonomy, two dimensions of religious ethno-national politics that are typically kept apart in studies of minority politics?

The theoretical resources of phenomenology and this dissertation's core concept of intersubjective desire provide a way to address this question. I use phenomenology's core concern with the dialectical relationship between subjective religious experience and the public circulation of semiotic forms, which are then made available for further experience, as the core structuring dynamic driving the "politics" of the hillside shrine as a moment in a broader process of claiming ethno-national autonomy. Any account of religion's role in the emergence of new sacred geographies, historiographies, and cosmologies that perform socially integrated functions such as substantiating claims to cultural sovereignty, national autonomy, regional independence, or cultural recognition must acknowledge that the former exist on the far side of a long process the contours of which takes shape in the phenomenological tension between subject and world. Regarding sovereignty claims as the center around which social process revolves or the central product of religious activity is problematic not simply on empirical grounds insofar as it misarranges the order of critical events leading to the emergence of new shrines or related national narratives, although I do offer the claim that the most intensive account of the hillside shrine begins with the fundamentally and primarily *human* processes that led up to Erika's communication of divine messages and the ways in which these processes affected how those messages were understood. Rather, my more fundamental theoretical claim builds on my review of debates among post-socialist Catholic elites in Chapter One, arguing that situating the action of religion and politics centrally in processes leading to social integration and consensus elevates the particular form of Catholicism that accentuates this theme – the form associated with Csaba

Böjte, Elekes András, and priests who cater to the bourgeois entrepreneurial classes – to an authoritative position.

In addition to this effort to re-site the point at which religion and nationalism meet as primarily a politics of intersubjectivity, I argue that the statue affair can be construed as an exercise in discovering divine desire. The figures whose lives were taken up by the apparitions and divine messages circulating around the hillside shrine were also thrust into positions of trying to orient their lives according to the desires of divine beings. Some of these figures had felt their lives gripped by Mary's will before, but for others this was a new experience sparking unfamiliar anxieties, attractions, fears, and aversions. The statue affair is therefore also an account of desire within intersubjective dynamics between human and divine beings – that is, it is a story about humans unexpectedly encountering, being shaped by, and responding to a divine being's desires in the midst of their own efforts to be at grips with the world as it has been given to them.

Part Two begins with a description of the visionary Erika's lifeworld in urban Miercurea Ciuc and the messages she began receiving from divine beings in early 2008. I provide an account of the ways in which Erika's experiences and the divine messages she received were selectively taken up by figures like Father Pál in the process of erecting the hillside shrine. I conclude this section by giving an account of the geoinfancies, cosmologies, and histories that circulate in the official narrative about the new shrine and underwrite sovereignty claims, but which exist only on the far side of the former politics of religious experience. In Part Three, I return to the way in which Erika's visions provided a venue for pragmatic reorientations of family relationships in the context of the anxieties about family structures.

II. Intimacies and Religious Experiences Entangled in a New Shrine

Charisma in Crisis at the Csíksomlyó Pilgrimage Site

Those involved in the efforts to erect the statue on the hillside at the pilgrimage site all linked this initiative to a crisis following the Transylvanian archdiocese's decision to relocate Father Pál away from Csíksomlyó in 2007. Throughout the summer and fall of 2007, local and county-wide newspapers carried the news of lay mobilization against Father Pál's transfer, including organizational meetings and efforts to collect signatures for a protest petition (Anonymous 2007a). Other web postings featured worries about the future of the Church in light of the ecclesiastical hierarchy's seeming assault on its most "charismatic" priests, naming several other priests besides Father Pál who had been moved. (Anonymous 2007b).⁵ A member of the Father Pál's local parish lay council named Ágoston was featured in several newspaper articles delivering pleas to the archbishop. These petitions ultimately fell on deaf ears and Father Pál was transferred to his new parish in the fall of 2007.⁶

While serving his new parish in the winter of 2008, Father Pál received news that a former confirmand living in Miercurea Ciuc, Erika, had had a vision concerning these events. Erika initially contacted a colleague and supporter, Father Albert, to share this experience. She used the Skype internet communication system to tell him about a divine message that she had received while asleep, which Father Albert then forwarded as an email to Father Pál, championing it as an authentic vision. Erika avoided contacting Father Pál directly not only

⁵ Efforts to interpret apparitions as the resolution of social crises and the reestablishment of disorganized relations between nature and culture are a staple of historical and anthropological literature about such phenomena (Christian 1981). For a Hungarian example, see Gagyí 2004..

⁶ On the surface, this conflict invites a comparison to the schism that Douglas Rogers describes in an Old Believer community in Russia (Rogers 2009: 71). Rogers' study is guided throughout by a modernist, functionalist, and symbolist Durkheimian theoretical perspective that rigorously reinterprets all aspects of a religious lifeworld in terms of ethics. Thus, the emergence of a schismatic group of Old Believers is really a dispute over the proper balance between work and asceticism, the authority of clergy and laypeople, and sexual morality. The latter two concerns were evident in the conflict concerning Father Pál. First, his efforts to establish charitable institutions and charismatic prayer groups outside the purview of the archdiocese was a threat to established patterns of authority. Second, many knew that Father Pál had a common-law spouse and several children.

because up to that point they had been out of contact for a decade, but also because this lack of familiarity, he speculated, would have led her to worry about his reaction:

She didn't dare to tell me this. She used to go to catechism classes with me, and spiritual development conferences. But she didn't dare tell me lest I ridicule her or look at her like she's an idiot and so on. That's why she told Albert, and then Albert let me know. So that I shouldn't be able to gossip about her behind her back [*ki ne beszéljek vele*].

The roundabout way by which Erika communicated her message, Father Pál's references to worries about ridicule, and Erika's distant relationship with Father Pál are all typical elements that can be found in accounts of modern Catholic apparitions. In most other ways, however, Erika looks different than most modern Catholic visionaries and the women who gathered at Csíksomlyó to see Mary in the rising sun at Pentecost – both groups are comprised mostly of poor, rural, and uneducated women.⁷ Erika even departs from the model established by a prominent seer located closer by: Mary's apparitions in the 1990s in the village of Seuca, about 150 kilometers away from Miercurea Ciuc, came to a rural blind woman (Jánossy 2005). Erika, in contrast, had an urban childhood in Miercurea Ciuc. Her parents' had good connections within the county bureaucracy and well-paying jobs that had required professional training – Erika's father was a skilled and successful chef who served the Party elite. Erika herself attended university in a large city and received a professional degree which has allowed her to land a position in a white collar field.

One of my conversations with Erika took place while she was on a shopping trip with her daughter. Our talk about religious matters was intermixed that afternoon with the consumerist palaver of picking out ballet slippers for Erika's daughter who, Erika confessed, had been

⁷ See Zimdars-Swartz (1991) for a general description of the rural, poor, and socially marginal profiles of modern Catholic visionaries. While the Lourdes visionary Bernadette's family experienced mobility, but they moved from house to house as a result of poverty and always remained within the confines of their rural natal village. Apolito discusses the different social position of contemporary seers in contrast to figures like Bernadette, Lucia, and others (2005: 65). Erika's background might be more akin to these contemporary Catholic "internet-based" visionaries: educated, white-collar, married, with a family, enjoying consumer pleasures such as travel and exercise.

pleading for over a year to be allowed to take ballet lessons. Erika expressed reluctance about acquiescing to her daughter's requests; she criticized mothers who over-indulged in consuming opportunities for self-development by forcing their children to go from activity to activity and class to class. When Erika tried to pay for the shoes, she discovered that the store could not accept credit cards. She promised her disappointed daughter that, "Daddy will come back tomorrow with money." Erika herself did not seem at all disappointed, but instead, appearing both nonplussed and eager, she loudly declared her frustration with "backwards" storekeepers and customers who could not accommodate consumer desires as well as the social practices and understandings of time involved in using credit cards.⁸ On another occasion, I joined Erika sitting on a bench in the city's central park while we watched her daughter jump through and hang from a brightly colored jungle gym alongside a swarm of other kids. When I complimented the jungle gym, she turned my comment on its head and complained about the difficulty of raising children in an urban "ocean of asphalt." When I asked her if she would like to buy a house in a near-village suburbs, she said, "Of course," but then noted that such homes are very expensive (*drága*) and beyond her family's means.

Erika projected in these moments an image of a savvy and discerning consumer, choosing to manifest this way of being-in-the-world publicly on the street in a way that other urbanites her age were prone to do, but would have set her apart from my rural acquaintances like Szilveszter.⁹ Erika's desires also took shape in the midst of material limitation that frustrated her ability to

⁸ The association between consumption as a form of "cultural practice" that constructs gender and marks a division between post-socialist East and capitalist West is a leitmotif in Berdahl's account of an East German village in the early 1990s: Berdahl 1999: 159-60, 196-7. For other references to the association between desire for the modern, consumer practices, and the renunciation of the socialist past, see Creed 2011: 80; Kideckel 2008.

⁹ Such public displays of consumer savvy set Erika apart from older women whom I often saw focus their efforts on moving habits of consumption into expressive modes in domestic contexts, thus reflecting the influence of their upbringing in the socialist-era when, as I argued in Chapter One, public displays of individual or family-based consumption were risky. However, such responses should not be understood as amounting to "great differentiations in public taste" that set younger generations apart from their elders or "different [religious] worlds" among Bulgarian Muslims (Ghodsee 2009: 133).

take a position among new post-socialist suburban elites. Piroška's husband's death threw the family into difficult financial straits. Piroška compensated by opening a small shop in the city in the early 1990s, and Erika was still able to graduate from university. However, the financial difficulties resulting from losing a primary source of income resulted in being cut off from owning a "garden house" and other, more capital-intensive forms of consumption-oriented identity construction. Erika complained about being forced to raise her daughter in an urban "ocean of concrete" and expressed a strong aspiration to relocate to a nearby village. In so doing, Erika was pointing not only to the way incorporating multiple generations in urban apartments signals lack of access to the private capital that is a gatekeeper to the ranks of post-socialist Transylvanian Hungarian suburban elites; she was also indicating how such living arrangements were a source of destabilizing tensions in families at a time of bitter conflicts about the virtues and vices of maintaining close ties within an extended household. As we will see, when Mary and other divine beings began sending Erika messages, they stepped into Erika's various familial relationships knotted together by cords of dependence, hope, love, and resentment. Taking stock of and responding to their subjective desires became part of Erika's efforts to assess and respond to the desires of human kin and acquaintances, and vice versa. And religious idioms merged with the idioms of consumer culture in this process of working on the world.

After getting to know Erika and Piroška a little bit, I was not surprised that they were able to become involved with Father Pál and Father Albert. Those who took leadership roles in Father Pál's various projects tended to project an attitude of belonging to the same class of well-traveled, educated, and consumer-oriented urbanites that emerged in the Ciuc valley after 1968. Erika and Piroška also share with their urban contemporaries, like Beáta about whom I wrote briefly in Chapter One, the experience of seeking out involvements in Catholic prayer societies

such as those sponsored by Mary Radio or other less ecclesiastically supervised charismatic groups. For Erika and Piroska, these involvements are the source of relationships that began as adults, as opposed to rural residents whose everyday contacts tend to involve relationships that stretch back to childhood (Gagyí 2002: 45-7). Thus, Erika and Father Albert did not meet as children, but rather Erika was introduced to him later in her adulthood through her mother. The fact that Piroska developed a close relationship in recent years with a man several decades younger than her is also remarkable and a sign of lay Catholic associations' influence on a society that the historical evidence summarized in Chapter One shows was only recently quite gender segregated. It was not on the basis of a long association, but rather her mother's recent contact with Father Albert that led Erika to believe that Father Albert would not ridicule or question her sanity if she shared her suspicion that she had received a message from a divine source.

If Erika is able to participate in elite practices of consumption in certain ways through her efforts to care for her daughter, but not in others insofar as she is shut out of owning a suburban home, Father Albert is also only in partial command of practices that might allow him to enter into reciprocal relationships with post-socialist religious elites like Father Pál. Father Albert is a Hungarian-speaking Greek-Catholic (Eastern Rite) priest, one of very few such priests in Romania. As a Hungarian-speaker with poor Romanian language skills, he is unable to serve in most Greek-Catholic parishes which are predominantly Romanian-speaking. He is married and has several children, which is permissible in the case of Greek-Catholic clergy, but this prevents him from serving in Roman Catholic parishes. As a result, Father Albert's family is not well-off, and he once solicited me for help in obtaining a job in the United States during a time of financial difficulty. The types of work that he suggested he could perform – picking vegetables

or working as a home-care assistant for the elderly – are more associated with those of less social stature than a middle-age highly educated man (see Bodó 1996, 2008; Bodó and Bíró 2009).¹⁰ Effectively excluded from conventional avenues of professional advancement, it is no wonder that Father Albert sought professional involvements in associations that attracted entrepreneurs, the powerful figures who were often attracted to leading roles in the Church but who were largely excluded from these positions because their drive for self-aggrandizement sparked ambivalent reactions in Catholic elites.

Divine and Human Intersubjectivity on the Internet: Skype-ing Messages from the Beyond

Erika's early messages to Father Albert indicate not only that he lacked command of certain consumer practices, but also that he and Erika were not close and Erika was unsure if he would help or laugh at her. According to Father Albert, Erika had wanted to speak to him verbally and face-to-face. She initially requested that he travel to Miercurea Ciuc to visit her, but he could not make the trip. She then wanted to speak to him over the Skype on-line phone and messaging service. Albert, however, was unfamiliar with Skype and other forms of face-to-face on-line interactions. Albert also did not own a computer that was equipped with the necessary microphone for such a conversation. They had a misunderstanding about this, which resulted in Erika trying to contact Albert over Skype after which Albert informed her that they could only type messages back and forth. In the end, Erika wrote down the entire divine message as a single account and sent it to Albert over Skype. The following translation preserves Erika's typographical errors and informal grammatical formulations – for instance, using all capital letters to express emphasis – from the original text:

¹⁰ Father Pál's experiences in traveling abroad, in contrast, involved not manual labor but rather multiple pilgrimages to Medjugorje and giving lectures to Hungarian émigré communities in New York City.

I saw the following dream 4/20/2008. Location: The Church (I always see the same church; built on a hill, old big church). Many priests were inside the church, praying (I recognized several among them but I know that they were all presently living, serving, and real personages). There were some who during the prayer stood up and left the church and there were some who were constantly glancing towards the exit. I saw on their faces and I sensed their uncertainty.

One priest could not take it anymore. He jumped up from the pew, but I chastised him, saying that he had not finished the prayer. He looked at me angrily and then knelt before the altar, said a quick “Our Father,” stood up, and rushed out of the church. On the other hand, I just stood there (the shocking disappointment and pain that I felt is indescribable) and I watched as the church quickly emptied out. And only then did I notice that one side of the church was totally black, as if a thick soot had covered it. I asked the Father (he is always there, approx. 70 years old and like this church’s caretaker), if this church was always like this and if I am not remembering it correctly, or if something has happened? To which, hanging his head in sadness, he shook his head, no, and said quietly: It has not been like this, my child. At that moment, it was as if an internal voice said: The WORK that the priest(s) began at Csíksomlyó, someone (someone or some people) wants to tear down and destroy. They are working on this right now! I went out into the free air and I saw a young couple: they could have been approx. 18 years old. The girl hung her head. She had brown hair, unremarkable (I felt this). I was looking at the boy when I heard the following:

If she lives in darkness, not seeing the light, she is nevertheless blessed, because she sees what others cannot! The Lord, God, loved the world and decided to gift it with Tanja Popovice seeing the light. At the sound of this name, the boy looked towards the girl and squeezed her shoulder, saying: that is you! The girl answered: I know and raised her head. She was blind. On her face, however, was some kind of indescribable glory! Since then I have seen this face in front of me.

Albert, I know that I have gone on, but when I woke up, I had the feeling that I have to tell this to you. I waited on it for 5 days but since this feeling did not pass, I have written it down. I hope that you can understand more of it than me. This has or must have some kind of meaning.

Several elements of Erika’s message reflect both Erika’s urban, entrepreneurial background as well as the affective dynamics that predominate among Catholics involved in charismatic prayer groups. In the first case, Erika speaks with Father Albert in the informal mode, which stands in stark contrast to many rural settings where priests are addressed formally.¹¹ The parts of her account in which she narrates her experiences retain an urbane and sophisticated vocabulary and style. Erika’s decision to refrain from editing out typos and

¹¹ I observed laypeople addressing Father Pál in the formal mode of address on a number of occasions; when he described discourse between him and Erika, he had her address him in the formal mode.

misspellings further demonstrates not only its informal character, but also her comfort with consumer technology. When the voice speaks about God, it does not use a mix of national languages and local dialects as Mary did when she communicated with child seers at Lourdes and Fatima. Rather, the voice uses the authoritative and archaic vocabulary and style of the King James Bible in Hungarian.

If Erika had had regular contact with Father Albert over a number of years, as would have been expected if they had grown up together or if Father Albert had been Erika's local priest and confessor, then she would have had much more information on which to base a prediction concerning his reaction to her suggestion that she was receiving divine messages. Instead, expresses a hope that the experience "must have meaning," but she avoids any kind of certainty that her experience is more than a subjective invention. Erika's parenthetical comments, likewise, indicate the recent provenance of her relationship with Father Albert; she feels the need to repeatedly introduce him to the basic parameters of the manner in which she encounters the divine: "(I always see the same church; built on a hill, old big church)," she writes. These parenthetical asides giving details about her typical dream-visions suggest that although Father Albert knew that Erika was prone to receiving messages in dreams, this aspect of Erika's experience was unfamiliar to him to the extent that Erika needed to provide basic background information.

Erika and Father Albert's involvement in charismatic prayer groups helps this message take on a very different affective register than the religious ritual poetry documented by Gail Kligman in Romania's Maramureş region in the 1980s.¹² There is no hint of the suffering, sadness, and despair that women often used to speak in public, drawn from genre of the funeral

¹² See Kligman 1988. For accounts of these apparitions and the seers' relationships with the local priests who first heard their testimonies, see Harris 1999 and Zimdars-Swartz 1991.

lamentation or the more secularized “litany of woe.” Instead, the affective dynamics of Erika’s vision moves within modes that combine Csaba Bőjte’s description of interiorized, affectively-rich experience and charismatic prayer groups’ emphasis on open emotional expression and the strength of righteousness. Erika thus criticizes uncertainty (*vivodás*) and prayer that is not felt at a deep subjective level but rather superficial. She gives free rein to a sense of righteousness, publicly chastising (*rászólni*) a priest, to which he responds “with anger” (*haragosan*). Her affective language reaches a peak of expressive strength in statements such as, “(the shocking disappointment and pain that I felt is indescribable).”¹³ When the young man identifies the young woman as the object of God’s message, he touches her affectionately on the shoulder, showing more cross-gender public affection than is typical for rural couples and older generations. Finally, there is an air of urgency throughout the message, especially when the divine beings announce that there is a plan afoot “right now” to undo Father Pál’s work. The general impression left by the message is that Erika and Father Albert’s relationship is limned by the contradictions of everyday interactions among participants in lay Catholic prayer groups: Although Erika defers to Father Albert as an authority figure, she also insists on establishing a peer relationship with him, adopting the attitude of a collaborative colleague, and speaking informally about affective experiences felt deep within her subjectivity.

The fact that aspects of her experience stretched across her dreaming and waking states, influencing both, means that Erika is not able to pin down her experience as either a dream or a vision. She avoids calling her experience a vision (*látomás*) in her initial email. But she also refuses to refer to the experience simply as “dreaming,” which would place this experience in the realm of subjectivity. Instead, she uses a grammatically unusual Hungarian phrase: “I saw the following dream” (*A következő álmot láttam*). The Hungarian word for “to see” (*látni*), which

¹³ In Hungarian, the phrase is, “a megdöbbenes csalódottság és fájdalom amit éreztem leírhatatlan.”

Erika uses in this sentence, also provides the root for both “vision” (*látomás*) and “visionary” (*látnok*). At the same time, this phrase does not conform to standard Hungarian grammatical usage.¹⁴ Scholars’ typical definitions of visions, apparitions, messages, dreams, and so on, constructed in order to isolate the distinctive elements of these modes of religious experience, collapse in the face of Erika’s intentionally non-standard usage. On the one hand, Erika suggests that she has had an apparition or vision as it has been conventionally defined: an encounter with a person or being not normally within perceptual range who appear to the “visionary” as part of the environment (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 4). Erika never uses this term for herself, despite the fact that Father Albert and others call her a “visionary.” On the other hand, Erika’s suggestive references to “seeing” dreams cannot be ignored, with the result that her encounters with otherworldly beings are significant precisely because they are neither oneiric nor conscious, neither subjective nor external (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 4). I will use the term “dream-vision” to describe Erika’s experiences out of deference to her poetic efforts do justice to compelling but unclear experiences.¹⁵

Father Albert accepted Erika’s private experiences as divine messages, deciding that Father Pál was the object of her dream-vision: “I thought that it related to Father Pál in more than one way,” he told me over lunch one day in Cluj, “and also to the Csíksomlyó parish. At the same time, it was also generally valid for the Church.”¹⁶ He considered Erika’s dream-vision to be a message concerning the broader Roman Catholic Church because Father Pál’s transfer coincided with the transfer or forced retirement of several other priests involved in the

¹⁴ In Hungarian, either one “dreams” (*álmodni*), with the content of the dream as the direct object of the verb, or one “has a dream” (*álma lenni*). In contrast, this formulation would not be unusual in Russian, since the idiom for this experience in this language involves one “seeing” dreams (Luehrmann 2011: 143).

¹⁵ I use Zimdars-Swartz’s definition since it is rooted in a study of the particular experience and social dynamics of modern Catholic apparitions of the Virgin Mary. A similar definitions of visions, apparitions, and dreams can be found in Christian 2012: 45-6.

¹⁶ Catholic religious authorities often toggle between local and global interpretations of contemporary apparition events (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 16-8).

charismatic movement. As a result, according to Father Albert, there was a general feeling that “the church community’s spirituality had fallen apart.” These were the events, he concluded, that were addressed in the dream-vision through the symbolism of the old church crusted over with soot and the group of priests praying without fervor. After reaching this conclusion, Father Albert attached several sentences clarifying that this was the proper interpretation of the dream-vision. He then forwarded the entire text to Father Pál. In these lines, Father Albert states his conviction that Erika’s message is a vision by announcing to Father Pál that she is a “visionary: “The first message, which the visionary [*látnok*] forwarded to me as a Skype-message.” By adapting and contributing to Erika’s message, Father Albert eliminated some of the hesitancy that Erika retained in her description. Where Erika had intentionally sustained the possibility that her dream-visions were subjective experiences, Father Albert eliminates this ambiguity and unequivocally declares her to be a visionary.

This note not only identifies Erika’s experience as a vision; it marks a change in Father Albert’s relationship with Erika insofar as he makes himself open to the divine beings speaking through Erika. The divine beings communicating with Erika then responded to Father Albert’s openness and the changed circumstances of the relationship between Erika and Father Albert.¹⁷ Erika does not indicate why she decided to send her first message specifically to Father Albert. She said that the divine beings demanded she send the message, but they did not specify to whom besides imparting a vague “feeling” that it was intended for him. “Albert, I know that I have gone on,” she tells him, “but when I woke up I had the feeling that I shouldn’t keep this from you.” After Father Albert became convinced she is a visionary, the divine beings communicating through Erika were much more forthright in declaring their intended recipient.

¹⁷ I derive this observation from Apolito’s argument that Mary modified her messages and behavior towards visionaries in response to new circumstances on the ground during the apparitions at Oliveto Citra (Apolito 2005: 164-6).

“Two weeks ago or so,” she writes Father Albert, “you were sent a message in my dream, and it went something like this: Tell him (that is, you) that triad means that the three of you, strengthening each other, constitute a truly strong unit.” In her first account, Erika confesses that she is not sure if the dream-vision is a message. Now she is certain that the triangular image she perceived is a divine communication. Not only is it a communication from the world beyond, but the message itself demands to be communicated to Father Albert. Erika adds a parenthetical comment specifying that the “him” addressed by the voice in her dream-vision is “you,” Father Albert. If this is insufficiently clear, she adds further clarification at the end of the message. “It didn’t say your name,” she writes, “but I saw you, and that’s how I knew that the message was meant for you. And it was to you, absolutely, that this needed to be said and passed on.” Father Albert’s life now became more centrally involved in the divine plan that was being communicated through Erika’s dream-visions. Divine beings had not only broken into Erika’s life, but they also began working on and altering her relationships; they attached themselves and Erika to Father Albert with such clarity that they were able to draw a detailed portrait of him that Erika immediately recognized. Father Albert’s willingness to call Erika a “visionary” suggested that he enthusiastically launched himself and welcomed being launched into the priest/patron-visionary relationship that stands at the center of many Catholic apparition events. He welcomed having his subjectivity made open to the divine through this new series of relationships. Erika, on the other hand, never used this term to refer to herself, and while her messages express enthusiasm she also retains a note of cautious reserve about what Father Albert and the divine beings might expect of her. The history of Roman Catholic apparitions is littered with stories about priests who received seers skeptically at first, but then become convinced of the authenticity of their visions after receiving a divine sign (Zimdars-Swartz 1991).¹⁸ The email

¹⁸ The case of Juan Diego at Guadalupe is the most famous instance of the conversion of a seer or a seer’s

correspondence between Erika and Father Albert, however, provides greater insight into the way intersubjective dynamics and historical conditions combine to constitute the process of this shift from skepticism to conviction.

From Private Dream-Visions to Shared Intimacies between Heaven and Earth

Father Albert interpreted the content of the second message concerning the “triad” in light of his assessment of Erika’s first dream-vision. This was a reference to a grouping of three priests – Father Albert, Father Pál, and one other. Father Albert ascertained that the divine beings with whom Erika was in relationship were demanding that these priests conduct an atonement or repentance (*engesztelés*) prayer rite, perhaps because the first dream-vision had featured a group of priests praying together. He felt that the divine beings were also demanding that they perform this rite outdoors, based on the fact that Erika had heard a voice after she left the interior of the church. Finally, this rite needed to be conducted at the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage site, since the dream-vision had featured God’s voice condemning those who were destroying the projects initiated at Csíksomlyó. According to the recollections of the “triad” of three priests, whom I interviewed both separately and together in 2011 and 2012, they were able to assemble for the atonement rite during the summer of 2008 after considering the requests of several other colleagues interested in joining them.

The preceding process of moving from social crisis to apparition to shared religious experience in the form of an expiatory ritual follows classical Catholic conventions for the establishment of a local shrine (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 8; Blackbourn 1993; Christian 1981). Acknowledging this model, however, should not distract us from exploring the way this ritual establishes intimate bonds that render the boundaries of the priests’ selves porous in the midst of

contemporaries from doubt to conviction after receiving a sign from Mary. According to the shrine’s origin narrative, Mary healed Juan Diego’s ill uncle and provided flowers blooming out of season to convince skeptics (see, for instance, Poole 2006).

the tense process of transforming Erika's private experience into a venue and springboard for others' shared religious experience (Lindquist 2006: 20; Glücklich 1997). This was the dominant impression conveyed in my conversations with them about the evening that they spent gathered on the hillside at Csíksomlyó. They began praying in the evening as the sun went down, and they stayed on the hillside until sunrise, praying, singing, and pacing in a sometimes trance-like ecstasy.¹⁹ In subsequent interviews, Father Albert, Father Pál, and the third priest described this encounter as intimate (*intím*). Father Pál described this rite as one of the most significant spiritual encounters of his entire life. It was "truly a memorable evening." It was like a "dream," he explained, which was so intense that one remembers forever what took place in it. He compared the intimacy of that evening to the kind of relationship that comes from two or more priests coming face to face with the divine in the act of consecrating the host during Mass:

It was like when priests [after holding Mass together] feel togetherness (*összetartozás*), feel closer to each other. If I have a problem, an intimate (*intím*), or whatever kind of problem, they will help me. . . . It's not just that we understand each other, but they will help me if they can. That is, there was a greater kind of trust (*bizalom*) and togetherness between us.

Submitting themselves to the desires of the divine beings communicating through Erika formed these men's subjectivities into a new intimacy and openness towards each other.

The Shrine's Multiple Missions, Part 1: Whither the Seer?

Later that summer, reports that Father Pál had left his new parish and taken medical retirement began circulating in the media (Rédai 2008). After the atonement ritual but before it was announced that Father Pál was returning to Csíksomlyó, Erika came to Father Pál with a third message. According to the priest's recollection, Mary used Erika to tell him,

¹⁹ Their descriptions of this atoning prayer rite involving a small group of people gathering for a full night of song and spiritual communion mirrors accounts of charismatic gatherings in the Ciuc valley from the immediate post-socialist period (Gagyí 2002: 21-47).

I have to come back. Not to the Szekler region, but here to Csíksomlyó. And it was a very specific message. And I said to her, 'Ask again, whether the Virgin Mother is certain.' Then I met with her once more. I said, 'Erika, what's the deal?' Do I need to...?' She said, 'This isn't even a conversation. Not a conversation. So. Right. Not just anywhere, but here. I have to come back here.'

Finally, Erika took him to a location on the side of the hill, the site of the current statue, and pointed down. She said, "This is it!" According to Father Pál, she was pointing to the location that Mary had indicated in the dream-vision. It was his understanding that this was where Mary needed to be crowned with the Hungarian national symbol of the Crown of Saint Stephen and honored with a shrine.

The commissioning of key figures in carrying out a mission, typically understood as the establishment of a shrine, is a common step in the process of giving private experience a transactable and recognizable shape via a shared idiom that can also become a medium for others' subsequent religious experiences. While the idea of a public mission arising from private religious experience is an ancient one, tensions between multiple missions associated with the emergence of a shrine and confusion about the seer's role in these various missions is a modern phenomenon (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 50-3). In Erika's initial message, there is an evident but still undefined sense of a mission being revealed to those involved in this process, which exceeds the project of erecting the physical structure of a new shrine. This mission could be the continuing encouragement of charismatic prayer in the church, which seems to be the point of the first message with its critical portrayal of priests lackadaisically going about their devotions. However, the message abstains from clarifying which players had a role in this mission and what responsibilities were demanded from them. For instance, Erika might have received an ordination into this mission by virtue of the fact that she is the most obvious candidate for the young blind woman standing outside the church who receives God's approval. Her dream clearly

gives her a venue for criticizing clergy who have little interest in charismatic prayer. Thus, the question of mission once again opens up a tension in the space between Erika's desire, the divine beings' desires, and the uses made of them when appropriated by Father Albert and Father Pál. Although these priests named the need for charismatic leadership as a concern, they neither identified Erika with the young woman commissioned by the voice of God as a religious leader nor viewed Erika's critical response to the lackadaisical clergy as warrant for further such statements on her part. Likewise, it is unclear if Erika herself wanted this mission as it was given to her in the dream-vision, since in waking life she chose to keep her experiences to herself when they became the subject of controversy.

Father Pál and Father Albert's accounts of Mary's message demanding the erection of the shrine function in a similar manner to emphasize that the message is an affirmation of their role in a larger mission. It is not clear, in contrast, if Erika has a role in this mission beyond announcing Mary's desire, since their account limits her involvement to pointing to Mary's intended location for the statue. Father Pál's convictions concerning his role, as ordained by Mary, are much clearer. For Father Pál, the dream-vision crystallizes an affirmation of his work in the area. Mary has appeared, demanded his presence at the pilgrimage site, and called on him to honor her tie to this place. On a broader level, Mary also supports the identification of a new center of religious devotion for the Hungarian nation, the transformation of a non-descript spot on a hillside into a new focal point for various kinds of religious and non-religious attention (Bernstein 2013; Grant 2011; Zubrzycki 2008). These multiple and vague references to missions that went beyond the project of erecting a new shrine allowed for confusion, claims, and counter-claims concerning who was to have a central role in such a mission.

Erika praised Father Pál's work and was proud of her association with him when she was his confirmand. She also insisted on minimizing her role in installing the statue. Father Pál seemed to suggest that she did have some involvement when he called her and asked for permission to send me to meet with her. I understood that "the Holy Spirit" had erected the statue on the hillside, he reported to Erika on the phone. At first, when we met personally, she flatly denied having any involvement in the statue affair. She later referred obliquely to brief email exchanges with some individuals involved in the effort. This was the extent of her discussion of the statue. Her reticence stood in stark contrast to our more detailed conversations about childhood encounters with divine beings not directly connected to the new shrine. Although she gave me permission to view the account of her dream-visions that she sent to Father Albert, she insisted that they were unrelated to the statue. Erika spoke positively about the statue, albeit in generalities, when I broached the topic of the statue again after some time. She had been there to pray, but on her own. She approved of its location outside and in the open air. She welcomed a shrine to Mary at Csíkksomlyó that was always available for veneration, in contrast to the statue in the pilgrimage site church that was often locked. Erika flatly refused to speak about the statue beyond these abstractly approving statements. When I brought up the topic of her dream-vision and the statue a third time several months later, she again distanced herself from the affair. After this, she did not pick up the phone when I called her. She stopped responding to emails, and subsequently informed me, through her mother, that she did not wish to speak further about her dream-visions. This refusal to make her experience an explicit topic of conversation included Father Albert and Father Pál, as well. By the summer of 2013, they had also reported unsuccessfully trying to contact Erika, who had cut off contact with both of them.²⁰

²⁰ It is not uncommon for shrines to crystallize nascent conflicts between government agencies and groups of devotees. For instance, Bernadette of Lourdes isolated herself such a conflagration when the government attempted

The Shrine's Multiple Missions, Part 2: Whither the Shrine?

The components and location of the shrine are intimately bound up with the tension between Erika's private experience and the shrine's public profile as embodied in its ambiguous and multiple missions.²¹ Father Pál admitted that Erika's third dream-vision did not specify which statue should be placed on the hillside. The statue that ended up being placed on the hillside, according to Father Pál, was a matter of providence while others saw it as a vindictive and controversial riposte to the archdiocese. Father Pál had built a small chapel in honor of Mary in another part of his parish while serving as a priest. The priest who replaced Father Pál in 2007 had it dismantled, leaving the wooden statue out in the elements to decay. Father Pál rescued Mary's statue when he returned to Csíksomlyó in 2008. This statue came to mind when Erika brought him Mary's message. That winter, Father Pál placed a request with the Csíksomlyó town commission in charge of commons grazing land to install the statue on the hillside below the amphitheater. Father Pál was thus able to counter efforts to "demolish" his work as a priest – if we are to believe that the first message's reference to an unnamed, unspecified "WORK" targeted for destruction describes Father Pál's initiatives – turning what had been an obscure private chapel off the side of a small village road into a highly prominent shrine at the pilgrimage site.

As for the statue's location on the hillside, Father Albert contradicted parts of Father Pál's account of how it found its way there. Father Pál could not recall whether Father Albert was present when Erika marked out Mary's new shrine. Father Albert not only insisted that he

to discourage groups of seers and devotees from occupying the grotto where her initial apparition took place (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 66).

²¹ This argument departs from interpretations of the emergence of post-socialist shrines in Poland (Zubrzycki 2006) which emphasize their role in clarifying the relationship between religion and nationalism. Anya Bernstein's (2013) description of the politics of post-soviet shrines in Buddhist Buryatia as most clearly effecting a redrawing of space, time, and geopolitical imaginaries for the purpose of making claims to cultural and political autonomy seems to replace the concept of nationalism with cultural autonomy while making similar arguments.

was present for this encounter, but he also described it as a private interaction between Erika and himself, claiming that she had telephoned him and told him that they have to visit a certain place in Csíksomlyó. She explained her demand on the basis that a special place “close to the spring” will become part of a “spiritual initiative.” Erika’s reference to the spring would have placed the statue close behind the Franciscan monastery, alongside a road leading up to the amphitheater (Image 3). The location, Father Albert reported, lay on Father Pál’s property, on the land surrounding a house his foundation owned. They then told Father Pál about the location of the new shrine. According to Father Albert, Father Pál was “overjoyed” that some kind of new spiritual initiative was going to begin on his property.

A former member of Father Pál’s parish council whom I interviewed supported Father Albert’s version of this story. The former parish council member, Ágoston, is also a member of the commission overseeing the village commons property; his support was necessary if the statue was to be placed on the hillside. According to Ágoston, he and Father Pál only discussed the hillside location after first considering placing it on the private property where Father Albert said Mary had told Erika to place the statue:

[MRL]: How did it happen that Father Pál asked the village commons commission?
[Ág.]: Well, he couldn’t put it on private land. Then there will be pilgrims who will come, who will destroy the crops. And so he asked, ‘Where does the grazing land start?’ And I said, ‘It starts up higher from the private land. The town commons land starts up there.’ And he said, ‘We should allow it to be set up there, this Mary statue. It’s about this big, the statue.’ And I thought, ‘Who is this going to hurt to put up one statue, onto a stone, onto a small stone?’

While it is not clear if these three accounts of Mary’s intended location for the shrine can be reconciled, it is more revealing to note both the tensions and the convergences between Erika’s private experiences and the way they are taken up and transacted in the missions attributed to the shrine by others. On the one hand, Father Albert’s conviction that the mission declared by Mary

was limited to the erection of the shrine without reference to its role in the lives of a broader religious or national community is reasonable based on his recollections. Likewise, it stands to reason that Father Pál was responding to his own idiosyncratic needs and desires through his interpretation that the mission assigned to him by Mary was not only simply to erect a shrine but also that the shrine should become a vehicle for the replication of his experience during the atonement ritual for a much broader community. However, this interpretation is not completely without basis in Erika's private experiences, since her original message includes a reference to God's gift to "the world."

Tensions between Private and Shared Religious Experience at the New Shrine

Emerging shrines often attract devotees who first seek out the visionaries themselves as media through whom others can encounter divine beings; the visionaries sometimes remain an attraction even as others' miracles and the spread of visions among the new devotees – all taking place at the site of the apparition – help the focus turn from the person of the visionary to the place of the encounter with divinity. Father Pál referred to a group of women who had taken to praying at the shrine and offered to arrange for me to meet them. The social profile of this group resembled Father Pál's broader network of entrepreneurs: educated, urban, and consumer-savvy. They had all relocated to the city from villages in the Ciuc valley and beyond. The leader of the group, Báborka, has a white-collar position in a well-appointed office renovated from her former apartment residence that she still owns. She drives her own car from a suburban garden house. There was no suggestion from any of these women that they might have ever petitioned Mary for help or experienced an apparition. Nor was there any intimation of signs following Erika's dream-vision of Mary and the establishment of the new shrine – new Catholic shrines are commonly accompanied by unexplained events such as out-of-season blossoming trees or the

appearance of water sources.²² I specifically inquired about whether they had ever received favors from Mary as a result of petitionary requests either at the shrine or in general, but I received only embarrassed gestures indicating demurrals. In contrast, it seemed that Father Pál was the real glue that kept this group together; the members spoke warmly of the ongoing spiritual leadership that he provides for them and they felt attached to the new shrine because of its connection with his ministry.

Most of the group had no idea that the hillside shrine was connected to a vision. During my initial conversation with Biborka, she said that she did not know how the shrine got there, and then corrected herself in order to tell a story about Erika that she introduced as something she had “heard from Father Pál.” When I met with the group, Biborka told the group another version of this story:

Father Pál said that a woman told him to do this. A woman who has the capacity for visions. She had a dream at night, and a voice appeared to her that a statue should be erected in that place. She went out to Father Pál and she marked out the place and she showed him the place. For her, for her, always in her dreams, there should be a place marked out like this. That it should help to raise up the Szeklers and the Hungarian people. But she is afraid to speak about it because she works in a government office and people might ridicule her.

Biborka’s pronouncement illustrates the way Erika’s subjective openness to divine beings serves others’ very idiomatic purposes: Her comment betrays entrepreneurs’ deep fascination with people whose subjectivities allow them to be open to divine messages and visions, a curiosity that brought back memories of my extremely driven acquaintance who raced me up and down the hillside at Csíkсомlyó in search of the women who see Mary in the rising sun. Second,

²² These are typical examples of “public religious experience” accompanying the private experience of a visionary in the latter stages of the emergence of a new shrine (see Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 104-12; Harris 1996: 204-5; Poole 2006). For other anthropological studies of the emergence of new Christian shrines as a result of the discovery of new objects, see Dubisch 1996: 135-158. Robert Orsi also tells the story of the emergence of the shrine to Mary at 115th Street in Italian Harlem (Orsi 1985). Thomas Tweed includes a chapter about the origins of the shrine to Mary popular among Cuban exiles in Miami, which emerged not as the result of miracles but rather as a reflection of domestic devotions that were then rendered public through the local archdiocese’s organization efforts in building the shrine (1997: 58-96).

Biborka used this opportunity to demonstrate her insider knowledge to the other participants. Erika's subjective experiences served Biborka's desire to show that she occupied a central position in Father Pál's network.

Biborka's account also shows the way in which one of the public narratives about the shrine is a selection from among the multiple other accounts in circulation in the area. Ágoston and Father Albert had argued that Erika originally directed Father Pál to put the shrine on private property, but Biborka is either unaware of or intentionally leaves out these alternative stories about the vision that established the shrine. Biborka also adds certain meanings to the shrine that were only inchoate in Father Pál's statements about Erika: Although Father Pál was insistent on the national significance of the shrine, he never explicitly named the need for the "spiritual uplift of Hungarians or Szeklers," which is a phrase that Biborka seems to have attributed to the shrine based partly on her own experiences of attending public readings of nationalistic poetry held on occasion at the hillside shrine. The fact that Erika's original dream-vision did not include explicit references to national uplift indicates the precarious way in which others' subsequent religious experiences and narratives appropriate such private experiences. Although this act of appropriation makes these experiences real by moving them into the realm of transactable shared conventions, they effect and necessitate deviations from those private experiences in the process.

Political Claims, Histories, and Geoimaginaries in the Public Narrative of the Shrine

It is only in light of this process of appropriation and deviation that effects unstable tensions between private experience and public narrative that we can understand the status of the political claims, histories, and geoimaginaries that are authorized by the new hillside shrine. Franciscan monks and others who offered comments about the shrine criticized it for being an inappropriate mixture of national and Catholic symbolism. In the words of one volunteer at

Csíksomlyó, “There is no need for national symbolism. There is need only for hands put together in prayer.” The account of the shrine that most closely resembles Biborka’s narrative seems to have reached the widest circulation, based also on the explicitly nationalistic symbolism of the cupola. Thus, one of the conceptualizations of the shrine circulating in the area is that it is a national monument contributing to a broader effort to nationalize Transylvanian space. This effort takes shape within the efforts by political and, on occasion, Catholic elites to define autonomy as a unifying concern of the entire Transylvanian Hungarian community. As many scholars of contemporary European politics have noted, the erection of monuments in public space oftentimes served to further such efforts by combining the various registers of autonomy indexed in elite discourses, including political, geographic, and cultural, while also converting space used for a variety of purposes into “national space” (Wanner 2012; Brubaker 2007; Zubrzycki 2008).²³ The shrine functions in the same way by using nationalist imagery such as the map of Hungary during the time of the dual monarchy and the crown of Saint Stephen to transform what was a hillside that, at least on the level of everyday life, was used primarily as grazing land into “our national shrine.” The shrine also promotes national spatial imaginaries by placing Mary on top of the map of Hungary when its borders were largest during the dualist monarchy. This image conveys Szekler Hungarian national claims to the geographic space of the whole of Transylvania and furthers the idea that Hungarians living throughout the Carpathian basin are participants in a single “imagined community” (Brubaker 2007; Anderson 1991).

²³ For instance, Rogers Brubaker notes that installing public monuments in the Transylvanian city of Cluj was a strategy used by elites to nationalize urban space, making a public square enjoyed as a quiet refuge from traffic or a romantic spot for couples into “our Hungarian [or Romanian] national space” (Brubaker 2007: 136-141). Several significant studies of memorials, monuments, and nationalism in Eastern Europe have been published in recent years: See, for instance, Bucur and Wingfield 2001; Wanner 2012; Verdery 1999; and more recently Buckler and Johnson 2013.

At the same time, the shrine also extends a religious geoimaginary to the space of the hillside by transforming agricultural space into a “special” place where Mary has directed prayers for atonement. “Let us bring our atonements to this place because the crowned queen of heaven will fulfill [them],” the inscription declares. Ápor’s talk at the site in 2013 describes the site of the shrine in even more clear terms as religiously special, referring to “lights” coming from the ground in this place.

Later, Father Pál said that this whole stone flew down from heaven, plopped down from heaven, plopped down from heaven. All of it all together here. So. In truth, she signaled, it was signaled to Pál that that this location is strong. This place needs to be demarcated, first with a stone, just with a plain, carved, square stone, but actually then they laid down this stone and then afterwards together with the statue. In the end, as it is written on the sign, ‘Let us bring our atonements to this place because the crowned queen of heaven will fulfill [them].’ So, that’s what we distilled from it. That, that is really the message of this place. That is, that is how he feels. That is how he sees it somehow. That somehow atonements converge here. Uh, uh, here the, uh, lights, as he put it. He saw something as if lights were coming here. And then they flow in all directions.

Ápor almost states that a distinct individual signaled that this location is “strong” (*erős*). He begins a sentence with the third person verb, “he/she signaled” (*jelezte*). However, he interrupts himself and continues with the third person plural, the Hungarian equivalent of the passive voice: “they signaled” or “it was signaled” (*jelzték*). Rather than a slip of the tongue, it is a not-so-subtle suggestion that there was a definite person or divine being who delivered the message to Father Pál that this was the proper location for the statue. Erika’s subjective experience is present, and precariously so, even this moment in which the shrine organizers are articulating a narrative focusing on the broader religious and national significance of the shrine. At the end of the speech, however, Ápor transforms the dream-vision that was “signaled” to Father Pál into Father Pál’s own dream-vision of lights emanating from this place. The lights serve the purpose of marking this new shrine as a spiritual center. Csíkсомlyó is the place where all Hungarians can bring their prayers for atonement. This statue and the idea that it has been sacralized by a

divine act of intervention support a claim to Csíksohely's centrality in the Hungarian national imaginary, but this effort to construct new geoinimaginaries and histories is situated in a difficult and precarious relationship of appropriation and adaptation with Erika's subjective experience of bearing the desires of divine beings.

III. Intimacies Betrayed, Intimacies Redirected

The Lady in the Locked Apartment

The statue on the hillside began in the creation of human intimacies opened up by and mediated through an encounter between Erika and several divine beings. I have thus argued that the meaning of the "renovated timespace cosmologies" and "political claims...of cultural sovereignty" established by the shrine take shape *in the space of the tension* between subjective religious experience, subsequent public religious experience, and efforts to cast such experiences in shared narrative forms, thus renewing and renovating these idioms (Bernstein 2013: 89). The preceding section focused on the latter pole of this tension, discussing the meanings of the public story told about the shrine by its organizers. However, I do not wish to give these shared narratives the last word. What remains of how Erika, Piroška, Father Pál, Father Albert, and others continue to experience divine desires in their changing human relationships? Returning to this topic from the previous consideration of post-socialist sovereignties will thus preserve the tension between experience of self and immersion in collective being-in-the-world that lies at the heart of intersubjectivity.

To understand the intimate dynamics established through the intervention of the divine into human affairs, we must return to the beginning and to the fact that it was Erika's mother who first met Father Albert in the context of lay Catholic associations and prayer groups. Moreover, all of this action between 2008 and 2013 took place while Erika and her growing

family were living in a two-bedroom apartment together with her mother, Piroska. When I mentioned to Piroska, the first time I arrived at her apartment, that I had heard that Erika had extraordinary experiences, Piroska confirmed Erika's descriptions of a lifetime of encounters with divine beings. Piroska's account situates Erika's first conversation with Mary when Erika was six years old. Erika's parents used to work alternate shifts so that one could always be home. Erika was left home alone if one needed to step out for something or to leave for work before the other arrived. Erika's lifetime of dream-visions began in the quiet of a locked apartment in response to a young girl's fear of being left alone.²⁴ This is how both Piroska and Father Albert described the affective dynamics of Erika's first encounters with Mary, who appeared to Erika in the shape of an older lady (*néni*). In Piroska's words,

I was going out to the store somewhere. She was always fearful [*félénk*]. She was always whining [*nyafagó*]. She was a crier [*síró*]. [I said,] 'Don't be afraid! I'll come back soon!' [She said,] 'Oh, Mommy, I'm not afraid! I won't be alone.' 'Well, who is with you, [I asked]?' 'An old lady. But I don't see her. I only hear her. And she has such a kind voice.'

Early experiences of fear and loneliness associated with difficult or strained family relationships are strongly represented in historical accounts of modern Catholic visionaries (Zimdars-Swartz 1991; Blackburn 1993; Apolito 2005). This theme of early suffering transformed into meaning persisted in Piroska's descriptions of her daughter's other extraordinary experiences as a child. Whereas visionaries at other apparition sites describe flying to places of global interest like Jerusalem and meeting historical luminaries, Erika stayed closer to home in order to meet her deceased father (Apolito 1998):

There was a time when she said, 'I saw Dad.' My husband was working [in a nearby resort]. For a period of time. She said, 'I have never been in that hotel, but Mom, I knew the place. I recognized it.' She said to me, 'I knew where everything was. I went where

²⁴ Managing childcare by working alternating shifts is by no means unusual (see Massino 2007: 148-50; Kligman 1998: 83-4).

Dad was working. I saw everything. I saw when he was drinking....' She said, 'I saw Dad drinking many times.'

Erika's father was an alcoholic who died when she very young. According to Piroska, it hurt Erika to see him come home drunk. After he died, Piroska noted, Erika grieved (*gyászolni*) for a long time. As a result, the affective experiences offered by her trance flights took shape in the context of this intimate relationship and the psychological experience of shame, frustration, pain, and anxiety. While the Oliveto Citra seers were filled with awe in the presence of great historical figures in Jerusalem, Erika's trips appear to have provided succor in the context of intersubjective dynamics of dependence, loss of identity, and autonomy:

She said that she heard her father's voice. She said, 'Now, now, I won't appear to you so much because...' Somehow it told her to accept this as a gift. Now you have found your true partner. Perhaps, it was communicating that [Erika's husband] is the true one for her. Her father was always protecting her. And now he has released her. And now he has released her.

Later Visions of Good and Evil and Apocalyptic Battles

Piroska also reported that, at several times in Erika's life, divine beings gave Erika the responsibility of protecting her close friends and family members. The dream-visions they sent for this purpose were horrible (*szörnyű*), filled with violent and frightening imagery.

Many times she was in such a big struggle. Black horses appeared to her. She said that they attacked her. And then it happened that she was here at home and she shrieked and shouted. She saw the black horses very many times. She said that, 'Mom, these horses are something bad. They aren't good.' When she saw the horses, then it wasn't good. And she always protected them [the students]. She got from her dream or in picture. That is, in a vision (*vízió*), what she needed to save her classmates from.

These disturbing images could not have been the result of any subjective psychological imbalance, Piroska insisted, because Erika was in a healthy social environment when she received them. Therefore, they must have been the result of objective divine intervention.

Because these accounts all come from her mother, it is difficult to confirm them as descriptions of Erika's childhood and adolescent suffering and divine visions. Although Father Albert told me independently of the Lady who kept Erika company in the locked apartment, he learned of this from Piroska, not Erika. Erika's subsequent withdrawal from her relationships with Father Albert, Father Pál, and others prevented additional verification. Beyond the uninteresting question of whether or not these accounts are accurate, this information provides insight into the core tension I have been tracking in this chapter between private experience and public narrative. The problem at hand therefore becomes not one of validating stories about Erika's childhood, but rather one of diving deeply into the way one person's subjective experiences precariously interact with others' desires.²⁵ Piroska and Father Albert were converting Erika's experiences into widespread tropes of Catholic visionary culture to paint this portrait of Erika as a visionary who makes meaning from early childhood suffering and misfortune (Blackbourn 1993: 23-4; Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 76; Apolito 2005: 48). They demonstrated their own idiomatic desires and goals in taking up Erika's experience in this manner, converting it into these idioms for their own use and benefit in speaking with me and others.

It is difficult to track the events surrounding the "Statue Affair" within a binary of local "vernacular" practices and "official" transnational Catholicism. In particular, the idea of an urban, educated, and internet-savvy visionary is intolerable for both ecclesiastical and ethnological writers.²⁶ Erika's ability to use the internet to avoid ecclesiastical controls on her

²⁵ For a discussion of oral historical material in post-socialist contexts, see Chapter 5. In brief, this question has plagued scholars using oral historical material in post-socialist contexts and led into uninteresting impasses insofar as it presumes that there can be any kind of narrative that escapes the tension between self-interest and honesty towards experience.

²⁶ Conflicts between vernacular, lay, or national religion and official Catholicism is a trope that retains a powerful hold not only on the study of religion after socialism, but also the study of Marian pilgrimage in general. See, for instance, Kapaló's argument that, "It is exceedingly difficult to escape the legacy of the [national folk] discourse that

speech provokes ecclesiastical anxieties concerning controlling messages from divine figures. Ethnological observers have a stake in presenting visionaries as rural, uneducated, and socially marginal in order to confine religion to the countryside and maintain their positions as experts on this vernacular rural culture. As such, the core tension driving this apparition is situated not between official and popular religion, but rather, as I have argued thus far, between private experience, public experience, and shared narrative idioms.

A Divine “Stabbing” While Doing Dishes

There is another level on which these stories about Erika’s experiences can be read. They not only reflect the way *Erika* mingles her relationships with intimate familial and divine figures; they also reflect the affective dynamics that structure *Piroska*’s relationships between heaven and earth. *Piroska* felt that her own subjectivity took shape through her encounters with divine beings, encounters which were mediated through her daughter’s relationships with these beings. *Piroska* told me about one such experience in which she felt a sudden desire to make a pilgrimage to the Marian apparition site at Medjugorje, even though she had previously declined the opportunity to go due to financial limitations:

On one occasion-. Well, this was also a miraculous thing. [Erika] had a miraculous vision this time, as well. She was at university. And so I was all alone. And in my heart I felt that I was really longing to go to Medjugorje, but I have no money. Because my husband had died. I couldn’t get the money to be able to go. Well, [I thought], if the Virgin Mother wants me to go, then I’ll get the money somehow.

Piroska learned from a friend that a trip to Medjugorje was being organized from Miercurea Ciuc, and that there were three seats open on the bus. She shared this information with Erika during one of her visits home from university. *Piroska* was standing at the sink washing her coffee cup the day after Erika returned to university, with only two days before the bus was to

erected these seemingly ‘real’ and concrete divisions [between magic and official religion]” (2011: 231). For examples from literature about Marian pilgrimage, see Harris 1996; de Busser and Niedzwiedz 2009; Tweed 1997.

depart, when she experienced a piercing conviction. “Here, in my heart, I felt something stab into (*belenyilallni*) my heart strongly – not a pain. An instigation. A commandment. Not an instig-. You are going to Medjugorje! As I was washing the cup! I am going to Medjugorje. Just like that. I couldn’t stop myself!” The preparations necessary for a week-long trip came together in under an hour without a single problem. She immediately called Erika after finishing her tasks. “I said, ‘Erika, I’m going to Medjugorje.’ And she responded, from Brassó [Ro.: *Braşov*], ‘I know!’ I said, ‘Kiki, how do you know? I mean, I left you on Monday. This only came to me two h-. This only happened to me two hours ago! That I feel in my heart that I need to go!’

Erika was speaking from her aunt’s apartment nearby the university where she was living while attending classes. At this moment, Erika passed the phone to her aunt, because Erika wanted her to tell Piroska what had just happened: “She said, ‘Imagine! We were sitting here drinking coffee an hour ago and she [Erika] said, just like that, ‘Mom will go to Medjugorje.’ I said, ‘Erika, where are you getting this from?’ She said, ‘I had a dream. And she told me her dream.’” In the dream, Erika had a dream-vision of Mary. Mary did not speak, but she simply smiled at Erika. When she woke up, she told her aunt, “Mom is going to Medjugorje.”

Although divine intercession resulting in the removal of obstacles in the way of making pilgrimage is a genre within Catholic shrine culture, this story is remarkable in the way Piroska’s openness to divine desire simultaneously makes her open to her daughter and Mary (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 98). When Piroska’s experience became fused with Erika’s dream-vision, what might have been her own desire became something else. It was transformed into Mary’s divine desire impinging on Piroska’s desire. The “stabbing” feeling in her heart is revealed to be more than an internal instigation (*indítatás*); it is an external command (*parancs*). It is Erika’s dream-

vision that allows Piroška to experience these emotional “stabs” as divine commandments. The stab becomes heaven breaking through into the mundane routine of washing dishes.

What is critically important, however, is that for Piroška to learn to experience this moment as an encounter with the divine, she must also learn that her relationship with Mary is mediated through Erika’s relationship with this divine being. This sets Piroška’s experience apart from instances of dream interpretation in group settings described in some post-socialist Protestant communities (Clark 2009). Piroška’s dream is not only a matter of making meaning and taking action; Piroška represents this event in terms of the relational space it opens up for her and Erika to re-imagine themselves, each other, and Mary through twinned subjective oneiric and bodily experiences. In other words, Mary’s intervention into their lives, emerging as a single event that is both shared and distinctive in their different experiences as a stabbing sensation and dream, carves out a space of reflection from within the everyday flow of pragmatic task-involvement such as doing the dishes. Within this space, mother and daughter pragmatically play with who they are for themselves and each other through their relationships with Mary; for Piroška, in this encounter as in the others she narrated, this relationship with Mary is finally dependent on the mediating placement of her daughter who feels Mary’s desire directly.

This last feature links Piroška’s account to descriptions of 19th and 20th century apparition events in European Catholic communities. Zimdars-Swartz refers to the sick who crowded around Bernadette of Lourdes, touching the young girl’s body in order to be healed. Others scooped up and ate the dirt on which the young visionary had walked, craving some kind of direct contact with the presence of the divine. Piroška seems to speak of her daughter, like Bernadette, as “the interpreter if not the image of a superior power” who opened new avenues for religious experience (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 50, 80). In this sense, Piroška’s phone conversation

with her daughter is not only a moment of hermeneutical interpretation or the elaboration of one's narrative experience into the "biographical process" of the divine being (Bernstein 2013: 88). Rather, the divine becomes physically present in the subjective experience of painful "stabbing" even as the divine becomes more intricately braided into Piroška's relationship with her daughter.

A Precarious Balance between Engagement and Disengagement

Historians of Catholicism sometimes note the ambivalent psycho-social dynamics that enlivens the worlds that are established around visionaries who have become the "images" of a divine being.²⁷ The visionaries, their friends, and family members are not only bound together by the satisfactions of being under the mutual care of divine patrons, as Piroška was bound to both Erika and Mary on the pilgrimage to Medjugorje. They are also aware of an opposite effect: a feeling that visionaries have become strange and inscrutable, even if they might find it difficult to acknowledge or speak of this. Piroška's statements about her daughter occasionally gave voice to this ambivalence:

From the beginning of her life. From the beginning. As she was growing up, I saw that as she was growing up she was standing out (*kivállni*) from the others. It was strange for me (*furcsa volt nekem*). But in a good way, not bad. She wasn't like the other children. Yes, she was kind. And very cute. But...well...how should I express this? There was a lot of positive in her. More positive.

Piroška is aware that Erika's relationships mediated through her dream-visions have set her apart from those around her. There is a hint of a sense that Erika's openness to the unpredictable desires of divine beings have made her opaque – "strange" – not only to others around her but to Piroška, as well. Yet it also seemed to me in this moment that Piroška sensed the negative and

²⁷ See, for instance, Lucia of Fatima, who was the only one of the three young visionaries at Fatima to survive into adulthood; Zimdars-Swartz notes that the other two children's fatal illnesses were exacerbated by the constant hounding of pilgrims who could not be held back from trying to touch them and have them bless devotional objects even as the children were dying.

critical tone that could be read into such a characterization and thus contextualized it by describing Erika's strangeness as "positive."

This tension was part of all my conversations with Piroška about her daughter. At times, Piroška spoke about a perfect harmony between mother and daughter. She called their apartment a "little heaven;" she described how Erika "tells me everything" when she comes home from work, because the apartment is "blessed by God" and a "refuge" from Erika's daily contact with cruelty at her workplace. At other times, Piroška seemed to acknowledge that divine beings made Erika do things that established her autonomy from Piroška that exceeded this harmony, openness, and honesty. For instance: "I sometimes saw that she was tired afterwards," Piroška once told me, "That is, she is between two worlds. Between two worlds." She continued, "I used to see as she came out of her room that her color had changed. She was different (*más*). Different. It was strange. So I left her alone in quiet." In such statements, Piroška appears to be not quite able to make sense of her daughter's extraordinary experiences; Erika's encounters with divine beings have again made her "different" and "strange."

While accounts of apparitions often feature descriptions of visionaries who frequently experience trance-like states during their encounters with Mary, these states are commonly interpreted in terms of evidentiary practices of proof.²⁸ Piroška's comments about her daughter's "strange" demeanor and the way she kept apart from Erika in these moments offer two alternative interpretations centering on intersubjective dynamics shaped by changes in family structures in the Ciuc valley. First, Piroška wants to be seen as providing for her daughter's independence. She is distancing herself from the picture of the overbearing mother, rooted in the psychological and social dynamics of the rural household, trying in this way to find some kind of

²⁸ For a discussion of seers' ecstatic states as "proof" of the authenticity of their paranormal abilities, see Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 133-8 and her account of the apparitions at Garabandal in Spain.

balance against Csaba Bőjte's effort to use the hyper-intimacy of the mother-son relationships to condemn those who would deny the satisfactions that elites find in such memories. Second, Piroška also evokes the image of the "heroic family," describing her relationship with Erika as a bastion of honesty and openness.²⁹ Scholars have noted the widespread invocation of the "idealized domestic" in post-socialist contexts, although they differ in their portrayals of its significance and sources.³⁰ Gal and Kligman (2000: 76) argue that the idea of the family as solidary unit and nexus of authentic relationships through which the true self became visible became especially salient in Romania under late socialism in the context of widespread fear of predatory socialist government bureaucracies and secret police. Krisztina Fehérváry strengthens and expands the significance of this trope by recasting it within Michel Foucault's (1984) concept of "heterotopia," arguing that consumer-subjects remade the alienated and generic material products of socialism – especially mass-produced apartments – into heterotopic private spaces absolutely set apart, thus "invert[ing] the set of relations governing spaces outside of them" (Fehérváry 2013: 50). Piroška's reference to the idealized domestic does seem to take shape in a context defined by post-socialist legacies that applied the idea of heterotopia to comment on the dishonest, aggressive, and inauthentic private sector interactions that plague her daughter's professional life (Fehérváry 2013: 163; Gal and Kligman 2000: 76).

From Honesty to Anger: The Divine Beings Redirect Their Messages

But Piroška's oblique references to a sense that her daughter was made strange to her and set apart in her openness to divine beings provides a hint of the way that such heterotopias of

²⁹ For other references to the "idealized private sphere," see Fehérváry 2014: 14-8; Dunn 2004: 141; see also Bauman 1991: 40. Gal and Kligman point out that this image of the family was never actually accurate under socialism, since family members betrayed each other to the state police under various circumstances throughout the socialist period in Romania (2000: 77). Instead, they speak of indexical and contested instantiations of private and public (see also Gal 2002).

³⁰ Gal and Kligman's essay is part of a huge body of literature on this topic in the study of socialism and post-socialism, focusing primarily on the informal economy and the construction of the us/them divide: See Creed 1998; Jowitt 1992: 287-94; Sampson 1987; Verdery 1996.

“total honesty” are not so defining in this instance. It turns out that Piroška had no knowledge that Erika had any involvement in the statue affair. Piroška confessed during one of our conversations that Erika had started refusing to tell her about her dream-visions several years before Father Pál’s transfer. Erika’s openness to her mother changed after she overheard Piroška talking about her with a friend through the closed door of the bedroom:

Once it was my mistake, it was my fault, because I told one of her visions to a dear friend, by the name of Marika. And she [Erika] noticed. And she said, ‘Mom, I’m not going to say anything more to you ever again.’ And this hurt me. And this hurt me so much. It hurt so much that now I don’t even ask about her dreams. But I can see it on her, and even now, even now she’s still having dreams. I know it. These things are happening to her.

A number of factors could have contributed to Piroška’s desire to share her daughter’s experiences with Marika. I suspect one possible reason was simply that Piroška shared Biborka and the prayer group members’ fascination with visionaries whose experiences, as they had been told repeatedly by Catholic elites like Judit Ozsváth and István Hajdó, were radically different and alien. Erika, in contrast, did not appreciate being the object of this fascination. When I asked Piroška to tell me more about this exchange, she explained that Erika had become “angry” (*haragni*) and had accosted her in the living room after she got off the phone with Marika. She was so angry that she now refuses to say anything more about her dream-visions. “She is so secretive,” Piroška continued. “It is as if she is guarding this in the depths of her soul.”

After Piroška told me about this altercation, I took out a printed copy of the dream-visions from the Skype exchange between Erika and Father Albert and I carried it across the living room. She admitted that this was the first time she was hearing about this particular dream-vision. She broke from reading the text to recall a time when she had come home to find Erika talking intently with her husband.

They go into the bedroom and they chat and I leave them to talk. She came out on one occasion and said, ‘Don’t take me wrong, Mom. I need to talk with my husband about things that don’t involve you.’ And then I said, ‘You think I didn’t know that? That’s not the issue. It’s just that I have to learn about it now from others.’

Piroska now surmised that this conversation that she had stumbled onto was about the statue affair, but her final comment is the most revealing of all in light of Catholic elites’ bitter recriminations about young people who betray the satisfactions of the multi-generational family by choosing autonomy and emigrating abroad. Piroska’s fascination with her daughter’s experiences led her to act independently to share them with a non-family member. As a result, Erika became angry and disengaged from her, perhaps as an act of a self-protection. Piroska wanted to let Erika act autonomously and take a role in “things that don’t involve” her like the statue affair. But she also felt betrayed by the secrecy that Erika felt was a necessary part of her autonomy. Piroska struck an offended and accusatory tone in the statement about getting the information about the statue affair from “others.” Who these others were remained unclear, but they might have been Father Albert, to whom the Skype message was addressed, which shows the way in which new charismatic prayer groups are providing local Catholics with opportunities to establish new intimacies outside domestic heterotopias.

If Piroska felt betrayed by Erika’s secretiveness, her reflections suggested that getting along with her daughter’s family on a day-to-day basis meant she had to accept her daughter’s reticence, even if she continued to harbor lingering pain. During one of our conversations, I directed her attention to the Skype message in which Erika declared that the dream-vision showed her Father Albert’s face. I asked Piroska, as politely as I could, how it felt to know that God and Mary were using Erika to send messages to Father Albert when they no longer wanted to send messages to her. Her first response was to insist that she had to accept this, if it was God’s will. While she said that everyone has a cross to bear, she still admitted that it causes her

pain that she no longer receives messages: “It hurts. It hurts that she doesn’t talk to me anymore. She keeps quiet about it. She didn’t have confidence (*bizalom*) in me.” She recognized that social sanctions and criticism frequently levied against visionaries necessitated Erika’s decision to disengage, even though this decision still stings. However, she cannot dwell on the pain caused by her daughter’s secretiveness:

I have sealed off (*lezárni*) that fact that it once hurt me. So I keep quiet now. And I entrust this to the Virgin Mother. And to the Lord Jesus. She [Erika] doesn’t talk about this now. At one time, she did talk about it. But now she doesn’t say anything. This hurts me. It hurts.

Still, this acceptance sat uncomfortably with her ongoing desire to return to a relationship of engagement, honesty, and openness, as Piroska suggested in a later comment: “She’s afraid that I will talk about these dreams with someone else. She doesn’t trust me so much anymore. By now, no. Truly. If something happens to her, I won’t say anything to anyone.” Piroska’s promise to keep her daughter’s confidences seems to cut in two directions, mirroring the way Erika and Piroska’s relationship sat sometimes uncomfortably across the boundary between heaven and earth causing Piroska to look upon her daughter as “strange:” While the promise gives voice to a longing for the lost pleasures and satisfactions that Piroska experienced in intimate moments when Erika entrusted her mother with her most private subjective experience, it also displays regret for the decisions that Erika and divine beings took to isolate Piroska from their interactions.

The desire for a daughter’s autonomy that then leads to betrayal, accepting independence by necessity but harboring lingering resentments – these are psycho-social dynamics that are not unique to Erika and Piroska’s lives, but rather constitute a Catholic world at Csíksomlyó defined by bitter conflicts about dependence, autonomy, and the virtues and vices of the multi-generational family. When Transylvanian Catholic elites like Csaba Bőjte write about the family,

they construct oppositions that are both relevant to Erika and Piroska's lives and also sit at an awkward angle across their lived experience. Although Bőjte and others draw on real experiences of dislocation in order to generate luscious praise for the intense openness and intimacy shared between mother and son, Erika sees the need to modulate the balance of engagement and disengagement as a way to make some use of the demands put on her by divine beings while also establishing a position for herself with a Roman Catholic Church in flux. When Erika invited the divine beings into her life – we might also say that Father Albert invited them in on her behalf even as they themselves dropped in unbidden into Erika's dreams – they set to pulling on the same tense cords that Erika had grip of in her own search for the right balance between familial dependence and autonomy.

The same point can be made about Erika's position vis-à-vis Catholic discussions of visionary subjectivity at Csíksomlyó. What is striking is that, first and foremost, I sensed Erika was adverse to any kind of condescending treatment. This would have been a concern not only by virtue of the association between childhood suffering and powerlessness that was evident in Piroska and Father Albert's interpretation of the sources and meanings of Erika's religious experiences. As I argued in Chapter One, ecclesiastical and ethnological writers describe visionaries as under threat and in need of protection and patronage. Most often these authors present themselves as best able to provide this protection for these "simple," "poor," and "vulnerable" seers. Yet Erika seemed not at all interested in being protected by such figures. Her choice of alternatives to the tropes preferred by Piroska and Father Albert reflects this. She avoided linking meaning-making to powerlessness in the face of misfortune and suffering. While she spoke of seeing dream-images in front of her while fully awake, she never spoke of suffering as a result of her encounters between heaven and earth. The voices whose voices speak to her

and she takes on in her messages are authoritative and male, demanding first and foremost respect, recognition, and deference. Nor did Erika express any desire to be seen as open to the divine by virtue of inhabiting the world of the stereotypical visionary – the old woman who lives “close to the rhythms of nature.” As she strolled around urban Miercurea Ciuc, chatted about studying English at university, watched her daughter jump through a jungle gym, shopped for ballet slippers, and gave waitresses instructions about when she would pay her bill, Erika strove to set herself apart as consumer savvy, worldly, traveled, curious, and socially mobile – everything that visionaries are not supposed to be according to those who would protect them from tourists’ onslaught. These associations between powerlessness and condescension no doubt were on her mind as she considered how to speak about her religious experiences.

The Priest’s Subjectivity between Heaven and Earth

Mary and the divine beings’ interventions opened up new relationships not only for Erika and Piroska to experiment with stances of dependence and autonomy towards each other; this was also true for Father Pál. I have already discussed the way the divine beings’ interventions created a frame for new intimacies in Father Pál’s life as he gathered with three other men on the hillside at Csíksomlyó following Erika’s dream-visions. By the summer of 2013, however, Father Pál was troubled by the fact that Erika was now avoiding him. For instance, Father Pál was puzzled after Erika had apparently crossed to the other side of the street to avoid him one afternoon in Miercurea Ciuc. His confusion was not only a feeling that shaped his relationship with Erika; it raised questions for him concerning his relationship with divine beings. When we first met in 2010, Father Pál was eager to tell me about how he understood his role in the community around Csíksomlyó. He described himself as a “mediator” who can “open up the heavens” so that light flows out onto the world, “burning out” negative feelings in the

community. By 2013, his tone had changed and he admitted that he had acted overly self-confident in assuming that Erika's dream-visions ought to be shared with the world: I am not convinced," he reflected, "that she was happy that I released all those people onto her...I don't know how much of this came from God or from my soul, if I forced it on her."

This statement suggesting a new, hesitant reaching out towards a partially altered sense of self points to the essentially intersubjective character of Marian apparitions. Typically, anthropologists and historians emphasize priests' ability to manipulate seers' narratives about their experiences for the purpose of proving visions' authenticity and popularizing new shrines. Such transformation on the part of the seer under the influence of the priest can be understood, in part, as a type of "charismatic" interaction. From a phenomenological perspective, the charismatic self is auto-effecting, creating its own boundaries and defining the interactional context for the other who is thus open to the machinations of the charismatic subject but not able to exert reciprocal influence.³¹ Accounts of apparition events frequently include priests' vociferously denying accusations concerning such self-interested manipulation, which only serve to demonstrate their charismatic influence over seers.³² But what is distinctive about the statue affair is the fact that Father Pál and Father Albert's subjectivities were just as broken open and reoriented by the world established in Mary and the divine beings' interventions as Erika and Piroska. Father Pál's subjectivity also became susceptible and open to transformation through Erika and Mary's actions. Mary's messages through Erika had sacralized his mission in the community, but the uproar that resulted in submitting to Mary's desires made Erika the object of

³¹ I adapt this definition as a simplification of Csordas, who offers a much more elaborate understanding of charisma based on the tripartite conceptual framework of locus, source, and object of charisma (1997). I am also indebted to Galina Lindquist's treatment of Csordas's theory in terms of the healer-healed dyad as "charismatic" love in Russian alternative medical clinics (2006: 20-3).

³² See, for instance, Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 97. While Zimdars-Swartz notes that doubting the validity of an apparition can reverberate between a seer and the surrounding devotees, doubt does not seem to be the issue at stake between Father Pál and Erika in this moment (Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 147-51).

uncomfortable attention. And when Erika disengages from those with whom she became involved through the dream-visions, she also disengaged Father Pál from a relationship that had helped constitute his sense of self as a priest and community leader. The divine breaking into the lives of devotees as they were doing the everyday work of orienting themselves to worlds in and around Csíksomlyó led Father Pál to doubt one of the ways he enacts the mediating role that is central to his relation with Mary. In this way, his relationships with divine beings were taken up and altered by dynamics of his making, but also outside his control – dynamics taking shape in the space between subjective experience and collective life – once he had opened himself up to Mary and Erika through the dream-visions.

Since it is Mary's ability to intercede in the lives of her devotees that give her shrines efficacy, in Transylvanian Hungarian communities, as in other post-socialist contexts, the erection of new shrines has been crucial in crafting broad collective narratives that reorder time and space, reconsecrate the post-socialist Transylvanian Hungarian landscape, and set in motion various claims for minority political and cultural autonomy within Romania and religious prominence within Catholicism. However, I have argued that such claims are preceded by multiple contested pragmatic applications of a visionary's subjective encounters with divine beings. Political claims must be understood to be critically dependent upon the intersubjective politics of pragmatic narrative engagement with experience if scholars are to avoid situating the action of religion and politics in processes leading to social integration. Additionally, the statue affair was also an exercise in encountering to the newly revealed desires of divine beings, and I have shown how these desires took shape in an intersubjective process of being at grips with various social and religious worlds. While this chapter has focused on some intersubjective relational processes at the pilgrimage site, the hillside shrine also constituted a major change to

the built infrastructure of the pilgrimage site. The hillside shrine is just one of several major new buildings and structures installed at Csíksomlyó around the time of my fieldwork, and I use these examples in the next chapter to include recent theories of material culture in my discussion of religious change.

Chapter Four: Remodeling Mary's Post-Socialist Home

I. Introduction: Materialities and Devotional Worlds

One of the first signs you see as you approach the pilgrimage site from Miercurea Ciuc is a banner that reads, “The Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó Welcomes Her Children Home.” Many anthropologists of religion and pilgrimage in Eastern Europe have noted the critical roles that concepts of “home” play in this area (de Busser and Niedzwiedz 2009; Katic 2014; Losonczy 2009; Tsimouris 2014). Symbolic and linguistic analysis have generally served as the primary theoretical touchstones for these anthropological discussions of “home.” Anthropologists outside the field of pilgrimage studies have recently begun arguing that the study of material culture can shed new light on the way “house/home can produce, reinforce, and transform persons as social beings” (Fehérváry 2013: 13; see also Reis 2009; Keane 2003). The angular lines and concrete-gray shades of poured-concrete urban apartment blocks built in Miercurea Ciuc in the 1970s and ‘80s were prime venues for extending socialist ideology and modernity into material forms encountered in everyday life (Attfield 2007; Humphrey 2005). Today, post-socialist political and entrepreneurial elites continue to promulgate social reconstruction in and through domestic material forms, for instance by building new single-family homes painted in vibrant hues in suburban housing developments. And ordinary residents in Miercurea Ciuc and surrounding villages do what they can to contribute their own efforts to this trend by repainting socialist-era apartment building exteriors, reconstructing apartment interiors, or adding extensions onto village houses.

Although Csíksomlyó might seem to be a set of purely religious structures, the banner’s text reveals that it, too, serves as a home: as *Mary’s* home. As such, the pilgrimage site was no less affected by the post-socialist drive to remake subjectivity through domestic material

transformation. Sometimes it seemed to me, during my fieldwork, that the pilgrimage site's material infrastructure was in a constant state of reconstruction. I mentioned one of these changes in the previous chapter: the installation of a statue and cupola structure on the hillside below the amphitheater. Besides this new structure, previous projects at the site included the installation of a new altar in the amphitheater and the construction of a bathing area around a natural spring. While these projects took place in nearby areas, within the church itself the Franciscans replaced a system of ropes with metal gates for crowd control leading up to Mary's statue. And new single-family houses were filling suburban developments in former agricultural land around Csíksomlyó. In turn, those who came into habitual contact with these new material forms were shaped by the affective sensibilities and norms inhering in these three-dimensional structures (Fehérvári 2013: 9; Keane 2006; Meneley 2008).

In this chapter, I examine several of these material transformations that constituted efforts to “remodel Mary's home.” I take insights of scholars of material culture as a theoretical guidepost.¹ But I also seek to balance this approach with phenomenological descriptions of materiality as caught up within a dialectical play in and through subjectivity. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's effort to root the perception of material objects in embodied worlds provides one vector within phenomenology we can follow to surface this dialectic. For Merleau-Ponty, material objects possess creative potentialities independent of human meaning by virtue of their very material structures and qualities. “Prior to and independently of other people, the thing achieves that miracle of expression: an inner reality which reveals itself externally, a significance which descends into the world and begins its existence there...” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 373).²

¹ In religious studies, Birgit Meyer's notion of “aesthetic formations” captures a sense in which material semiotic forms orient subjectification (Meyer 2010: 751; 2009)

² See also Merleau-Ponty's description of material signification that comes close to C. S. Peirce's conception of semiotic linguistics: “The passing of sensory givens before our eyes or under our hands is, as it were, a language

Materiality takes this independent shape, however, only insofar as it fully inhabits worlds that are also fully inhabited by subjects, worlds that both pre-exist them but also emerge in conjunction with their pragmatic activity. This account of material objects in lifeworlds is critical to any phenomenological understanding of objects insofar as it provides an account of the way an object's pragmatic relating to its whole environment, shaped in part by its form and materiality, provides a matrix for the subject's engagement with the objects within that environment.

One of the metaphors Merleau-Ponty uses to evoke this process imagines a person moving from a brightly lit part of a room into a shady corner in which a white piece of paper is sitting. The object's color changes in the process, and thus the object becomes what it is through its pragmatic interactions with the light, walls, and person that constitute a whole environment: This world, Merleau-Ponty argues, "surrounds us, becoming our environment in which we establish ourselves.... [It] steals round the subject and offers to come to terms with him" (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 362). A world, in this sense, is partly shaped by the material and formal interactions between a particular object standing out against a penumbral background of other less demanding, but no less constitutive material objects, such as the light and the walls. And these objects, interlaced with each other as in a world, *act* on us as we pragmatically engage with such a materialized world, although this action is not imagined as a process of materiality dictating to the subject, but rather as the way in which objects and subjects weave themselves together in the process of pragmatically *inhabiting* the world together. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, "smoothness" as a particular materiality quality of an object may act independently on subjects, but not outside of reciprocal pragmatic encounters: "Hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness... present themselves... as a certain kind of symbiosis, certain ways the outside has of

which teaches itself, and in which the meaning is secreted by the very structure of the signs, and this is why it can literally be said that our senses question things and that things reply to them" (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 372).

invading us and certain ways we have of meeting this invasion...” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 370). Both the moment of invasion and subjective responses are inseparably present in the object, whose materiality “suspends” around it particular gestures that form subjectivity even as subjects also use gestures to form objects: “The object which presents itself to the gaze or the touch arouses a certain motor intention which aims not at the movements of one’s own body, but at the thing itself from which they are, as it were, suspended” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 370). And this mutual engagement between subject and object is only effective insofar as embodied subjects and objects continuously inhabit a loosely structured and open-ended world that allows them to be synchronized in and to each other (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 361-2, 369).

This chapter examines two groups of changing spaces at the pilgrimage site. In Part Two, I describe the spaces and materialities of the first group which includes the new “Trimount Altar” (*harmashalom oltár*) in the amphitheater, the “Brothers’ Bath” (*barátok fűdője*) bathing area, and the hillside shrine to Mary. I argue that the material forms of the first group, which were organized and financed largely by post-socialist entrepreneurial elites, heighten anxieties among members of the Franciscan Order, county government, and Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy concerning entrepreneurial desire. While these exterior structures are the focus of conflicts among these elite groups, Mary’s devotees, in contrast, are most often found inside the Csíksomlyó church. In Part Three, I examine a system of ropes used for crowd control in and around the church as well as the new metal gates that replaced them during the 2011 pilgrimage. I argue that the materiality of these objects bears directly on the pragmatic behavioral habits of devotees and a group of all-male volunteer security guards who serve in the church. I then relate the story of a devotee named Edina who described an experience of feeling Mary “call” her to the statue despite the fact that the security guards had pulled up a rope to block access. I argue

that both the guards' work in general and this incident are best understood through the lens of materiality's inhabitation of lifeworlds as subjects orient themselves along precarious paths of social mobility.

II. Post-Socialist Aesthetics and the Search for the Catholic Leading Class

The “Organicist Suburbanization” of Csiksomlyó

The most prominent new structures built at the site since 1989 – the new altar, bathing area, and hillside shrine – predominantly reflect the “Organicist” aesthetic that came to prominence in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s. Krisztina Fehérváry ties the emergence of this aesthetic to a vernacular response to the “Socialist Modernism” that characterized construction and domestic material worlds in Hungary in the 1950s and 60s. Urban Hungarians sought to humanize and organicize modernist aesthetic configurations, perceived to be cold and unnatural, by bringing wood, fabrics, and folk arts – the forms of a stylized rurality – into urban apartments (Fehérváry 2013: 149-50). The designers who have had the most access to the shrine positioned themselves as the vanguard of this popular preference for Organicism and rejection of socialist modernist aesthetics.³ And since socialist modernism was associated with urban space, Organicism's designs were most prominently adopted in growing post-socialist suburbs in Hungary. Architect Imre Makovecz, whose suburban home and church designs mixed Hungarian folk art traditions and more esoteric far eastern motifs, had a direct influence on the material world of the shrine through the installation of a stage that he designed specifically for the natural amphitheater in 1996.⁴ The form of the Trimount Altar follows his principle of matching design to the specific contours and needs of a place. The altar's undulating roof covered with grayish-

³ See Ferkai's (1998: 290) description of this wing of the organicist movement: In his assessment, modernism reflected the “domination of bureaucrats and the building industry over architectural creativity.”

⁴ See Fehérváry 2013: 149-52 for a description of Makovecz's beliefs about organicism as the rejection of communism and capitalism.

green slate tiles conjures multiple associations. First, the altar is intended to accommodate itself to the specific natural landscape of the site. The rounded covering evokes the mountains that form the amphitheater on either side while its materials are intended to withstand the long winters and generally wet weather of the Ciuc valley. The tripartite shape also calls to mind Christian symbolism of the Trinity and the mountain of Golgotha where Jesus was crucified. In a typical move characteristic of the Organicists' frequent associations with right-wing forms of nationalism, it evokes national symbolism by pointing to a series of three mountain ranges that once fell within Dualist Hungary and now lie principally within the borders of Slovakia. The structure is unpainted so that the gray of the exposed wood of the front stairs matches the color of the altar's rough-hewn and uneven natural stone materials. These features similarly evoke the rocky soil and pine-forests of the surroundings area, as well as the use of non-professional, local craftsmen in its construction. Finally, the altar is set into a mound covered in grass so that the altar seems to either be flowing from the earth itself or receding back into the hillside. All these elements accentuate the virtues of "Organicism" over the clean-lines of poured-concrete panel houses that characterized socialist modernism in Hungary as well as in nearby Miercurea Ciuc.

Later architectural projects adapted and applied Organicist sensibilities in the construction of other buildings and structures at the site. The Brothers' Bath is a large pool set in a field behind the Csíksomlyó monastery linked to the main road by a series of wooden planks forming a path. The structure is dominated by rough-hewn exposed pine lightly stained in order to match the rust-color of the spring water from the pool, accentuating the synchronicity between design and natural features of the site. The tulip pattern that liberally adorn structures around the Bath pays homage to the followers of the secessionist style who considered this to be a distinctively Hungarian motif (see Fehérváry 2013: 149). Commentators from Hungary used

Organicism, in the case of the Bath, to make a point that post-socialist reconstruction was a matter of letting nature flow where it had been suppressed by socialist modernism. Budapest-based publisher László Gulyás featured the newly remodeled Bath in a photo-essay in his annual *Csíksomlyó* magazine, noting that while it still stood in the 1980s, surrounded by a rotting wooden structure, it was subsequently “filled in” (*betemetni*). Today, Gulyás writes, it “bubbles up with a plentiful flow” (Gulyás 2007: 20-1).

Incompletion and Ambivalence Materialized: The Hillside Shrine

Although the hillside shrine might at first appear to continue the pattern set by the Trimount Altar and Brothers’ Bath in which the norms inhering in such Organicist forms are situated along a clear binary – in this case between the reviled socialist past and an organic future – on closer inspection the shrine’s material form embodies not a dichotomy but rather incompleteness and ambivalence. Ápor, the architect and associate of Father Pál whom I introduced in Chapter Three, wrote the proposal for the construction of the cupola submitted to the DCCNCH. He uses typical Organicist principles to justify the structure, emphasizing the harmony between the new structure and the natural features of the site: “The cupola is a sacred structure in a sacred site and landscape on the “Holy Mountain” of Şumuleu Ciuc.” To this he adds the fact that it is “constructed from prime ‘organic’ building materials and tailored for this [sacred] purpose and destination.” The columns supporting the cupola are made from rough-hewn pine retaining open cracks exposed in the surface. They are adorned with tulip motifs and other esoteric and “eastern” designs. The statue of the Virgin sits atop a large stone roughly hewn in the shape of a map of Dualist Hungary, a strongly nationalistic symbol.

When I met with Father Pál, however, he explained that the DCCNCH’s intervention had prevented him from completing the structure, and that several of the elements he left off would

have made the site more closely resemble both Organicist and Catholic aesthetic forms as he had originally intended. Ápor's proposal describes an exposed natural stone staircase leading up to the shrine that would have closely resembled the exposed stonework of the Trimount Altar: "Because of the great difference in the grade of the terrain," Ápor writes, "it is also necessary to execute a staircase from natural stone [*din piatră naturală*]." ⁵ A simple metal balustrade was also supposed to stand around the statue, preventing people from crowding around and touching it. This too was not built, with the result that access to the statue is free from all sides. The back side of the shrine is currently an uneven eroding cut into the hillside, but it was intended to be covered by a retaining wall complete with decorative windows: "For the prevention of erosion, it is protected by a retaining wall. . . . Blind windows will be situated in the side of the retaining wall." Father Pál told me that he had initially planned on digging deeper into the hillside to construct a replica Lourdes grotto to provide a stronger signal that an apparition like the one that had taken place at Lourdes had happened here, as well. This plan was also waylaid by the government intervention. Finally, Ápor's application notes that, "under the cupola will be placed a copper cross," copper being the same material Makovecz prominently featured in the church that he designed for downtown Miercurea Ciuc. ⁶ The result of the DCCNCH's interventions is noticeable in the symbolism of the hillside shrine insofar as a Lourdes grotto would have led visitors more easily to identify this location as a site of a Marian apparition, whereas the current design leaves this significance ambiguous. A critical meaning that could have potentially been borne by the structure was thus altered or redirected.

⁵ The Technical Documentation for Building Permits is on file with the county office of the Department under Project Number A-303/2010, "Amplasare Statuie Și Realizare Amenajare Cu Copertină Și Scară De Acces" [Locating a Statue and the Completion of Improvements with Cupola and Access Stairs]. The appeal of the Department's decision is on file as Contestation Number 323. Copies of these documents are also in the possession of the author and available on request.

⁶ For articles on Makovecz and his involvement in building this church, see Botond 2014.

Organicism and the Post-Socialist Entrepreneurial “Itch”

Given the financial and organizational weakness of the Transylvanian Franciscan Order in the immediate post-socialist period, the material transformation of the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage site has been primarily organized by elites acting from institutional positions outside the Order. The marginalization of the Franciscans from the material reconstruction of these exterior spaces at the pilgrimage site is due to the lack of clarity about who legally or effectively controls the land used during the annual pilgrimage event. The Department for Culture, Cults and National Cultural Heritage (DCCNCH) – a state-level office with a regional committee in the city of Braşov and local officials in Miercurea Ciuc – must approve construction within a certain radius of historically protected structures such as the medieval chapels on top of one of the mountains forming the amphitheater. The amphitheater is also within the boundaries of the land held in common for animal grazing by the town of Csíksomlyó and administered by a Town Commons Commission. Finally, suburban housing developments are creeping out from Miercurea Ciuc toward the pilgrimage site, some of them financed by entrepreneurs from Hungary (see Image 2).

Despite the entrepreneurial classes’ insistence that their use of Organicism was attuned to the natural attributes of the pilgrimage site’s landscape, the near-constant derogatory refrain about these suburban housing developments and the new additions to the pilgrimage site exterior was that they had a deleterious aesthetic effect; they ruined Csíksomlyó’s “ancient image” (*ősi kép*). In the words of the Harghita County representative of the DCCNCH, who actively opposed the construction of the cupola over the hillside shrine, “What they built offends the image that has developed about Csíksomlyó. What people know about this place.” She went on to lump the shrine together with the expanding suburbs as dangers to the shrine’s image: “The monastery

was all alone at one point; now the city has grown around it. It's lost the characteristic of being far from the city.”

Tensions between groups of elites promoting differing regional and national identities seemed to overlap with these criticisms of Organicism. From 1993 until 1996, when it was replaced by the nationally-resonant Makovecz altar, the main Pentecost Mass was held on an altar built by local carpenters in the shape of a hay-meadow cabin closely associated with regional Szekler agricultural practices before it was replaced by the nationally resonant Makovecz altar (Márk n.d.). During my fieldwork, a series of architectural contests sought to formulate the “Szekler house” as an alternative to foreign styles that had become popular among the new Transylvanian Hungarian entrepreneurial classes. A 2010 architectural contest organized by a consortium of local and county governmental and non-profit organizations, as well as several Catholic parishes, asked entrants to reformulate, for the “people of the contemporary age,” the Szekler house “as an inheritance that our ancestors left behind” (Daczó 2010).⁷ Later conferences in Miercurea Ciuc on the “Modern Szekler House” promoted such designs as a way to “preserve the traditional village-picture [*falukép*].” Reflecting the ambivalent reputation of entrepreneurs in contemporary Transylvanian Catholic communities, the contest produced designs “contemporary, comfortable, and landscape-appropriate houses” to be built not for entrepreneurs, but rather “for young intellectual families” (*értelmiségi családok*). Notably, the two winning designs for the “Szekler house” contest and the nine for the “Modern Szekler House” conference did not resemble Organicist style buildings at the pilgrimage site. Although

⁷ <http://www.szekelyhon.ro/aktualis/csikszek/kiadvany-a-szekely-hazrol>

the designs used exposed stone- and woodwork, they prominently featured angular forms that stood out in contrast to Makovecz's flowing Organicist Trimount Altar.⁸

As I discussed in Chapter One, aligned with this sense that Organicism was a foreign import were anxieties about the role of the entrepreneurial class in Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic life. These anxieties are the driving force behind a publication reviewing the history of the Trimount Altar featured on the Csíksomlyó Franciscan monastery's official web site. The Franciscan monk who authored the article refers disparagingly to Father Pál's role in building the altar. In particular, he criticizes Father Pál and the Csíksomlyó parish council – and by proxy the Town Commons Commission – for claiming that they had sole right to use the land in the amphitheater and the altar: “Altogether 3.75 hectares of the amphitheater belong to the monastery. There was a verbal agreement with Father Pál that while only the Franciscans could use the altar during the pilgrimage, on other occasions the parish priest could also use it” (Márk n.d.).⁹

A criticism of entrepreneurs' role in remaking the materiality of the shrine also lurks behind this remark. I repeatedly heard clergy and Franciscan monks offer harsh assessments of Father Pál's role in the new hillside shrine. When I spoke with the chief priest of the Miercurea Ciuc parish, he attributed the emergence of the shrine to Father Pal's personal “itch” (*viszketni*) to call attention to himself. Anxieties about entrepreneurs' involvement in remaking the pilgrimage site was not a new phenomenon related specifically to the hillside shrine, but rather it seemed that Father Pál had been the target of such attacks at least since the late 1990s when the Trimount Altar was built. Although Imre Makovecz designed the Trimount Altar, the project was

⁸ <http://www.arch.hu/tovabbi-oroksegvedelem/modern-szekely-haz-tervek-ingeny-szekelyfold-epített-oroksegenek-megvedeseert>.

⁹ The article appears to have been written before Father Pál's retirement, since it does not refer to the controversies surrounding his transfer.

organized and executed under the auspices of Father Pál's network. Makovecz's plans were adapted to the site by a local Miercurea Ciuc architect, Ernő Bogos, who worked with Father Pál on several other projects (Szócs 2013). Father Pál also took the lead in arranging the financing for the project. The description of the altar written for the official Csíksomlyó monastery web site retains hints of discomfort with Father Pál's friendly relationships with Hungarian government and entrepreneurial figures as enacted in such projects. The author of the article, an older monk who served at Csíksomlyó through the late socialist period, notes that Father Pál "utilized financial support from departments of the Budapest government." The monk then names several of these donors, including a number of prominent right-wing politicians in Hungary. However, he downplays their significance by insisting that the financial assistance, "in part or in total was donated by the [Roman Catholic] Hungarian National Pastoral Institute." Although the article acknowledges the contributions of these entrepreneurs and politicians to the making of the pilgrimage site, the entrepreneurs aligned with Father Pál also come under critical scrutiny for these activities.

The ambivalent relationship between the entrepreneurial class and the Franciscan Order becomes even clearer in the Franciscan monk's subsequent statements about the altar. The construction work itself, he notes, was dependent on a number of entrepreneurs whose involvement was arranged through Father Pál's parish: "The Csíksomlyó parish council completed the construction under the leadership of entrepreneurs [*vállalkozók*] Dénes Török and István Erőss and their crews of workers." But the monk is obviously displeased about an attempt by Father Pál and the entrepreneurs' to attract attention to their involvement in the Trimount Altar's construction. He belittles a plaque Father Pál had affixed to Altar declaring that the Csíksomlyó Parish Council arranged this structure. "It was Father Pál," the monk writes, "who

put up a plaque saying that ‘the Csíksomlyó parish council built’ the Trimount Altar. But the plaque is inadequate, because it forgets to say, based on whose donations?’ The way the monk treats the plaque as an inappropriately ostentatious gesture calls to mind the Franciscans’ discomfort at the entrepreneur’s over-pious showboating during his visit to the monastery that I described in Chapter One, demonstrating again the anxieties such figures provoke among Catholic elites at the pilgrimage site.

Materiality, Form, and Subjectivity at the Shrine

In the previous section, I have described the way in which material forms provided another venue for the ambivalent search for a post-socialist Catholic leading class at the pilgrimage site. However, one of the primary insights of scholarship on socialist and post-socialist materialities has been to show that material objects are not simply meaningful or symbolic structures in this way, but rather that the materiality and form of the Trimount Altar and other new Organicist structures at Csíksomlyó constitute aspects of unescapable “material worlds” that reconstitutes, develops, fuses with, and resists the embodied subjectivities of those who interact with them (Fehérváry 2013: 9; Humphrey 2005). The various modern domestic spaces around Csíksomlyó are not as rigorously structured so as to thoroughly orient subjects in stable social cosmologies in the way Pierre Bourdieu imagined the Kabyle house (Bourdieu 1977; Fehérváry 2013: 13). Still, the way domestic spaces fuse with embodied subjectivity helps people feel variously comfortable, out-of-place, effective, or ineffective as they move through the homologously materialized spaces that they encounter elsewhere, such as the pilgrimage site in the highly contested process of being materially reworked and reimagined as “home.”

As a design movement that emerged in historical processes particular to embodied responses to socialist politics in Hungary, it was my sense that the Organicist forms at the

pilgrimage site were tailored to the subjectivities of Hungarians from Hungary. And since the Transylvanian Hungarian suburban entrepreneurial class found social inspiration and models of desire in Hungarians from Hungary, they too viewed these material forms as places they should be comfortable in. The visionary Erika, who was concerned at times with being an effective presence in post-socialist urban and suburban consumerist worlds, positively evaluated the hillside shrine by noting that it was in the open air and always available for use. The statue inside the pilgrimage site church was often locked and when it was open there were often people around who disturbed efforts at quiet prayer. It was a good feeling to be at the statue, she argued, because she liked getting away from the city and looking out over the expansive view. Ápor's application to the DCCNCH replicated the same argument: "Furthermore, as a building without walls, it can be used freely as a place of prayer...." The values of ease of movement, open space, and free access were the primary virtues materialized not only in the material form of the hillside shrine's Organicist structure, but also in the people who used it.

If Erika's evaluation of this Organicist form was positive, others offered sly hints that these structures were making Csíksomlyó comfortable for people who did not necessarily belong there. The ethnologist Vilmos Tánzos lobbed this kind of indirect criticism in a 2010 lecture he delivered at a conference at the pilgrimage site celebrating Csíksomlyó's entry into a partnership with other Eastern European Marian pilgrimage sites. One of the goals of the conference was to bring community leaders together in order to develop ideas for using this partnership to attract more visitors to Csíksomlyó. Tánzos warned the audience that Csíksomlyó was vulnerable to those who would restructure the "time and space" of the pilgrimage site according to their own desires, and one of his comments about such interloper politicians from Hungary pointed to his sense that Organicist material forms were providing spaces for their efforts: "Various kinds of

political representatives, Hungarian politicians for instance, very much like to linger on the Trimount Altar,” he told the audience. His ironic use of the verb “to linger” (*tartozkódní*), a self-consciously formal word used primarily in news reports, suggests that this architectural form that provides high visibility appeals to this group’s general desire for attention and self-promotion such that they feel comfortable enough to “linger” there.

If Organicism’s fortunes waxed and waned in Hungary alongside the politicized tastes of the post-socialist middle class, initially being lauded as a rejection of socialist modernist aesthetics and then gaining detractors for its associations with right-wing nationalism, it faces an uncertain fate at the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage site (Fehérváry 2013: 196-7). Organicism’s reception at Csíksomlyó, I have argued, was ambivalent from the beginning because of Catholic Church elites’ ambivalent relationships with the entrepreneurs who felt most comfortable inhabiting such forms. The Organicist Trimount Altar was also seen to have displaced a material form in which an idealized rural Szekler peasant would have felt at home. Finally, Catholic elites deride the visual prominence of the hillside shrine for the way it serves entrepreneurs’ embodied inclination towards desiring self-promotion and the “itch” for attention. Still, the weak position of the Franciscan Order after 1989 and conflicting claims to ownership of land at Csíksomlyó have marginalized Catholic elites from processes of material transformation. Governmental agencies like the DCCNCH have stepped in, but this has only led to an uncertain process of “Organicist Suburbanization” and material forms that partially and ambivalently embody Organicist norms.

If most of these changes and conflicts took place in areas away from the pilgrimage site church and Mary’s statue, this part of Mary’s “home” has not been immune to the ambivalent

program of material transformation. In the next section, I examine changes to material forms inside the Csíksomlyó church.

III. Changing Church Materialities: What Does It Feel Like When Mary Calls?

From Ropes to Gates in the Pilgrimage Site Church

Although the most noticeable changes to the material form of the pilgrimage site – which I call the “Organicist Suburbanization” of Csíksomlyó – took place in areas away from the shrine church, the church and its adjacent courtyard have not been immune to this recent conflicted and ambivalent program of material transformation. The most prominent change to these spaces during my fieldwork took place in 2011 when the system of ropes that had been used to keep devotees in line as they waited to pray at Mary’s statue was replaced with iron gates. These gates also stretched out the front doors of the church in order to prevent scenes like the one I saw during the Pentecost event in 2010 when the group of security guards called the “organizers” (*rendező*) pushed aside the line of devotees snaking across the exterior courtyard, threatening to obstruct the procession up to the amphitheater. In 2011, the iron gates stretched out the right-hand side door of the church and along the long side of the courtyard.

These gates also prevented similar conflicts inside the church such as one I witnessed on the Sunday of the Pentecost pilgrimage in 2010. I was seated in the church balcony looking down on the line of devotees as they repeatedly stepped across the rope barriers into and out of line. Devotees had also pushed out in the center aisle; they were also on the chancel and heading towards the statue. The priests coming out of the sacristy to begin the Mass dodged around devotees who were still moving forward. The number of devotees who remained on the chancel – in part because they simply stepped under the rope after it had been pulled across – was so large that they continued processing up to the statue all through the Mass. During the 2011

pilgrimage, the new system of gates ensured that devotees could only gain access to the statue from the very back of the line beginning outside in the courtyard.

Ropes, Gates, and the Roughness of the *Rendező* Crew

For the *rendező* crew who are primarily responsible for interacting with devotees amid the material spaces of the church interior and courtyard, the materiality of the ropes mediated insecurities about masculine subjectivities and social mobility. These volunteers are a post-socialist addition to life at Csíksomlyó, organized in the early 1990s by the Franciscan monks with the help of Endre, a local biology teacher, in response to the growing numbers of participants at the pilgrimage and throughout the year. According to Endre, who continues to serve as *rendező* crew chief long after his retirement from teaching, the crew's mission is "keeping order and directing the crowd" in all the areas of the pilgrimage site, including "around the church, in the church, in the procession up to the amphitheater, around the amphitheater, and outside in the crowd [*nép*]." A small group of six to eight *rendező* serve at the church each Sunday during the year, with the number doubling during special holidays and then expanding to about seventy participants for the annual Pentecost pilgrimage. While Endre described the makeup of the members as a mixed group, coming from urban, suburban, and rural areas around Csíksomlyó, he hit on some of the same tensions I encountered while interacting with the working class men whose feelings about social aspiration and mobility I described in Chapter Two: In particular, he highlighted the conflict between members who were urban and cultivated, and those who were rural, rough and simple. When I asked him if I could meet with crew members, he directed me away from talking with the latter, and instead provided me with names of lawyers, judges, and other "intellectuals" (*értelmiségiek*) on the crew.

I sometimes overheard my acquaintances grumble about the *rendező* crew members' rough behavior, criticizing them as interlopers among the ranks of "intellectual" elites and thus underscoring this tension between cultivation and boorishness. For instance, the following conversation among three members of the Csíksomlyó church choir during a bus trip to a choir festival maligned the *rendező* in this fashion. In this excerpt from a longer exchange, my seat mate, Paula, was chatting with a married couple, Alex and Izabella, about a recent uncomfortable encounter with the *rendező* crew:

[Al.]: You know what the problem is? Endre was given a task and now he's become such a great big important person.

[Pa.]: And sometimes the guards don't even let the village groups into the church at all!

[Al.]: Yes, they push them away.

[Pa.]: One group didn't get let in and they just walked away crying. I swear, I saw it!

[Iz.]: It's not hard for the cordon to go up to the amphitheater. You don't need guards for that!

[Pa.]: It's like at Easter when the guards in the white armbands [points to her arm]. When they come down the aisle row by row with the rope and you go up, you stand in line to kiss the cross. They acted like police, they did it like police [Ro.: *gendarme*]. From row to row. It's not hard to go up to the front of the church in a line. My God, I really didn't like that. I would have preferred just sitting quietly. You don't need guards. Yeah, Endre has a gigantic sense of responsibility now, doesn't he?

[Al.]: He's such an important person! So important. They're just craving some kind of task [*feladatra vágnak*].

[Pa.]: I haven't ever seen that kind of organization to it before. Using to ropes like that on Easter.

[Al.]: We're just the dirty masses [*pornép*]. They say go and we go.

Several aspects of the *rendező* crew's relations with pilgrimage participants come into focus in this exchange, each pointing to the tenuousness of their position as community leaders at Csíksomlyó. It begins with Alex's statement about changing forms of authority at the pilgrimage site and in the Transylvanian archdiocese in general. Alex maligns the guards' recently gained authority and social prestige as illegitimate. This illegitimacy is rooted in a sense that they are choosing the need to exercising their authority over the proper deference that must be shown to

certain groups based on the tradition established by the pilgrimage event's origin narrative. It is a sign that they are constitutionally inappropriate for their new authority that they neglect the task for which the ethnologists's cousins praised their relative in Chapter Two: "seriously looking after" tradition and community history – in this case, the proper deference due to certain village procession groups. They have additionally importuned themselves into a ritual element – the carrying of the *labarum* and the cordon – that is supposed to bodily, morally, and materially shape the future elite.¹⁰ Alex, Izabella, and Paula signal their conviction that the guards are not constitutionally appropriate in this milieu by noting that they push (*visszataszítani*) pilgrims back from entering the church. Paula then compares them to the Romanian police, who are not only the epitome of the "outsider" in Transylvanian Hungarian communities but also generally seen as rough and uncultivated, thus further questioning the guards' legitimacy. Finally, Alex confirms his understanding of Paula's meaning by rephrasing her complaint: The guards make them feel put upon by authorities whom they must obey even when they do not want to.

Changing Materialities Mediate Anxieties of Desire and Social Mobility

These criticisms of the *rendező* crew's rough behavior that revealed them to be imposters to the "intellectual" classes seemed to be on Endre's mind during our interviews. Endre made a distinction between the people he assigns to serve at the Trimount Altar and those in the church. The Trimount Altar is for men, "who can speak with intellectuals [*értelmiségiek*]. You're not allowed to behave in an ugly manner [*durvaskódni*]. Not at all with anyone." In contrast, before he tended to assign guards to work in the church during the pilgrimage event who need not interact in a delicate manner, but rather were capable of confrontational behavior: less educated rural or working class men who were used to physically demanding work. Endre admitted,

¹⁰ Alex's sarcastic remarks also evoke commonplace critiques of the early socialist government that placed individuals from the lowest ranks of village communities in positions of power (Kligman and Verdery 2011: 66).

however, that although he needed men for this work who inhabited material worlds in which they were called on to perform demanding labor and physically confront others, this solution also posed a problem. On occasion, men who were forced to interact with unruly devotees pushing towards the statue became unruly themselves.

It happened that they spoke too loudly... We tried to deal with it carefully. We tried to deal with it carefully. But sometimes unfortunate things, things I shouldn't mention, took place. And it was hard. Hard. The guards aren't happy to accost [*megszólítani*] adults. And there is no place to have an argument [*vitatkozni*] there.

Endre specified what he meant by “unfortunate things” by noting that there had been an occasional need for physical confrontations: “Where it’s necessary, here inside the church, sometimes you have to confront people physically.”

There was a general understanding among Catholic elites that unruly devotees were drawn to such behavior as a result of their intense relationship with Mary. The church organist once confided that he “really does not like” the Pentecost Sunday afternoon Mass during the pilgrimage event where Mary’s devotees often act in such a way as to prioritize their devotion. Although the organist called these devotees “wild animals” (*vadállat*), their desire was not inexplicable to him. It was an expression of devotees’ greater interest in Mary over Jesus or God: “I don’t understand them. I mean, Jesus is there on the altar! You don’t need to go up to the Virgin Mother.” Endre was likewise aware that their relationships with Mary and their desire to be close to her were at the heart of these conflicts. People who “stampeded” [*lökődösödés*] and “shoved” [*tolongás*] their way towards the statue were wanting to “visit” [*látogatni*] Mary, a word that can refer to visiting individuals. Endre also described devotees’ desire to approach the statue to make petitionary requests of her. And finally he also commented that, “everyone absolutely wants to get up to the Virgin Mother,” offering this as the most general explanation for the crowd control problems.

The way in which the material change from the ropes to the gates invades the security guards' subjectivities and shapes their responses to this invasion thus emerged at the intersection of these four subjective and material vectors: The material space of the church, Mary's charismatic power over her devotees, devotees' desire for Mary, and the precarious pathways of social mobility at Csíksomlyó. For Endre as chief of the security guards, the changes to the material forms occupying the church interior and courtyard provided a critical means to grapple with this complex tangle of elements that shaped the guards' sense of themselves in relation to their worlds:

The ropes weren't appropriate. They were more flexible. Elastic. You could step across them. In this way [with the gates] it's easier to make order. Much, much easier. It's possible to guarantee a constant flow of traffic. Up to that point there was pushing. If they stand in line nicely like this, then they won't push anyone, or whatever. The movement will be more secure with these gates. These iron gates.

Before 2011, the use of "flexible" (*rugalmas*) and "elastic" (*elasztikus*) ropes in the church allowed devotees to move in and out of linen and form larger groups before the chancel. With the shift to iron gates, in Endre's words, there is "no need any more to behave in an ugly way" (*durvaskódni*). If the *rendező* crew members no longer "chastise" participants or push them back, now they behave in a gallant and care-taking manner befitting cultivated intellectuals: "Now, what we have done...is that one or two *rendező* crew members, personally, will take parents or grandparents with little children to the front. These little ones do not need to stand in line all the way to the front." Previously, the ropes had generally prevented the crew from performing this service, since devotees could decide for themselves when to leave the line. Now, the materiality of the gates – their heaviness, in particular – precludes boorish behavior on both sides.

Despite these benefits in allowing the crew members to behave in a more "cultivated" manner, the iron gates have not proven to be a foolproof solution to the web of anxieties relating

to materiality and social mobility in which the *rendező* crew are caught. The scene that came to Paula's mind while criticizing the *rendező* crew was her encounter during the annual Good Friday Mass. Paula was upset that the crew forced her to process up to the front to kiss the crucified body of Christ – a liturgical act performed by Catholics around the world on this high Christian holiday. Paula is the child of urban teachers who were forbidden from regularly attending Mass under socialism. She joined others among the post-socialist elite in recently relocating to a renovated suburban village home. She has also begun participating in the Csíksomlyó church choir and, as a result, is now a regular at Mass for the first time in her life. Although while speaking with Alex and Izabella, she did not specifically recount her discomfort with being confined within ropes as part of a larger group to kneel and kiss Christ's body, it stands in contrast to her repeated praise for the quiet, clean air, and, most of all, openness of her new home – especially her expansive backyard. A preference for such open spaces and the embodied experience they foster, for members of the rising Catholic entrepreneurial class like Paula, contradicts the bodily attitude required of participants in the Good Friday ritual. This seems to be Paula's message as she contrasts being forced to get up en masse to kiss the crucifix to sitting quietly in internalized prayer, an image that evokes Bőjte, Elekes, and others' praise for this form of prayer as proper to the post-socialist Catholic leading class.

Endre was aware that the foremost complaint about the iron gates was that they made devotees feel as if they were “locked in” (*be van zárva*). When I asked him if there had been any problems with the new system, he said, “There are some who say, ‘I feel a little locked in.’ [I say,] ‘if you please, it's not required!’” Endre called this feeling a “phobia” (*fóbia*), and he associated it with a certain type of person: “You listen to the complaint and then you look at the person who is making it. Last year, three women came up to me, all of them licking some ice

cream. And we the *rendező* were there in the door of the church. And one of the women said to us, ‘So, hey, what’s up. You can’t even go inside now?’” The root problem, he commented, was that in a crowd of three hundred thousand people such as gathers for the pilgrimage, “people desire [*kívánni*] three hundred thousand things.”

“I Desired to Be Close to Her:” Materiality and A Devotee’s Account of Mary’s Call

Edina was in her late-60s when we first met. She lives in a northern Ciuc village, but commuted to the textile factory in Miercurea Ciuc for a decade. Later, she arranged a good job on the cleaning staff at an urban department store. On the first occasion she told me her story about feeling Mary “calling,” we were sitting in her kitchen across from her goddaughter who had introduced us. She told me how she crossed under the rope that the guards had pulled in front of Mary’s devotees as the 2010 Pentecost Sunday afternoon Mass was starting. “I’ll tell you about last year’s experience [*élmény*],” Edina began.

One of her two sons and his wife were helping a friend run a stand selling pastries to visiting pilgrims, “So they left me the little girl. Or rather, they entrusted it to me to watch her, because they had to go out to Csíksomlyó...And I took the little girl, my granddaughter, to the pilgrimage.” It was not unusual for her family members to be involved in such entrepreneurial activities, Edina explained. She herself had learned to drive and, during the early 1990s, when her family was trying to make a primary living from farming, she often carried loads of potatoes to distant markets. On this occasion, Edina joined the long line of devotees stretching up to Mary’s statue to lift her granddaughter up to receive a blessing, since her son and daughter-in-law had not yet brought the child to Mary. She was also joined by her other daughter-in-law, her young infant, and the young woman’s mother all of whom remained in the pews. They also, according to Edina, did not long to bring their newborn to Mary. Edina attributed the reluctance

of her 1-year-old grandchild's mother's reluctance to the fact that she had not been raised in a religious family, a situation that Edina had recently rectified when she successfully persuaded her daughter-in-law to begin attending Mass. If, in Edina's words, they did not "long" (*vágyódni*) to bring her to the Virgin Mother, Edina felt what she described as a "desire" (*kivánni*) to do this. "I very much wanted to...No, I *desired* it! I *desired* to be able to give thanks for this child before the Virgin Mother, in the closeness of the Virgin Mother. To give thanks that we have her."

Edina remembered the number of devotees in front of her when the guards pulled the rope in front of her as the Mass was beginning. "I believe that there were precisely two people in front of me when they shut it down," she recalled. They even turned away the last few devotees who had at that moment ended up on the wrong side of the rope barrier. But rather than go backward, she went forward onto the altar to answer Mary's call:

The Virgin Mother called me [*hívni*]. I had to introduce [*bemutatni*] this little girl to the Virgin Mother. I had to give thanks for her. I was so grateful for her. I walked up there so arrogantly [*öntelten*]. I picked her up and I was weeping. I'm even getting all choked up now, too. That the Virgin Mother allowed me to do this on her first birthday... Somehow I was called by my soul. I didn't just do it out of my own head that I'm going to push forward now. I didn't do it wilfully. But rather I had to take her to the Virgin Mother.

Edina freely admitted that part of her desire was the result of external *social* pressures and obligations: "I was bound to do this as a grandparent, because her parents hadn't done it. Later, I would have been held to account. [They would say,] 'You had an opportunity. They gave it to you. Then why didn't you do your job?'" Still, she was also aware that the call constituted a breach of similar social proprieties. Edina herself surfaced this tension via her description of the feeling that consumed her and caused her to cross the rope barrier. She explained her condition as "arrogant" [*öntelt*]. While the meaning of this word is pejorative in Hungarian as in English, Edina used it during our second interview without alteration as an appropriate characterization of

how she felt and behaved in response to Mary's call. Yet later, when we went back and listened to this second recording, Edina asked me to stop so she could amend this description:

It is arrogance when someone is walking on the street and she doesn't have a good word or a smile to share with those around her, those whom she meets. But rather, she is arrogant, wise, and conceited. But in this instance, I was satisfied [*megelégedve önmagammal*] with my own self. That I was successful in doing enough to respond to the call.

On another occasion when I was paying a visit, Edina took the remarkable step of calling me on cell phone and urgently asking me to come back after I had said goodbye to return to Miercurea Ciuc. After hurrying back from the main road where I had been hitchhiking for a ride, I found out that Edina's urgent item of business was continuing our conversation about the word "arrogant." She insisted that, in addition to being "satisfied," she had also experienced "relaxation" [*nyugvás*] when Mary called. Whether Edina was "arrogant" or "relaxed," the call inspired her to cross the rope barrier and carry her granddaughter up to Mary's statue. She raised her granddaughter up to kiss Mary's hem, and then they then walked down from the statue, off the altar, and back to their seats.

Materiality and a Catholic Religious World: Themes in Edina's Story

Devotees disregarding the directions of shrine security guards is a trope that appears in scholars about Catholic pilgrimage sites around the world, and anthropologists commonly treat this phenomenon in terms of the disciplinarian unity sought by the Church and the chaotic emotionality of crowds (of women).¹¹ Such explanations, however, overlook both the historical and personal particularities that drive desire to be close to divine beings and divine beings' desire for human closeness. What comes across in Edina's story is a powerful sense of how the particular structural conditions of social life in the Ciuc valley enmesh both with intersubjective religious experience and material objects. I sensed the contours of the Catholic Church's angst-

¹¹ See, for instance, Katic 2014: 23-4; Dubisch 1996: 220-1.

ridden relationship with the entrepreneurial class, especially in Edina's ambivalent characterization of the meanings of Mary's call. Such tension was illustrated by her use of the word "to desire" (*kivánni*) after dismissing the word, "to like" (*szeretni*) as seemingly too modest to describe her decision to offer her granddaughter to Mary. As I argued in Chapter One, Catholics are engaging in practices of petitionary prayer in a world comprised of contradictory messages about desire – messages that are often mediated through anxieties about the role of entrepreneurs in Catholic communities. On the other hand, Edina took pleasure in describing her ability to drive as indicative of both independence and competence in the post-socialist market economy, which, in turn, was a continuation of her comfort with practices of traveling and commuting that she developed during the socialist era.

It's true that I traveled a lot. The car – we had a green Dacia – we filled it up with potatoes here at home with my husband. And I went to Megyes (Ro.: Mediaş). Totally alone. I sold the potatoes. And I came home from there also on my own. Because my husband couldn't come with me. He was commuting by bus to work.

Edina seemed to prize these opportunities to drive alone to distant locales to conduct business. Having a driver's license, she later remarked, set her apart, since she could only think of one other woman in her village with a license.

But such entrepreneurial activities can draw one close to a negative characterization. Independence is just as easily reframed as arrogance: "Just he himself, and onward," is another way Edina described her arrogant attitude. These unflattering comparisons influenced the way she described her experience in the church, and she explicitly sought a rebuttal. She offered the observation that, "People perceive events in many different ways," as an explanation for why one might see crossing the ropes as "selfish" (*önző*) gesture. Instead, she insisted, it was a sacrifice for her family, and there is a difference between the two: "But it's different when I do this for my own self or for my own family," she argued. Edina seemed to sense that her initial description of

her behavior might merit the criticism lobbed at entrepreneurs with the “itch” that drives them to call attention to themselves.

Edina’s struggle with finding the right words to characterize her experience – “arrogant,” “relaxed,” “satisfied,” and so on – opens a window onto a tension at the core of the phenomenological experience of prayer as intersubjectivity, a tension that I sensed in many of my conversations with Mary’s devotees. Edina initially chose the word “arrogant” because Mary’s call was so strong that Edina was oblivious to social proprieties. She once contrasted this event to her regular visits to Csíksomlyó. Although she often goes up to the statue to pray, she does not “bother anyone” (*zavarni*). Her contrast implies that stepping across the ropes might have constituted “bothering” others. During moments in our conversations when Edina looked back at this experience in an attitude of drawing distinctions and making clarifications she was prone to say, “I know what is proper and what is not” (*Tudom, mi illik és mi nem*). But this later evaluative orientation came on the far side of her initial account in which she described herself as “arrogant” without such a strong effort at drawing clear boundaries and dichotomies.

The way in which Mary’s intercessions in her devotees’ lives provide a medium for a pragmatic orientation to changing familial relationships within the context of the material world of rural courtyards is also a part of Edina’s narrative about crossing the ropes. As I noted in Chapter One, the material form of courtyards is organized to facilitate regular face-to-face contact between multiple generations. Fathers and especially mothers are able to keep track of sons and especially their wives on an everyday basis. During my conversations with Edina that took place outside in the courtyard, her daughters-in-law and grandchildren moved in and out of earshot, occasionally interrupting with questions and comments of their own. The materiality of this domestic form provides for constant verbal and visual contact between multiple generations

of a family, but especially between mothers and daughters-in-law for whom such contact heightens anxieties about independence and autonomy.

For Edina, the interior material domestic form of Mary's home – the Csíksomlyó church interior – is an equally visual space that brings together women who watch or do not watch each other. Edina was able to take her granddaughter up to the statue precisely because her daughter-in-law's family was not watching her that day, since they were helping friends with a business venture. And Edina was watched by two other female family members who lingered behind in the pew while she proceeded forward. In addition to these considerations that hearken to rural courtyard domestic material forms there is the fact that Edina felt obliged to bring her granddaughter up for Mary's blessing because her daughter-in-law's family had not raised her to attend Mass, a situation Edina had later rectified. My acquaintances who were raised in intellectual families and thus the most open to socialist-era scientific propaganda were the ones who described themselves like this as infrequent churchgoers as children. Thus, Edina is describing not only the classic anxieties of pre-collectivization patrilocality – a daughter-in-law moving into her husband's household – but also the more recent tensions of encountering the effects of socialist-era propaganda in the setting of one's most intimate relationships. At the same time, Edina was drawn to talk about this because she was eager to describe her influence over her family life. But Edina had to be careful not to admit having incorporated atheists into her family. This would have meant admitting having been influenced by socialist-era propaganda when the Catholic Church's overwhelming public legitimacy required people to attach their own legitimacy to it by claiming unequivocal support for the Church throughout their lives. Edina's desire for Mary takes shape in the space between wanting to avoid the suggestion of being influenced by atheism, wanting to be seen to have converted her daughter-in-law, and wanting to

exercise influence over her family by blessing her granddaughter *despite* her daughter-in-law's religious apathy, which she cannot fully admit in the first place.

Despite Edina's concern to be seen as knowing what is appropriate and inappropriate, she retains the hint that her action *had* to constitute a breach of social norms if I was to understand its full significance. Critically, these norms were conveyed in the ropes themselves. Part of the affective force of her story is dependent on her willingness to subjectively meet and redirect the social norms materialized in the rope barrier as an object with the ability to make moral distinctions about keeping people in and out of certain spaces (Latour 1999: 186; 1992: 153-4). It is this engagement of subjectivity with materiality that allows her to take a necessary risk on behalf of her granddaughter and the Virgin Mary: Edina began crying precisely when she began describing herself as "arrogant." Critically, Edina's neighbor and age-mate who had joined us for this conversation joined her in crying at this moment, as well. While their tears no doubt signaled the depth of their love for their children and Mary – the two seemed to merge and mingle in Edina's experience – for Edina that depth comes on the far side of the risks that she is willing to take on their behalf. Likewise, the intimacy of these relationships as conveyed in her desire to bring the granddaughter into the "closeness" of the Virgin Mother is also dependent on a sense that she enacts this desire by being willing to violate the social improprieties materialized in objects – their ability to decide those who belong inside and outside of spaces. If her gesture was only a sign of the morally laudable experience of "satisfaction" and acceptance of one's surroundings, it would weaken the drama of the event and reduce its poignancy.

Comparing Endre's and Edina's reflections on key material forms, ropes and gates, highlights the different ways in which the same objects can mediate efforts to take up post-socialist Catholic worlds. For Endre, the change from the flexible ropes to the heavy gates is part

of a larger precarious process of finding a way into the post-socialist elite. Although the members of the *rendező* crew have been raised to a position of prominence and authority – even to the extent that they take a place alongside the students who are being honored as future community leaders – some of them lack the cultivation that would allow them to embody “intellectual” demeanors. The highly precarious processes of social mobility come to the fore in the way Endre contrasts the sophisticated behavior of those assigned to the Trimount Altar with the rough behavior of the rural and uneducated crew who discipline unruly devotees at the church. While the materiality of the gates allows for the mediation of this contradiction, it does not provide a foolproof solution, since keeping devotees “locked in” behind the gates is offense to the sensibilities of the rising suburban Catholic bourgeoisie. And lurking behind this process by which Endre and the *rendező* crew use material objects to be at grips with their world lies Mary’s acting within this same world. If Endre’s *rendező* crew felt the flexibility of the ropes and the heaviness of the iron gates as a kind of “invasion” of their subjective sense of self, heightening and mediating anxieties about social mobility, Edina pragmatically engages the ropes in this same dialectic of material orientation and subjective reorientation as she grapples with a religious world constituted by Mary’s calls to her devotees.

Post-socialist efforts to effect social transformation have placed a central focus on built infrastructures as a critical venue for subjectification processes, and Csíksomlyó has not been immune to these processes. Entrepreneurs’ conceptions about proper subjective orientations towards the world and divine beings inhere in the new material structures that they have organized and installed at the shrine. I have argued that some of these structures convey conflicted meanings about regional and national identity. The material forms themselves, however, also structure ambivalence as unfinished and imperfectly constructed structures have

resulted from the way religious and other elites tend to vacillate between encouraging and repudiating entrepreneurs' involvement at the shrine. Inside the pilgrimage church, the light and flexible materiality of a system of ropes is one element in a nexus subjective and material orienting forms through which devotees and security guards are at grips with desire and aspiration after socialism. In the next chapter, I turn my attention on secular hospitals as another critical venue embracing distinctive material forms into which devotees regularly invoke Mary. Marian devotionality has become a primary medium not only for religious healing in such contexts, but also for the creation of a devotional world the contours of which shed light on the nature of religious change as well as the workings of power and subjectification after socialism.

Chapter Five: “I Chatted With Her When I Was Alone:” Devotees Take Mary into the Secular Post-Socialist Hospital

I. Introduction: Gender and Intersubjective Change at Csíksomlyó

If my account of the Pentecost ritual procession in Chapter Two focused on the relationship between Mary and her Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic male devotees, women are also clearly enmeshed in relationships with the Mother of God, inhabited during the annual pilgrimage event. Women predominate in the line of devotees waiting before Mary’s statue in the Csíksomlyó church, and they often reach up to the statue with objects in their hands. These devotees request blessings for wallets, purses, t-shirts, pants, socks, blankets, handkerchiefs, and stuffed animals to bless as well as a wide assortment of small statues, icons, candles, rosaries, and prayer books that they purchase from the shrine’s shop. Women carry these objects with them everywhere they go in their everyday lives – workplaces, cars, busses, government offices, and courtrooms in addition to the spaces of the home. But I most often heard Mary’s female devotees speak of using them in hospitals to heal. Women once held ritually recognized positions in villages performing such healing acts; Mary’s devotees were familiar with such rural healers as belonging to past generations and lost rural lifeways, but they never described their hospital-based healing activity mediated through Csíksomlyó in these terms. If devotional healing in secular hospitals does not match the typical descriptions of patients’ informal strategies for responding to illness and modern medical care in hospitals, then what are Mary’s devotees doing when they call on the Virgin Mother in such settings?

Given the centrality of healing to the transition from the rural “past” to “modernity,” I argue that Marian healing practices show the central role that Mary plays in facilitating intersubjective experiences of change. For her devotees, Mary constitutes the kind of transitional object that D. W. Winnicott placed at the center of such processes. She is a figure who intervenes

in a world to both mediate and disambiguate unfamiliar objective realms and subject structures that, for all their current familiarity, have become part of the past. She belongs to both and to neither simultaneously, and therefore allows such contradictions to be affirmed and muddled. Mary's devotees are hold onto the past world of the rural household into which their mothers were socialized, the world in which women's lives and power were encapsulated within the roles and practices of religious healing and even miracles – a world currently idealized by Catholic elites. Yet, they have been taught to accept the authority of modern medicine, initially through propaganda in socialist-era schools. Today, medical modernity that stands before Mary's devotees appears in the alluring guise of a transparent pay-for-service system that derides exchanges between women as atavistic relics of socialist-era friendship-peddling which needs to be unlearned. Instead, devotees use Mary to establish a frame within which such practices, attitudes, and objects that otherwise might appear as absolutely old and new, obsolete and necessary can be held both intermingled and apart. As a transitional object partly identified with new and unfamiliar worlds of global Catholicism, Mary allows women to satisfy the demands of *both* the old role of the village healer *and* new roles required by the world of bureaucratized modern medicine.

However, since Mary's devotees are encountering modern medicine in secular hospitals and the means by which capillary forms of power have worked on modern subjects, such accounts of intersubjective change cannot be kept apart from historical and social processes.¹

Scholars typically argue that the secular biomedical imagination embodies productive capillary

¹ Post-socialist Romanian and East European hospitals have been sites of extensive research on the conceptualization and implementation of multiple social transformations and linked processes of moral subjectification. During the pro-natalist period between 1966 and 1989, the Romanian socialist state's control over its subjects' bodies was experienced viscerally as the state instituted elaborate bureaucratic mechanisms in order to prevent illegal abortions (Kligman 1998: 63). Socialist-era sexual health education also disciplined productive bodies using scientific norms of hygiene and self-control. The suffering body in pain in a hospital setting gained centrality as both the locus on which power effects made themselves known and as the social effect of power itself (see also Rivkin-Fish 2005: 92-3).

power by defining various regimes, objects, and attitudes as informal in contrast to its own authorized systems of practices. As a result, informal regimes are infected with instabilities that undermine patients' efforts, for instance by preventing them from getting information that would help them control their care in the first place (Rivkin-Fish 2005: 133). However, I argue that Marian devotionism, under certain circumstances, mediates power's ability to work directly on their bodies. For example, where informal practices of affection-cultivation, under the table payments, and occult cosmological conspiracy theories focus on "immediacy," that is arranging face-to-face interactions between patients and doctors, Mary's devotees call on her to *step in-between* this key dyad that constitutes the phenomenological experience of the post-socialist secular hospital.

I justify these claims in an argument that passes through four additional parts. In Part Two, I briefly sketch the post-1968 transformation of the health care system in the new Harghita County. In Part Three, I use ethnographic materials to track everyday conditions in contemporary hospitals to convey the manner in which patients encounter and interact with doctors, nurses, priests and other religious professionals. In Part Four, I describe several stories women shared about devotees praying to Mary on each other's behalf. The fifth part describes the objects that devotees touch to Mary's statue and carry into hospitals to heal themselves, each other, and kin. Finally, as Csíksomlyó takes its place within a global network of Marian devotionism, I consider what healings say about Mary's role as a "transitional object" between the old and the new.

II. Secular Hospitals During and After Socialism

Reciprocity, Gender, and Healing in Socialist and Post-Socialist Romania

The second half of the 20th century in Romania saw the reorganization of healing from home to the hospital alongside the secularization of medical care. In pre-collectivization rural culture, many women in the Ciuc valley were renowned for their skill in the healing arts and endowed with great authority in the liminal times and spaces of sickness at the margins of the patriarchal system (Kligman 1998: 46; Hitchins 1994: 343).² Women in labor were attended to by midwives (*bábasszony*) or female relatives in the privacy of the home while men were kept at a distance (Balázs 2009: 252). The hospital became the site for the institutionalization of “modern medicine” under socialism, and the hospitalization of childbirth was of special concern for socialist states that billed themselves as the vanguards of gender equality. Articles from the early 1960s in Hungarian-language publications paired triumphalist descriptions of modern medicine with features denouncing women’s healing practices as religious “superstitions” (*babona*), thus combining these campaigns against rural women healers with scientific propaganda.³ Especially after the advent of pro-natalism in 1966, the socialist state undertook a broad campaign to transform medical care from a specialty supported by religious ritual and performed by women in the home into a “modern science” executed by male professionals in state-run hospitals. In Gail Kligman’s words, traditional midwives thus became early victims of ‘scientific rationality’” (Kligman 1998: 277, 309).

One of the Harghita County government’s first major building projects in Miercurea Ciuc was a 500-bed medical center, completed in 1971, which continues to provide acute and long-

² During my fieldwork, I met several older women in their eighties from more isolated villages in the region who remembered giving birth at home. They described childbirth as a series of highly intimate interactions between one or two women. Propaganda concerning birth clinics began appearing in Hungarian-language magazines to coincide with campaigns for collectivization in the late 1950s and early 1960s. See, for instance, an article about a birth clinic in Lunca de Jos, “A Home Away from Home for Parents” (*Szülőotthon*), from the February 1959 edition of the *Dolgozó Nő*, p. 12.

³ The May 1960 edition of *Dolgozó Nő*, under the title, “Quackery, Reading the Runes” (*Kuruzslás, Ráolvasás*), features an article accompanied by a two-panel illustration in which a woman dressed in black waves her hand above a pot containing chicken parts while a pregnant woman waits behind her. The second panel shows the pregnant woman, desperately ill, crying out for a doctor as a man in a trench coat with a hat enters her room.

term medical care for the Ciuc valley and beyond. While a number of excellent monographs have been written about the Romanian medical system during or after socialism and an extended discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this dissertation, one feature of this hospital as an institution and material form deserves mention. It is located on a single-access dead-end road atop a steep hillside on the edge of town, isolated from the to-and-fro of everyday life and far from flows of foot traffic that bring people together for socializing amid the pragmatic tasks of shopping and getting to and from work, school, and church. Patients and loved ones today must get to and from the hospital by bus or a fleet of taxis that wait in the hospital parking lot. There are no cafes, bars, parks, or other spaces nearby where friends or families might gather to share pleasantries or form relationships through the reciprocal exchange of drink and food.

I will discuss the internal material forms of this structure shortly, but for now it is enough to note that a set of socialist-era norms concerning regimes of reciprocity are embedded in the hospital's location and its relation to the material forms of urban infrastructure. Socialist ideology placed the greatest emphasis on the state's monopolization of the means of production and vertical redistributive capacity – its ability to, ideally if never in practice, extract and rationally redistribute resources to its dependent subjects (Verdery 1996: 19-56).

Correspondingly, it penalized or discouraged various forms of horizontal reciprocity that waylaid the state's ability to establish a monopoly on redistribution.⁴ Gail Kligman's ethnographic study of socialist pro-natalism between 1966 and 1989 charts the way in which the state, "intruded into the most intimate realm of social relations" through the formalization of medical procedures, the institution of monitoring protocols, and the elaboration of surveillance mechanisms designed primarily to prevent illegal abortions (Kligman 1998: 22). Rural women healers were either

⁴ See Kligman and Verdery 2012: 182-3 for a discussion of the state's animosity towards horizontal reciprocity in the early socialist period. See also Verdery's (1996: 19-56) classic discussion of vertical redistribution and socialism's emphasis on the monopolization of means of production and redistributive capacity.

integrated into the system of urban hospitals and rural birthing clinics through systems of licensing, or they were forbidden from practicing altogether. In the course of little more than ten years, the socialist state shifted the site of birth, death, illness, physical pain, and healing from the home and exchanges that enacted the private patriarchy at the margin of official culture to a social context defined by state-mediated vertical exchanges.

A raft of studies of socialism and post-socialism have noted that such efforts to monopolize reciprocity along vertical pathways were always parasitically and co-dependently counteracted by subjects who sought to use the system to ensure their own survival or benefit, employing systems of “connections” that operated according to their own moral calculations.⁵ Michelle Rivkin-Fish’s study of post-Soviet Russian maternity care notes two moral codes that functioned within the interstices of the state-run health care system of the early 1990s: a regime of affection and a regime of equivalence (Rivkin-Fish 2007: 154).⁶ Patients sought to make doctors into affectionate friends by reaching out to physicians through their personal networks, thus ensuring better care by overcoming the anonymity of the health care system (Rivkin-Fish 2007: 175). The position of such personalization techniques within an encompassing structure of power meant that these efforts often undermined themselves, for instance by arousing the ire of staff resentful of patients’ “special treatment” (Rivkin-Fish 2007: 175-179). If the state-run health care system fostered such regimes of affection in the early 1990s, neoliberal privatization that introduced “pay for service” systems in the late 1990s changed the strategies used to obtain quality care (Rivkin-Fish 2007: 181).⁷ Paying cash for medical service was a sign of being a good consumer and cultivating individual responsibility. Money became the marker of “moral

⁵ Hungarians generally use the Romanian word for this term, “*pile*.” The Russian equivalent is “*blat*.”

⁶ Similar accounts of post-socialist Romanian health systems describe almost identical moral systems (see Stan 2007; 2012).

⁷ Again, Stan describes very similar “reform” efforts in the Romanian health care system, spearheaded by Western and transnational organizations (Stan 2007: 261).

transactions” and the means to establish “normal relationships” (Rivkin-Fish 2007: 182). In the process, neoliberalism recoded personalization strategies of affection-building and informal payments as immoral behavior and “bribery.”⁸

Still, as Lavinia Stan argues, informal cash payments persist in the Romanian system out of a sense that there ought to be a “just price” for things. While payments are perceived as the due cost of good treatment, patients also feel that health care ought not to cost so much. They seek to mitigate expenses by gaining direct access to physicians and avoiding other gatekeepers who demand payment to procure this access (Stan 2007: 265; Brubaker, et. al., 2007: 198). In addition to cash payments, patients’ develop alternative quasi-religious cosmologies based on their experience of the time-space of the hospital characterized by confusion, congestion, chaos, and demeaning contests for access based on open displays of “social position, connections, and command of authoritative talk and self-presentation” (Stan 2007: 268). As a reflection of this experience, patients invent what outsiders call “conspiracy theories” and generally take pride in understanding “what is really happening in the system” by way of their own “occult cosmologies” (Stan 2007: 270). Neoliberal transparency thus undermines itself by fostering the circulation of informal payments or alternative cosmologies “throughout the very domains that neoliberal policies seek to transform (Stan 2007: 270).⁹

During my fieldwork, I observed similar examples of these everyday coping strategies.

Stan and Rivkin-Fish’s accounts provide a crucial background to my ensuing discussion of

⁸ The supposed transparency of the pay-for-service system actually put patients at a disadvantage by instituting privatization without state regulation of hospitals as they sought to drum up consumer demand (Rivkin-Fish 2007: 185). Here is Stan’s almost identical account from Romania: “Indeed, formal flows of information are constantly broken, and therefore have to be constantly reactivated in the system” (Stan 2007: 260).

⁹ I focus on hospital settings in this chapter, and thus leave to the side of my discussion non-hospital magical healing practices and shamanism, about which there is a burgeoning literature in the study of Eastern Europe. For an exemplary account, see Lindquist 2006. Rivkin-Fish offers a more jaundiced conclusion regarding the privatized Russian health care system, giving little credence to the role of such alternative cosmologies and instead arguing that privatization left no structures for the dissemination of information that actually would have guaranteed good care, leaving this essential tool in the hands of hospitals and medical professionals (Rivkin-Fish 2007: 188).

Marian devotional semiotic forms in post-socialist secular hospitals; they draw attention, in particular, to Mary's role in constituting "informal" reciprocities as well as to the relationship between unpredictable temporal-spatial experience in hospitals and invocations of Marian devotional worlds. However, I will argue in the conclusion that the patterns of pragmatic habits authorized and constructed in the devotional world of Marian healing operate differently than these practices of informal exchange and occult imagining.

Additional Reflections on Experience in the Secular Post-Socialist Hospital: Dispersion, Domination, and Missing Priests

Stan's sketch of the experience of chaos and congestion in the space-time of Romanian hospitals is evocative, but needs to be supplemented with descriptions of additional conditions if we are to fully understand the systems into which the sick and their kin ask Mary to intervene. The spaces of health care in contemporary Transylvania are highly dispersed. In Chapter One, I mentioned that women often travel to Odorheiu Secuiesc for better obstetrical/gynecological care, putting pressure on poorer women who are dependent on unreliable public transportation. Devotees travel far from home not just for obstetrical/gynecological services, but for all kinds of care. They travel far from home, in particular, when their illnesses exceed the capabilities of under-equipped local medical facilities or when local doctors are deemed to lack the skill to provide necessary treatment (Kiss 2002).¹⁰ It was not unusual for devotees to nonchalantly tell me they traveled to cities one, three, six, and as much as twelve hours away to obtain care. They never mentioned the length of their journeys – traveling long distances was typical to the point of being unremarkable – but rather they just referred to the city where their stories were set. Still,

¹⁰ During my fieldwork, I frequently heard my acquaintances speak about arranging travel to Odorheiu Secuiesc, more than an hour away, for both routine and emergency care. Women often complained about the fact that they had to travel several hours to see doctors in Odorheiu Secuiesc who provided better gynecological and obstetrical care. None of my acquaintances described their awkward encounters with doctors as a result of anti-Hungarian animus, but rather their own lack of sufficient Romanian language skills.

this travel put special pressures on devotees, which they registered in comments about loneliness and isolation from family at times of crisis.

Being apart from home and established social networks when faced with crises was so difficult for devotees because of the general conviction that health care decisions are best made via face-to-face interactions with family members. Without the presence of such intimates with whom people prefer to deliberate and make decisions, the sick find themselves paralyzed by fear. During one of my visits to Miercurea Ciuc, I returned to the apartment where I was staying to find my hosts – a family of four children ranging from 19 to 26 and their mother – intently discussing how to intervene in order to persuade a great aunt to stop avoiding treatment for a worrisome growth. When I inquired later, one of the family members told me that the elderly woman had developed a paralyzing terror of doctors after her son's recent tragic death that she attributed to physician incompetence. She had compassion for her great aunt's reaction even though she also felt she should find treatment. The older woman had been breaking out in cold sweats, was constantly nervous, and suffered repeated panic attacks ever since she discovered the growth. During the earlier family conversation, it came out that the mother had tried to persuade the great aunt over the phone, since the mother worked and would not be able to travel to visit her personally. The children were not surprised that this effort did not work. "You can't handle these things over the phone. You know that she's really closed and private," one daughter said, and the mother agreed that she should have known better. Instead, they figured out which of the female children would visit the great aunt to speak with her personally, and then they looked up the bus routes from her home to Odorheiu Secuiesc to visit a physician. It was clear to the family members that the only effective solution to this woman's predicament – not only because of her

traumatized condition but also as a general attitude towards medical decision-making – was a face-to-face conversation and direct familial assistance in navigating the health care system.

If her belief in doctors' incompetence had caused the great aunt to become terrified of physicians, other acquaintances often spoke of feeling humiliated by medical professionals as a result of their frequently authoritarian demeanor. In devotees' stories, physicians are often brittle tyrants who are ready to take any patient request as a threat to their legitimacy. I encountered doctors' anxieties about the fragile character of their authority during my own hospital sojourn. After a fall that resulted in a fractured collar bone and dislocated shoulder, I ended up in the Miercurea Ciuc hospital emergency ward for treatment. When the X-ray of my injured shoulder arrived, the physicians on duty began enthusiastically discussing the image. They were not five feet from where I was seated against a wall, so I stood and approached them, asking the nearest doctor about the X-ray. His demeanor suddenly changed from lively engagement to stern distance. He turned, drew up his chest in order to look down at me, and directed me to sit down, uttering a phrase used to communicate impersonal regulations: "The rule is that one must sit down" (*le kell ülni*)!

In stories malign medical professionals' characters and build on the perception that they are insecure authority figures. They portray physicians as selfish, argumentative, boorish, and liable to become unhinged. One devotee of Mary shared a story about being accosted by a doctor in Târgu Mureș in this manner:

And, I didn't know why, [but] the doctor [started] swearing at us. Nastily. 'Where have you been?' I should be honest that I didn't dare look at him, or at the nurse, either. But I didn't know what was happening, because there was no way I could have known. And he said to me, 'Do you see this?' I said, 'Yes.' 'It's in a bandage. My finger is broken, and I can't operate.'

By engaging in such “nasty” talk, the doctor reveals his lack of cultivation. While my acquaintance maintained her composure in the face of reproachful humiliation, quietly displaying her mortification by averting her eyes, other devotees inserted stories about casting snide comments at doctors or directly talking back to them. They admitted during later conversations that these parts of their stories had been fabricated, but insisted on the validity of their feelings of humiliation caused by incompetent and authoritarian physicians.

In addition, patients reported feeling psychologically trapped by their inability to comprehend, and thus question, a medical prognosis. They frequently spoke of feeling alienated from their own or loved ones’ care by esoteric “doctor speak” (*orvosi nyelv*) and “doctor scrawl” (*orvosi írás*) and noted with frustration how the doctor’s pronouncement was delivered in a manner that rendered it final and indisputable. One devotee whose son suffered from a severe chronic illness succinctly captured this feeling: “When so many doctors had said, you know, ‘it will be like this, like that. He will not be able to walk. He will not be able to...’ And so then *I* should ask that something should happen? How should *I* ask for this? It will end up how it ends up. That’s it.” The domineering authority of the medical professional translated, in many devotees’ experience, into a feeling that they were not able to simply *ask* for help. The act of giving voice to one’s deepest desires had been placed beyond their reach. They were not only unqualified; they were *unworthy* of using a request to imagine a world outside of an official prognosis. In the face of such feelings, those on the outside of the devotion might have collapsed into despair at the idea of continued and ineluctable suffering. As we will soon see, however, those who turned to Mary often found that she provided them with ways to ask – it is perhaps no accident that this devotee used the verb that begins every petition to Mary: “to ask” (*kérni*).

If anthropologists were to study the activities of parish priests and lay employees of formal Catholic institutions to assess the nature and level of religious healing in the Ciuc valley, they would most likely conclude that they are insignificant and marginal phenomena around Csíksomlyó. I was struck during my fieldwork by how priests and church employees were often absent from devotees' recollections. This is not simply a rhetorical device; it reflects a widespread clerical lack of interest in tending to the ill. During my conversations with older priests who came of age before 1989, they recalled being excluded from hospital wards during socialism as part of the "domestication" of religious practice (Dragadze 1993). As a result, they had few opportunities to learn how to interact with ill parishioners. Other venues for becoming more familiar with alternative, non-biomedical forms of healing were also cut off. For instance, seminary authorities discouraged young priests from experimenting with charismatic healing practices in the late 1970s when a young seminarian's hospitalization after an attempted prayer healing caught the attention of state authorities (Gagyí 2002). Today, priests' visits with ill parishioners at home are often limited to the custom of visiting the ill on the first Friday of the month. I accompanied a local priest on his rounds several times during my fieldwork and noted that while parishioners were often grateful for his attention, his visits were often brief and reflected a harried attitude stemming from his need to finish in the time allotted.

Supporting hospital-based religious work has not been a priority for the archdiocesan hierarchy, and the efforts it has made have been hampered by socialist-era legacies. The Catholic social services organization, Caritas, has only recently begun to offer services for the ill and their kin.¹¹ The Order of Saint Camillus, whose mission includes caring for the ill, has a small chapter in Miercurea Ciuc, which established a mission to the hospital in 2000. The young recent

¹¹ For instance, their three-times a year program of "spiritual practice" (*lelkigyakorlat*) sessions for alcoholics and their families was offered for the first time in 2012. See the article on the Transylvanian Archdiocesan Caritas web site, "Kiút a függőségéből," [Way Out of Addiction]: <http://www.caritas-ab.ro/?p=9766>.

seminary graduate who supervises the Order's hospital work holds Mass once a week for patients. However, he is forced to provide this service in temporary office space because the hospital, reflecting its socialist-era provenance, was built without a chapel and remained without religious facilities during my fieldwork (Bartos 2013). When I met with the Order's pastoral assistant, our conversation was tense and strained. She refused to take up any topic if she sensed a relationship to "politics" (*politika*). She clearly cherished the public persona she had crafted for herself through her service on behalf of the Order, but she was also aware that women's public profiles achieved through the structure of the Catholic Church rested on weak foundations that could be dismantled at a moment's notice. As such, her priority in speaking about her work was to avoid controversy. In general, it was my impression that the official institutional structures and individuals through which the work of hospital chaplaincy was performed were marginal to the centers of ecclesiastical power and unsupported with significant material resources.

Likewise, some devotees' accounts of their illnesses sometimes recorded clerical unease and lack of experience in encountering broken and suffering bodies. One acquaintance described taking her infant son to a Mass at Csíksomlyó while he was suffering a severe urinary tract infection. She wanted a priest to bless her son, but he recoiled when he saw that the infection had caused the child to urinate blood. She remembered most clearly the priest's dismissive question to her: "And they asked, 'Well, what could I possibly want for this child?'" My acquaintance's tone of voice communicated the priest's discomfort with the sight of a visibly ill child and even conveyed his cruelty in implying her son's case was hopeless.

III. Illness and Intersubjective Experience

"But we didn't know what to do:" Sickness Intervenes in Family Reciprocities

One of the primary ways in which illness – and especially chronic illness – impacted my acquaintances’ lives was by distorting and disrupting patterns of expected and cherished social reciprocities within the family. One day early in my fieldwork, I joined a group of women – two cousins in their thirties and their children – on a trip from their rural homes north of Miercurea Ciuc to their natal village in the south of the valley. I was the only man in the group as we traveled and then spent the afternoon having lunch. This sparked some awkward laughter when the conversation got onto topics such as the quality of obstetrical/gynecological care, but in general I tried my best to recede into the background while my female research assistant got to know one of the cousins, Dóra. Their similar ages allowed the conversation to flow smoothly and after a while, they began talking about Lilla, Dóra’s sister, who was not with us that day. Dóra explained that Lilla’s son, whose name was Sebestyén, had suffered a stroke during childbirth at the Miercurea Ciuc hospital. As he grew, he suffered frequent bleeding in his brain and seizures until he passed away at the age of eighteen months. Dóra had been close with her sister, frequently paying her visits at her home in a nearby village, which meant that she saw first-hand what it was like to tend to a chronically-ill child. She spoke about how Lilla exercised Sebestyén “eight times a day” and how he had monthly bouts of pneumonia, which caused him to sweat profusely. In her description, she emphasized the extremity of these illnesses: “He just sweated out all the water he drank,” she recalled.

Dóra went on to explain that Sebestyén was born in the same month as her youngest son. The two children looked almost identical. “My sister laid little Sebestyén down, put him to bed,” she remembered, “so that you couldn’t see that he was sick.” However, Dóra also noted, this effort only worked until Sebestyén suffered a seizure. Her description conveyed her confusion when she witnessed her nephew’s suffering: “He looked just the same until he was caught by a

big seizure [*a nagy görcs*]. Then his head and his legs went backwards, like this, both at the same time with such force that you couldn't hold him." Dóra finished her description by miming Sebestyén's involuntary contortions. The exact position of Sebestyén's body as he underwent these convulsions had so caught her attention that she had preserved them precisely in her memory. She hoped that we, too, could see and perhaps understand their awful and disturbing violence.

It made matters worse for Dóra that she felt shut out from Lilla's experience despite firsthand knowledge of her sister's efforts. She saw that her sister was consumed with caring for Sebestyén. Still, Dóra was unable to help in the way that seemed most critical:

It was such a bad feeling [*rossz érzés*] when we came over here. We didn't know what she was saying or what she was thinking. We were afraid to pick him up. What's going to happen? What happens if she says that we shouldn't pick him up? It was a bad feeling. Fine. We were afraid to pick him up in case he gets another seizure. She knew what to do. How to press on his little legs a little bit and everything. But we didn't know what to do. He suffered so much, night and day.

Dóra's account constitutes a sensitive but forthright attempt to probe the horizons of her world on the far side of the process by which it was rearranged and reoriented by illness. Two aspects of Dóra's recollections cast light on the phenomenological experience of illness in the Ciuc valley today: the first concerns systems of familial reciprocities mediated by childcare sharing and the second the specialization of therapeutic massage.

Dóra does not explicitly name childcare sharing in her conversation with my research assistant, since she would have been familiar with patterns of sleepovers, day visits, and extended stays that provide a frequent means to bring sisters together in Ciuc. The conditions that underwrite such familial reciprocities were sketched out initially in Chapter One, and they deserve a brief elaboration in order to understand Dóra's experience: Under socialism, sharing childcare among families divided between city and village was a critical survival strategy in the

face of the continuing social under-remuneration of childcare. Childcare exchanges continue to be a critical part of urban women's lives, since they rely on rural parents for this assistance especially during summer vacations from school. Parents and rural siblings who can provide childcare in the summer also serve a critical role in the lives of rural married couples who leave in the summer for seasonal agricultural labor. Finally, where women might risk opprobrium for talking on the phone in a fashion that could be called "gossip" or shirking one's work duties, hosting a family guest is an acceptable form of socializing. Sisters who might live apart in distant villages due to patrilocal family residence patterns often use the occasion of visits to pick up or drop off children as opportunities for the critical social work of catching up on news and making future plans.

Sebestyén's chronic illness disrupted precisely these patterns of reciprocity, since Lilla was unable to leave Sebestyén with his aunt for longer periods of time. While Dóra was able to see her sister when she visited their natal village, she was unable to take Sebestyén into her home or leave her children with Lilla in a way that would have sustained not only rhythms of back-and-forth visits between the sisters, but also patterns of sharing basic information. The strained relationships that resulted when Lilla and Sebestyén had to frequently leave their local worlds and familial networks in the Ciuc valley is equally preserved in Dóra's memory. Being forced to travel to distant hospitals and be apart from sisters, mothers, and other kin no doubt was also a factor preventing childcare exchanges between the families. If Sebestyén had not suffered from his illness, the fact that their children were the same age might have served as a foundation for a lifelong series of reciprocities and cherished recollections, but instead Dóra's memories in connection with nephew's short life and the effect it had on her relationship with her sister are strongly associated with "bad feelings."

If Dóra leaves implicit the understanding that childcare sharing is a foundation of women's reciprocities, her account explicitly names the specialization of therapeutic methods as a disruptor of such familial relationships. Dóra recalled that Lilla had paid for and learned a massage technique for her son during their frequent visits to a clinic in Târgu Mureş. She "knew what to do," in Dóra's words, to ease the child's suffering. She noted that the costs involved in receiving and learning this treatment had been as much as "three new cars." This served as further recognition of their distance from each other, since Lilla could afford this, whereas Dóra, who lived in modest circumstances supported by occasional babysitting and her husband's seasonal construction jobs, could not.

Domestic and Professional Practices of Therapeutic Touch

This professionalization of therapeutic massage that Dóra senses has disrupted her ability and obligation to ease suffering and preserve familial reciprocities is not an isolated case of a single medical technique moving from the home into the hospital. In the contemporary hospitals that I visited, therapeutic massage and physical therapy are often performed by machines or professionals deploying special techniques.¹² After my own injury, I underwent several weeks of orthopedic physical therapy in the Miercurea Ciuc hospital. I spent the vast majority of my time alone and hooked up to machines that sent various forms of electronic waves into my shoulder and neck muscles. These procedures involved only the least amount of touch as nurse assistants used paint brushes to coat my shoulder with foul-smelling unknown oils and then strapped rubber cups, nodes, and bands around my arm before leaving me in isolated curtained areas

¹² Gail Kligman notes the use of abdominal massage to terminate pregnancies under socialism, although her references describe both women and men performing this act and in emergent situations, not under the care of rural women healers (Kligman 1998: 192, 253). Abdominal massage performed by Eastern European rural women healers for a variety of purposes is attested to in Kapaló 2011 and ethnographic films such as "Shapes in the Wax: Tradition and Faith among Folk Medicine Practitioners in Rural Ukraine," by Sarah D. Phillips, dir.. For a review of the film, see Wanner 2008. For a historical review of women healers in Europe that mentions massage, see Fissell 2008.

while the machines hummed at various decibels. I came to long for the brief massage sessions when I received soothing hands-on treatment. But the specific techniques of massage these professionals employed remained opaque to me after they rebuffed my inquiries about how I might ask others to massage me in similar ways. Although Dóra's sister, Lilla, had acquired similarly professionalized techniques, Dóra did not attend the classes necessary for acquiring it. Dóra remembered that Lilla, "knew what to do." She knew how to "press on his little legs" in order to relieve his pain. In contrast, Dóra did not have the financial resources to acquire the professional training that would have allowed her to share her sister's ability to therapeutically ease Sebestyén's suffering. She was left on the outside of her sister's experience since, in her words, "we didn't know" what kind of touch would cause him harm and what would cause him pleasure.

Still, massage and other kinds of professional physical therapy have not been entirely lost in domestic contexts. On several occasions, I witnessed family members use massage to ease the labor-related chronic pains of loved ones. For instance, one evening I spent the night at the Miercurea Ciuc apartment of an electrician, Nándor, and his wife, Szabina. Their daughter was occupying the one bedroom in their small apartment, so I was on a narrow pull-out chair, while they laid down next to each other on the pull-out couch in the same room. After kneeling to pray and turning out the lights, I heard Szabina turn over underneath the blankets and whisper to Nándor, "Do your legs hurt?" He told Szabina that they did. He had spent the day climbing ladders and crawling on roofs to wire a second home for a member of Miercurea Ciuc's entrepreneurial class. Szabina and Nándor whispered a bit while she rubbed his back to soothe tense muscles. After about five minutes of ministering to her husband, Szabina turned back over again, and we all fell asleep.

I observed another instance of therapeutic massage several months later, again prompted by a family member's labor-related chronic pain. I was waking up after spending the night in my acquaintance Márta's spare bedroom in her Miercurea Ciuc apartment. Márta is a professional assistant in her mid-20s living primarily in Cluj. Her mother and father had worked in the tractor factory until it closed, at which point her father moved on to construction jobs in Hungary until he passed away suddenly. During my fieldwork, Márta's younger siblings were supported by their mother who loaded trays of bread in and out of the ovens in twelve hour shifts at Miercurea Ciuc's bakery. Her work was brutal. Besides the black scabs on her arms that were evidence of the burns she suffered, she also winced from pain in her feet and ankles due to long hours spent on her feet. When I stepped into the living room that morning, Márta was sitting at the foot of her mother's pull-out couch cum bed. At one point, Márta's mother exhaled as she adjusted her legs on the bed, and Márta asked if she would like to have her feet massaged. She retrieved her purse from a chair and fetched out a plastic tube of sports cream. I watched as Márta looked down at her palm to squeeze out a line of grainy brownish salve along the flat surface. Rubbing her hands together, then pressing them deeply and rhythmically into her mother's calves, ankles, and feet, they slipped into silence as Márta became absorbed in her task.

I was also caught by its similarity to the massage practiced by rural women healers that I had read about in local ethnologists' books; but I could not ignore the urban social context of this act. Some vague recollection of the rural past may have led to a sense on Márta's part that it was her obligation to tend to a relative's physical suffering. She may have been acting in a way that harkened back to stories told by Márta's mother's rural kin who had stayed behind in the village when Márta had moved to Miercurea Ciuc in the mid-1970s. But this gesture was not explicitly

tioned to a full system of healing practices that had been passed down to Márta or a paraliturgical ritual system that would have established Márta into the role of healer.

Bodies of the Past in Everyday Life

The conditions for the phenomenological experience of illness in Romania are also shaped by global processes that lead elites to tie the bodily reconstruction of suffering subjects to the “transition” from socialism to capitalist “development” as a part of Europe.¹³ As Stan and Rivkin-Fish have noted, one of the primary results of neoliberal privatization was the establishment of a new temporal structure that put practices of affection-building into a “socialist past” to be eradicated through various disciplinary techniques. In Romania, privatization also makes broken and suffering bodies look like “the past.” Post-socialist efforts by transnational NGOs to transform Romanian hospitals and health care were initially sparked by images that flooded Western media concerning the truly horrific conditions in state-run orphanages in the 1980s and early 90s. Media reports almost universally blamed these conditions on Ceaușescu-era pro-natalist policies and socialist ideologies that stipulated the state as *pater familias* with ultimate responsibility for children (see Kligman 1998).¹⁴ These images were then resuscitated by a spate of newspaper articles from the mid-2000s sensationally “exposing” the persistence of poor conditions in orphanages and the more recent international adoption rackets that were supposedly “selling” children to foreign adoptive parents. These stories were then taken up and

¹³ See Jack R. Friedman’s observation that Romanian elites’ desire to erase the state socialist past leads to the demonization of “those who remain tied to the values or discourses of state socialism” as “being ‘stuck’ in memories or nostalgia for a past that is, according to most public media, best left in the scrap heap of history” (Friedman 2011: 210).

¹⁴ For an example of the enduring value and currency of such ideas to justify transnational humanitarian interventions, see Powell 2010. This *Harvard Gazette* article, titled, “Breathtakingly awful: HMS professor’s work details devastating toll of Romanian orphanages,” is about a Harvard Medical School pediatrics professor’s ongoing study of Romanian orphans. The justification for his project relies on blurring the boundaries between the past and the present in order to justify this intervention. On the one hand, the professor decries the “prevailing belief” that the state could provide better care than parents, which, he suggests, has now been relegated to the past since it “endured at the time of the study’s start.” On the other hand, he is quoted as speaking in the present tense about “horrific” conditions in Romanian orphanages: “One of the eeriest things about these institutions is how quiet they are. Nobody’s crying.”

exaggerated by Western politicians skeptical of the European Union.¹⁵ The result was to heighten the embarrassment of elites who, as Fehérváry and other observers of post-socialist societies have argued, tend to calculate such conditions not purely as a result of the economic hierarchy of their own society but “in comparison to the state of the developed West” (Róna-Tás 1996: 41, quoted in Fehérváry 2013: 249). Among other political interventions, these images of Romanian orphans prompted high level politicians to instigate the “demolition” of the “old” socialist-era child welfare system in favor of a system that not only replicated Western European models, but also functioned to underwrite the legitimacy of Western European political and social welfare systems in general (see Gál and Kligman 2000).

This tangled transnational “body politics of the past” plays out in everyday life by engendering efforts to banish stories about illnesses to a forgotten past that no one needs to remember. And this effort is often manifested in elites who direct feelings of embarrassment towards those who choose to remember the conditions of socialism that caused such illness. I once visited a mother and daughter in a southern Ciuc valley village to speak about the daughter’s illness that Mary had helped cure. Although the mother, Edina had commuted to a working class job on the line at the Miercurea Ciuc textile factory, her daughter Júlia had risen to become an intellectual with her own car, an urban apartment, and a job as a high school teacher. When Júlia came down with scarlet fever as a child in the early 1980s, Edina had massaged her with a handkerchief that had been blessed on Mary’s statue and Mary had relieved Júlia’s severe and debilitating pain. When we spoke, Edina was enthusiastic about remembering how an expansive social network came together to heal Júlia, including an aunt who brought the handkerchief from Csíksomlyó and friends who provided gas for the trip to Miercurea Ciuc and

¹⁵ Most notoriously, Prince Phillip, the Duke of Edinburgh, was twice quoted making cruel jokes about Romanian parents “breeding” and “selling” orphans (Walker 2010).

then to Târgu Mureș. All of this had been no small feat, Edina proudly reminded me, because of the severe rationing programs of the 1980s.

Rather than trumpet the role family networks played in her recovery, Júlia dwelt on the conditions of socialist-era medical care that had exacerbated her illness and her sense of embarrassment at the contrast between past and present, Romania and the West. In fact, her mother's efforts to get gas to take Júlia to the hospital became, for Júlia, an explanation about how gas rationing meant that the ambulance service only ran every other day.

At that time, they didn't deal with emergency cases. That is, they didn't transfer them on the same time. Now, things have changed. If there is an emergency on Saturday, they go on Saturday. The ambulance system wasn't developed. It was a different time. I don't know. But for sure it [medical care] was better organized in America than it was here.

At a later point in the conversation, she returned to this deprecating comparative mood:

"Unfortunately, here medical science was held back," she explained again. I later asked if Edina and Júlia had occasion to share this story with others. Edina turned to Júlia and asked, "Have you told this story to people?" Júlia was clearly embarrassed and answered noncommittally: "Well, I don't know. It was so long ago. And it is so distant from life right now."

Adult men who suffer from chronic illnesses resulting from industrial labor also bring the past into the present in ways that cause discomfort for others. I was told many times about how the use of unsafe mining technologies and poor ventilation in the Bălan copper mines in the 1950s and '60s resulted in widespread cases of silicosis among a now-elderly generation of men (Barabási 1996). Many younger men who worked in the mine in later years also complain of cardiovascular and silicosis-related chronic health problems despite the use of new industrial technologies beginning in the 1970s.¹⁶ As I argued in Chapter One, a variety of conditions after 1989 led many Transylvanian Hungarian men to distance themselves from any and all aspects of

¹⁶ See Kideckel 2008 for an extensive study of health and embodiment among Romanian miners and industrial workers.

their involvement in the Bălan mine. Men who suffered from industrial labor-related ailments were less able to do this distancing work, with consequences for how they negotiated their everyday interactions. One day, I was sitting with a group of younger men on break from doing a day of agricultural work for a former miner. He was complaining to another older man about a persistent shortness of breath that, he declared, was lingering silicosis.¹⁷ The younger men began joking about how his symptoms were probably a result of allergies to hay. The older man overheard us and interrupted: “It’s not an allergy [*allergia*],” he shouted, but rather, “it’s silicosis!” The former miner’s voice rose even higher as he displayed a growing frustration at his inability to convince them that he was suffering from a “real illness” (*valódi betegség*). In everyday life, this inclination to occlude experiences and memories associated with socialist-era industry results in such instances of recasting the etiology of a chronic illness from industrial to agricultural. As a result, the disease’s severity is reduced. An allergy might be considered a nagging annoyance; silicosis is a life-threatening and debilitating degenerative disease. Finally, whereas silicosis had once formed the basis of miners’ claims for collective preferential treatment and state benefits, an allergy to hay is considered an individual problem and not a source of solidarity that might allow a man to feel he has a solid purchase on his world.

IV. “And they brought this small statue for me:” Devotees in Marian Devotional Worlds in the Secular Post-Socialist Hospital

Devotees and Everyday Reciprocities among Women

If there is a conviction shared by all of Mary’s devotees with whom I spoke about healings inside hospitals, it is that they felt Mary’s presence in the goodwill of supportive people. Sometimes these people were strangers, but most often Mary came to devotees’ aid in, through,

¹⁷ As I mentioned in Chapter Two, I observed Hungarian men from the Ciuc valley speaking to each other about their experiences in the mines in various ways and venues. Kristen Ghodsee’s description of miners responding to social marginalization with silence and alcoholism would be overdrawn if applied to the case of Transylvanian Hungarian working class men.

and with the prayers of other devotees. Sára, who leads a Marian prayer group in Miercurea Ciuc, recalled asking for Mary's help when she was facing a major operation to remove a tumor on her thyroid. She had traveled to Târgu Mureş for the procedure. When she arrived at the hospital, however, she was informed that they could not accept her because the anesthesiologist was on vacation. When she returned three weeks later, he still had not appeared for work. Her third appointment, which fell on a Tuesday, allowed her to visit Csíksomlyó and participate in her prayer group on Sunday. After spending the night in the hospital, Sára was informed of another delay. An unfamiliar physician came into her room and reported that the surgeon assigned to her had become ill overnight. She did not grasp the problem at first because the information was conveyed to her in Romanian, which she speaks only imperfectly. Finally, Sára understood that she would have to come back yet again at a later date. The physician offered her the option of having the procedure done that day by a young surgeon who had not yet finished certification examinations.

She says, 'Decide! You have five minutes. Either you come into the operating room or you go home. Later when the doctor gets better, we'll call you back.' 'Oh,' I said, 'Virgin Mother, what should I do?' I started to cry so much. 'What should I do? Should I go home? [Should I] drive my family crazy one more time? It costs money to go back to Vásárhely [Târgu Mureş]. Or should I trust myself to someone, to this young girl, and she doesn't even know what she needs to do? Hoooh, what should I do?' I started to cry. 'Virgin Mother, tell me, what should I do?'

Soon after her prayer, an acquaintance named Kati called Sára's son.

[She asked], 'Your mother, how is she? What's up with her?' They knew that I was sick. And he said, 'They're going to operate on her tomorrow.' Kati says that she put down the phone and called twenty-five different people. [She told them to] all pray tomorrow when I am being operated on. She called every acquaintance.

Kati then called Sára back and told her that this group of women were praying for her. Once she hung up the phone, she felt ready to make a decision. "I said that I will go [to the operating room]. I said, Lord, I am here. I will live. I will die. I will go." For Mary's devotees like Sára, the

Virgin Mother and one's friends are not separate entities, but rather divine help and human help appear indistinguishable from each other. Mary is embedded in chains of prayers as devotees call on each other and on the Virgin Mother for help. These exchange networks allow boundaries around what constitutes the realm of human activity and influence to be kept open and porous so that Mary can step in when she needs to come to the aid of those who call on her.

If Mary comes to her devotees' aid when they are forced to respond to crises far from their usual social networks, she also helps her devotees sustain and then reintegrate into patterns of everyday reciprocities that were originally designed to be disrupted by hospitals. One evening, as members of a weekly Miercurea Ciuc prayer group were gathering in a participant's living room, I overheard an older woman discussing difficulties surrounding her daughter's recent hospitalization for surgery. The young woman lives in Hungary, and her mother had just returned from an extended visit to help her recover. She was still anxious about her daughter's condition, and her consciousness was clearly divided between Hungary and Miercurea Ciuc. She spent several minutes telling the participants about her frustrating experiences trying to understand what the doctors had told her, and she was clearly consumed by lingering worries. Later, during our prayers for various groups, the prayer leader inserted a brief prayer for "our sick" (*a mi betegünkért*). The insertion of the possessive, "*mi*," marked the possessive phrase as emphatic. She was referring not just to the sick of a nondescript collective, but to the sick of the group present in the room. At that moment, I noticed several participants smile in sympathy towards their apprehensive partner in this prayer group.

Halfway through my fieldwork, I joined a similar Rosary prayer group, this time organized for Romanian-speaking women in the city of Bălan, the economically-ravaged former mining town in the north of the valley. The group was composed of women who knew some

Hungarian, but not enough to follow the Hungarian Mass or to participate in other Marian prayer groups for Hungarian-speakers. Instead, once a week we squeezed into the one-room apartment of a woman who went by “Bunică,” or Grandma, and surrounded a table on which sat a statue of Mary that she had received from a friend who had traveled to Lourdes. Several months after I joined, one of the organizers, a woman in her late thirties named Adelaide was absent for three weeks after being admitted to the Miercurea Ciuc hospital. After her surgery, she continued to lead the group despite being confined to her hospital bed and then her apartment by calling Bunică and leading us in prayers and songs through the phone. Each week after the prayers, we passed the phone around and sent our personal greetings. Bunică wept each time she received the phone, pressing it directly to her lips as she spoke her message to Adelaide lying in her hospital bed.

Mary Mediates Power in the Secular Hospital

The Virgin Mother is frequently asked to step in between doctors and patients in hospital operating rooms and recovery wards. Mary’s devotees often included in their narratives appearances from doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals who confirmed the efficacy of their prayers by declaring that the ill person’s recovery had been inexplicable and maybe even a miracle. An acquaintance named Dorottya told me about a doctor who gave her son a dire prognosis after an accident left him severely burned. When Dorottya heard the doctor say, “I will do everything, my dear, but he will not survive,” she left the hospital and walked across the street to a Catholic church where she began praying. “And I asked for the Virgin Mother’s help. I wasn’t able to...I only had enough strength to say, ‘Help me now, Mary!’” Not long after, instead of a hopeless prognosis, the doctor revealed that he was confident her son would survive. “A

miracle happened to this child,” he confessed. “Imagine, the doctor said *this!* That the Virgin Mother healed my son,” Dorottya projected self-satisfaction after sharing this comment.

The Objects of Marian Devotion in Secular Hospitals

Mary’s devotees not only ask her to be present for each other in their prayers; they bring each other objects that serve several interlocking purposes as they move among the increasingly dispersed medical spaces of contemporary Europe. One devotee’s story exemplifies several of the ways in which invoking Mary into a hospital setting reorients and reorganizes the elements of this world. A woman now in her late sixties named Melánia once described a visit to the hospital in the early 1990s after she became ill with a serious infection. When she reached this point in the story, she reached behind her to a cabinet in which she kept several statues of Mary. The one she selected was small, a little larger than the size of her palm, with the white base and a light blue mantle of the Virgin Mary of Lourdes, the Catholic shrine in France. She stroked the statue and held it tight to her chest as she continued:

My mother and a neighbor lady came to visit me. They went out to Csíksomlyó. This happened on September 8th [which is the feast day of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary]. And they brought this small statue for me. They had the Franciscan priest bless it and told him that they are taking it to a woman with four children who is in the hospital. The priest said that he will pray, too.

After her mother and her mother’s friend left, the statue remained with her in the hospital ward. She felt afraid (*félni*), she remembered, but the statue helped her relieve this fear as she talked with Mary: “They brought it. And I was always holding onto it [*fogni*]. I chatted to her [*beszélgettem neki*] when I was alone.” As I have described above, secular hospitals have been organized so that the sick move through them in a pattern of unpredictable and uncontrollable modes of disengagement and engagement. One goes suddenly from being surrounded by doctors and physicians who make demands on subjects’ attention as they ask for information, fluids,

gestures, and signs to lonely isolation in rooms occupied only by impersonal machines. Mary's devotees most commonly said that they felt the greatest fear when they were alone, overcome by the direness of their condition or the gravity of the decisions that lay ahead. When Mary's devotees bring statues and pictures into these spaces and times, she helps them persevere through loneliness as they communicate their needs, fears, and anxieties in conversations like this one.¹⁸

Objects beyond Moral Genealogies: Intersubjective Intimacies at Csíksomlyó

As I mentioned earlier, besides such statues, the material culture of Marian devotionism at Csíksomlyó involves the use of a wide panoply of consumer objects many of which devotees touch to the statue.¹⁹ During my fieldwork, I interviewed Emma, the shrine director's young niece, who volunteers at Mary's statue during the pilgrimage event by helping devotees touch objects to Mary's feet in order to keep the line moving. I initially sought her out after her uncle, the shrine director, had rebuffed my question about touching objects to the shrine; he denied ever having paid attention to this practice or known anyone personally who had done it. Emma agreed to meet with me at a coffee shop in Miercurea Ciuc on a day that she had come into the city from her village home to run errands. I asked Emma to tell me about the objects people touch to the statue. I then asked for the "strangest" objects, she described two instances when women brought pantyhose to Mary. On one occasion, a woman took a pair of pantyhose out of her purse, while

¹⁸ It is not only the social conditions of medical treatment that renders subjects into this position. Illness and suffering as a general phenomenological experience powerfully affects the movement of the self as it reorients itself in pragmatic gestures and acts toward being at grips with the world. Suffering affects speech as a gesture and orientation toward the world. Suffering, according to philosopher Hannah Arendt, is "the most private and least communicable of all [experiences]" (Arendt 1958: 2000). Since chronic illness often subjects in their own subjectivities, rendering their experience of pain incommunicable and their social horizon telescoped to the immediate time and space of the illness (Kleinman 1988: 60). Melánia's account of Mary's presence as establishing a world in which she can speak her fears is thus also an account of a devotee working on this phenomenological experience of illness.

¹⁹ Erika Vass mentions a woman who relieves headaches using handkerchief taken from the statue, but she does not pursue this conversation within the social and historical context of the experience of pain (Vass 2010: 129-30). Budapest-based historian Mohay speculates that the objects touched to the Csíksomlyó statue, "have connections to the region of the head." However, this conjecture seems not to be based on communications with actual pilgrims, but rather a comparison to other Catholic pilgrimage sites dedicated to illnesses affecting specific bodily regions (Mohay 2008: 101).

another time a woman handed Emma her undergarment after untying her shoes and removing it in front of her. Emma also recalled a woman who once approached the statue carrying money. Thinking that the woman was donating the amount, she pushed it into the box that holds monetary gifts. The devotee became incensed; she had wanted to rub it on the statue. They resolved the situation by walking down to the sacristy, asking a sacristan to retrieve an equal amount, and returning when she blessed the money. Emma was quick to separate herself from this woman's behavior. According to her, she had "raised a ruckus" (*cirkusolni*), a descriptive term that offers a stark contrast to the portrait many clergy paint of the commendable, quiet, and disciplined devotee. If Emma's narrative did not make her disapproval explicit enough, she felt obliged to finish with a definitive statement, "I really don't like this at all" (*nagyon nem szeretem*).

Without knowing who these women are, it is impossible to say how they were asking Mary for help in these moments. What can be commented on, though, is the way Emma was at grips in a world made for her in part by Mary's action, a process that became clear to me when I asked her if she herself had ever had Mary bless an object for her. She replied that her mother had asked her to carry a handkerchief to Csíksomlyó as she was giving in to a grueling terminal cancer. In the days before she died, she was bedridden with severe pain in her abdomen. So she appealed to Emma to bring this blessing from Mary to her bedside, at which point, according to Emma, her mother also requested that she use the cloth to massage her torso.

The other memory I carried into that conversation dated to Emma's mother's funeral. Emma's godfather is the Csíksomlyó choir director, and as a member of the choir I joined him and a group of others in attending the services. I remembered, as Emma was speaking, that the choir members had been chatting amiably while we walked to the home viewing, until we heard,

at what felt to me like a great distance, the sounds of the keening. The repeated phrases of the lament, “jaj,” silenced us immediately, and several women were daubing their eyes as we approached the house gate. After coming through the gate, I saw that it was the deceased woman’s sister who was wailing, leaning heavily on the outstretched arms of several attendants and her weeping niece. The experience stood out in my mind as the only time in three years and multiple funerals that I heard this grieving lamentation. It struck others in the choir as an uncomfortable public display. One urban woman and proud entrepreneur, who once huffed critically at another woman’s outburst of worry about a sick daughter, told me afterwards that this was the last time she was going to go to funerals like this unless she had to.

In contrast to her forthright moralizing, Emma delivered this account of Mary’s intervention with embarrassed demeanor and quiet tone. This was a highly personal story for her, and two interlocking processes were at work in the actions through which Mary is defining this young woman’s devotional world. First, the abstract moral binary of “good” and “bad” religion is operative in her life only to the extent that she adopts a distanced attitude to explain Mary’s actions in strangers’ lives. Second, these moral binaries are eclipsed, muddled, and isolated – although not without obviating the experience of shame – when Emma felt Mary’s visceral touch in making her own world. If Mary had not been real before for this young woman, she became real in her mother’s plea that the Mother of God and her daughter attend to her agony, making her dying just a little easier. I did not ask, fearing that I had pried too much, so it is hard to say what mixture of grim resignation, embarrassment, duty, and grief Emma brought to the Virgin Mother as she reached up to rub the handkerchief on her feet, or later as she pressed it against her mother’s skin. But it is safe to say that the handkerchief Mary blessed constituted this devotional world in a precarious intersubjective interplay: Emma’s mother’s demands on her time and

attention; Emma's uncle's sense that speaking about Mary's action in his family's life constitutes a shameful revelation; and Emma's own efforts to be at grips with these claims on her, an effort to make some kind of place in her life for this shared moment between mother, Mary, and daughter.

The Virgin Mary and Her Missing T-Shirts: Redux

The idea of promoting devotion to Mary at Csíksomlyó allowed devotees to alter the meanings of object-oriented healing practices for family members who might view them with a jaundiced eye. I was introduced to a devotee named Valéria by her son. A first-generation Miercurea Ciuc resident, she had enjoyed the benefits of the state's investment in urban areas by working as an operator for the ambulance service established in Miercurea Ciuc after 1968. Due to the state's forfeiture of social obligations to pensioners, she now supplements her meagre pension by commuting to Miercurea Ciuc's suburbs to clean houses. Valéria's son, however, has achieved social mobility not available to his mother: He entered the Transylvanian Hungarian intellectual elite after receiving several higher educational degrees and becoming the director of a university library. I sensed their distance from each other in the puzzled and sad tone that crept into her voice every time she mentioned that he was divorced. Valéria's son also conveyed this distance by introducing his mother as a "simple" woman, and worrying that I might not be able to understand her rural accent.

Valéria recalled that her former daughter-in-law had attended the Pentecost pilgrimage with the family. Even though she is Protestant and, as an actress, is a member of the cultural elite, she was "touched" (*meghatodni*) by the experience. "We'd been telling her forever that the Virgin Mother heals people," Valéria recalled. And when Valéria's grandson later ended up in the hospital with a case of pneumonia, his mother turned to her mother-in-law for help:

She gave me his own t-shirt. A clean t-shirt that was washed. She gave it to me. She put it in a sack. I took the sack and I wiped (*meztörölni*) it and I put it back and then back home. It was his own. I took out the child's own piece of clothing. His t-shirt. His own that he had worn before. A t-shirt that you wear around the house (*házipolo*). That's what she gave me.

The daughter-in-law asked Valéria to wipe a t-shirt on Mary's statue so that he could wear it while he slept in the hospital.

Valéria's story brought to my mind two memories. First, I recalled my Protestant acquaintances lampooning the Catholic Eucharist by comparing Catholics to automatons; Catholics seemed to line up before the priest and quickly move on as if the priest were a machine dispensing wafers. Second, Valéria's story pointed me back to the *National Geographic* photographer, whose visit to Ciuc I described in Chapter One. The photographer requested that her local partner Microregional Association NGO provide her with "pristine" scenery, which meant she should not see "tourists in t-shirts."

In the first case, where the daughter-in-law might have felt estranged from Catholicism and the material culture of Marian devotionism due to her Protestant upbringing, Valéria changed the calculus by taking advantage of the opening Mary provided for these women to comfort and support each other. Mary's healing intervention breached not only this religious divide, but also the barriers of education, cultivation, and upbringing that otherwise might have kept these women apart. Valéria was able to contribute to her grandson's life in a way that both she and her daughter-in-law saw as significant. Maybe Dóra and Lilla would have had the opportunity to interact with each other in this way had they been similarly open to the devotion. Certainly, Valéria's pride in helping her daughter-in-law made this experience into a cherished memory, which stood in contrast to Dóra's memories that conjured up "bad feelings" in her. Mary's role in this episode from Valéria's life allowed it to stand as an account of her own

resourcefulness as well as the healing intercession of the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó against the powerful undertow of negative feelings that she might harbor as a result of her son's divorce.

In the second case, Valéria's story illustrates precisely what kind of devotional world is excluded from the concept of "traditional religion" as imagined in institutions like the European Union-funded Microregional Association NGO and *National Geographic*. When the photographer demands "no t-shirts" in her photos of rituals and the Microregional Association tries (unsuccessfully) to comply, it is *women's* devotional worlds built with and through Mary that are pushed beyond the margins of this "tradition." In particular, it is women's efforts to cross various social boundaries – class, educational, and religious – in the act of healing that the photographer finds intolerable and condemns to the world of tourists that must be kept from ruining *National Geographic's* "pristine" religion.²⁰

Mary's Soothing Touch and the Professionalization of Massage

Another key element of Valéria's story lies in the way she and her daughter-in-law used the t-shirt to *touch* their sick relative. Whereas therapeutic touch, as I noted earlier, has been increasingly professionalized as massage and hospitals often keep patients from soothing contact with close family members, Mary's devotees like Valéria often insist on touching their sick

²⁰ In fact, there is nothing new to the observation that concepts of "religion" produced in authoritative institutions and by trained professionals "correlated certain environments and 'types' of people," especially women, in order to "pathologize unacceptable forms of religious behavior and emotion" (Orsi 2007: 187). Still, two elements stand out from a comparison between the exclusions resulting from the production of traditional religion at Csíksomlyó and such genealogical accounts: First, as I argued in Chapter One, the European Union, *National Geographic*, and environmental NGOs appear to be competing with state-supported universities as the primary venues for the production of traditional religion today. Second, the t-shirts that were made to go missing from the pages of *National Geographic* were the victims of exclusions not of improper emotions or behaviors, but rather improper objects insofar as they help constitute a devotional world alongside Mary's intercessions. Orsi's genealogy focuses on the study of American religion, but genealogies of the concept of "religion" and "magical" or "popular" religion in Europe often make this same point. Genealogies of religion have proliferated since the early 1990s, and the list of these works is now too long to present exhaustively. For works that focus on the construction of magical religion or tradition in both Eastern and Western Europe, see Masuzawa 1995, 2005; Kapaló 2011; Preus 1987; Smith 1982; Taylor 1998; Wasserstrom 1999; Luehrmann 2011).

relatives. Another acquaintance named Berta told me that when her niece, Marika, had been admitted to the hospital for severe pain in her joints, she decided to visit Csíksomlyó.

I ran out to Csíksomlyó. On foot. I went quickly before I went to the hospital. I took a nice, clean handkerchief. I went up to the Virgin Mary, to the statue, and I wiped the Virgin Mary's foot, and I put it in a nice plastic bag, in a clean [one]. I will take it to the girl so that the Virgin Mary should help her, that she shouldn't have so much pain, because she couldn't even sleep.

Her niece was in such pain that neither Berta nor her sister could approach her bedside. Her illness had been exacerbated by incompetent medical care, so Berta offered Mary's help instead. Berta's sister-in-law was at her niece's bedside when she arrived.

I said, wait, Marika, I brought you a handkerchief from the Virgin Mother. Put it on your legs. Then, [she said,] "Oh, oh!" She didn't want to let me [put the handkerchief on her legs]. And then, with the handkerchief [I rubbed her] gently on her knees through her pajamas. I rubbed her as much as I could. On her calves and everywhere.

Not long after I heard this account, I paid her sister-in-law, Bernadett, a visit to inquire about her version. It was largely the same, ending with an affirmation that Mary relieved Marika's pain:

And we put it [the handkerchief] on her legs and Marika said, "Mom, leave it on there because it doesn't hurt! And when the handkerchief was on her, the pain disappeared. It was interesting that when we took off the handkerchief, then she felt this big pain. And she said, "Mom, put it back!"

When doctors' injections proved ineffective, Berta used the handkerchief and the presence of Mary to provide physical comfort to her niece, massaging her legs and calves while surrounded by other female relatives.

For instance, several months after my conversation with Edina and her daughter Júlia about Mary's intervention to ease Júlia's scarlet fever I stayed overnight at Edina's home. We were chatting when Edina began to tell me about a recent experience in which she had also used the water to tend to a stranger's pain. Edina was in the hospital in Târgu Mureș for an operation. She drank the water and rubbed it onto her wound as she was recovering. The next day a new

patient arrived in Edina's room who was in sustained pain. Edina carried the bottle over to her bedside: "I didn't even know if she was Catholic. I didn't even ask. I just asked, 'Do you believe in the Virgin Mother?'" Edina then told her to drink from it. After taking a sip from the bottle, Edina asked where she was in pain. The Romanian woman then pointed to her stomach. Edina poured another dollop of water onto her palm. She "spread" (Hu. *megkenti*) the water into the woman's abdomen. "She was sleeping within an hour," Edina recalled:

When the woman woke up, she was totally rested. I was getting ready go home when she woke up. And she cried when I was getting ready to leave, saying that I shouldn't go because I am being healed by you. But not by me, by Mary...And this happened to me. I don't know. I don't know. They brought her in the morning. She was Romanian. And her pain disappeared.

A final account of a devotee using an object blessed on Mary's statue for healing in a hospital setting comes from a devotee named Monika from a village in the Ciuc valley. Monika's husband, Attila, appeared in Chapter Two via his story about Mary's intervention to prevent a nearly fatal accident while he was hauling potatoes to market. Attila continues to work as a truck driver, and he was on a haul the first time I met his wife Monika and their four children. On this occasion, the family's eldest son, teenaged Tibor, was drafted into playing the role of host. The atmosphere during my next visit, however, was very different. When I arrived, Tibor was hunched over the family computer and unresponsive to my greeting as I took off my shoes. He soon began casting cutting comments at Monika as we chatted in the kitchen. He made accusations toward Monika that accentuated his role as a son and gave voice to resentment at being forced into doing his father's jobs. He declared that Monika would be a horrible mother-in-law, since she had frightened away his last two girlfriends. He accused her of refusing to feed him. He complained that Monika was trying to exhaust him by sending him to do work around the house.

Monika responded to this litany by denying his accusations. To me she explained that Tibor had not slept in three days and that he had been back and forth to his grandparent's home in an unsuccessful attempt to calm him. She confessed that she had hoped my presence would relieve Tibor's illness, but to avail. When I called a few weeks later, she picked up from a hospital in Târgu Mureș where Tibor had been admitted. She explained that she had driven him to the city when his symptoms had not subsided after days more of the same suffering. After a few minutes, Monika asked me to pray for Tibor and then hung up.

The next chance I had to visit the family was three months later. Tibor was free of the anguish that had plagued him. We played guitar together; he showed me some new heavy metal licks he had picked up. He also mentioned that he was taking a prescription anti-depressant after his stay in the hospital. Later that night, I asked Monika about Tibor's stay in the hospital. In the middle of her account, she walked over to a drawer in the dining room where she had stored a white handkerchief. The handkerchief with embroidered sides was folded into a neat square inside a thin plastic bag when she pulled it out of its storage space. She had rubbed the handkerchief on Tibor's forehead and face, she said, when she had been in the hospital with him. I then asked Monika if she could show me how she had touched Tibor with the cloth. She walked the two steps to her son, who had turned on the television during this exchange. She proceeded to wipe his face gently, but steadfastly. She used long vertical strokes on his cheeks and brushed his forehead with a horizontal touch. Monika's gesture stood in stark contrast to the physical therapy I witnessed and experienced in hospitals, which isolates the ill from the healing touch of kin through the professionalization of therapeutic massage and the ministrations of machines.

Mary in the Lives of the Chronically III

Devotees often confessed that they encountered the most difficult trials when they or their kin were struggling with chronic illnesses like Tibor's. The chronically ill, psychological anthropologist Arthur Kleinman has argued, encounter a distinctive series of experiences that set them apart from those with acute medical conditions. Chronic illnesses have a particular and unpredictable rhythm of remission followed by renewed onset of symptoms. Treatment of chronic illnesses is expensive and makes severe financial demands on the patient's wider social network (Kleinman 1988: 44). Exhaustion is one of the common shared conditions of chronic illness – not only the exhaustion of a family's resources, but a shared emotional exhaustion experienced by exasperated caregivers, kin, and patients (Kleinman 1988: 47). The chronically ill often feel that their illnesses are not isolated to a single body part, but expand outward to infect their entire being and world. Patients become the illnesses and the illnesses become the patients to the exclusion of other attitudes and gestures towards the world besides those the illness allows (Kleinman 1988: 48). These experiences combine to produce deep emotional turmoil for those suffering from chronic illness, and both the sick and everyone around them are liable to shift between anger, despair, guilt, and worry within chronicity's the unpredictable rhythms.

While devotees often spoke of these and other aspects of chronic illness, they returned most often to the experience of despair as the province of Mary's help. A woman in her mid-sixties named Réka and her daughter, Aranka, shared their story about asking for Mary's intervention on behalf of Réka's youngest son. He was worked on a series of building projects in the 1990s, and he had to renew his visitor's visa every ninety days by crossing the border into Romania. The bus that was taking him across the border on one of these trips got into a horrific accident. Réka and Aranka traveled to Csíksomlyó regularly while he was recovering in hospitals

first in Hungary, then in Târgu Mureș, and finally Miercurea Ciuc. His recovery took several years, and was filled with setbacks. At one point, his physician told him they were going to amputate a leg. Aranka remembered that her brother became desolate at this news:

We took him into the hospital in Marosvásárhely where they, so they could get him to move...but they couldn't do anything. You can see that he has trouble moving today, as well. And the doctor said they need to cut off his leg. I will never forget. I took him to the bathroom. He asked me to push him [in the wheelchair] so that he could smoke a cigarette. He said that if they cut off his leg, then he will throw himself out of the fourth floor window because he couldn't bear it.

Aranka became choked up with emotion at this point in her recollection. After a few moments she continued, “We asked that the Virgin Mother help him get back on his feet, because he is so young. We asked that he shouldn't lose his leg.” Mary relieved her brother from this despair and helped him recover from his injuries.

There are hints of Arthur Kleinman's description of chronic illness' capacity to expand outwards into every part of a person's world in Dóra's recollections of her chronically ill infant nephew, Sebestyén. Mary's devotees also find ways to use the idiom of the devotion to recast this experience of the insidious pervasiveness of chronic illness in the lives of the sick. One of my acquaintances, Rebeka, gave birth to a son with a chronic condition much like Sebestyén's. Her son, Bertalan, continues to suffer from severe seizures and his condition affects multiple bodily systems, especially his gastro-intestinal function. During one of our conversations, Rebeka once mentioned that Bertalan had begun to refuse attending folk dancing classes. I was surprised by her comment, since these classes are a universal part of elementary education in the Ciuc valley. Years of afterschool dance instruction go a long way to constituting a Szekler Hungarian embodied attitude toward the world. They are also a mark of pride for parents who get to watch their children perform at local festivals, often providing opportunities for foreign travel to dance events in Hungary. Rebeka responded to my querying look by explaining that a

young girl had recently made fun of Bertalan after she had been paired with him in class. She had mocked his distended abdomen, a result of his chronic condition, by asking, “Are you pregnant?” Bertalan was so upset that he refused to go back. Rebeka was certain that this was a reality that Bertalan was going to have to get used to: “There will be many more [instances] like this,” she stated. Kleinman and others have noted that the chronically ill often cannot control how they present themselves to others, a critical part of the process of establishing a world around themselves. This difficulty then becomes a persistent aspect of their engagements with the world in the form of a “spoiled identity” (Goffman 1963: 3; Kleinman 1988: 159). Rebeka’s recollection also conveys how illness moves throughout the sick person’s social network; for those enmeshed in caregiving like Rebeka, Bertalan’s experience of the world becomes her own and his spoiled identity is her own sense of frustration (Kleinman 1987: 243).

Mary allowed Rebeka to repeatedly and powerfully recast this experience within the world of the idiom. Rebeka had written an account of her son’s illness as evidence of a miracle that had resulted from her prayers to Mary as well as other divine figures. She had worked with a local priest to publicize her prayers and Bertalan’s miraculous recovery through the local branch of the Catholic radio network, Radio Maria. The priest had also carried a copy of her testimony to the Archbishop who was seeking evidence of miracles for use in the canonization Cause of a local Catholic luminary. Rebeka was proud of her account, which mingled descriptions of Bertalan’s healing with acknowledgments that his condition still plagued him. Rebeka was eager to tell me about Mary’s intercessions the first time we met, and she proudly displayed Bertalan’s body before me so that I could see the evidence of his miracle and her relationship with Mary. If Rebeka and Bertalan were vulnerable to chronic illness’ power to become the encompassing medium of their engagement with the world, Marian devotionality also provided them with

powerful tools that disrupted and intervened in that process, reorienting the elements of a world that could threaten to become singularly defined by illness.

V. Conclusions: Power and Immediacy with Mary

What are Mary's devotees doing when they pray to her in secular post-socialist hospitals? One way to answer this question is to look to the crucial role of touch in the healing process. Where illness, pain, and the professionalization of therapeutic touch has robbed mothers, daughters, and close kin from the ability to provide solace through human contact, devotees respond by using Mary and objects such as handkerchiefs to provide desperately needed acts of physical tenderness. In effect, they invoke new subjects, objects, practices, and words – Mary, blessed handkerchiefs, devotional massage, and prayer – into the secular and isolating world of the hospital, thus recasting it as a devotional space in order to turn women's touch into a meaningful therapeutic gesture.

We are also now in a position to consider whether the devotion is an instance of affection-building, informal payment, or occult imagining. There are aspects of the way Mary's devotees talk about her help in times of sickness that lend themselves to comparison with all three "personalization" strategies. In the first case, doctors seem to become more affectionate and better able to provide better care as a result of Mary's interventions. The second practice enmeshes patients in debts and obligations, and the Virgin Mother certainly requires a great deal from her devotees in return for her help. Third, Mary appears to have secret knowledge of the inner workings of the healthcare system, using this privileged information to lead her devotees to the right doctors at the right times.

However, what sets Mary's interventions in the secular post-socialist hospital apart are the moments when she steps in-between doctors and patients. Unlike in the case of other

informal strategies, Mary's devotees are not primarily concerned with an "immediate" relationship with doctors when they disrupt the world of the hospital by invoking Mary's "mantle" into these spaces. It struck me, rather, that they are most concerned with achieving immediacy with the Virgin Mother. In the intimacy of this relationship with Mary, devotees are able to redirect, reorient, and mediate power's effects on and through them. When doctors operate more successfully because of Mary's assistance, when they express befuddlement at one of her miracles, and especially when devotees step in with healing touch after uncaring physicians have failed to resolve illness and suffering, Mary's devotees are recasting the relationships through which power is experienced in and through their bodies in contemporary Transylvania. The world established under and through Mary's mantle becomes constitutive of experience during times of illness; in the end, it appears as a discourse that "ironically" creates religious subjects who "better prepared to live in just the kind of [neoliberal] world this theological, political, and moral rhetoric seeks to overcome" only if one seeks to avoid the phenomenological experience of Mary's touch (Zigon 2011: 192).

Paying attention to devotees' healing practices also shows how Mary serves as the transitional object that D. W. Winnicott placed at the center of processes of intersubjective change. Mary establishes a world in which contradictions between past and future are simultaneously disambiguated and muddled. There was nothing about Mary's devotees approach to healing that suggested they believed in magic, runes, or the power of language to change reality. They used prescription medications and aspirin alongside blessed t-shirts and handkerchiefs. The world of modern medicine remained authoritative even as its points of contact in devotees' lives were mediated. And devotees recognized authorities' constructions of this world as absolutely different from the one that their mothers might have told them about as

children. But Mary is also redolent of the future, of openness, of global Catholicism, of the unfamiliar and unaccustomed world to which devotees are being told that they should desire even as figures such as Csaba Böjte blame them for this desire. When Mary's devotees are told that they both should and should not desire the new and unfamiliar, Mary helps them hold these contradictory messages together even as she also allows them to take hold the past.

Chapter Six: “I Ask the Virgin Mother...:” Transylvanian Radio Maria and the Politics of Devotional Storytelling in Global Lifeworlds

But, well, you know, if someone isn't asked about it. Like you, I mean, this interests you. And you asked and then someone calls it to mind. But otherwise, it's just not on your mind. You gave gratitude to God that, no doubt, He helped me. And you incorporated it into your life that God was with me and the Virgin Mother helped me. She interceded for me. But you don't have it on your mind most of the time in any special way.

- Emilia, age 63, southern Ciuc valley

I. Introduction:

This epigraph is a comment that came at the end of an interview. Emilia had told me a story about a miracle, and then offered to introduce me to a neighbor who was also devoted to Mary. When I asked her if she was referring me to this acquaintance because this acquaintance had told Emilia a story like the one I just heard, Emilia replied, “No, I don't know if she has a story like this.” Emilia's explanation for why people do not readily talk about times when they experienced Mary's intercessory help is also a description of the conditions necessary for someone to tell such a story. In essence, Emilia had taken a moment to probe one of the central paradoxes of the intersubjective politics of storytelling: What kinds of conditions are necessary to transform a personal experience that exists as something “incorporated” into your life into a “story” – an exteriorized object of pragmatic focus and use? In Emilia's words, who “asks” for a story, how do they ask, and when, such that a devotee turns experience into narrative?

In this chapter, I argue that this paradox defines the social, political, and religious significance of a major recent addition to life at Csíkсомlyó: a local branch of the World Family Radio Maria global radio network that broadcasts from a building at the shrine. Transylvanian Radio Maria is dependent on financial donations and volunteer service, primarily solicited through Rosary prayer groups that are members of the Transylvanian Radio Maria network. One of the ways that Radio Maria promotes the network is, to adapt Emilia's word, “asking” devotees

to talk about instances in which Mary has performed miracles for them. Such requests exist on an informal level as devotees feel comfortable sharing stories with each other about miracles in various Radio Maria-related settings and venues. But Radio Maria also formally invites devotees to call in to the radio station and share their prayer petitions on the air during a twice-weekly “prayer request” (*imakérés*) broadcast. Throughout the bulk of this chapter, I probe the phenomenological experience of storytelling evoked by Emilia in her comment that appears in the epigraph: I describe what is happening in and around Radio Maria as devotees take up experiences that normally stand in the backgrounds of everyday consciousness, using publicly circulating narratives to turn towards them anew and in the process making them into objects of focused concentration and pragmatic effort.

My approach, therefore, treats Radio Maria as an instance of the post-socialist politics of storytelling, or the pragmatic conversion of private experience into *publicly* circulating shared narrative idioms, with my operative notion of “public” emerging from Hannah Arendt’s intersubjective treatment of this concept, as outlined in the Introduction: the space of appearance by which people sharing a common world come together so that public concerns can be articulated from different perspectives (Arendt 1958: 22-78). The devotional world to which Radio Maria’s listeners contribute is critically different from the examples of national ritual spectacles that have often been used to describe the way religion has emerged in public life after socialism.¹ Pointing to these phenomena as the distinctive product of religion’s encounter with

¹ Katherine Verdery’s (1999) seminal study of reburial after socialism is essentially a study of funerary ritual. For other prominent studies of ritual as public religion during and after socialism, see Creed 2011; Rogers 2009; Kligman 1988; Bernstein 2013. Pilgrimage and shrine-making processes are also often seen as public ritual (Zubrzycki 2006). Saints and canonization processes have also provided a venue for making religion public after socialism, but such phenomena have received comparably little attention in anthropological literature. See Tosltaya and Versteeg 2014 for a literary critical study of saint-making processes in post-Soviet Russia. For scholars working in Transylvanian Hungarian communities, ritual is seen as the quintessentially religious phenomenon to be studied after socialism, with the result that storytelling is often assimilated into this category (see Fosztó 2011; Györfy

modernity allows scholars to assume that modern religious semiotic forms are distinctively deracinated from their capacity to mediate intersubjective relationships with divine beings, and instead provide the social function of constituting the legitimacy of powerful elites as they construct ritual into objects of culture alienated from everyday communal worlds.² Radio Maria in Transylvania offers an opportunity to revise this picture of religion's role in post-socialist public life in three ways: First, we leave behind such spectacle and ritual as the primary examples of post-socialist religion, and instead turn to the distinctive ways that the idiom of the miracle forms not only subjectivity, but also a religious public. Second, and more importantly, the formation of this public and the circulation of religious forms does not come at the cost of alienating local communities from their gods, but rather constitutes ongoing intersubjective relationships between devotees and divine beings.³ Third, I argue that the miracle stories circulating through Radio Maria offer opportunities for everyday people – and especially women – to actively contribute to the building of a global religious public that emerges as it intersects with and draws from, but does not wholly encompass, intimate family life.

These themes and claims will appear and reappear throughout this chapter. I sketch the history of Radio Maria in Transylvania and at Csíksomlyó in Part Two. In Part Three, I use ethnographic observations of everyday Catholics talking about petitions to Mary to describe the prevailing everyday context in which devotees use Radio Maria to create publicly circulating

2009). Because ritual is seen as the formation of subjects through assimilation into collective norms, what is lost from the study of storytelling is the subject's distanced attitude of pragmatic focus that emerges in storytelling.

² For studies that either implicitly or explicitly adopt this understanding of modern religion as the process of converting local ritual into public national spectacle, thus fundamentally transforming, secularizing, and alienating such semiotic forms, see Verdery 1999; Creed 2011; Rogers 2009; Kligman 1988; and Luehrmann 2011.

³ For other studies of Catholic communities that used miracles to constitute themselves as a religious public, see Robert Orsi's account of Catholics in the United States who constituted a religious public through the new devotion to St. Jude, Patron Saint of Lost Causes (Orsi 1996). See also Kaufman 2007 and Harris 1999 writing about Lourdes.

stories about miracles. And in Part Four, I focus on a survey of prayers to Mary, which I collected between 2010 and 2014, after I was invited to volunteer for the radio station.⁴

One likely criticism of my approach to storytelling in this chapter is that I inappropriately downplay the recalcitrance of semiotic form in constituting storytelling processes. While in Part Three, I briefly discuss the basic elements of the semiotic form of Catholic miracle stories from a phenomenological standpoint, in truth, I do not examine the history of local, Catholic, or broadly Christian religious genres in any depth. My theoretical orientation towards understanding desire in terms of primary intersubjectivity has led me away from such stories that might begin with and give greater emphasis to discussions of the way religious ideology, encoded in semiotic form, works on subjects; or the way modern mass media systems likewise function to alienate religious subjects from themselves. Rather, I begin with an account of face-to-face interactions and concrete subjects' efforts to work on their lifeworlds as the crucible through which semiotic form takes shape and the forum that provides the best insight into Radio Maria's influence on contemporary Catholic storytelling practices in Transylvania.

II. Radio Maria Moves into Transylvania

Global Influences and Minority Institutional Autonomy: The Early Period of Mary Radio in Transylvania

Radio Maria constitutes the primary medium through which devotees of the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó in the Ciuc valley and the whole of Transylvania hear and exchange prayer petitions and accounts of miracles. Radio Maria only became a regular presence at Csíksomlyó in 2009, with a station set up in a room that once served as a kitchen for the

⁴ The archive of prayers submitted over the Transylvanian Radio Maria web site can be accessed at <http://www.mariaradio.ro/imaszandek>. Individual submissions are cited either in the text or in footnotes by date, author, and place of residence, if available. Emailed prayers dating from before November 2013 are in the collection of the author and available upon request. Recordings of the prayer request program before 2014 were made from live broadcasts. This material is also in the author's collection and available upon request. Place names are given in Hungarian since they are quotations from individuals. I preserve full or partial names since these prayers are offered in forums open to the public.

Franciscan monastery. The radio network's history in Transylvania began only a few years before in 2003 according to the recollections of the current president. In a May 5, 2011 interview with the archdiocesan newsletter intended for more "cultivated" audiences, *Christian Word* (*Kereszteny Szó*), the president Ferenc Szatmári describes a meeting with a group of Italian Radio Maria organizers who were looking to expand the network into former socialist countries. At this point, Szatmári was a member of a foundation promoting the Medjugorje pilgrimage site, and the Italian organizers paid a visit to the foundation's headquarters in Oradea.⁵ Six months later, he received an email inviting him to the world congress of the radio network in Rome (Ferrario 2003). His recollection emphasizes the global nature of Radio Maria:

Every president and director [of local Mary Radio chapters] are present at these conferences. In this case, more than two thousand people were there [in Rome in 2003], and there were representatives from "exotic" countries such as Burkina Faso – can you imagine, I hadn't even heard of this place before then.

Beyond Szatmári's sense of astonishment, what comes across in the article is his sense that Radio Maria is currently establishing a place for itself as a foremost medium for the fashioning of a contemporary *global* Catholic culture, while also providing Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics like him an access point to this culture. At the end of his article, he proudly describes Transylvania Radio Maria's place in a network that stretches from the United States to Papua New Guinea and consists of sixty different countries. "We are there in the world's largest Muslim country, Indonesia," he informs his readers, as well as in the Philippines and Lebanon, while Transylvania has sent contributions through Radio Maria to countries where they are just setting up stations for the first time, including China and India.

⁵ It is not surprising that Mary Radio as a link to the transnational Catholic world should have been mediated through someone with experience at Medjugorje, since this pilgrimage site served as a similar medium for people like Piroška, Erika's mother, who spoke about meeting African priests for the first time while on her trip to Medjugorje.

In his account of the network's early days in Transylvania, Szatmári assesses the significance of Radio Maria along two lines, both of which harken back to the desiderata of Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic elites formulated through their search for a Catholic leading class. Szatmári gives his account of Transylvanian Radio Maria as part of the process of forming the Catholic bourgeoisie a decidedly ethnic tinge: In his opinion, those Hungarian-speaking Catholics in Romania who have shown themselves as exemplary entrepreneurial subjects have proven their exemplary character in contrast to Romanian-speaking Catholics. Thus, the Catholic diocese in Iași first invited the Italian volunteers for Radio Maria to come to Transylvania and then the Greek-Catholic diocese in Cluj, but for reasons that Szatmári does not provide they left both meetings without accomplishing anything. Finally, the Radio Maria group paid a visit to Szatmári in Oradea where they found enthusiastic and willing volunteers.⁶

Szatmári's report also describes his efforts on behalf of the radio network as evidence that his goals and values are in accord with those of the intellectual leaders of the Transylvanian Hungarian community. He insists that he told the Italian organizers that he would only take on the leadership of the radio network if they established "two separate radio stations – one Romanian and one Hungarian." The establishment of ethnically separate and parallel institutional structures has been at the top of the agenda for Transylvanian Hungarian elites since the early 1990s.⁷ Not only is this the model that Szatmári is referencing here; he also presents himself as a community leader who has established himself in this class by using Radio Maria to help fulfill this desideratum of the Transylvanian Hungarian elite. He then returns to the theme that those

⁶ He returns to this theme of ethnic competitiveness later in the article, combining it with his valorization of Radio Maria as a symbol of the attributes of the Catholic leading class: He notes that Transylvanian Hungarian Radio Maria's situation stands in contrast to the Romanian version of the network that is still dependent on outside funding.

⁷ See Brubaker, et. al.'s (2007: 149-52) discussion of Transylvanian Hungarian intellectual elites' romanticization of the early socialist period higher educational system when the government established separate Hungarian and Romanian universities in Cluj. After 1989, Transylvanian Hungarian intellectuals united around the desire for recreating a similar system.

who were involved in Radio Maria demonstrated the proper attributes of the post-socialist Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic leading class, especially the capacity for volunteerism, institution-building, and initiative, since the radio network is now self-supported by networks of donating volunteers. In this case, Szatmári holds Radio Maria – and himself – up as role models of the “openness” (*nyitottság*) and “maturity” (*nagykorúság*) that are required of leaders in contemporary Transylvania.

Finally, Szatmári concludes the article by affirming that the events in this early period of the network’s development betray the work of God’s “providence” (*gondviselés*). He compares this early period of Radio Maria to driving a car without brakes that again and again comes upon a steep precipice. The fact that bridges repeatedly and suddenly appeared over these cliffs shows, in Szatmári’s words, that “providence was standing behind everything.” Adopting this attitude of using storytelling to tie together seemingly random occurrences could be a way of encouraging devotees to adopt a similar stance in their own narrative practices; it could be a reflection of devotees’ pre-existing practices; or it could be a combination of the two. In any case, there is a widespread impulse that stands behind storytelling about miracles that can be encapsulated in a devotional dictum that I often heard right after devotees told me about a specific instance of Mary’s intercession: “There are no accidents” (*nincsen véletlen*). This same attitude makes an appearance in Szatmári’s use of divine providence to draw a through-line tying together events in this early period of the radio network’s development.

Radio Maria Expands: The Prayer Request Program

Residents of the Ciuc valley self-stereotype themselves as closed and resistant to change, and this added to my surprise that Radio Maria has achieved so much success in a short time in the Ciuc valley and Transylvania. A constant accompaniment to my fieldwork, it was on in the

background during a great many of my interview recordings, and in my many conversations with devotees about their relationships with Mary, we often referenced recent news we had heard from Radio Maria about events at Medjugorje, Guadalupe, and other Marian shrines around the world. Its listenership includes every demographic group, gender, generation, and social position in the Ciuc valley. Even urban doctors, intellectuals, and lawyers who did not attend church and did not admit to listening to Radio Maria were still able to tell me about news announced on the station.

One of the primary ways that Transylvanian Radio Maria has promoted itself is by establishing new Rosary prayer groups and tapping into existing networks of women who pray individually but exchange the “mysteries” of the Rosary in a circle according to a monthly schedule. Many villages in the Ciuc valley have one or more Radio Maria prayer groups in which participants are encouraged to record their donations using small stamps in booklets. Such a system harkens back to socialist-era practices, at least according to one of my acquaintances who elicited laughter from her group when she compared the booklet to a similar one she had used in the “Pioneers” youth groups. Radio Maria also publishes a monthly newsletter that features autobiographical profiles of volunteers. Acquaintances who were volunteers were very proud of their contributions to the newsletter, and they sometimes read these vignettes aloud for me so that they could demonstrate their pragmatic proficiency in this emerging world of autobiographical and devotional storytelling.

Listeners are given the most consistent education and encouragement towards Marian devotion during the twice-weekly call-in “prayer request” (*imakérés*) programs broadcast from

Csíksomlyó.⁸ Volunteer announcers receive phone calls from listeners who offer petitions for Mary's help and report her divine intercessions. The volunteers also read a few of the hundreds of email and text messages the station receives each week.⁹

The Semiotic Form of Petitionary Prayer and Miracle Narrative

Radio Maria's prayer request program is part of a long Catholic tradition of the Church using miracles both to establish new institutions and expand its profile in the world of modern mass media, with other examples going back to magazines associated with 19th century American Catholic missions that regularly published reports of answered prayers (Taves 1986; see also Orsi 1996). Although the genres of petitionary prayers and miracle stories are often treated simultaneously in historical and anthropological literature, they are rhetorically and structurally distinct semiotic forms in Catholic cultures.¹⁰ The petitionary prayer is constructed as a simple genre consisting primarily of a statement of the situation devotees are facing and the resolution that they desire.¹¹

The miracle story is more complex and precarious than the petitionary prayer, adhering to a general five-part structure. First, the narrator begins by setting the context – describing the year and location of the events. Second, key players are introduced followed by, third, a narration of events constituting an unresolvable crisis. Fourth, the narrator describes the petition to Mary that

⁸ Although devotees reported hearing such narratives in a variety of other venues, including the Marian apparition site at Seuca (Szökefalva) and charismatic groups, none mentioned contexts that provided them the daily education into Marian devotional habits that I am describing here (see Gagyí 2002; Gyórfy 2009).

⁹ The program lasts only fifteen minutes, in which the hosts are able to speak with four or five individuals on the air and read three or four SMS text messages and emails. The hosts receive phone calls, email messages, and texts with prayer requests throughout the week, amounting to almost ten times as many requests than they can possibly read in the time allotted. All of the prayer requests that come in via email and text messages are brief, lasting only a few lines or a full paragraph at most. Longer messages are condensed.

¹⁰ As I argued in Chapter One, under the first decade of socialism until the mid-1960s, these genres appeared in anti-religion propaganda and campaigns against the Catholic Church. Women preachers who proclaimed miracles were denounced as bourgeois reactionaries and were committed to hospitals as mentally ill.¹⁰ Articles in *Dolgozó Nő* about miracles cited the Lourdes pilgrimage, and used this genre as grist for scientific propaganda providing materialistic explanations of such phenomena or debunking them as tools of bourgeois interests.

¹¹ See Robert Orsi's discussion of "narratives of petition" to St. Jude for the basis of this discussion (Orsi 1996: 122-4).

follows the crisis. Fifth, the narrator describes the resolution of the crisis. Finally, there is an affirmation of Mary's role in the resolution, often involving some kind of praise for her power and beneficence. For instance, "I give thanks to Mary" or "Mary helped me" often signal the conclusion of the miracle story. Petitions and miracle narratives that I encountered during my fieldwork were often intertwined with other oral vernacular semiotic forms – including joke genres, tall tales, litanies of woe, religious poetry, nationalistic cant, and conversion stories.¹² In the next section, I address the question: What are the specific intersubjective dynamics of making desires public and embodying them into circulation through petitionary prayers and miracle stories?

III. The Precarious Pragmatics of Narrative

The General Context for Storytelling about Petition and Prayer

My interlocutors who narrated instances of divine intercession reported few other regular venues besides Radio Maria for sharing these experiences with others who were not family and close kin. The staff and clergy at the pilgrimage site do not encourage such stories, perhaps out of a theological and cultural discomfort with the excesses that miracles represent. Excess and associated class anxieties seem to be the concern to which the shrine's cleaning staff responds when they regularly clear *ex voto* objects left at Mary's feet, including flowers and other gifts that could provide evidence of miracles. They are preventing the church from "filling up," to cite the words of one church staff member. Devotees are left only the opportunity to contribute the (expensive) marble plaques that hang on the walls besides Mary's statue.¹³

¹² For discussions of some of these vernacular speech forms in Romania and Eastern Europe as a whole, see Ries 1997; Kligman 1988; Kligman and Verdery 2011: 35-45; Alexopolous 2003; Wanner 2007; Fosztó 2007.

¹³ See Notermans and Jansen 2011 for a discussion of the politics of *ex voto* objects at Lourdes. For a discussion of excess, abundance, and class at Catholic pilgrimage sites, see Orsi 2008.

Given this atmosphere that makes Radio Maria's efforts so precarious, including the possibility that one could be slandered as insane by one's neighbors, it mattered a great deal how I came into contact with devotees if they were to feel comfortable sharing their stories. What seemed to matter most was a combination of my attitude, family background, and relationship with Mary that I carried into these interactions. Devotees read a great deal into who provided me with introductions, helping them anticipate my attitudes toward Mary. For instance, I once received an introduction to a devotee through a priest who was known to be so devoted to Mary that his retirement gift from the archdiocese was a trip to the Marian shrine in Guadalupe. At the end of the conversation, the devotee praised my demeanor by saying, "I knew you were serious [*komoly*] because Father Lukács told me about you." Father Lukács was not a mirthless man, and I saw him smile and laugh – albeit in the subdued fashion characteristic of Transylvanian Hungarians – on many occasions. Rather, his "seriousness" seemed also to be a matter of how committed he was to his devotion, and his positive reference on my behalf indicated my own similar commitment.¹⁴ Devotees even demanded that I be serious when they were not. One devotee broke into laughter at several points during our first conversation, even commenting that she was saying such "stupid" things [*hülyeség*]. When I laughed with her at one of these points, she responded sharply: "Don't laugh!" Her tone conveyed this comment as both a demand and a plea. She might be allowed to laugh, but I was not. Stories about Mary's miracles were often interlarded with distancing comments and laughter that bordered on self-ridicule, but I learned that although such laughter might be necessary for a devotee to feel comfortable it was rarely an invitation for me to join in.

¹⁴ See a reference to "moral seriousness" as a value among Transylvanian Hungarians in Brubaker, et. al.: 2007: 175.

Finally, sharing a devotion with my own family members also seemed to help devotees feel that they could speak with me. My mother came to Transylvania during my second year of fieldwork, and she was eager to visit some of the Rosary prayer groups that I had been frequenting, including several in Bălan. Later, I started meeting with a devotee there who had recorded a series of apparition experiences, but after one conversation that did not go well, due primarily to my unwise attempt to conduct interviews in the midst of a bad cold, she suddenly cut off all contact, only to call me two weeks later and invite me back. Her neighbors later told me that they had received inquiring calls about me from the visionary during this time; they told me that they had reported I was a strong devotee of Mary, and recalled my mother's visit as evidence. Apparently, the fact that I had others who could vouch for my devotion inspired the visionary to give me a second chance.

Although public petitionary prayers were such a new phenomenon that my Transylvanian Hungarian ethnologist acquaintances, who generally focused on phenomena associated with “archaic” practices, expressed little interest in them, popular media entrepreneurs' efforts to record such prayers illustrated for me the way in which devotees insisted on personal, face-to-face relationships with me as the medium for talking about praying to Mary.¹⁵ A clergy acquaintance once introduced me and my research project to the Budapest-based entrepreneur and editor of the annual *Csiksomlyó* magazine, a glossy tourist-oriented publication he sells as a money-making scheme each year at the pilgrimage event. Several months later, I was having lunch with another clergy – a chaplain at a Miercurea Ciuc high school whom I had met for the first time that day – when he told me a story about a recent request from this editor. The editor

¹⁵ During socialism, the purview of ethnological research in Hungary had been shaped by seminal work on “paraliturgical” religious semiotic forms that were also viewed as temporally atavistic and thus “archaic” (Kapaló 2011: 231-55). Transylvanian Hungarian researchers largely adopted these categories, and so I received frequent suggestions from ethnologists to change both the location and topic of my fieldwork since petitions to Mary did not fit accepted research models.

had asked him solicit his students for stories about petitionary prayers to Mary. Unfortunately, the priest noted, he received not a single reply to the mass email he sent out. He received resounding silence to his suggestion that they canvas their “older” relatives – he mentioned grandmothers specifically in his email – for miracle narratives to be published in the magazine.¹⁶ Three factors set this appeal apart from those moments when devotees felt comfortable speaking to me about their relationship with Mary. First, whereas devotees often only told me stories about Mary if they knew that I felt some connection with Mary, Hungarians from Hungary generally felt Marian devotionism to be an exotic, foreign, and strange phenomenon. No doubt encouraged by messages from Catholic elites like Hajdó and Ozsváth trying to keep tourists in their place, Hungarians from Hungary like watching other people do things like pray to Mary, but it provided no basis for sharing within the world formed by Mary’s mantle. The editor himself was open about having no interest in Marian devotionism or any family connection to it. Second, students and young people were generally shy to meet with such unknown foreigners, who also frequently doubled as authority figures. Third, schools were often seen to be like workplaces – contexts in which teachers had license to openly dominate and humiliate students. Sharing personal and intimate information in such circumstance put them at risk of judgment in ways that were intolerable.

I was slow to catch on about this latter expectation about home as the proper venue for conversations about Mary. Early on, it was only when I unknowingly asked devotees to talk about miracles while at work or in front of non-family members that my acquaintances’ shocked and even offended reactions prompted conversations about the quiet (*csendes*), intimate (*hangulatos*, *meghitt*, *bensőséges*), and spiritual (*lelki*) atmospheres required for such stories.

¹⁶ Fosztó associates the aspiration to monovocal recitation with the enactment of authority in the case of Transylvanian Roma conversion narratives (Fosztó 2010: 75).

These efforts to embody the quietness of the home in gestures of compassion have their roots in the idea of the domestic “heterotopia” that identifies the home with relations of mutual support, authenticity, and trust (Feherváry 2013: 14-19; see also Gal and Kligman 2000: 63-8). However strong devotees’ inclinations were to establish a safe domestic space in this way, most were rarely ever able to put this idealized picture into practice. Only older, widowed women were able to arrange a time to be home alone so that they could tell their story without interruption. In most other cases, my acquaintances managed as best they could. For instance, one young woman who worked at Miercurea Ciuc’s central parish initially demurred when I solicited her narrative while we were sitting in the rear parking lot sharing a cigarette. Later, when we met in the basement laundry room, where she thought we could speak alone, she stopped her narrative to loudly chastise another coworker who walked in during our conversation. There were few opportunities for men, in particular, to speak privately outside the home in both urban and rural settings, which made it difficult to guarantee settings for uninterrupted narratives. When I met rural men inside their homes, they often told me their narratives in the presence of family members, with wives stepping in and out of conversations, asking questions, disagreeing with the accuracy of dates, and so on. Speaking in their courtyards was no better, since these spaces saw a constant flow of traffic as neighbors stepped in and out of gates to visit for various purposes. Sometimes urban men tried to tell stories at the small sheds at the edge of the city where they keep chickens and farm animals, but these spaces, like rural courtyards, were not free from interruption since passersby could overhear or step into the conversation at any time.

The Position of Insanity and the Anxieties of Storytelling about Miracles

If Radio Maria uses the semiotic forms of petition and miracle to attract members and supporters, it is working in a very difficult atmosphere in which devotees often fear that they will

be socially demeaned or called “insane” if they speak openly about Mary interceding on their behalf.¹⁷ I became aware of how these interactionally mediated anxieties shape the process of storytelling about Mary’s miracles early on in my fieldwork during a series of conversations with a married couple and their female neighbor, a devotee named Zsuzsa. I had previously met the son of the married couple, whom I will call Mihály and Zita, after he had asked them to help me with my research. One afternoon, they invited me to their home in a village in the northern part of the valley, after which they walked me down the street to meet Zsuzsa and her husband. Later, I learned from other acquaintances that they had been surprised I had sought out Mihály and Zita for help. Zita was widely known to be antipathetic towards Catholicism. In her words, “I keep farther apart from these religious things than Mihály. I go to church if I’m forced to.” Mihály, in contrast, spoke proudly of his service on the local parish council, while harboring an equivocal attitude toward miracles; he struck the pose that it was really up to the ecclesiastical hierarchy to decide on such matters. At the same time, in their behavior towards their neighbor, Mihály and Zita conveyed that Zsuzsa held a relatively less powerful position in the village. Although Mihály, Zita, and Zsuzsa lived nearby each other, they did not speak about frequently socializing as was common for friendly neighbors in villages around the area. Instead, Zsuzsa only spoke of accidental encounters with Zita at the local grocery store. This impression of social distance was further enhanced when Mihály and Zita immediately turned to leave to leave after introducing me to Zsuzsa, at which point Zsuzsa’s husband jumped up to persuade them to stay for a coffee.

¹⁷ I suspect two possible precedents constitute the ground of this anxiety. First, my acquaintance was active in the Hungarian Lay Carmelite Order that had recently experienced a leadership split. A clergy leader of the group had ousted a woman from her leadership position by claiming that she was suffering from a mental illness, which she protested by sending letters to the leaders of all local chapters. Second, religious leaders and women who publicly claimed to be performing miracles or having visions were diagnosed as insane and placed in hospitals during the early anti-Catholic Church campaigns in this region in the 1950s (see Gagyí 2002: 235-55).

After exchanging some pleasantries, I explained my interest in stories about Mary's intercessions to the four neighbors. Zsuzsa, who worked as a nurse for many years, responded by telling us about the time she prayed to Mary while tending to Mihály's ailing mother. After Zsuzsa prayed, she was immediately able to locate a vein for an emergency injection. Mihály and Zita responded to this story by keeping their bodies pitched straight against the backs of their chairs while maintaining a stony silence complete with folded arms against their chests. This silence prevailed until Zsuzsa's husband reached across the table and offered another shot of hard liquor to me and Mihály.

A couple of days later I visited Mihály and Zita to ask for an explanation of their cool demeanor. Mihály said it was because he doubted that Mary had intervened, but he decided to be tactful.

But if I were to say definitively: 'Well, I don't believe in it.' Then I am questioning her interpretation. From the perspective of tact, we are not so brutal as to say, 'The whole thing is a fairytale!' We don't say this kind of thing, because then our opinions conflict. And then the one starts avoiding the other.

Zita based her reaction on her inclination to "keep a greater distance" from miracles and religion in general. They both absolved themselves from any implication that they could be blamed for entrapping their neighbor. It was Zsuzsa, they insisted, who had made the choice in this instance. *She* had "taken it upon herself to make this public" (*publikus, nyilatkozni*).

Zsuzsa's reaction to this encounter was significantly less sanguine than Mihály and Zita's. During my frequent visits to her home over the course of my fieldwork, I observed Zsuzsa greet guests generally with a friendly smile, but on this occasion her tone was tense and her demeanor serious. She even interrupted me several times – a surprising display of anxiety overriding typical Transylvanian Hungarian conversational rhythms that feature long pauses and generous use of silence. Her statements about the interaction shifted back and forth between

denying that she had told this story and arguing that she had, but it proved her superior intellect and social position. First, Zsuzsa seemed anxious to dissuade me of any impression that she was “simple” (*egyszerű*), “uneducated” (*tanulatlan*), or “primitive” (*primitív*). These were all words that she used to describe women who tell stories about miracles – a class of religious people from whom she now distanced herself. When I expressed confusion about this denial, she changed her argument slightly. She gave me a piece of advice – from one educated intellectual to another – that I should change my research topic away from such stories. I would never find enough material for a research project, she insisted, because only educated people who understand “metaphysics” (*metafizika*) would be able to talk about such matters. Zsuzsa turned the tables on those who would ridicule her story about Mary by casting doubters into the mass of uneducated “rural” people. In a telling illustration of this second point, Zsuzsa claimed that these “simple people” (*egyszerű emberek*) would express their ignorance by deriding those who tell stories about miracles as insane:

But people don't dare tell these stories, because, in the end, people will believe that she is crazy. *That's* not how to talk. She has no brain! She's lost her mind! Because if I go to a neighbor, and I tell a neighbor this kind of story, and now he sits down a bit and thinks and meditates. He'll think, 'Wow, her mind has gone.'

This series of exchanges is captivating as an illustration of how Mary helps her devotees manage difficult affective experiences. Looking exclusively at the direct, face-to-face interactions, it is clear that Zsuzsa felt humiliated by her neighbors' silence and interpreted it as demeaning arrogance. She then recreates herself as the subject of the situation, rather than merely the person who has suffered the imprecations of others, in our following conversation. Their arrogance is actually a sign of their own social marginalization; her humiliation then becomes a launching pad for taking action by offering guidance and advice to a visiting anthropologist.

Also embedded in this instance of storytelling about Mary is an effort to take up a more abstract relationship with changing forms of social mobility, authority, and domination. In particular, Zsuzsa defends herself in this comment by reworking several socialist-era discourses (Gagyí 2004: 239-40).¹⁸ In the late 1940s and early 50s, when the new socialist government placed female visionaries in “hospitals” as victims of mental illness, intellectuals were featured in newspapers explaining that the illnesses were due to the fact that visionaries’ families had not been able to afford treatment. Whereas, in the 1950s, representatives of the enlightened declared impoverished rural religious figures to be insane, Zsuzsa now insists that it is a sign of the rural population’s lack of enlightenment – or perhaps a sign that they had been influenced by socialist propaganda – that they would slander a devotee for having lost her mind when she speaks about miracles. Zsuzsa is not only talking about the exchange with her neighbors; she is engaging in an oblique commentary about the state’s efforts to disparage petitionary prayer and the miraculous by associating it with terms such as simple, rural, and uneducated.¹⁹

It is also telling that Zsuzsa’s response to this encounter with Mihály and Zita does not explicitly reference the situation that it seems intended to address. My acquaintances who felt themselves to be socially vulnerable often engaged in such roundabout forms of commentary. In this case, although Zsuzsa felt obliged to disagree with them in order to repair this feeling of having been *acted on*, she was also aware of potentially negative consequences if she named her adversary directly. If Zsuzsa had responded to Zita explicitly, she would have admitted that Zita was in a social position that enabled her to spark such anxieties, further cementing Zsuzsa’s

¹⁸ Other newspaper reports criticized such figures as agents of counter-revolutionary and bourgeois elements, and that there was always some kind of “interest” behind the miracles they promoted in the population (Gagyí 2004: 242). This theme was commonplace throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, appearing frequently in articles denouncing miracles.

¹⁹ See Basso (1979: 9-13) for a discussion of similar themes in the politics of storytelling.

sense of vulnerability. In this untenable position, Zsuzsa attempted to preserve the appearance of not caring while still defending herself.

This encounter illustrates how in Marian storytelling understood as intersubjectivity there is always the potential to turn a balanced exchange into a lopsided relationship in which one person is a subject of action and the other a patient. Additionally, petitionary prayers and stories about miracles attract interest and raise anxieties in equal measure by virtue of the way they bring subjects into engagements with more abstract social actors such as Catholic commentators like Csaba Bőjte who label such experiences as out of the mainstream of the Catholic leading class. It is this intersubjective context that makes the decision to narrativize private experiences of prayer such a powerful fulcrum for leveraging social position, subjective psychological states, and educational levels in everyday life.

Asking for Miracles or Asking for Gossip: Anxious Encounters with Radio Maria

During my conversation with Zita, she spent several minutes declaring in no uncertain terms that she was not interested in “gossiping” (*pletykázni*) about Zsuzsa’s miracle story. Her desire to avoid the impression that she engaged in gossip drew on long-held stereotypes about women’s talk in Eastern European communities (see Kligman 1988). But beyond noting that Zita’s nervous efforts to defend her reputation are situated in history, what is interesting about this event is the way Marian devotionality brings together gossip, women’s everyday interactions, and the miraculous in ways that sparked uneasiness among my acquaintances. It was my impression that Radio Maria’s advocacy of public talk about miracles arouses high anxieties and tensions among Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics.

On a return trip to Transylvania in 2013, I learned that the family I had lived with for eighteen months had lost an infant child due to complications during childbirth. Of course, the

death hit the parents hard. I traveled to visit them, during which time I wept together with their father and attended the funeral. This tragedy was still on my mind several days later when I visited another family in a village about forty kilometers away. I was joined for Sunday lunch by my host Dávid's extended family, including his mother Szabina, sister Blanka, and younger brother Dániel. They were chatting about hospital conditions in a nearby city when Szabina jumped in with a question: What happened, she asked, to "that child from the village to the north?" The following exchange involved these siblings in a discussion about my former host family:

[Szabina]: How many days old was he when he died?
[MRL]: Where did you hear this?
[Szabina]: From Radio Maria.
[Dániel]: Really?
[Szabina]: They asked for prayers for the baby.
[Blanka]: Was this recent?
[Szabina]: It was recent. Recent. Recent. It happened either before Christmas or a couple of days after Christmas. Maybe before Christmas.
[Blanka]: This was the one that would have been the eighth, or ninth, or tenth child in the family, right?
[Dávid]: Yes.
[Blanka]: They said that she had been told that the mother wasn't allowed to give birth again? I mean, don't you understand Hungarian? What are you trying to prove by giving birth to a child and then the others will up as orphans? But the mother is sick, too. That's what they said.
[Dániel]: That's what I heard, too.
[Dávid]: If she's sick, Marc will know about it.
[Blanka]: What are you talking about? How is Marc going to know about it? Anyway, isn't this what happened? That she was told that her last birth had problems. And she isn't allowed to give birth any more. Isn't that right? The mom. The mom can't have any more children. So, wait, this just happened recently?
[Szabina]: Recently. Recently.
[Dávid]: I didn't hear that she was sick.
[Blanka]: She probably had a Caesarean, too. But is the woman sick, too, like the baby?
[Szabina]: They didn't say anything about the woman on the radio. They only said that they took the baby to a better hospital and that they took the mother there afterwards. Not at the same time. That's how I understood it. And

now the mother and baby are together. And we should pray for them.
That's all they said. I didn't hear anything more about it on the radio.

A few minutes after this exchange, Dávid managed to alert Blanka that she was talking about people I knew. She was abashed and asked me, in a suddenly much quieter tone, if I really had lived with them. After I answered in the affirmative, she continued reproaching the mother's "irresponsibility" (*felelőtlenség*).²⁰

This entire exchange offers material worthy of being explored on many different levels – including the topic of religious groups' role in promoting pro-natalism in contemporary Romania – but I want to draw attention to two elements that bear specifically on my investigation of devotionalism, the politics of storytelling, and Radio Maria. First, Radio Maria is not singled out for criticism, even though many things about this exchange might have been different without Radio Maria's role in publicizing this request for prayers to Mary. Indeed, Radio Maria's role is critical insofar as this family might not even have known about this prayer request – it might have remained solely within the village's informational networks – if, for instance, the priest had only announced it during Mass at the family's local parish instead of on the radio. There are several possible reasons for this group's lack of interest in criticizing Radio Maria specifically, one of which is the general sensibility among my acquaintances that, while the Roman Catholic Church and Radio Maria could be faulted for collecting money and gathering wealth from believers, no one could be faulted for choosing to pray in public and the Roman Catholic Church could not be maligned for promoting such practices. Blanka's criticism thus stayed away from the implication that the Church was somehow at fault in this situation.

²⁰ Such criticisms lobbed back and forth between women have appeared in recent anthropological studies of gender after socialism, described in terms of the way labor migration offers opportunities for reassessing economic decision-making (Keough 2006).

Even if this group did not single out Radio Maria for censure, it is still evident in the exchange that the radio station's activities *do* prod at certain anxieties among residents of the Ciuc valley. In particular, Szabina's concern at the end of the conversation mirrored Zita's as she reflected on her encounter with Zsuzsa: They were both worried about being accused of spreading malicious gossip, an accusation that Szabina sought to deflect by repeating as precisely as she could the information she heard reported on the radio. The implication of her recitation here was that this did not amount to gossip because she had done nothing more than repeat, without emendation, addition, or subtraction, what she had heard from this public source. By pushing back against the implied criticism that speaking about someone else's prayer was like gossiping, Szabina was revealing that, in fact, the information shared in such prayers was fodder for such informal talk. The family's prayer request had opened a window onto private family business – specifically family members' health crises and information that points to the causes. On the one hand, Radio Maria has found success in publicizing its activities because it has tapped into village Rosary prayer circles that also doubled as means to spread information through informal networks of women's talk. On the other hand, this means that many of the prayers broadcast on the radio can easily be taken up by these same informal networks, leading to anxieties that emerge in response to criticisms levied at women who build social relationships in this way. Thus, anxieties about gossip constitutes a critical factor that devotees must take into account when they consider how to convert their subjective experience of prayer into publicly circulating stories about Mary's miraculous interventions.

Private Family Problems and Public Petitions

It was my experience that even people like Blanka, adamantly critical of publicly circulating stories about familial concerns, were often unable to keep up such appearances

themselves. Indeed, her criticism of my acquaintances was no doubt fed by her own anxieties about exposing familial secrets which I observed when she spent twenty minutes on the phone chastising her eleven-year-old niece for treating her rudely in public. Her furious reprimands were possibly indexing a desire, long acknowledged among working class and bourgeois European populations alike, to prevent the public airing of private familial difficulties, an inclination rooted in the early modern establishment of hegemonic distinctions between self-controlled bourgeois and libertine aristocratic and working class populations (see Gal and Kligman 2000: 44). During a conversation I was having with a group of teachers, they tried to illustrate the definition of an obscure rural Hungarian slang term I had just heard: *bütürmec*. They laughed together as they explained that this derogatory word – the equivalent of “rough” (*durva*) – could be used to describe men who stand around watching their children fight in the street while others look on. What came across from this laughter-inducing illustration, however, was less a definition for this word than the fact that these urban bourgeois intellectuals harbored a profound fear of admitting that they had experienced or one day might have to experience something like this.

More than just a subject for joking, elites sought to actively discipline others to keep familial discord private through their various leadership activities as organizers of cultural festivals and programs. It was my experience that those who would have felt themselves to be comfortable on stage at the Pentecost pilgrimage as “intellectuals” (*értelmiségi*) were often among the most voluble critics of “fads” (*divat*) like psychotherapy as a way to address marital and familial difficulties. They drew on motifs similar to that deployed by Csaba Böjte in his 2012 sermon, discussed in Chapter One, valorizing the deep intimacy of the multigenerational extended family as the way to resolve – and even prevent – family problems. I witnessed this

advocacy play out in everyday life in various instances, but none illustrated this conviction more clearly than an exchange between family members I observed one evening as I accompanied a village group to the valley's carnival celebration (*farsang temetés*), a highlight of the annual government-sponsored festival cycle. The group's leader was an art teacher who commuted to work in Miercurea Ciuc each day. Although the teacher began the bus ride home by taking over the bus driver's microphone and leading us in prayer, he spent the rest of the trip standing in the aisle leading traditional folk songs on his violin. At various points, a young man, big and burly in his late teens, stopped by my seat to make conversation and offer swigs of plum brandy while also trying to persuade me, and anyone else who would listen, to get off the bus early for a party he had heard something about. During one of his visits to my seat, I learned that his younger brother and mother were also on the bus, while his father was at home, but was only in Transylvania for a short time while he waited for word from an acquaintance about a construction job in Hungary.

Twenty minutes later, when we arrived at the village where the party was taking place, the young man turned aggressive as his mother and younger brother followed him off the bus, urging him to continue home. At one point, he had his younger brother in a headlock and struck him while the mother and others were shouting, "Stop! Stop!" At various times, people called to the art teacher for help, but he remained in the back of the bus. Either he did not hear them or he did not want to, because he continued playing music and did not acknowledge these hails. Finally, after about fifteen minutes, the mother and younger brother gave up and we pulled away, leaving the young man to attend the party. The younger brother and mother remained visibly upset for the rest of the ride home, involved in quiet conversations about what had transpired on the side of the road.

When I related this incident to other acquaintances, they agreed that the art teacher's behavior had been consistent with his belief in keeping family problems private. I never met this family again, and thus have no way of knowing if the mother ever called on Mary for help in moments when, as hard as she might try and as much as others might ask her to, circumstances prevented her from abiding by the dictum that such problems be kept in the family. But when I heard women call in to Radio Maria and describe situations like this one – families stressed by labor migration, alcohol consumption, and aggression – I often thought back to that night beside the bus, and wondered if she was one of these women who were asking Mary to help them inhabit a lifeworld in which they were forced to publicly air familial conflicts.

IV. Global Prayers to Mary and Transylvanian Radio Maria

Face-to-Face Storytelling at Radio Maria – Csíkсомlyó

There is a fundamental continuity between devotees' in-person petitionary prayer and storytelling about miracles and efforts to use the same semiotic forms during the call-in program and on the Radio Maria web site. In particular, it is my impression that basic similarities unite the *life conditions* about which Mary's devotees spoke and on which they were working while communicating using these venues. I therefore begin my discussion with a description of a miracle story that Ilonka, a Radio Maria volunteer, shared with a small group of colleagues during a gathering at the Csíkсомlyó station, which I subsequently recorded on another afternoon during her weekly shift. Ilonka lives in Bălan with her husband, a retired upper executive in the mine administration, which allows them resources to enjoy relative comforts such as leisure travel and a personal car. Her sister, Fruzsina, lives in Miercurea Ciuc an hour and a half away. Ilonka and her sister are also outsiders to the Ciuc valley, having moved to Bălan from a village outside Târgu Mureș; they are doubly outsiders because they were raised in

a Protestant family. In contrast to other women who spoke of their involvement in Radio Maria as an extension of their relationships with their mothers who had taught them to pray the Rosary, Ilonka was a new adoptee of Marian devotionism and a newcomer to the radio's volunteer network. The social ties she spoke about in her story resemble those of other urban women who maintained familial and secondary relationships in villages and cities several hours away.

Ilonka's narrative revolved around a series of trials after Fruzsina was diagnosed with a cancerous tumor on her kidney. They traveled together to see a surgeon in Târgu Mureș who was more skilled than doctors in Miercurea Ciuc. The doctor began "swearing" at the two women after he examined Fruzsina, blaming them for irresponsibly delaying treatment. Ilonka defended their delay by turning this accusation back onto the physician, who had given them the initial report about the tumor in "doctor's script" (*orvosi írás*). They mistook a one for a twelve and concluded that they could wait because the growth was still miniscule. After roaring that the tumor had expanded to seventeen centimeters, the physician dismissed them, offering the consolation that if they traveled six hours to Oradea, a city close to the Hungarian border, then he would have a colleague there do the operation. The hospital staff in Oradea ferried her from test to test, but did not give information about her condition. In the meantime, Ilonka had to return to the Ciuc valley. On the road between Miercurea Ciuc and Bălan, Ilonka's husband stopped to pick up elderly male hitchhiker. During the conversation, he unexpectedly referenced the Virgin Mary, which Ilonka noted but did not take as a significant sign. The next day, however, her sister called. She was so upset that she could barely speak:

She called me at 9:20 AM and she was crying so much she was sobbing. I couldn't understand what she was saying. I said, 'Listen! Stop for a second. I don't understand. I don't understand what you are saying.' '[She said,] 'The professor said that he will operate on me. He will have to take ninety percent of my kidney. I will have go on dialysis. And he will be able to save ten percent of my kidney. He gave me ten minutes to think about whether she will agree to the operation, or not.'

Ilonka comforted her and told her that she would be praying to Mary. Her sister then decided to have the operation. That evening, Ilonka was home alone, took out her Rosary. “As I closed my eyes, Jesus appeared in front of me, who was standing like this. And my sister was standing next to him. And Jesus put his hand on my sister’s forehead.” The next day, Fruzsina phoned Ilonka to report that the tumor had turned out to be smaller than anticipated. The physician had saved enough of her kidney to eliminate the need subsequent regular dialysis.

Ilonka’s acquaintances at Radio Maria universally described her story as highly affecting. Several women were crying as she told it, and they later urged me to record the narrative for my research. We can understand the reasons behind her story’s effectiveness on other devotees as a process of balancing the inner world of experience with the outer world of recognition through pragmatic efforts to work on self and world. As Michael Jackson argues, in storytelling there is a “deeper need for some integration and balance between one’s personal world and the wider world of others, such that one’s voice carries and one’s actions have repercussions...” (Jackson 2013: 40). Her story recorded an instance of a devotee asking Mary to attend to a family relationship strained by distance and illness, which found a responsive audience among urban and rural women who sometimes experienced obligations to family members in far-off cities and villages as the demand to be in multiple places at once. It also served the particular pragmatic purpose of establishing her position within a community of volunteers at Radio Maria that might not have felt inclined to welcome her as both a regional and religious outsider.

Mary and Modernity: Beyond the Anonymous and Isolated “Modern Pilgrim”

Such instances of face-to-face storytelling that are called forth by contemporary conditions of social mobility provide a starting point for understanding devotees’ prayers on the call-in program and web site. The first thing that becomes clear, on reviewing petitions published

through Radio Maria, is that recent anthropologists' efforts to erect a distinction between "religious" and "secular" pilgrims, no matter how much "epistemological clarity" it provides, is itself epistemologically obfuscating (Margry 2008: 30). There is little productive value in trying to sift and sort among devotees who offer petitions through Radio Maria. This is not so much because devotees flummox categories such as "religious pilgrims" versus "secular travelers" – the former who write anonymous notes in shrine "intention books" because they are supposedly ashamed to talk about "religious dimensions" versus the latter who extravagantly narrate their experience of finding themselves on the Camino de Santiago – although it is the case that these distinctions are ill-fitting in the case of Radio Maria in Transylvania (Margry 2008: 25-6; Frey 1998; Fedele 2013: 22-3). Rather, the problem with this approach is that anonymity is not a way for scholars to make people safely thinkable according to their categories, but rather a pragmatic and situated tool by which people intersubjectively construct religious worlds. Participants in Transylvania Radio Maria's prayer request program often insist on voiding their anonymity by announcing their identities and their hometowns on the air. For instance, during the February 25, 2011 prayer request program, "Renáta Mihály from [Csik]szereda [Ro.: Miercurea Ciuc]" offered a prayer for, among other people, "My dead father; for myself so that I can keep to a good path; [and] for my mother's health so that she can take care of the family."²¹ Devotees frequently name deceased friends and relatives on whose behalf they are offering prayers, much like surviving family members announce the anniversaries of relatives' deaths in newspapers.²² When devotees provide the full names of those on whose behalf they are praying, they are also

²¹ For other examples of remembering the dead in this way, see the prayer from "A Mother from Csik [Ro.: Ciuc]," on February 15, 2014 for, "my deceased love." Teréza Srepler, on February 16, 2014, names in her prayers for the dead, "József Orosz, his son Géza, and Pál Srepler."

²² See, also, Szilvia Lukács, February 24, 2014, from Csíkdánfalva (Ro.: Dănești).

inviting listeners to pray for these devotees in need.²³ Mary's petitioners are especially keen to name friends and family members who have been hospitalized, often as a way to help the ill feel less isolated and alone. On March 21, 2014, Valéria Szőcs asks for prayers for Klára Bogos who had recently been hospitalized, and requests that other devotees also pray for her recovery.²⁴ Sándor Csegöldi, from Marosludás (Ro.: Luduș) prays, "For my dear wife's improvement. She is sick and tied to her bed. Please say a prayer together so that she will recover her ability to speak and to be relieved of her suffering."²⁵

Not only are devotees willing to shed their anonymity when they pray to Mary, whether they call, email, or text message, they are hardly the isolated individuals that appear in the typical scholarly accounts of "modern" European pilgrimage. Devotees often speaking directly to the specific people they are praying for since they expect that these people are listening to Radio Maria and praying to Mary at that moment. A caller on January 6, 2011 asks Mary to "hear my daughter Erzsike's prayers. Please, I ask you, Virgin Mother, change her family situation. We, the listeners of Radio Maria, will be praying together with my daughter." Ibolya writes in an email on January 13, 2011 asking Mary to support "those who are praying for me." It is especially typical for mothers and daughters to exchange prayers back and forth through Mary, as in the case of a caller on January 13, 2011 who announces that, "I would like to greet my mother with all my prayers, Beáta Gulyás, who is listening to Radio Maria at this moment. From

²³ See also, Gabriella Ferenczi from Csíkszereda (Ro.: Miercurea Ciuc), March 7, 2014, who offers a prayer for the members of her Rosary group and her grandmother.

²⁴ March 10, 2014. See also Erzsébet Benkó's prayer for her children, "Piroskáért, Mancika és Nándor, for their health and peace," from Görgényüvegcsűr (Ro.: Glăjărie). March 17, 2014. Devotees will give their own names if they feel they are the ones in need of Mary's help. Anna Bugja from Csíkszereda (Ro.: Miercurea Ciuc) wrote in to the web site on February 22, 2014 to "offer this reading for myself." Births are also joyous occasions on which devotees often offered prayers in their own names. Mónika Keresztes from Csíkmenaság (Armășeni) gave thanks to Mary for, "last but not least our soon to be arriving child with which the Virgin Mother and God blessed us."

²⁵ July 13, 2014.

her daughter Erzsike in Csik [Ro.: Ciuc].”²⁶ Mary’s devotees often expect that their acquaintances, friends, and neighbors will recognize their voice when they call to offer their petitions to Mary, even when they do not name themselves. One devotee told me that her goddaughter recognized her voice when she called the radio station while her husband was having surgery and began praying right then and then. These new forms of religious practice at the Csíksomlyó pilgrimage site are not so much a vehicle for modern individuals to be left alone in order to find meaning in their lives, but rather, the prayer requests establish ties of reciprocity and systems of favors and debts that endure and bind devotees to each other and Mary over time (Morinis 1992; Margry 2008: 22).

This sense that devotees are bound together with Mary through long-term reciprocal exchanges of prayers and intercessions is especially clear when they choose or feel obliged to remain anonymous, since many expressed the conviction that Mary already knows their needs, desires, and problems. “A Listener” from Balán (Ro.: Bălan) on begins her petition from February 20, 2014, “My dear Virgin Mother, you already know what kinds of problems I’m struggling with, take me into your grace and give back my soul’s peace.” This conviction is helpful when devotees are struggling with a difficulty that is especially shameful or embarrassing, allowing them to anonymously ask for help without having to unduly discomfit themselves when greater harm might come from such disclosure. Far from pilgrims who are surreptitious or silent because they are ashamed to talk about the “religious dimension,” what comes across from reading such prayers is devotees’ pragmatic oscillation between concealment

²⁶ Devotees expect and know that people will be praying for them and thus involved in events in their lives. They often send serial prayer requests: Mária in Switzerland offers this urgent prayer on July 17, 2014: “I would like to prayers tomorrow for my sister-in-law for the Virgin Mother to help her and that her operation should be successful.” The next day she writes, this time in all capital letters, “I would like to this current Rosary for my sister-in-law who is being operated right at this moment. I ask for the Virgin Mother’s help.”

and revelation effected within the context of intersubjective relationships with divine and human counterparts.

Religion and “Neo-Traditionalism” Reconsidered: Work in the Devotion to Mary

Unemployment and family finances are constant concerns for devotees and thus frequent topics addressed in prayers. Mary’s female devotees ask for help for their husbands and sons as they search for local jobs, often in the hopes of avoiding labor migration that could disrupt family routines and reciprocities.²⁷ In these cases, women pray also for their husbands and sons to be spared from workplaces that maim and leave bodies broken and wounded. For instance, I. Balog, on February 18, 2014, asks that her son Norbert, find a “well-paying, accident-free job.”²⁸ When young men find work abroad, women do not ask that they come home or blame them for leaving. Rather, they pray that Mary remain with them and protect them from harm. Marika from the Gyergyó (Ro.: Gheorgeni) valley asks for a prayer for “my children who are working in foreign countries...Protect their everyday activities with your mantle, Mary.”²⁹ Finally, Emese, writing from London on April 6, 2014, offers that day’s Rosary to the Virgin Mother, “For our health and that we have work.” Whereas Csaba Bőjte and other elites use petitions to Mary to reprimand female devotees when they ask for help so that their male relatives find employment,

²⁷ For examples of devotees praying for men to find jobs, see Melinda, February 13, 2014: “And for the Virgin Mother, help us all and my husband to succeed in finding a job.” “An anxious mother” from Márosvásárhely (Ro.: Târgu Mureș), February 20, 2014: “I ask for a prayer for my son who is in big trouble because he is without work. Please, God, help him to find work.” János from Székelyudvarhely (Ro.: Odorheiu Secuiesc) asks God to help him “find a job during these difficult times.” March 18, 2014.

²⁸ “I. Balog” is given as the residence for this entry, with the name, “A Mother.” However, since I. Balog does not correspond to a place name in Transylvania, but rather resembles a common name I have included it as the devotees’ identifying information. February 18, 2014.

²⁹ February 15, 2014. See also Babi from Csík (Ro.: Ciuc) writing on June 6, 2014: “I offer all my prayers today for pilgrimage, for the Pope, for my children living abroad, for their spiritual and physical wholeness...Jesus and the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó and every saint of God please come to our aid!” On February 17, 2014, “Listener” from the Sepsiszentgyörgy (Ro.: Sfântu Gheorghe) offers that day’s Rosary to Mary so that she will “protect my little son who is far away at work.” Erzsébet from Csík (Ro.: Ciuc) asks for a prayer for her grandson, “Who is working abroad and struggling with many problems. Virgin Mother, help him!” February 24, 2014. An anonymous devotee from Márosvásárhely (Ro.: Târgu Mureș) writes, “I would like to give thanks for the grace that my son has arrived in a distant country. Continue to help him make a life for himself where there is faith.” March 3, 2014. Ildikó from Gyergyóditró (Ro.: Ditrău) asks for prayers “for my husband working abroad.” March 27, 2014.

women like Emese turn the idiom of the devotion to their own uses, sidestepping Bőjte's efforts to turn them into reviled examples of disordered desire and improperly dependent relationships with the saints. Their prayers to Mary allow them to become one of a large group of women who struggle with the same reality of poverty, joblessness, insecurity, and loneliness. The idiom of offering prayers to Mary over the radio allows them to give voice to their fears without having to worry about being personally rejected as Bőjte did when he refused the woman who came to him to request a Mass. Women praying to Mary for their distant loved ones or giving thanks for their own jobs while living abroad become agents of mutual understanding and laudable champions of a movement reviving the Transylvanian Catholic archdiocese.

As I mentioned in my discussion of Transylvanian Catholic elite representations of Mary in Chapter One, it is a well-known fact among scholars of gender after socialism that religious groups have led the charge for a "re-traditionalization" of gender after socialism.³⁰ I did not discuss in detail the topic of gender, women, and Mary in my review of post-socialist Catholic elite literature in Chapter One, since Eastern European clerical writers' use of Mary for conservative and nationalistic purposes is well-established in anthropological literature. Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic writers deploy Mary to make many of the same points as religious elites elsewhere. Like Russian Orthodox Church Patriarchs, Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic devotional writers argue that women bear responsibility for betraying the nation by refusing to bear more children, thus precipitating a demographic crisis and the need for a return to religious gender moralities.³¹ And anthropologists have noted that Polish "Catholic

³⁰ See also Bernstein 2013: 99 for uses of this concept in studies about religion after socialism.

³¹ See Rivkin-Fish 2005: 99-102; 2006 for a discussion of the Russian case. An article in *Sunday* provides the occasion for a priest to comment on the special responsibility that mothers have to Transylvanian Hungarians: "The most painful point of the Hungarian folk is that they are not bearing children, the blessing of children, so much anymore....I wanted mothers to sense how responsible they are for the nation...." The article appears in the May 11, 2011 edition of *Sunday*. See also Daczó's comment from *The Secret of Csíksomlyó*: "[I]t was not only the jealousy and bad will of...other peoples that led our people, in the 20th century, onto the death-bed of being eradicated, but

nationalism” demands that women leave the workplace because they are defined by their social roles as mothers, a view that dovetails with the widespread evaluation of wage labor as alienating and housework as liberating in Transylvanian Catholic literature.³²

But what becomes clear from reading devotees’ petitions is that there are distinct differences in the way devotees and elites use Mary, with the result that anthropologists ought to use caution when assuming that religion contributes to “re-traditionalized” gender messages after socialism (Bernstein 2013; Dunn 2004; Daskalova, et., al. 2012). Where Catholic elites hold up Mary as the ideal woman and use this idealized picture to request that women give up jobs to have more children, female and make devotees often ask Mary to help female kin find work. On November 24, 2013, Eva Lukács from Temesvár (Ro.: Timișoară) asks Mary for an “appropriate workplace for my daughter.”³³ Edit from Csíkszentkirály (Ro.: Sâncrăieni) asks Mary to ensure that she safely delivers her first child and that, afterwards, she is able to “keep my job.”³⁴ On February 25, 2014, Zsolt from Miercurea Ciuc asks Mary to help his wife successfully complete an “entrance examination for a job.” Finally, Mary is petitioned not just for any kind of work, but she is asked to provide quality employment, as in the case of Mária, writing on March 17, 2014, who asks for “a good job for my daughter.” Petitioning Mary for a daughter, sister, mother, or wife to find quality work helps devotees not only avoid the moral approbation of Catholic elites.

rather it was our own sins that did this. In particular, the self-destructive sin of our families: the sin of not even a single [child]; or just one; even the sin of just two! Áron Márton [Bishop of Transylvania during Communism] was very much right when he said that it was Hungarian mothers who lost Transylvania” (Daczó 2000: 317)! For additional discussions, see Gal and Kligman 2000: 28-33; Brubaker, et. al, 2007: 297-300.

³² For the Polish case, see Dunn 2004: 139-142. Father Dénes Incze uses his weekly column on morality in the February 26, 2012 edition of *Sunday* to cajole his female readers to have more children by quoting a common saying: “One is none. Two are few. Our people will only begin to multiply at three... Then one or two might end up for us priests, as well.”

³³ February 14, 2014,

³⁴ See also the prayer from Julia in Csíkszereda (Ro.: Miercurea Ciuc) on February 26, 2014: “I beg you, my Virgin Mother, help against wicked and bad people and allow me to keep my job. Give me patience and health in these difficult times. Keep away everything bad. Thank you.” “A Listener,” writes, “I ask a prayer for health, peace, and so that my mother will find a better job. Thank you very much.” March 4, 2014. Zsuzsa from Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc) asks Mary to “sustain my job” on March 9, 2014. Kinga from Sepsiszentgyörgy (Ro.: Sfântu Gheorghe) asks for help in “finding a workplace” on March 11, 2014.

As I noted in Chapter One, women's stories about efforts to contribute to family incomes often prominently feature experiences of male harassment. Petitions to Mary can also serve as a way to bolster fortitude in the face of aggression; when Mary is invoked as a presence in the job search, she intervenes in situations alongside women as a mediation of men's power to shame and embarrass.

Radio Maria in the Lives of Ill Devotees

Devotees often turn to Mary with their worries about relatives suffering from addiction to alcohol, giving voice to concerns to which, as I argued in Chapter Four, the Transylvanian archdiocese does not dedicate significant resources and priests rarely speak about from the pulpit. Although alcoholism can be a shameful experience for family members and something that many of my acquaintances tried to keep from me, Radio Maria's listeners often provide significant identifying information in their prayers, thus suggesting that they want their relatives who have this disease to be publicly recognized. A devotee who identifies herself as Éva Karda from the village of Csíkszentdomokos (Ro.: Sân Dominic) asks Radio Maria's listeners to pray "for my husband to be freed from drink and for my entire family."³⁵ The prevalence of prayers dealing with a father-in-law, uncle, or cousin's alcoholism indicates not only the way in which illness brings together extended families in the Ciuc valley, but also the way in which the corrosive effects of illness radiate outwards through these same networks. On March 24, 2014, an anonymous devotee, most likely a young man, asks for a prayer for "my girlfriend's father who is an alcoholic. I ask you, Lord, help him free himself from the temptation of drink."

It is clear that callers who read their petitions on the air are aware that their prayers will be heard by those who could directly influence family members' behavior. On February 17,

³⁵ See also Veronika from Kézdivásárhely (Ro.: Târgi Secuiesc) who asks God to "heal my sibling from the slavery to drink and to return to a good path." February 19, 2014.

2014, Éva Urkon from Sepsiszentgyörgy (Ro.: Sfântu Gheorghe) offered a Rosary so that her “parents and siblings can love each other from the heart.” “A Sibling” from “Transylvania,” who provides her family name later in her petition, announces her brother’s troubling behavior: “I would like to ask for a prayer for Kati and Tibor to cease all connections between them because they have wanted to be together for three years and now Tibor has been married for nine months.”³⁶ This hope and expectation seems most clear when female devotees ask Mary to return their estranged husbands to them. On January 13, 2011, an anonymous caller offered up “this Rosary so that my husband will return to his family.” Callers seem to be moved not only by shame but also anger when they ask Mary to repair marriages and arrange a spouse’s return: On January 6, 2011, an unnamed caller offered a Rosary so that “my husband will return to his family from the wicked one who has led him astray.”

As I noted in Chapter Four, Mary is frequently asked to help relatives confined to hospitals by illness, and the ways in which devotees call on Mary in such settings provide an alternative intersubjective account of religious change in a global setting. Prayers publicized through Radio Maria also deal with hospitals and healing, with devotees often petitioning for help to avoid such institutions or for strength to persevere during extended treatments. On February 18, 2014, Mónika from Brassó (Ro.: Braşov) asks Mary to ensure that her daughter, Emőke, “does not go back into the hospital again.”³⁷ “A Five Year-Old Girl,” who did not provide a residence, asked on February 19, 2014, “Please, I ask everyone to pray a little bit for my mother, that her eye heals with medicine and that they don’t need to operate on her.” Prayers

³⁶ July 10, 2014.

³⁷ For other prayers on behalf of the sick, see “A Listener,” from Sepsiszentgyörgy (Ro.: Sfântu Gheorghe), February 17, 2014: “I would like to offer this week’s worth of Rosaries and Masses for my sick husband, so that the Virgin Mother heals him. Thank you.”

for safe and healthy births are a recurring concern for devotees.³⁸ As I argued in Chapter Four, Mary often mediates between medical professionals and devotees, deviating the power of the former when it seems that treatments are not helping, but rather exacerbating an illness. “I am Piroska Szabó from Csíkszereda (Ro.: Miercurea Ciuc),” one devotee introduces herself on July 12, 2014,

I would like to ask for a prayer for my healing [*gyógyulásom*] because I have had muscle weakness for seven years and this most recent moment has not been the best due to some strong medications and bad thoughts. Even my eyelids have begun to droop. Recently I have been well and then suddenly I was again attacked by bad forces and I’m not well. I’m asking for this prayer for my release [*szabadulás*] and for my brain to be cleansed.

Chronic and recurrent illnesses like the one Piroska is suffering from are Mary’s purview, and thus this petition is also example of the way the Mother of God often steps in to help devotees keep despair, loneliness, and isolation at bay.

When death is inevitable, Mary helps devotees face this reality while still maintaining hope for diminished suffering. On March 26, 2014, Julia from Sepsiszentgyörgy (Ro.: Sfântu Gheorghe) offers a prayer for her father, “Whose tumor was discovered just recently and day by day is getting worse. I ask, dear Lord, be kind and don’t make him suffer but rather call him to you as soon as possible.” And after a loved one’s passing, Mary is given thanks for reducing the agony of a death that could have been much worse: “I have recently asked multiple times for prayers for my grandparents in their suffering,” a devotee named Anna writes on March 23, 2014, “I would like to thank everyone and the dear Lord, because they both passed after a relatively short period of suffering.”

“Because you are powerful:” Mary beyond Propriety in Petitionary Prayer

³⁸ On February 19, 2014, “An Everyday Listener” from Csíkszereda (Ro.: Miercurea Ciuc) offers Rosaries for “my soon to be born child.”

For all the times that Mary's devotees use Transylvanian Radio Maria to petition Mary for help in returning relatives within the boundaries of social propriety, there is an implication that Mary might violate such proprieties in the prayers that frequently that either ask Mary to give "strength" (*erő*) or laud the Mother of God by declaring that devotees have felt her "power" (*hatalom*).³⁹ What is lurking behind these statements is the sense that the experience of such power can be tightly interwoven with fears that Mary will make her devotees do things they perceive to be inappropriate. In this way, Mary is seen as a divine being whose subjectivity produces sometimes inexplicable demands on her devotees in the mode that Robert Orsi calls "the dangerous edge of sacred power" (Orsi 1996: 117). This dangerous edge of sacred power can be seen in Edina's story about Mary's powerful demand that she violate social proprieties by crossing over the ropes in the shrine church. This dialectical image of Mary came up again in a later conversation. One day we were inside the church sanctuary when an older woman, supported on the arm of a younger man, begun shouting as she approached Mary's statue while her son audibly tried to make her stop. The older woman did not quiet down entirely, but rather continued to have a conversation with Mary in a slightly lower voice that Edina and I could hear but not understand. When I asked Edina about this scene, she offered this explanation:

The woman wanted to give thanks, out of joy. Why did her son not like it? It's possible also that...it was possible she was under the influence of a devil [*ördög*]. Perhaps she was complaining. Accusing Mary. I accuse Mary because she has not done something for me. I wasn't successful in reaching a goal. The devil manifests himself in dissatisfaction. But she was expressing her happiness aloud, at least that's what I think. Her son thought that you aren't allowed to bother others while they are praying. Everyone is going to pay attention to her.

Devotees' fear of the Mother of God seemed rooted in the experience that Mary's love and desire will make demands on them, even constitute them as subjects, in such overpowering

³⁹ See, Erzsike, writing from Germany, on March 27, 2014: "Thank you, my dead Virgin Mother, for your intercession. We very much feel your power [*hatalmad*] and that you are beside us."

fashion that they will “forget themselves” [*megfeledkezni magáról*] – a typical Hungarian expression for rude behavior – and step beyond the boundaries of propriety and expectation. Intimate family members, like this woman’s son, are also familiar with the relational dynamics that structure interactions between the Mother of God and their mothers’, sisters’, aunts’, daughters’, and even themselves. “Everyone will pay attention,” is the Edina’s description of the son’s fear that maybe his mother or even will be called to do something unrecognizable to himself.

Another devotee, a man in his early 60s, offered a similar portrayal of the Mother of God who acts on her devotees in surprising and even frightening ways. He compared entering into cycles of reciprocity with Mary to giving wedding gifts. You might give the typical amount of cash – three hundred lei (about one hundred dollars) – but the other person can then respond by giving more. My acquaintance named amounts in successively larger numbers until quoted the ridiculous amount of six hundred lei. And then he offered this explanation:

But Mary loves us. That’s why she does it. The Virgin Mother has helped so much that we should sense it every day. And we cannot complain. Because, you know, it would be rude to complain about the Virgin Mother giving too much. Because, well, the Virgin Mother is so beneficent. She is so loving that I, I, this, this...I would have been ashamed to complain. You’re not allowed to say, ‘Well, okay, that’s too much.’ She helped me so much that we should always ask again and for more. It’s base behavior. You have helped me with a good heart. And now I don’t want you to help me anymore? And I don’t thank you for it? No.

His implication was that if one tries to give thanks to Mary for her help, these efforts always pale in comparison to her intercessions, putting a devotee in the awkward position of having to respond to gifts that exceed a devotee’s ability to reciprocate. For my acquaintance, asking Mary for help might solicit returns that are both beneficent *and* overwhelming to the point of bending propriety.

What became clear to me as I reflected on both this man's and Edina's insistence that they were grateful or relaxed in their relation to Mary, and never angry, frustrated, or bitter towards her, because these conglomerations of feelings were, in fact, so tightly joined that they could easily become indistinguishable from each other. For Edina observing the older woman calling out to Mary, gratitude could have been recrimination; joy looked a lot like anger; happiness was the mirror image of dissatisfaction; prayer resembled possession; speaking with Mary looked like speaking with the devil. Perhaps this woman was expressing joy. Maybe she was giving voice to a deep dissatisfaction. Edina had such a hard time distinguishing the two in this moment because they are both so much a part of what it feels like to be devoted to Mary.

Beyond a Symbolic Mother of God: An Existential Public at the Csíksomlyó Shrine

In the Introduction and Chapter Two, I critically evaluated Anne-Marie Losonczy's argument that the post-socialist transformation of Csíksomlyó from a regional Catholic shrine into a polyphonic national pilgrimage site as a story about "the politics of [the circulation of] symbols." Her effort to keep a distance from people and activities at the shrine is apparent throughout her argument: She examines how the groups look when they are arranged in the amphitheater, not what it feels like to walk in a group to the shrine; how a spectator recognizes ethnic folk costumes, not what it feels like to wear them; and how to understand the symbolism of the Szekler national anthem, not what it feels like to sing it. The result is that she comes to the conclusion that changes at the shrine are best understood as a form of metonymy: "The recent and concomitant appearance of two anthems (Szekel [sic] and Hungarian) in this region became the cornerstone for constructing a new, supra-local patriotic space which encompassed the local and the universal" (Losonczy 2009: 181). The same process is at work in the way post-socialist Hungarian public culture treats the Szekler Hungarian minority in Transylvania: They appear as

an undivided whole symbolically reproducing the concept of a Hungarian nation stretching uniformly throughout the Carpathian basin. And finally Mary abets this process as a “metaphor for Magyar-ness” writ large.⁴⁰

While in Chapter Two I used a phenomenological analysis of changing lifeworlds at the shrine to criticize this approach, Losonczy’s argument bears further consideration and critique in light of Radio Maria’s role at Csíksomlyó today. First, it is difficult to argue that the public profile of the Szekler Transylvanian Hungarian minority is comparable to a “fortress” in light of the publicly circulating prayers offered by many devotees who live abroad. In the six month span from January to June 2014, devotees offered prayers to Mary from Israel, Austria, Holland, Denmark, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, England, the United States, Canada, Ireland, Italy, Germany, and the generic “Across the Ocean,” (*tengerentúl*). But beyond their far-flung places of residence, what comes across powerfully on reading these prayers is the *way* in which Mary is invoked: Mary is most often asked by her devotees to *heal*. Listing her residence as Switzerland, Emese offers a Rosary to the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó, “for the healing of my one-year old son, for the health of my loved ones, and for myself.”⁴¹ On February 28, 2014, Judit Merket, writing from Holland, offers her gratitude to Mary for answering her prayer: “I would like to offer this Rosary out of gratitude for the grace I have received, for my children, for my husband’s mother, sibling, and his family. For the healing of two illnesses.”

As these prayers also suggest, Mary is instrumental in helping families lessen the pain of distance and mend the relational bonds that are often stretched to the breaking point by

⁴⁰ The following position describing an existential, rather than symbolic, transnational public formed around petitions to Mary also resonates as a note of caution to those who would apply Alexei Yurchak’s account of the role of radio in the late Soviet Union to the example of Radio Maria (Yurchak 2006: 180-1). Shortwave radio, he argues, produced an “imagined West” by allowing people to learn English and listen to Jazz. For Transylvanian devotees, Radio Maria is primarily a vehicle for existential, not imaginary, discursive, or symbolic processes.

⁴¹ April 10, 2014.

separation. Mary provides this kind of healing by keeping distant relatives present in the lives of devotees: “I would like to offer this Rosary for my family, my husband Ervin, my mother, my bother István, [and] my husband’s parents and siblings,” writes Emese from London, “I ask you, Virgin Mother, to give health and peace to our family.⁴² And because sudden health crises put even greater stress on familial relationships, these are often the moments when Mary is called upon for help: András in Germany offers this petition on May 5, 2014: “I would like to offer the following prayer for my family. May the good Lord give health and endurance while I am far away from them and please let my wife’s medical tests be successful.” On June 5, 2014, “Gerti” in Germany names “my dear aunt Anna who was always helping so many people” and asks the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó to intervene in her healing after “yesterday’s serious accident.”

Although the prayers of parents who are residing in Transylvania often express a sense of sadness when they see their children changing into people they do not recognize, the prayers of parents who have moved to Hungary or further abroad sometimes convey a sense that their children’s transformation under the influence of these places is an even greater betrayal and rejection. Anna Ázbe, writes from Sándorfalva in Hungary on July 4, 2014, “Dear Virgin Mother, I ask that you return all three of my adult children and my grandchildren to the true religious path, because I raised them to be religious but unfortunately the contemporary world has ruined them.” “A Listener” from Germany asks for Mary’s help and protection so that, “with

⁴² The date for this prayer is April 7, 2014. See also Erzsike writing from Germany, March 27, 2014: “Thanks be to my Virgin Mother! For the fulfillment of my petition!!! I continue to ask my Virgin Mother to intercede with the Holy Son and to bring our petitions before him. Protect my children, parents, us, and my siblings from sickness and trouble. May there always be love and understanding between us. May we be able to help and love each other with pure hearts! Thank you, my dear Virgin Mother, for your intercession. We feel your power very much and that you are beside us. Thank you very much!!!” K. Z. writes from Italy on May 2, 2014: “I thank you. I thank you for everything, our good Father. I ask you to forgive our sins and help us day by day to be better. Thank you for letting me reach this year and continue to give my life meaning. Help me keep to the true and the good and defeat my temptations.”

the help of my prayers, my child will be able to change and live a life pleasing to God.”⁴³ The tone of barely concealed resentment in these parents’ prayers often resembles the frustration that gnawed at Szilveszter and prompted his comment that his son Töhötöm had become “coddled” after working abroad.

Like prayers for the sick, petitions that bind devotees together across national borders speak to the way Mary helps devotees sustain profoundly intimate relationships, which, in this case, is a need made harshly urgent by distance and separation: Judit from Márosvásárhely (Ro.: Târgu Mureș) asks for prayers for the Lakatos family in Toronto to “save their marriage which is in crisis. My dear Virgin Mother and every saint,” Judit continues, “be intercessors in heaven and help this marriage heal, since both sides are suffering and their seven year old child is suffering the worst harm.”⁴⁴ Labor migration puts distinctive pressures on adult women when they are apart from their children during critical rites of passage. As I noted in Chapter One, in the pre-collectivization period, birth and death once brought groups of women together in intimate settings in the home. Today, women working abroad ask Mary to be there for their daughters as they give birth for the first time. Ildikó calls on Mary from Israel on July 4, 2014:

I would like to ask for a prayer for well-being and health for my parents, for my three children’s health and happiness, for my daughter’s soon-to-be-born child, and for my own health and protection, that the Virgin Mother and the good Lord should help and protect us from evil in the midst of this great distance, so that we can meet my parents and children in health and well-being, if the time comes to return home.

As in this prayer, Mary eases the unbearable uncertainty of not knowing when or even whether one will return to one’s kin. Mary is also there for her devotees as they struggle with needs and

⁴³ The date for this prayer is February 17, 2014. See also “A Soul,” writing from an unknown location, March 11, 2014: “I ask for intercessory prayers for conversion and proper, good thinking in the lives of my two sons, my daughter, and my grandchildren.” Magdi from Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc), March 18, 2014: “I would like to ask a prayer for my cousin Szilveszter and Antal my nephew. My dear Virgin Mother help them find the right path and give them strength to support life.”

⁴⁴ See also “An Everyday Listener,” April 25, 2014, writing from Germany: “I ask with my prayers today for the Virgin Mother’s help and protection for a former colleague who is in the Csíkszereda [Miercurea Ciuc] hospital. I ask for her speedy healing and recovery.”

desires at the end of their loved ones' lives. The Mother of God takes the place of distant relatives at hospital bedsides, and later tends to the pain of those who cannot attend wakes and funerals. "A Listener" from Germany asks for prayers for her daughter living in Transylvania, "whose little baby died" on March 12, 2014. On March 31, 2014, Margit Urszuly offers this prayer from Sweden:

I ask for prayers for both my godmother's passage into heaven and at the same time for my aunt who is just today making her final journey. Because of the great distance, I cannot be there next to the coffin, but I ask the true God and the Virgin Mother to reward her for everything, for every loving moment of care-taking. May her tired body rest and her soul come before the Savior. May the Lord give solace to her loved ones and wipe away the tears of their pain.⁴⁵

Mary helps her devotees turn departed loved ones into memories of loving-kindness. And she remains behind remains beside her devotees when they cannot attend the rites of passage that are so critical to the process of being able to adapt to a changed world after the death of kin.

Three critical insights can be gained from reading these petitions to the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó from such far-flung locales: First, Csíksomlyó does not move Transylvanian Hungarian Catholics into post-socialist Hungarian public culture in the metaphorical shape of a Carpathian basin "fortress." Second, it is difficult to call the Virgin Mary of Csíksomlyó a "metaphor" in any substantive way when one leaves behind a distanced perspective and comes close to her devotees' experience. Mary is a *real presence* in her devotees' lives as they ask her to be with them and solace through critical events that stand out from a background of everyday efforts to maintain relationships and obligations. Finally, the public that is formed around the

⁴⁵ See also Magdolna Fodor's prayer from Sweden, April 6, 2014, "I would like to offer this Rosary for my brother Antal's passage into heaven. May the good Lord give him eternal rest." Terézia György, writing from Ireland, remembers her deceased grandparents in Gyergyóremete (Ro.: Remetea) on March 29, 2014. The Czumbil family in "Freising-Germany" commemorates the death of "our brother-in-law János Biro, who passed from among us a week ago." May 26, 2014. Dalma writes from Manchester writes on August 7, 2014: "I pray today's Rosary together with Radio Maria for my beloved friend's passage into heaven who died yesterday at 2:30AM after a long suffering. May God give her rest and comfort to her family. I ask the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó to offer our sister Katalin into her holy Son's grace."

Virgin Mary of Csíksomlyó is not constituted primarily by symbolic processes of metonymy and metaphor, but rather by *existential* processes of *healing* and *mourning* mediated through the semiotic forms of Transylvanian Hungarian Catholic devotional culture.

Petitions to the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó sent to Transylvanian Radio Maria also stand out in contrast to the dominantly national significance Ferenc Szatmári attributes to the network's role in the history of the Transylvanian archdiocese. Jill Dubisch has argued that national pilgrimages combine the “individual search for healing and identity with the creation of a collective narrative” (Dubisch 2004: 109; see also Niedźwiedź 2014). In Chapter Two, I noted that ways in which participation in such collective narratives of Hungarian national identity requires men like Szilveszter to push petitionary prayer to the background of their lives. In this case, what is remarkable is that none of these devotees felt obliged to include key markers of Hungarian national identity in these prayers: Almost every aspirant to intellectual status explained devotion to Mary in terms of the models provided by key historical figures, primarily Saint Stephen's decision to offer the Hungarian crown to Mary as national protectress. In contrast, none of the prayers on the Radio Mary feel the need to mention Hungarian national history as a way to insert their efforts to heal into such collective narratives. Whatever the reason for this disconnect, it should not be assumed that there need be any isomorphism or interweaving of devotees' efforts to secure healing and the concerns of Catholic elites like Szatmári: If the latter asks how religion function to solidify national belonging and loyalty, this question need not even be on the minds of devotees who participate in Catholic devotional cultures. Early on in this research project, a respected senior scholar in the study of religion after socialism suggested that I should include nationalism in my project as a way to explain why Transylvanian Hungarians remained loyal to the Catholic Church under socialism, providing them with a forum to sustain

their national identity. However, this study of prayers to Mary sounds a cautionary note to this approach. Though Szatmári situates Transylvanian Radio Maria's significance primarily in its role ensuring the ethnic autonomy of Hungarians in Transylvania and as an incubator of the entrepreneurial virtues of a rising Transylvanian Catholic bourgeoisie, this agenda is not an accurate reflection of all devotees' actual concerns when they turn to the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó for help. Nor is it accurate to say that all devotees share Szatmári's conviction that Mary is primarily a vehicle for reproducing the Transylvanian Hungarian community and establishing devotees' loyalty to the nation. It is less accurate to say that shrines provide venues to "entangle" personal and national stories than it is to note that, within the frame of devotees' experiences, petitions to Mary seem to disregard national loyalty altogether as irrelevant to their lives and relationships in the moments they turn to Mary for help (Niedźwiedź 2014: 82).

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