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La sfida del pentecostalismo

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Pentecostalism in Romania
The Impact of Pentecostal Communities on the Life-style of the Members

ABSTRACT

Pentecostalism in Romania. The Impact of Pentecostal Communities on the Life-style of the Members *(by László Fosztó and Dénes Kiss)*
In this article we argue that the spread of Pentecostalism in Romania can be interpreted as a relative success of a particular form of this religious movement which in contrast to the culturally sensitive and ethnically defined approach of the 'historical' churches proposes a more culturally neutral form of Christianity. The article presents a short history of the emergence of the religious pluralism in Romania, and a general view on the present religious demography. We argue that a more culturally neutral approach attracts certain social groups (for example rural population in some areas, urban lower classes, Roma in both urban and rural context) and we propose an interpretation based on two ethnographic case studies.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; Romania; Transylvania; Roma; cultural pluralism.

1. Introduction

This study proposes to investigate the expansion of Pentecostalism in Romania. We seek to explain the relative success of the Pentecostalism in well defined social contexts and among certain social groups. This analysis should be considered as a preliminary statement of a larger research project with the collaboration of specialists on sociology and anthropology of religion from the Department of Sociology at the Babeş Bolyai University (BBU) and the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities (ISPMN)[1]. The structure of the study is the following: this introduction presents the general framework of the analysis. The second section contains a historical overview of the religious pluralism in the region and the origins, development and spread of Pentecostalism in Romania. We present an overview of the Pentecostalism in Romania today; followed by two ethnographic case studies and a short concluding section.

The sociological and anthropological literature on religious and cultural revival is abundant. We will discuss only a cross section of this litera-

ture which we consider most relevant for our topic. First we consider two approaches which can be seen as opposites but also as complementary to each others. The anthropologist Peter Worsley (WORSLEY 1957) can be credited for an approach which proved to be influential in interpreting religious and cultural revival. Worsley elaborated a hypothesis first published by Tibor Bodrogi (BODROGI 1951) which links the religious revival-movements of Melanesia. According to this hypothesis the religious movements are a response with symbolic means to the declining economic and social conditions and the aborigines engage in the religious activities in order to seek solutions (by religious means) to the crisis situation caused by colonialism. This hypothesis is a prototype of a whole family of explanations (also labelled as the deprivation hypotheses) which interpret the rising religious activities in the frame of economic and social decline, and attributes *defensive character* to the religious revivals.

A second hypothesis can be extracted from the work of Jeremy Boissevain. Boissevain edited a volume on the ritual revitalisation in Europe (BOISSEVAIN 1992b). The volume consist of

case studies coming form different European societies showing that public rituals connected to religious and cultural activities intensified across the continent during the 1980s. Boissevain advances the explanation in his introduction to the volume that these changes should be interpreted in connection to the post World War two social changes. The economic reconstruction that followed the War demanded high social costs. The forced centralisation and industrialisation which characterised the post-war period resulted in intensive and demanding workload on the population, high rate of migration, and the dissolution of the local communities.

These demands lost their intensity by the 1970s. During the 1980s churches, cultural associations and local authorities were more willing to subsidise public festivals and celebrations generating more social solidarity, and reconstruction of local identities. Boissevain concludes that ritual revitalisation which resulted in these developments contribute towards turning Europe into a more relaxed and cheerful place (BOISSEVAIN 1992a: 15-16). One can interpret the model proposed by Boissevain as a hypothesis which offers an explanation for the European ritual revitalisations as *compensation* mechanisms for the earlier demanding efforts on the eve of a more relaxed and economically prosperous period.

Apparently there is a theoretical opposition between the models offered by Worsley and Boissevain but this tension can be used in a constructive manner of one takes a look on the Eastern side of the European continent after 1989. Although Boissevain included one study dealing with Poland into his collection most of the ethnographic material the volume exposes comes from South Europe: from Catholic (Spain and Malta), and Orthodox (Greece) societies with the addition of a study from England. The situation of the rituals and religious revitalisation in Eastern Europe remained unexplored. This is the terrain explored by the studies collected in a volume under the title *The postsocialist religious question* (HANN and THE CIVIL RELIGION GROUP 2006). The studies gathered in this volume depict a colourful image of Eastern Europe and

Central Asia, but this picture is far from being as cheerful as the South European cases would suggest. Still at the most general level one can conclude that religion and ritual revitalisations can still be interpreted as devices which mobilise societies and they can be *resources* even in contexts where the postsocialist State fails to deliver social care and solidarity, and religious organisations still can create alternative social structures.

But why certain religious movements have greater impact than others on the socio-economic conditions of the society where they appear? And what can be the explanation of their relative success? In order to investigate this question we propose to consider a typology of religious movements according to their attitudes and practices directed at the cultural values they encounter. There can be distinguished two major types of religious movements and accordingly two kinds of religious expansion, how a religious system of ideas and practices relate to and intends to change the "culture" – meaning the ideas and everyday practices which define the life-style of a group. The distinction in approaching culture determines how a religious movement "travels", how it will cross boundaries of different groups and how will be incorporated into the lifestyle of new communities (see LEHMAN 1998). The two poles which we distinguish are: the *cultural sensitive* approaches and those movements which prefer to propose a *cultural neutral* (or "culturally blind") approach.

Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages. The culturally sensitive approach develops a distinct theory of cultural systems and attributes cultural value to the ideas and practices which are expressed and enacted by a particular group. This kind of approach accepts or even values the "culture" of a society and envisions the accommodation of the new religious ideas and values within these older ideas and practices. Therefore a culturally sensitive approach will tolerate religious syncretism and encourages the expression of its religious ideas in varied forms. It has a long-term perspective and often employees a step-by-step approach. One particular form of culturally sensitive religious movement can be encountered in the form of

the idea of *inculturation* as defined by Catholic theologians. A big advantage of the culturally sensitive approach is that it is prepared for encountering cultural differences and it engages into the often very complicated process of cultural translation of the religious principles and it is ready for the intercultural communication. But these virtues can be also become its main drawbacks: the intellectualism of the culturally sensitive approach may backfire, and the attempts to cultural translation and intercultural communication may fail.

Moreover the most serious problem of this approach is that it is dependent on the concept of "culture", more exactly on how the idea of "culture" is defined and put into practice. How can a religious form expanded into other sociocultural context if it is intimately connected to a set of ideas and practices which are bound to a group? How can it incorporate new subgroups into these culturally specific forms? These questions need to be addressed through everyday situations and culturally sensitive approaches need to stay "open" in order to incorporate new subcultures and if it embarks on "travel" they need the expertise of cultural specialists of the receiving society. Compared to the culturally sensitive approach the culturally neutral forms "travel" much faster. Because the concept of "culture" as a theoretically constituted whole has little practical significance for these movements they cross group boundaries easily and reproduce their social organisations based on their internal logic under different circumstances. They do not aim primarily at reproducing cultural values but proclaim and demand moral renewal ("rebirth") and in order to achieve this they even criticise some aspects of the receiving "culture" or declare certain aspects outright sinful.

Although these two forms are markedly different need not to be seen in a dichotomy. They can be found within one and religion and they can characterise different periods of the development of a single church. The most typical scenario is cyclical: a movement "travels" in a more culturally neutral form and after being received and accommodated by a group, or social strata develops into a more culturally sensitive approach in order to integrate further subgroups or other social strata. The history of Christianity in Romania can be interpreted through this scenario. Christianity arrived into this territory in a rather culturally neutral form but during the centuries of religious incorporation and differentiation the different Christian denominations adopted increasingly culturally sensitive approaches. Therefore most denominations are seen as ethically marked in Romania today. Orthodox Christianity and Greek Catholicism is connected to Romanian language and ethnicity, Calvinism and Unitarianism is seen as ethnically Hungarian, Lutheranism is connected to German ethnicity, because historically it was embraced by the Transylvanian Saxons. The most culturally neutral forms of Christianity are the neo-protestant denominations in Romania these days. In order to trace the development of the ethno-religious landscape of Romania we propose a historical overview.

2. A historical overview of religious and cultural pluralism in Romania

Present-day socio-cultural divisions in Romania originated in the distinctive development of the historical regions that now compose the state. Three major historical provinces make up modern Romania: Moldova, Walachia, and Transylvania. Each was a separate polity for a long time. Not until the modern period did they come under common administration and form a political unit strong enough to promote a unified legal framework and homogenise their societies. We focus on the history of Transylvania more than on the others, because this was the region in which we conducted our research.

As a consequence of the 1918 unification, Transylvania, together with Bessarabia and Bukovina, became part of Romania. Problems related to regional differences and ethnic and religious diversity have been present since the inception of Greater Romania. In 1930, ethnic minorities made up 28% of the total population, 48% of the Transylvanian population, and the majority of the population in Bukovina (56.5%) (LIVEZEANU 1995: 10). Religious diver-

sity was even greater. State-building in Romania reinforced the hegemony of the national churches, which were given priority over minority denominations. "Sects" were banned in a general attempt to control the public sphere. The distinction between these three categories of religious organisations – national churches (Orthodox and Greek Catholic), historical minority denominations, and sects – had strong ethno-national overtones. As the two major national churches were composed mostly of ethnic Romanians, minority denominations had some degree of legitimacy because most of their members belonged to one of the ethnic groups. The "sects" were usually seen as illegitimate.

Pentecostalism has appeared in Romania during the 1920s. The first assemblies were set up in villages close to the western border the country. The early Romanian Pentecostals were converted from rural Baptist communities. The newly formed communities maintained close relations with Romanian Pentecostal communities from the US. The closest association was established with the Assemblies of God. The main argument against all kind of new religion was that all of these will have a disintegrating effect on Romanian national unity, the Romanian Orthodox Church being considered the preferred church of all Romanians.

After the communist take-over new laws regulating education and religious denominations were adopted on 3-4 August 1948. These measures outlawed the Greek Catholic Church and gave increased legitimacy to the sects which had been previously banned. All religious organisations were subordinated directly to the state, and repressive administrative measures were applied when the government felt it needed to crack down on religious activity. Members of the Greek Catholic clergy and laity, those who were reluctant to "return" to the Romanian Orthodox Church, sectarians – mostly though not exclusively members of the Jehovah's Witness movement – and people caught engaging in "subversive activities" (e.g. proselytising in villages) were deported together with kulaks, intellectuals, and other enemies of the regime (VASILE 2003: 212-60). The communist regime

has had a twofold politics in religious issues. At the one hand an increased religious freedom was declared, on the other hand the communist authorities introduced restrictions on the activities of the churches, in order to realise a strict control over the religious institutions.

The communist state also created increased space for institution-building which was not previously possible for the neo-protestants. The official monthly bulletin was published between 1953 and 1989[2].

In September 1954 the Pentecostals moved their central administrative office from Arad to Bucharest. This relocation of the administrative centre closer to the power-centre of the regime proved to be a mixed blessing: by the late 1950s the church was purged of leaders perceived as disloyal. The dark side of the communist policy regarding religion was the attempt to take under strict control the activities of all kind of religious bodies. This control was attained through a number of regulations and restrictions, the most important of them being the following:
– the regulation of the number of religious services
– the denial of religious education for children
– the dissolution of choruses and orchestras
– thematic control of the church services
– swamping of the clerical personal with administrative tasks
– restrictions on mobility
– dissolution of communities through administrative reorganizations
– controlling the permits (authorizations) of the preachers
– replacing disobedient leaders with loyal ones

To reduce the time for preaching, and generally for religious activities, pastors and preachers were swamped with a lot of new administrative tasks, they had to make a lot of financial reports etc. There were denied the visitations between communities, both for simple members and for the preachers. And in the beginning of the 60-s were dissolved the communities with less than 20 members, with the argument that there exist a disproportional relations between churches

regarding the number of pastors relative to the number of their believers. The control of the authorizations on the preachers, the revocation of them, constituted one of the most repressive technique used by the communists in cases of disobedience.

Conversions to neo-Protestant confessions increased considerably in the years between 1968 and 1988. A table from the archive of the secret service provides data about neo-Protestant denominations during this time period (see NEAGOE and PLESA 2003: 64), revealing how Pentecostalism became the frontrunner in the broader neo-Protestant movement[3]. Although state officials kept institutional expansion of all churches under strict control during the 1980s[4], a large number of Romanians converted to some form of neo-Protestantism. Scholars of religion consider migration and displacement to be important factors explaining the rise of religious activism in general, and specifically in explaining Pentecostal movements in many parts of the world (for a discussion see ROBBINS 2004: 123-27).

Romania seems to be no exception. Moreover, the growth of Romanian Pentecostalism can be seen as part of the emerging worldwide Pentecostal revival in this period (1970-1990)[5]. In the same period, neo-Protestants were relatively successful in making converts. This success stemmed in part from the movement's flexibility of association and avoidance of confrontation. Although the Inspectorate for Denominations limited the official program of churches to Sunday services, clandestine, informal gatherings were often organised in private homes during the evenings. At these private celebrations Pentecostals could sing, pray, and study the Bible (VLASE 2002: 146-47). Prayer houses were built "privately" by loyal members in order to avoid administrative obstacles such as the need for building permits for worship places. These "owners" later donated the buildings to the assembly (VLASE 2002: 143). The lack of printed materials, especially Bibles, and educational institutions was counterbalanced by informal meetings of leaders, handwritten notebooks with songs, and smuggled Bibles that had been printed abroad.

3. Pentecostalism in Romania today: facts and tendencies

During the communist regime in the censuses the religious affiliation of the people was not registered and the public opinion had no information about the size of different evangelical churches. For this reason after the census in 1992 the number of Pentecostals, exceeding 200.000 was a surprise for the public opinion. But it was even a much bigger surprise the growth of the next ten years, until 2002 their number reaching 330.000.

The Pentecostal movement proved to be the most dynamic religious movement of the post-communist Romania. In the 2002 census, 324,462 persons, accounting for 1.5 per cent of the Romanian population, declared themselves belonging to the Pentecostal Church. In 1992 there were 220,824 self-identified Pentecostals, so the domination had registered growth of 50 per cent in the first postsocialist decade. Ethnic Hungarians account for 6.6 per cent of the population of Romania, mostly living in Transylvania, and 92 per cent are distributed among the Calvinist (46.5 per cent), Roman Catholic (41 per cent), and Unitarian (4.5 per cent) Churches. The proportion of Pentecostals among Roma was higher: according to the 2002 census, 6.5 per cent of the 535,140 self-declared Roma belonged to the Pentecostal Church. Overall, Pentecostals were the fourth largest denomination in Romania in 2002, preceded by the Romanian Orthodox Church (86 per cent of the total population), the Roman Catholic Church (4.7 per cent of the total, of which 57 per cent are Hungarian), and the Calvinist Church (3.2 per cent of the total population, of which 95 per cent are Hungarian) (INS 2003).

Based on analyzes of available statistical data the following characteristics of the Pentecostal population can be outlined: (1) the population concentrates in the western and northern counties of the country, especially in the border regions; (2) the rural population of the country is overrepresented (60% of the Pentecostal population lives in rural settlements); (3) the majority of the Pentecostals are ethnic Romanians, but the Roma population is significantly over-

[3] Unlike official statistics on socialist production, these numbers are unlikely to be inflated, because state institutions had no interest in exaggerating the growth in neo-Protestantism in Romania.

[4] See SANDRU 1994 for the Pentecostals.

[5] In 1970 there were approximately 74 million Pentecostals worldwide, accounting for 6 per cent of Christendom. By 1997 the numbers of Pentecostals had reached 497 million, accounting for approximately 27 per cent of all Christians (ANDERSON 1999: 19).

represented. The number of Roma Pentecostals is probably even much higher, given that a great proportion of the Roma identified themselves as Romanians or Hungarians when censuses were taken, their number being estimated between 1,5-2 million based on hetero-identification.

Although statistical distributions indicate that overall in Romanian Pentecostalism are overrepresented some disadvantaged social categories, it is also evident, that there are very different social milieus in which Pentecostal communities has developed. In the Romanian society one of the most important dividing factors is the type of the settlement, the rural regions offering significantly lower living conditions than the cities (KISS 2005a). Ethnicity is another relevant divisive borderline of the Romanian society, especially between the Roma / non-Roma population. These considerations justify considering the phenomenon of Pentecostalism is constituted by different components, its spread being determined by different factors in the above mentioned different social circumstances.

Based on these considerations we have chosen two Pentecostal communities, an urban community (one of the largest from the city of Cluj), and one rural settlement (pseudonymously referred as Gánás) from Cluj area. Our fieldwork in these communities consisted of participant observation, observation of the community events, and semi-structured interviews with leaders and members of the communities.

4. Case studies

4.1. Assemblies in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár

The city of Cluj, center of the Transylvanian region, is the home of a large Pentecostal community. Looking at the confessional statistics it can be found that this community is relatively new, developed under the communist decades: in 1941 there were no Pentecostals among the residents, while in 1992 their number is more than six thousand, and during the next ten years it reached 8.270. The growth of this Pentecostal community coincides with the most intensive period of socialist urbanization. In this period

the population tripled, from 115.000 inhabitants in 1941, to 328.602 in 1992. This intensive urbanization caused a dramatic cultural change in the life of migrants, due to the huge differences between their past rural and present urban living conditions. The disintegration of social networks due to urbanization is especially forceful during the socialist period when voluntary organizations were prohibited and the tradition of civil associations was very weak.

In cities migrants faced religious pluralism. While most of villages were ethnically and religiously homogeneous, cities were relatively pluralistic both ethnically and religiously. This is true especially for the ethnic Romanian population whose members lived mostly in homogeneous orthodox villages. Despite official atheistic education the religiosity of the population largely remained untouched. Atheism became the "official" world-view only for a tiny political elite, the majority remaining basically religious – even if due to the restrictions of religious institutions the content of this religiosity became less controlled by the church. This high level of religiosity increasingly raised after the collapse of the communist regime (see for example CUCIUC and GHEORGHE 1995).

Regarding the general religiosity of the Romanian population there is a relative abundance of elements originating in popular religiosity. As a consequence of its specific historical development, the Romanian Orthodox Church has maintained a stronger relationship with its (mainly rural) believers than the western churches (TOMKA 2005). For this reason this church was much more tolerant with the various elements of folk religiosity. Many scholars have described the role of the orthodox priests in deserving the different spiritual needs of the population (CZÉGÉNYI 1999; GAGYI 2007; KOMÁROMI 1996), and the belief in the priest's capacity of healing and curse was described in different contexts.

According to the memories of believers in Cluj the birth of the Pentecostal community dates back earlier than what statistics show. On the basis of the documents of the church a small Pentecostal community appeared immediately after the Second World War. In the follow-

ing years many other Pentecostal communities developed in the city. Nowadays the Pentecostals of Cluj form 15 assemblies. The assembly analysed below was the fifth to be created and it came out during the 1960s. It is one of the largest, with 800-1.000 participants on average during Sunday gatherings. Though there is a rational distribution of the members between assemblies based territoriality, the believers follow this only partially, the members of a certain assembly frequently participating in other assemblies events.

The prayer house of the community was built in the 1970s. It was replaced by a larger one, which was built after 2000 and hosts 1.180 places. The prayer house gathers about 400-500 participants on weekday prayers, 800-900 on Sunday gatherings, and 1.000-1.100 on special occasions (concerts, festivities). On the basis of our observations the majority of the participants is between 25-45 years old, who mainly belong to the working class. A big group of students joins the assembly during the academic year.

The assembly is led by a pastor who coordinates and is helped by the presbyters during the events. Ministers are usually chosen among presbyters and they arrange assemblies a month earlier. The ability to preach is tested in many situations, and those who are more gifted are asked to deliver the most important preaching. This public role in front of the assembly is not exclusive of the educated preachers. Beside the coordinator preacher the other important leading body is the assembly council, which is formed of a secretary, a treasurer, two censors and several council-members. The role of this council is the organization of the assembly life and the supervision of believers' life and needs. The members of the council are elected by the general assembly for a period of four years, and the nominations are made by the coordinator preacher. In this way the composition of the council is under the control of the main leader. Mobility within the assembly is ensured by the existence of different statuses. Beside the main leader there are six levels of the status: the presbyters, the deacons, the apostles (missionaries), the evangelists, the teachers and the messengers.

Each status mentioned above can be fulfilled only by males.

The program of the community is rather intense. There are three compulsory commitments for the whole community: two gatherings on Sunday and a weekday prayer meeting. The later one is organized in various days of the week by different assemblies to guarantee everybody's participation. The result is a creation of a complex network among the assemblies. Further on, this system gives the most religiously zealous believers various occasions to participate, many of them taking part in more than one prayer meeting during a week. In addition to the prayer meetings held for the whole assemblies there are several other events organised in smaller groups, formed by believers who create closer relationships. This is one of the believers' accounts:

> I work during the day and in the evening I go to the prayer. That's all. I recharge my battery, because I work all day long. Recharge again in the evening and work. In fact God recharges me. And God recharges me on Sunday morning and in the evening too. That is really good because I have the strength for all the week. I attend the prayers every evening regularly. We who love the prayer look for places where we can go and pray.

Another believer says:

> I am attending several circles of prayer. On Monday I go to Someşeni, to brother Iacob. Prayers are told on Saturdays too but I go rarely there on Saturday, because I attend another group in the afternoon starting from 7 o'clock in Griviţei Street. And there comes a brother called Cornelius from USA who is a student of medicine. In the morning if I am free I go to prayers in Albini Street. The meeting is in the basement. And there is prayer group there. We pray there all, we pray for the church workers, for the ill people, for those we know are suffering, for those who have hard times, in diseases, we pray for the pastors of the church, for our families and for the work God wants to carry out there.

During Sunday gatherings there are 3-4 lessons on the Bible, several individual and collective prayer sessions, songs and recited poems. The poems are usually own compositions, com-

monly performed by women and girls. Melodies frequently remind of pop music songs, or popular music.

Lessons are held by the most experienced members of the community. Prayers are commonly loud prayers with a strictly fixed duration. During our fieldwork we witnessed two cases of speaking in tongues and in one case it was interpreted by one of the preachers. Prayers can be addressed to needy or ill people, when somebody sends their names to the coordinator preacher on a sheet of paper. Healing through laying hands is much less frequent, during our fieldwork it occurred only once, made by a foreign preacher. Prophecies and visions occur rather frequently. Among the missionary programs it is worth mentioning the publishing of a bulletin, of books, CD-s, DVD-s and audio tapes, a webpage, the internet broadcasting of all the assembly events. The assembly organizes a local evangelical radio program and a national evangelical TV program.

In conclusion we can sum up the main features of this community as follows: it is an assembly of relatively young people, coming from lower to lower-middle classes. The markedly conservative and patriarchal moral orientation is combined with a technically sophisticated environment and a pragmatic social organisation which relies on initiatives coming from below. The community offers space for social mobility and promotes participation and solidarity without relying on a high degree of cultural capital or on values which would require higher levels of formal education. This community gathers people with various backgrounds (often with migration experiences) and reproduces a pragmatic social organisation.

4.2. Rural awakening

Compared to the city the village assemblies have some distinct characteristics. In this section we will present the development of an emerging Pentecostal community in a village inhabited by Hungarians and Roma. Gánás (a pseudonym) is a village aproximately 15 km away from the city. Most residents of the village are members of the Calvinist Church (Hun: *református*), ir-

respective of ethnicity. Religion is a unifying social marker of the local society and also distinguishes locals from residents of neighbouring villages. The Gánási Roma consider that being Calvinist means that they are of "Hungarian religion" (Rom: *po ungrikon törvényi,* literally "of Hungarian law").

They emphasise that being Calvinist, they are distinct not only from Orthodox Romanians but also from Roma groups who are of "Romanian religion" (Rom: *po xlahitjikon törvényi*). Those Roma groups are sometimes also referred to as *mântjene* (singular *mântjean*), from the name of the southern province of Romania, Muntenia. Being called *mântjean* is considered derogatory or even an offence among the local Roma, although it is used in some cases teasingly. Those included in this category are seen as being closer to Romanians, whereas the Gánási Roma see themselves as closer to Hungarians. They usually are perceived as "Hungarian Gypsies" (Hun: *magyarcigány*) also by outsiders. They often employ "Romungro" or "Roma ungrika" (Hungarian Roma) as their self-definition. Indeed, during official censuses, many of them declare Hungarian ethnicity. A teacher from the village who had served as a field operator during the 2002 national census recalled that several local Roma families, when asked about their ethnic affiliation, responded that they were "Református".

In the early twentieth century a relatively strong Baptist assembly emerged among the Hungarians in the village. A Baptist chapel was built in the centre of the village. Today it is visited sporadically by the few remaining Baptists, most of whom are Roma. Pentecostals form a relatively small minority, about 10 per cent of the Roma population. They are most active on religious holidays, congregating in the houses of converts. The language of the Pentecostal rituals (sermons, testimonies, and prayers) is almost exclusively Romanian, but some singing is performed in Romani. Pentecostal services have an intimate atmosphere, and 15 to 20 persons participate on a regular Sunday. These converts are integrated into a larger network of Pentecostals composed of converts from neighbouring villages and larger assemblies in the city, who tend

overwhelmingly to be Roma. None of the local Hungarians has converted to Pentecostalism, and all the Roma Pentecostals were baptised in assemblies outside the village. Gánás has no local ordained Pentecostal pastor, just several self-taught preachers.

The village of Gánás appears to an outsider to be rather underdeveloped. In spite of the relative proximity of the city, the village lacks modern infrastructure such as pavement on the streets, sewerage, gas heating, and a communication system. In contrast to Cluj, Gánás seems to be an island of past and tradition. Ethnic relations and social life are organised in many respects on the basis of patterns that can be better understood according to the long-term social history of the settlement than in terms of the recent past of socialism. The social life of the village seems to have followed the path from socialism into postsocialism without major ruptures. Some elements of religious life that were more hidden during socialist times have become more visible. People more readily claim religiosity and ethnic belonging in public (e.g. confirmation rituals are increasingly attended by outsiders), religious education has been introduced in school, and a church-related foundation has begun to be active. The most visible changes are perceivable in the revitalisation of rituals that create new local public spheres.

The "traditional" character of the village needs to be explained in dynamic terms in the present. For example, the success of folk artefacts manufactured in the village, like the popularity of local music and dance, lies in the ideas or ideologies linking Gánás and, implicitly, the villages in the region to the Hungarian nation. Villagers were exposed to these ideas more intensely after the collapse of the socialism, but Gánás has been part of the national imagination for a long time. After socialism it simply became more public than it was before. A revitalisation of village traditions with the support of the local Calvinist church is underway in Gánás in a similar manner to other communities in the region.

Although the ideological significance of local customs and folk art is rarely mentioned or enacted among the Roma, they are well aware of the practical usefulness of personal connections with their neighbours. Those neighbours might be buffalo owners in need of herders, farmers needing hired hands during haymaking, or peasant women in need of female hands to prepare necklaces for the market. The local social order is rarely challenged publicly. Nevertheless, Roma have their own perspective on the local world in which they enact their rituals and even accommodate new rituals, as the cases of Pentecostal conversions demonstrate. Converts often speak of their personal experiences and emotions among these expressions one often can hear of "the open heart".

"Opening the heart" is not necessarily an intentional act; it can occur spontaneously during the ritual, beyond the control or will of the affected person. The further step of "filling the heart" with God (i.e. making a commitment) requires more conscious activity and social control. A ritual in which the convert raises his or her hand, goes to the front of the congregation, and verbalises some variant of a prayer marks the initiation of this process. Following this commitment, the active contribution of the assembly is of paramount importance. Most assemblies in Cluj have special structures for incorporating and educating future members. "Groups for growth" (Rou: *grupuri de creștere*) are small study groups that gather at the house of a member for this purpose, although few of the Roma converts I met had been incorporated into their congregations through such structures. A Romanian Pentecostal pastor in the city expressed his view that Roma converts might accept Jesus more easily than members of other ethnic groups, but they were not consistent enough in repenting. He gave the example of a young Roma who, in the assembly, cried loudly, "Oh, how nice it is along with you, my Lord! [Rou: *Oh, ce mișto e cu tine Doamne*]", but the pastor found the man's commitment superficial.

There is one aspect of assembly life in which the sincerity of church members is continuously tested. Pentecostal churches rely heavily on contributions from members, who are expected to tithe (Rou: *zeciuială*) regularly. But because most Roma live on irregular and of-

ten very small incomes, the pastor and other members cannot directly determine how much each member should be expected to contribute. If church members do not pay their tithes for some time, their economic survival can be seen as proof of insincerity in the domain of the material world, because they are thought to be hiding their income and failing to support the church financially. Therefore, the financial obligations of church members constitute a recurring sermon topic.

Converts find support and encouragement inside the assembly, but they sometimes find themselves the targets of suspicious looks in their broader community. In Gánás, unconverted Roma and the Hungarian majority look from "outside upon Pentecostals" observance of ascetic rules. This is particularly true in the case of male converts who were once known as drinkers. In a community in which drinking is a common form of male sociability, men who quit drinking rupture connections with their peer groups. This is compensated for by the alternative community with which converts are connected through conversion, but they may still be tempted to join their former buddies for drinks[6]. Discussing alcohol consumption with two converted Roma in the village, I was told that it would be wrong for a converted person to drink even an alcohol-free beer. They explained that if one is a known convert and is seen by non-converts drinking beer, it would encourage the non-converts to continue drinking and so would damage the image of Pentecostals in the larger community. In this way converts in Gánás exclude themselves from many settings of male Roma sociability. On Sundays one can see these people dressed in elegant suits, carrying Bibles or hymnals, and even donning eyeglasses that they do not normally wear on weekdays. Greetings of "Peace!" are exchanged, and converts shake hands. Even when the gathering is at a local home, a visible attempt is made to celebrate the day.

On a Sunday in early February 2004 I attended a Pentecostal assembly in the village. One members of the assembly hosted the gathering in his home. Twenty participants, all of them

Roma, crowded into the small room. The men took turns testifying and preaching, whereas the women dominated the singing. Intense collective prayer connected the different stages of the event, and Dani led the service. The dominant language was Romanian, although some of the songs were in Romani and some exchanges in Hungarian also took place. With the consent of the preacher I recorded the event, and I later gave a copy of the tape to the assembly. The following testimony is from a transcript of the tape. The testimony was performed by Jani, a middle-aged Roma convert. He said:

> I want to say a few words, and then we will come to a conclusion. Brother Dani said a word that is spoken by the whole country. And not only in this country, but all the nations say this word. But this word is not true. They say: "Look at the Gypsy [Rou: *țigan*], he is converted and he is going to ... he will reach the kingdom of God". But this is not right, it is not true. There are no Gypsies in this world. The Holy Scripture does not say this. It does not mention that there are Gypsies. There are no Gypsies, my dears, we are not Gypsies, and on this earth wherever there are Gypsies, they are not Gypsies. This people that is called by all the nations in this way is named this way as a mockery.
>
> But why is it mocked in this way, this people, that they are Gypsies? Because it is the lowest nation and people [Rou: *neam și popor*] of all the nations and peoples. Because wherever a Gypsy goes he cannot say that this is my country. If he goes to Hungary, when he returns he cannot say, I am going home to my country, because Romania is not his country. And this is the same in all countries. But if a Hungarian goes, or a Romanian, or a German, or a Slovakian... all the nations can say, I am going home to my country, except the Gypsies. He cannot say, "I am going to my country", because he has none.
>
> But the basis is this: in the times of Noah, Noah got drunk and he completely disrobed. He showed his nakedness. And his brother ... his eldest son reproved him: "Aren't you ashamed to stand in front of the peoples and nations, letting them see your nakedness?". Because of this reproach Noah became furious and cursed his son. But the curses he spoke did not fall onto his children, because God blessed his children. [Praise Him!] So his grandchild was hit by the curses.

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[6] Michael Kearney (KEARNEY 2004) described a similar problem in the case of a peasant community in Mexico.

He said: "Cursed be the children of your nation [Rou: *neam*], and the children they beget ... Let them be the lowest nation and people of all in this world...". And the Gypsies came from them for sure, those who are called Gypsies, as a nation of the lowest of all.

But the Scripture later says that God will return and will take and he will raise ... therefore, the Scripture says: "I raise you from the dirt and I will put you among the great men..." [So the scripture says]. Today we already see how many Gypsies have converted. Before there were no Gypsies to be converted, you rarely saw them in the church, because "He is a Gypsy, part of the lowest nation...". Even today they are not looked on favourably ... but the Scripture says: "I raise you from the dirt and I will put you among the great men ... and I will put the nations and people in your hand...". And now we are coming close to this, that the Gypsies in this country have risen and are supported. They attend schools, go to church, receive a university education, and so on ... God is showing that he will raise his people from the dirt, and he will place them among the great men.

Jani spoke freely, without looking at the Biblical texts, encouraged by the preacher that he was quoting correctly. Later, when I visited Jani in his home to discuss other issues and asked about the exact reference, he had difficulty finding it in the book. He insisted that he had read the story in the Bible and had not heard it from someone else. Because I was unsure about the verse myself, I later checked and discovered that Jani had quoted it rather inaccurately (Gen. 9:20-25). The other quotation, about God's promise to raise his people, can be found in Exodus 3:17. Some minor differences, though, are important for interpreting the biblical story as a Roma origin myth and as an evocation of scriptural authority to reject stigmatisation.

I interpret the refusal of Roma to accept the label "Gypsies" as a rejection of the perspective of outsiders and a contestation of their social stigmatisation. Even though Jani's rhetorical performance was at one point logically self-contradictory ("On this earth wherever there are Gypsies, they are not Gypsies"), the moral element of the claim stands undamaged: "The Holy Scripture does not say this"; it is "a

mockery". This rejection of social stigmatisation marks the first step in clearing the ground in order to lay a basis for a more positive social identification. The explanation for the mockery provided in the second paragraph of the testimony focuses on the fact that Gypsies lack a state. This interpretation supports a claim that people labelled and stigmatised as Gypsies are, in principle, on equal footing with other nations. This should not be read exaggeratedly as a sign of nascent ethno-national mobilisation among these Roma. It would be farfetched to link the story of the Canaanites to the history of Roma slavery if the social actors do not take this step themselves.

The third paragraph offers a narrative explanation of the origins of the population labelled Gypsies and attributes the group's present subjugated social position to a past injustice. It also asserts the common origins of the Roma and all other nations (and therefore their equal rights) through the genealogical relatedness of humanity – that is, other nations came into being as descendants of Noah's other children. It is important from the perspective of the construction of collective identity that this scriptural interpretation bases its explanation of present inequalities and the low status of Gypsies not on the divine order but instead on the curse brought on by the original patriarch, Noah. The cause of this curse is unclear in the original scripture, but Jani's interpretation attributes the Gypsies' plight to the fury of a drunken father who felt his son had defied his authority, even though Noah himself had been behaving improperly.

Jani's divergence from the original text in this regard is significant: in the Biblical version, a drunken Noah is asleep in his tent when his youngest (not eldest) son sees him unclothed. Jani's version permits the insertion of another important deviation from the original text, namely, Noah's attempt to punish a morally superior person who, according to kinship relations, is socially inferior but who is nonetheless protected by God's blessing. The biblical version is not without ambiguities: it is unclear why Noah curses his innocent grandson rather than the son who is guilty of seeing him naked.

In Jani's testimony this problem is solved by God's supposed blessing of the son and by Jani's changing the scene to introduce a public gaze that legitimates the son's actions. In this way the origin of inequality is shown to be deeply unjust in religious terms. Theological authorities might consider Jani's interpretation heretical, and some social analysts would expect "ethnicity" to emerge from this discourse. I take a more reserved view in which this reading of scripture is a creative attempt to make the narrative comprehensible and credible through a shared sense of humanity and morality.

The closing part of Jani's testimony provides a strategy for collective liberation from Noah's curse, and the day of reckoning seems to be imminent. The redemption of the Gypsies is based on a divine promise of liberation and the second coming of Christ: "God will return". The signs foreshadowing the fulfilment of this prophecy are by no means apocalyptic: Gypsies have converted and attend churches, schools, and universities. From a secular perspective, these advancements could be read as signs of social emancipation. God's promises to place the Gypsies among great men and to deliver peoples and nations into their hands are more like the sort of visionary mobilisation.

What is remarkable about the power of this form of ritual revitalisation is that although it is rather simple, promising a reversal of social positions, it is nonetheless exceedingly efficient in deeply penetrating social structures without relying on additional resources or preconditions (e.g. hierarchical social structure, common cultural features). The cultural requirements for this form of ritual revitalisation are basic: ideas of an open human heart and the Spirit that can fill this heart.

To what degree may identities forged in such new religious movements be performed outside the boundaries of the revitalised religious establishment? In other words, is there space in Romania for newly emerging ("born again") public identities? This question provokes no simple, concise answer. It seems likely that such religious identities will be squeezed into the local and national public spheres as soon as those who participate in their construction are able to ameliorate their social position and decide to claim the identities publicy. In Gánás I saw no sign that the rituals of new religious movements were being incorporated into representative local public rituals. Nor were converts assertive in claiming their share of the village public sphere beyond their own rituals. Pentecostal rituals were marginal, when not totally ignored by local Hungarians. They are more focused on revitalising folk traditions and ethnically marked cultural elements.

The different forms of revitalisation appear not to produce open social conflict in Gánás, but we would not want to imply that revitalisations in general cannot or do not generate conflict. Rather, we believe that in this particular case no such tensions emerge because the rituals are separated by the divisions of the local public sphere. In other Transylvanian villages not far from Gánás, Hungarian rituals, which canonise dress and musical codes (i.e. folk dresses and folksongs), clashed with the universalistic orientation of the converted segment of the same group. Adventist parents refused to dress their children in folk dresses or to allow them to sing folksongs, thus scandalising the local Hungarian community, which saw the gesture as disloyalty to the ethnic group (Kiss 2005b). In Gánás, social divisions are tacitly agreed upon and masked by a homogeneous appearance of "local community". The local public sphere is not disturbed when different identifications are created and practised in the alternative public forum of an assembly of relatively lower status.

5. Conclusions

The success of the Pentecostalism in Romania can be interpreted as an example of the strength of a rather culturally neutral religious movement among some segments of the population in a period when traditional churches are engaged in culturally sensitive revitalisation. The case of the city demonstrates that the lower segments of the society and the relatively lower educated can engage in a large scale institutional revitalisation within the Pentecostal movement. This segment of the urban popula-

tion is building an alternative social space with distinct internal hierarchy and internal values. The alternative structures created serve both as spaces for internal social mobility, given a multitude of status positions within the church and in activities which fill in the needs for expressing solidarity and also providing space for leisure activities within the moral limits of the faith. A rather conservative structures and gender roles and family relations are reproduced and legitimised also by this alternative.

Other main aspect which was revealed by these case studies is the attractiveness of a culturally neutral approach to religious expansion in the city and the influence of ethnicity on the growth of Pentecostalism. Although the salience of ethnicity seemingly contradicts the characteristics of a culturally neutral movement, the explanation lies with the overall low status of the Roma ethnicity which in fact has a reverse effect on the conversions: apparently Roma are less bound to the culturally sensitive approach of the big churches, as these churches often formulate their appeal in national terms (which are often exclusivist). In this sense the cultural values salient in the mainline discourse keep Roma in a marginal position within these communities and therefore Roma often prefer the culturally more neutral approach of the neo-protestants, in our case the Pentecostals.

In the village the main feature of the representative public sphere in the village is the symbolic suppression of differences and maintenance of the appearance of a homogeneous "local community". That community is ethnically marked as Hungarian for outsiders, but local interactions are often unmarked by ethnicity. The representative public sphere masks both local social divisions and local effects of transformations in the broader Romanian society.

At the local level, the production of a "unified locality" through ritual is dependent on the relative religious homogeneity of the village and the tacit agreement of all participants to maintain homogeneous appearances. Roma participate in the representative public sphere of the village and tacitly agree to uphold the appearance of a unified community, but they have different ways of maintaining their own identity. Although the local community frames the lives of Roma villagers, individuals are not subordinated to the community, nor are shared cultural traits such as language and folklore politicised as a means of expressing a separate collective identity.

In an earlier works (see FOSZTÓ 2003) we addressed Roma ethno-politics and concluded that segments of the Roma elite were beginning to experiment with political projects in the wake of the collapse of socialism and emergence of a market economy. The emergence of conventional cultural politics, involving the use of selected and standardised cultural features in collective mobilisation, had yielded limited success.

These earlier conclusions need to be revisited in light of the study of conversion and ritual revitalisation in Transylvanian communities. We suggest that religious conversion illustrates the possibility of alternative forms of grass-roots social activism. Anthropologists working among Gypsies in France (WILLIAMS 1984) and Spain (GAY y BLASCO 2002) have noted the emergence of new ethno-religious categories (e.g. *notre peuple* and *pueblo,* respectively) that overcome traditional divisions between Gypsy groups (e.g. Manouche, Rom, Gitano) as a consequence of religious conversion. Incipient signs of similar developments can be observed in Transylvania, but some status divisions among Roma groups seem to remain firm at this point.

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