Chapter 12
Mono-Ethnic Churches, the 'Undertaker Parish', and Rural Civility in Postsocialist Romania

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Ethnographers often focus on groups or sub-groups that are seen as insignificant by a great majority of the people in the states where the ethnographers work. Yet attention accorded to these groups may reveal something about the general political and social climate of the respective society. The people with whom I am concerned, Roma who convert to Pentecostalism, sit at the crossroads of two social categories that have been at best ignored and more often despised in Romanian society. To assert that one is a 'Gypsy' or a 'born-again' (Rou: *pocăit*) is to be burdened with stigma.[1]

Though stigmatized, excluded from many domains of everyday life, and confronted with the hostility of official institutions, a growing number of citizens of postsocialist Romania make no attempt to conceal their 'marginalized' ethnic identities as Roma (Ţigan) or their evangelical religious identities as Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, and so forth. Among the evangelical churches, the Pentecostals have recorded the most dynamic growth.[2] This is due not only to more relaxed popular attitudes

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[1] I use (Rou) for Romanian, (Rom) for Romani, and (Hun) for Hungarian terms throughout this chapter.

[2] In the 2002 census, 324,462 persons, or 1.5 per cent of the total population, declared themselves to belong to the Pentecostal Church. In comparison with their number in 1992 (220,824), Pentecostals registered 50 per cent growth during the first postsocialist decade (see also http://www.oci.ro/recensament/CENSUS.htm). The proportion of Pentecostals among the Roma is higher. According to the 2002 census, 6.5 per cent of the 535,140 self-declared Roma, or Ţigani, belonged to the Pentecostal Church. Today Pentecostals, as the fourth largest church in Romania, outnumber some of the historical churches. They are behind only the Orthodox Church (86 per cent of the total population), the Roman Catholic Church (4.7 per cent of the total, of whom 57 per cent are Hungarians), and the Reformed (Calvinist) Church (3.2 per cent of the total population, of whom 95 per cent are Hungarian).

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towards the census, in comparison with the socialist years. In addition, people now actively adopt these categories as markers of their social identity, no longer afraid to declare their belonging. Fifteen years after the fall of state socialism, which imposed uniformity in the public sphere and promoted the ideology, if not the practice, of egalitarianism, extant and emerging pluralisms seem increasingly to surface and to be acknowledged. Along with growing public awareness of 'cultural' differences, socio-economic inequalities have been apparent in the postsocialist years, although they have attracted much less public attention.

In this chapter I discuss some social aspects of religious institutions and popular religious practices during Romania's dual transition to a market economy and a democratic political system. My main argument is that the historically rooted mono-ethnic churches reproduce monopolistic ethno-religious structures, and these structures dominate the public sphere of post-socialist Romania. But although divisions are strict on the surface, and higher levels of church hierarchies seem to be marked by ethno-religious exclusivity, crossing the boundaries between churches and ethnic groups is not uncommon at the 'bottom', or local, level.

Anthropological case studies can show the extent of the symbolic power that lies in the hands of local religious specialists. Looking at religious services from the 'demand' side, my ethnography reveals some of the economic and social aspects of religious practices. It also demonstrates how ideological divisions are refracted through local socio-economic conditions. Local clergymen are aware of these conditions, and my evidence suggests that they can use their resources in a positive manner to maintain civility in local communities.

In Romania, being a member of one of the historical churches is perceived as an almost exclusive ethnic marker. The Roma are the only significant exception. Unlike other ethnic groups, they do not cluster in a denomination that they dominate. My historical overview suggests that anti-pluralist ideologies, both before the Second World War and during socialism, prevented the expression of Roma ethnicity in the public sphere. Most members of this widely distributed minority remained economically marginal and maintained affiliations with one or other of the churches of their non-Roma neighbours. The transition to a market economy and privatization consolidated the position of the historical churches but also opened niches for new religious movements, especially neo-Protestant denominations. Among the Roma, conversion to Pentecostalism provides an idiom for collective expression of identity under postsocialist conditions, but the transformations accompanying the rise of Roma Pentecostalism need to be evaluated over a longer time span.

In the first part of this chapter I address the ways in which the Romanian state and religious institutions have dealt with problems of religious and ethnic pluralism at the level of legislation and public discourse during the twentieth century. I then turn to postsocialist developments and analyse ethnographic material relating to funeral practices among the Roma in a religiously plural and multi-ethnic setting. The case studies are based on my fieldwork among the Roma in the Cluj area of Transylvania.[3]

An Historical Overview

During the late nineteenth century the dream of the 1848 revolutionaries in Moldova and Walachia was achieved, and the two Romanian principalities were unified. In 1866 Romania promulgated a constitution, but it was not until March 1881 that the first Romanian king was crowned and Romania become an independent kingdom.[4] By that time some major social and economic measures had already been taken to transform the polity: the abolition of Roma slavery (1855–56), the sequestration of estates belonging to the Orthodox monasteries (1863), and the passage of an agrarian reform (1863). Almost all social strata welcomed the confiscation of the monasteries' property, but the nobles (boyars) opposed the land reform and did little to alleviate social inequalities.[5] By the end of the century the condition of the peasants had worsened. Because the constitution allowed the naturalization only of 'foreigners belonging to the Christian faith', large numbers of Jewish immigrants arriving from Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century were denied civil rights and public employment (Jelavich and Jelavich 1977: 178–79).

Following the First World War, Transylvania also became part of Romania, and problems related to regional differences and ethnic and religious diversity increased substantially. In 1930, non–Romanian speakers made up 28 per cent of the total population and 48 per cent of the Transylvanian population. They formed the majority in Bukovina (56.5 per cent; Livezeanu 1995: 10). Religious diversity was even greater. The process of state-building reinforced the hegemony of the 'national churches', which were given priority over the 'minority denominations'. 'Sects', or 'new religions', were banned in a general attempt to control the public sphere.

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[3] I carried out fieldwork between June 2003 and September 2004. I spent the first months in a city neighbourhood, improving my Romani and visiting both Roma and non-Roma Pentecostal assemblies. I then moved to live with a Roma family in a nearby village, from which I visited the city occasionally.

[4] The 1866 constitution was based on the Belgian constitution of 1831 (Jelavich and Jelavich 1977: 122).

[5] Monasteries controlled approximately 25 per cent of the country's total acreage. The abbots attempted to claim that they were not subject to state jurisdiction but were subordinated to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople.

The distinction between these three categories of religious organizations – national churches (Orthodox and Greek Catholic), historical minority denominations (Rou: *cultele minoritare*), and sects – had strong ethno-national overtones. Although the two major national churches were composed mostly of ethnic Romanians, the minority denominations were each dominated by a single minority group. Sects were looked upon as dangerous movements subverting established religious and ethnic structures.[6]

In 1928 a liberal government adopted a general law to regulate the religious sphere. The main proponent and designer of the Law on Denominations (Rou: Regimul Cultelor) was the historian Alexandru Lapedatu, minister for religious denominations and the arts. Judging from his contributions to the debate over the law, he found himself in a difficult position when he proposed regulating all the minority confessions on equal footing. The Romanian Orthodox Church had already been granted the status of 'dominant church in the state' in 1925. Lapedatu had a hard time explaining how the new law would serve the interests of the state. After 15 legislative sessions it still had not been adopted, and sceptics were asking whether it was needed at all. Lapedatu argued:

> In the law project there are some matters that might seem curious to us, those who lived in the Old Kingdom. Nevertheless these matters need to be regulated. There is the question of conversion from one denomination to another [*chestiunea trecerii dela un cult la altul*] and the problem of the religious affiliation of children. These problems did not exist in the Old Kingdom because cases of passing from one denomination to another were very rare and because the religion of children was regulated by civil law. Nobody bothered with the problem of conversion because we were living in the tradition of a single religion in the state, the Orthodox religion. We have now in our state seven or eight recognized historical denominations. The regulation of these matters is necessary (Lapedatu 1928: 22).

One matter for which the minister responsible for religious matters felt he had found a good solution was the 'issue of the sects and their propaganda'

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[6] The basic opposition behind these distinctions persists to the present. The minority denominations and national churches were merged as 'traditional' or 'historical' churches, while the 'new religions', or sects, form the other pole. Even though these labels have been abandoned as legal categories, they are influential in practice and shape cooperation between denominations (see Muntean 2005: 92–94).

(Rou: *chestiunea sectelor şi propagandei lor*). The limitation of 'sectarian activities' seemed to be a terrain on which the national and minority churches could be in full agreement with each other. The law finally adopted in 1928 aimed to ban the 'sects'.[7]

Other policies affecting minorities in this period, such as regulations on language use, seem to have been even less liberal. Members of ethnic minorities unable to speak Romanian properly lost their positions to Romanians. Career opportunities for members of minorities were still open, however, in the churches in which they were dominant. In this way churches became reservoirs of ethnic politics – and not only for Hungarians, Germans, Jews, and Muslims. The emerging organizations of the Roma also had strong connections to the Orthodox and Catholic churches in this period. But the religious and ethnic activism of Roma within the churches of the majority was looked upon with misgiving along the Orthodox–Greek Catholic divide, owing to suspicions of proselytizing on the part of some Roma leaders.[8] Ilona Klímová-Alexander (2005: 176) observed: 'However, it could have been the other way around. The [Roma] leaders could have used the support and resources of the Church to further their own mobilization goals. Religious conversion of Roma might have been just the necessary means to achieve this support.'

The use of religious arguments for political ends was not confined to minorities. Secular democratic values were shared by only a minority of the Romanian political and cultural elites, who were divided between 'traditionalists' and 'Westernizers'. Traditionalists viewed religion as a key element of the Romanian 'national character' and opposed modernization on the grounds that Romania should stay a peasant and Orthodox Christian nation. Westernizers largely ignored religion and stressed the importance of industrialization and democratic development.[9] By the 1930s the traditionalists had the upper hand; many joined rightist groups such as the Legion of Archangel Michael.[10]

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[7] Not all received the same treatment. Baptists, who had been recognized in Transylvania by the Hungarian state since 1905, 'inherited' this status in the successor state (Lapedatu 1928: 38–39). Adventists and Evangelical Christians were registered as 'religious associations', but others, including Pentecostals, Nazarenes, and Bible Students, were 'strictly prohibited' (Rou: *interzise cu desăvârsire*) (Cuctuc 2001: 18).

[8] Calnic I, Popp Şerboianu, was an Orthodox priest of Roma origin who allegedly converted to Catholicism and intended to convert all Roma to Greek Catholicism (Klímová-Alexander 2005: 201). For details concerning the mutual accusations of Roma leaders and complaints related to 'missionary certificates', see Nastasă and Varga 2001 (documents 54 and 56, pp. 151–54).

[9] For a discussion of the debates, see Hitchins 1995.

After the Second World War the Communist Party became the dominant political force, and by the end of 1947 a new pro-Soviet government had been formed. In April 1948 Romania was declared a people's republic, and in August new laws for education and religion were adopted. The new law on denominations outlawed the Greek Catholic Church but recognized the previously banned sects. All religious organizations were directly subordinated to the state, and repressive administrative measures were applied when the government needed to control them. In the first decade of the people's republic, imprisonment and deportation to forced work camps were common ways to punish anti-regime activities. Members of the Greek Catholic clergy and faithful, people who were reluctant to 'return' to the Romanian Orthodox Church, 'sectarians' – mostly but not exclusively Jehovah's Witnesses – and those caught in 'subversive activities' such as proselytizing in the villages were among those deported (Vasile 2003: 212–60).

The socialist state also created a new niche for institution-building, which enabled the Pentecostals to reorganize and institutionalize their movement. They published an official, state-supported bulletin from 1953 onwards, replacing earlier illegal and irregular publications.[11] In September 1954 the group moved its central administrative office from Arad in Transylvania to Bucharest. Being close to the administrative centre of the regime proved a mixed blessing: by the late 1950s the church leadership was purged of those disloyal to the regime. Other neo-Protestant movements underwent similar processes (Sandru 1994: 16).

In the 1960s Romania progressively distanced itself from the Soviet Union. In 1965 Nicolae Ceauşescu came to power and initiated a modest liberalization of the public sphere. His maverick stance, notably his refusal to participate in the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, eventually allowed him to build an 'anti-Soviet Stalinism' with Western financial assistance (Câmpeanu 2002: 251). Public discourse was increasingly dominated by nationalism, and the position of ethnic minorities became precarious.[12]

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[10] The legion was one of the most prolific eastern European fascist movements of autochthonous origin. Its military organization, the Iron Guard, became infamous through its anti-minority actions and political assassinations in the 1930s (see Volovici 1991: chapter 2; Ioanid 2004).

[11] Since 1929, Romanian Pentecostals had irregularly published *The Word of Truth* (Rou: *Cuvîntul Adevărului*). An official monthly bulletin was published from 1953 to 1989. The January 1990 issue of the bulletin was published under the title *The Word of Truth (New Series).* The editorial promised a return to 'words that could not be published previously'. The editorialist also apologized for some of the words that they had published, such as the 'forced telegrams' of congratulations to the supreme leader, 'which probably, as we console ourselves, were not read by anybody' (Roske 1990: 1).

Ethnic groups reacted differently to the repression. Katherine Verdery (1985: 80) highlighted the contrast between Germans and Hungarians, and the case of the Roma was different again. They were denied official recognition and had no representation in the public sphere (Beck 1984). Not even their folklore performances were tolerated.[13]

During the period 1968–88 the number of converts to neo-Protestant confessions increased considerably. A table in the archive of the secret service shows that Pentecostalism became the major movement of Romanian neo-Protestantism during this period (Neagoe and Pleşa 2003: 64). By 1988 the number of the Pentecostal assemblies had increased to 793, and their membership had reached 155,470.[14] This expansion during the most repressive period of the Ceauşescu era, when all religious groups were subject to the strictest controls (see Sandru 1994 for the Pentecostals), is remarkable. It can to some extent be explained in terms of the social disruption caused by migration and displacement, important factors in the rise of Pentecostal movements in many parts of the world (Robbins 2004: 123–27). It can also be seen as part of a worldwide Pentecostal revival.[15] In addition, whereas historical churches in Romania were openly critical of the regime's policies, the Pentecostals preferred to avoid confrontation. Although the Inspectorate for Denominations limited all churches to one Sunday service, Pentecostals privately organized clandestine gatherings in which they sang, prayed, and studied the Bible (Vlase 2002: 146–47). They constructed prayer houses 'in private' in order to avoid administrative obstacles (later the 'owner' would donate the building to the assembly; see Vlase 2002: 143).

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[12] As Katherine Verdery argued, 'the Party was *forced* onto the terrain of national values (not unwillingly) under pressure from others, especially intellectuals, whom it could fully engage in no other manner' (Verdery 1991: 122, italics in original).

[13] Elsewhere in the region, folklore was instrumentalized as a means of Roma ethnic expression. A letter sent to Radio Free Europe in 1982 by a Romani woman provides a rare indication of how this discrimination was perceived. Among other problems, she complained about the 'pseudo-ignorance' shown towards Roma – 'pseudo' because the denial to Roma of a separate ethnic identity did not prevent the police from maintaining special records and statistics for 'Gypsy criminals' (Cosmin 1983: 34).

[14] Across all the neo-Protestant denominations, membership grew by an average of almost 90 per cent; the number of Pentecostals grew by 139 per cent.

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

Postsocialist Developments

In 1991 Romania adopted a new constitution that proclaimed the separation of state and church, guaranteed full freedom and equality to all religious denominations, and stipulated that a special law would address the problem of denominations. The proposed new law, however, was not adopted, and an amended version of the old law of 1948 remains in force. After years of debate, the draft law is still contested by the smaller denominations, who fear that the distinction between 'churches' and 'religious associations' (denominations with fewer than 300 members) will prevent many new assemblies from being recognized as churches, thereby making them vulnerable to state interference.[16] The Greek Catholics, a 'historical church' re-emerging from illegality, also boycotted the ratification procedure, making their consent to the draft conditional on the restitution of property confiscated by the state (Rou: *naționalizare*) during the early socialist period (Corley 2005).

The restitution of confiscated properties was a dominant issue after the fall of state socialism. Many church buildings had been appropriated by public institutions. In such cases the church had to bargain and litigate with the local administration to regain access, even after legal title was restored. De facto restitution was often delayed by lawsuits or opposition from current possessors. In many cases the process was hindered by the perception that minority churches were putting forward ethnic demands that were unfair to the Romanian majority; such perceptions were fuelled by the xenophobic arguments of some local politicians.[17]

Despite the aggressive tone of the debates, religiously motivated violence has been rare in postsocialist Romania, and none of the conflicts has had an ethnic component.[18] Some of the most publicized disputes hinged on the unwillingness of the dominant Romanian Orthodox Church to hand over buildings to the Greek Catholics. In some cases, legal decisions ordering restitution could not be enforced because of physical resistance by the local Orthodox priest and parishioners. In the case of the Schimbarea la Faţă Cathedral of Cluj, Greek Catholics retook their property by force (Mahieu 2004: 10–12).

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[16] Only a religion recognized as a 'church' or 'denomination' has the right to provide religious education in schools, and only its priests or pastors receive salaries from the state.

[17] For example, the former Reformed High School in Cluj (Hun: Református Kollégium) was returned to the Reformed Church by government decree in 1999. The bishop agreed to take possession of some of the classrooms for a Hungarian school, while allowing a Romanian secondary school to function in the rest of the building. The mayor of Cluj, well known for his anti-Hungarian rhetoric, initiated a series of counter-lawsuits and issued inflammatory denunciations of Hungarian politicians (Transindex 2002).

Conflicts also arose between rural Orthodox clergy and members of 'sects'.[19] The mass media labelled one such case, in late November 2001, 'the jihad of Niculitel'. The account of one of the victims was widely circulated (Omuţ 2001). He belonged to a group representing the Romanian Evangelical Alliance, which had rented the village House of Culture in order to screen a religious film.[20] The mayor had agreed to rent the room, but the local Orthodox priest prevented the distribution of posters and had the church bells tolled as if for a calamity. Representatives of the alliance were threatened by a group of locals and left the village without being able to advertise the event.

The following day a representative of the alliance returned, accompanied by reporters from the regional media, and the priest was invited to the mayor's office to be interviewed. He and his brother, also an Orthodox priest, attended the meeting with the mayor but refused to grant an interview. When the reporters wanted to interview villagers, the priest brothers appeared on the scene, along with a third colleague, and prevented the interviews. The bells were tolled again, and a large number of locals gathered. The reporters were closed in the churchyard. When the representative of the alliance took refuge in his car, he was surrounded by a rowdy group, beaten by one of the priests, and then taken to the mayor's office. At this point a crowd gathered in front of the office, and the police arrived. The victim was escorted to the county police station, where he filed a complaint. The village mayor resigned the same day.

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[18] On the other hand, religion played no role in conflicts that were perceived as ethnically motivated. The violence between Romanians and Hungarians that erupted in Târgu Mures in March 1990 was connected to debates over secular institutions, notably the local Hungarian school. The most common cause of conflict between members of local majorities (both Romanians and Hungarians) and Roma in the early 1990s was theft (Fosztó and Anăstăsoaie 2001: 358–59).

[19] Instances of such conflicts were rare in Transylvania. For a list of conflicts involving Pentecostals, see Rusu and Tarnovschi, pp. 30–32. Some cases are also discussed on web forums; see BaptistNET.ro 2004.

[20] The Romanian Evangelical Alliance is an inter-confessional organization formed by three denominations – Baptist, Evangelical Christian (Brethren), and Pentecostal – and the 'Lord's Army', a religious movement within the Romanian Orthodox Church.

This event might be taken as an illustration of the intolerance of some local priests and their parishioners. It also exemplifies the way a conflict may be worsened by confrontation and the way the local majority supports 'its' priest. Attempts to 'go public' by enlisting media support are likely to fuel the antagonism. The majority church is unlikely to punish a priest for zeal against 'sectarians and Satanists'. For these reasons, Gabriel Andreescu, a leading Romanian human rights expert, has argued that the Romanian Orthodox Church and its priests are prone to extreme-right ideologies. Among senior clergy, the patriarch and the bishop of Cluj were involved in their youth in the anti-Semitic actions of the Legion of Archangel Michael (Andreescu 2003: 42). Other analysts have remarked on the popularity of nationalist and 'fundamentalist' ideologies and attitudes among members of the Association of Orthodox Christian Students of Romania (ASCOR). ASCOR maintains good relations with the New Right Christian Forum (Rou: Forumul Creştin 'Noua Dreapta'), which openly promotes the cult of the 'martyrs' and endorses the values of the Legion of Archangel Michael (Mănăstire 2003).[21]

In stark contrast to the examples I have presented so far, local communities provide many instances of everyday civility and tolerance. Anthropologists who have studied rural Orthodox Christianity in Romania have remarked on the permissive attitudes of the low clergy towards practices of popular religiosity, something quite different from the dogmatism one finds farther up the church hierarchy (Mihailescu 2000). In the following section I show that everyday forms of tolerance and civility can also be found in other (non-Orthodox) denominations – and where their limits lie. First, however, it is important to note the limitations of the metaphor of the 'religious market' in the Romanian case (see also Pelkmans, this volume).

Churches are far from competing freely for adherents in Romania, and religious choices are rarely individual. They are mostly made within a community broader than a person's close kin-group – typically a neighbourhood or a village that subjects its members to various forms of social control. Although recent legislation has promoted greater freedom for religious denominations and granted equal status to them all, the traditional ethno-religious monopolies have not been eroded. It would be misleading to focus exclusively on the relationship between Orthodox Christianity and Romanian national identity. All the 'historic' churches in Romania, especially the so-called Hungarian churches, are tied to ethno-national ideologies and identity projects. Belonging to one of the 'Hungarian' denominations is often linked directly to Magyar-Székely ethnicity, just as belonging to the Orthodox Church is equated with being an ethnic Romanian. The Romanian religious sphere, far from resembling a 'free market', consists of monopolistic structures with secular political alliances.

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[21] The website of the New Right Christian Forum (http://www.nouadreapta.org) offers many illustrations of the symbolism of this movement.

Religious denominations that emphasize the importance of individual conversion, characteristically the neo-Protestants, pursue a different strategy. They do not depend exclusively on members' having been born into an ethno-national group and baptized by their parents. They also recruit 'born-again' adults. Although families of course remain important, ethno-national boundaries are more easily transcended in these denominations. Their emphasis on individual salvation, on the one hand, and on the local assembly, on the other, relegates ethno-national identities to a marginal role. My cases demonstrate that there is some space 'in-between' the segments of the religious field, which marginalized groups such as the Roma can exploit (cf. Gmelch 1986). Given their history, it is not surprising that they show little interest in the ethno-nationalist arguments. Some of them might well be seen as victims of the emerging 'real' economic market. This leads me to ask how the more-or-less agreed-upon 'horizontal' boundaries on the ethnic and religious surface of the postsocialist public sphere correspond to the 'vertically' layered social reality – the increasing socio-economic differentiation – and how new forms of solidarity reaching beyond ethno-religious labels can perhaps be achieved in everyday life.

Religiosity, Life-Cycle Rituals, and Roma Funerals

If the religious services accompanying life-cycle rituals were used as the sole index of religiosity, the region I worked in would be regarded as highly religious.[22] This was particularly true for funerals. I rarely heard of a priest-free funeral during the postsocialist years. Even during socialism, village burials seldom took place without the assistance of local pastors or priests. This is in sharp contrast to the Bulgarian village studied by Deema Kaneff

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[22] In 2000 a representative survey showed that 92–94 per cent of the population of Transylvania considered it important to participate in religious baptisms, weddings, and funerals. This was much higher than figures obtained using the same survey for the population of Hungary, where 27 per cent of those aged 18–40 and 21 per cent of all adults considered baptism unimportant. In addition, 29 per cent of the total adult population (35 per cent of those aged 18–40) considered religious weddings unimportant, and 17 per cent of all adults declared that they would not hold a religious funeral (Tomka 2000).

(2002), where priest-led funerals ceased in the 1970s, and even in the postsocialist years the attendance of a priest was rarely requested.

Although the importance of religious services at life-cycle events is an indicator of the close connection between public religious practice and family life, life-cycle ceremonies should not be equated with religiosity. To illustrate, I quote an anecdote I was told during my Cluj fieldwork:

> In a town situated in east Transylvania, in the middle of a region inhabited largely by Hungarians [Székelys], a Unitarian pastor decided to put an announcement next to the entrance of his office: 'This parish is not a funeral director!' [Hun: *temetkezési vállalkozás*]. Because some of his parishioners were surprised at the strange inscription, he explained that the warning was for those who came to his office only to ask for burial services. Because he was not asking for the unpaid yearly contribution [to the church] retroactively, [such people] were quite numerous. And they were not exclusively Unitarians.

Unitarians are a strong denomination in that region, and Székelys are well known for their sense of humour. The story might have been a joke, but the problem was real, as some Unitarians confirmed to me. It is not enough to state that an important connection exists between religiosity and participation in religious ceremonies connected to life-cycle rituals; this connection has to be analysed more carefully in order to show the role of religiosity in the lives of the people under scrutiny.

Refusal of religious burial can be used to punish those who have not satisfied their obligations to the assembly. Traditional churches have also used it against 'sectarians' and their families, even denying them burial places in cemeteries, although liberal theologians have refused to countenance such measures (Fekete 1993: 135–39). A certain coercive potential resides in refusing burial, and it lies mostly in the hands of the local priest or pastor and the church council. How they use this symbolic power is an indicator of local conceptions concerning civility and tolerance. The cases I present here demonstrate traditional possibilities for dialogue across ethnic and confessional boundaries.

The timing of funerals, unlike baptisms, can never be planned, and Roma families rarely accumulate the resources needed for burials. Therefore, in addition to psychological distress, the family faces a sudden financial burden. There is an important difference between the peasants Gabriela Kiliánová (2003) described in Slovakia, who saved money for their own burials as they got older, and the Roma I worked with, some of whom occasionally joked about what their adult children would do with their dead body if they were unable to raise the money to bury them properly. During my fieldwork I discovered that Roma attributed to Orthodox priests in Cluj a function similar to that of the Unitarian pastor in the story just quoted. Apparently the priests provided funeral services for anyone in immediate need, without asking too many questions. Some of the Roma I came to know used them to give their relatives the last sacrament, even if the person dying had not been baptized Orthodox.

I recorded the life story of an elderly Romni. She had had a harsh life because of her husband and eventually got a divorce in the mid-1980s. The former husband died in an asylum years afterwards, and she felt compelled to organize his burial. The street-cleaning company she worked for offered her a coffin free of charge. A car was also provided to take the coffin to the asylum. But she had difficulty arranging a religious funeral. She visited several Orthodox parishes:

> I could not find him a priest! The priest from Horea Street did not want to come; I couldn't find a priest anywhere. The priest from Someşeni [a suburb, a former village] did not want to come. It was snowy and cold, it was so cold. ... Then I went to the priest on the Petru Groza [street] and talked to the priest, who knew him [the late husband]. This priest took his oath twenty times, that he will not drink anymore. 'Father, you know me, you also knew my man. You know my hardships. I beg you very much, I will pay'. 'Lady, I will go, but you should pay for a taxi. You should take me there in a taxi and bring me back from the cemetery'.
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> I went and talked to a taxi driver. The morgue took him [the deceased] directly to the cemetery [on the margins of the city]. I went together with the priest by taxi. The priest said three-four words before they put him in the grave, then he returned with the taxi. So we buried him. I went home and made a big pot of meal [Hun: *juhtokány*] to be the *pomana* [funeral meal]. I did not do anything else, and I did not give away anything anymore – that was it. I buried him not because I was regretting him ... but I did not want the girls to tell me when we have a quarrel, 'Mother, shut up, you let Father be burnt!'

Some conditions have changed since late socialism. Only a minority of the Roma I met in Cluj were employed, mostly for the street-cleaning company. Other circumstances remain similar. Roma still prefer burial and regard cremation as horrifying (bodies are taken to the crematorium unless claimed for burial). Both religious funerals and the *pomana* are observed. Orthodox priests are seen as the least demanding and 'the cheapest'. Cities offer more scope for individual choice of a priest (even across denominations), and social control tends to be looser in urban neighbourhoods. City dwellers perceive burial as a private problem, and surviving family members can seldom rely on support beyond their close kin. The increasing 'privatization' of burials in the city is an example of the 'ritual decline' observable elsewhere in eastern Europe (see Creed 2002 for Bulgaria).

Gerald Creed (2002: 65) also noted the potential for Protestant converts to redirect their behaviour towards more ascetic practices. Neo-Protestant rituals produce the social networks that people need, but without the costs of traditional celebrations, which they can no longer afford because of economic crisis. This observation seems valid for the Roma I worked with; conversion to Pentecostalism or some other neo-Protestant denomination offered the convert an alternative network.[23] Although people had various motives for converting, the local assemblies were always seen as important support groups, and not only for spiritual matters. Among other forms of mutual support, converts were guaranteed a proper burial without having to depend on relatives, for the congregation took care of its dead.

Individual requests to priests or pastors of a dominant church may transgress denominational boundaries without leading to conversion. Conversion involves collective engagement in faith and ritual practice in order to maintain the social network of the assembly. Whereas in the previous examples, pastors or priests of a dominant church dealt with individual cases irrespective of religious and ethnic boundaries, an assembly of converts publicly challenges the established divisions. Although this might provoke greater opposition in rural contexts (the conflicts between local clergy and 'sectarians' described earlier all took place in rural settlements), villages have their own traditions of civility (see Buzalka, this volume, on 'agrarian tolerance').

During my fieldwork in a village in the Cluj area, I witnessed two burials among the Roma and heard accounts of several others. In all cases but one the religious service was performed by the local Reformed pastor. Sometimes this meant that the relatives, if they had left the congregation and neglected their duties for a long time, had to pay up to five years' contribution to the church retroactively in order to have a religious funeral. This payment to the parish was considered important by the local community, but at the same time the community supported the families through donations during the ritual. The involvement of the community, beyond the limits of the family and ethnic group, was characteristic of the village in which I worked and of the region as a whole.

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[23] Some Roma who have more resources organize expensive burials. The regional press reported that at the burial of a respected and well-off *gabor* Rom in Cluj, the religious service was performed by a Catholic priest, and the eulogy, in his home, by a Jehovah's Witness pastor. The funeral feast was generous but without alcohol consumption, because most of the *gabor*s were Adventists (Corăbian 2003).

I describe two burials, neither of which I observed personally but about which I was able to gather detailed information. The first was a 'normal' burial in the late 1990s in which everything proceeded as expected, except that the pastor demanded more piety than was the custom. The second is the case of a Rom buried in the early 1990s 'without even a bell toll' (Hun: *harangszó*). Both cases provoked discussion about the nature of a proper burial. In this account I rely on my observations about the general scenario of funerals, but important comments and descriptions are drawn from recorded narratives about the two cases. I was told that the funeral of Kata followed the normal scenario. It was a 'beautiful' burial, some said to me.

Kata's Funeral

Kata, a Roma woman, was about to die after long suffering. She was in her early sixties, and her husband would survive her. The family gathered (three adult children, her sister-in-law, and her other relatives) and began to discuss how the pastor should be addressed and asked for help. Because most of the local Hungarians knew Kata well and appreciated her character, one of the neighbours offered to go with her husband to talk to the Reformed pastor. The pastor knew the husband and agreed to come and perform the religious service. That evening he came with several non-Roma women, and they sang religious songs and prayed. Kata died that night. Members of the family agreed that although unconscious, she seemed visibly relieved after the service. The next morning the husband went to the pastor again to report her death. The pastor said he would celebrate the funeral service on the condition that the husband would stop the Roma men from playing cards during the wake, as was the norm. 'The funeral will be either with me or with the cards!' the pastor said, as the husband recalled his words to me.

Kata had no debt to the church, because she regularly helped clean the church building and the parish garden, and this work was counted as a contribution. The family's financial burden, however, was not insignificant. The main expenses for a funeral are usually the coffin, the wooden plank (Hun: *padmaly*) that is placed over the coffin to prevent earth from falling directly on it, the drinks consumed during the three-day wake, and the food for the celebration that follows the burial. Personal wreaths and flowers for each family member should be ordered from the city. The grave in the village cemetery is usually dug by the male members of the community without expecting payment, but they need to be supplied with bottles of liquor. A small sum of money should be given to the person who tolls the bell. The pastor also should be offered some money. The money is usually put together by the immediate family, but all the villagers offer some contribution towards the expenditures. A trustworthy Rom, a friend or a relative, is asked to gather the cash, and as people come to express condolences to the family, they give the money to him.

In the general burial scenario, the body is prepared by female neighbours and friends and put on display in the open coffin in the middle of the main room. During the night of the wake, the body ideally should not be left alone in the room. The women and some of the men usually take turns sitting next to the deceased, chatting in a soft voice or recalling events from the deceased's life. Musicians may appear unbidden and play slow music as a sign of mourning. It is normal for the men to gather in a room next to the wake and play cards. In this case Kata's husband asked his *kirve* (Rom: godparent of one's child; Hun: *koma*) to stay at the gate and tell the Roma not to start playing cards, because he himself was ashamed to do so. 'I could not talk like this to the people', he said. The *kirve* offered bottled drinks to the men and asked them to respect the pastor's wish. Some recalled that this was the first wake ever without card playing.

On the third day the church bell is tolled in the early afternoon, and the community gathers at the house of the mourning family, who are dressed in their best dresses and suits, gathered around the body. When the bell is tolled for the second time, the pastor is expected to come. Upon his arrival the coffin is brought to the middle of the yard, where he delivers a sermon, prays, and sings hymns with the help of the cantor. After the service the coffin is closed, the relatives take emotional farewell of the body, and the coffin is carried to the cemetery. Everyone follows in a long procession, the bell tolling continuously as they proceed along the village streets. Musicians again play slow songs. Men take it in turns to carry the coffin on wooden poles to the grave, where they place the poles across the grave and rest the coffin on them. A second prayer and more hymns are performed by the pastor. Then the coffin is lowered into the grave. The wooden plank is placed above the coffin, and it is covered with earth. The fresh mound is covered with wreaths and flowers.

The pastor leaves, musicians begin to play again, and bottled drinks are distributed among the mourners. I was told that in former times an elder Rom performed a second eulogy before inviting all the people to take part in the feast. This meal is served at the house of the deceased's family or in the House of Culture. Drinks are offered again, and everyone can eat and drink, but not to the point of inebriation, which would be disrespectful to the dead and the family. The feast usually concludes before evening, and the people depart.

This case shows that the role of the pastor is well embedded in the ritual, but he is not its organizer. He is expected to perform his part in the ritual and then leave the Roma to continue in their way.[24] The most important organizers are usually from among the community, generally led by a respected and trustworthy Rom who, along with the male relatives, organizes the work of preparing the grave and the tables for the feast and distributing bottled drinks. If the organizer is good, everything will be prepared in time, people will be satisfied, and no one will become drunk.

During the wake, things might get a bit out of control – some of the card players can lose money, become angry, and curse – but that is not considered disrespectful to the dead. Nowadays the card players are likely to go to a neighbouring house, where they are supplied with drinks from the wake. The pastor's repeated efforts to stop the card playing altogether have had little success. Indeed, Kata's husband, who stopped the playing under the threat of a pastor-free burial, told me that his last wish would be that his son should bring all the heavy card players to his wake. 'Because I loved the card playing, but I was the first to stop the cards, I want to be buried with the cards', he explained to me, half-seriously.

In addition to card playing during the wake, the burials of Roma in the village differed in some other aspects from the burials of Hungarians, although the pastor did not see these differences as significant. Nor were Roma beliefs and fears of much interest to the local clergy.[25] Roma musicians rarely played any role in Hungarian funerals. Emotions were expressed more openly during Roma funerals, and Roma stayed longer at the cemetery after the departure of the pastor and continued the funeral in their way (playing music, sharing drinks, etc.). Personal objects and coins were placed in the coffin, or money was put into the hands of the deceased. Kata had 'the price of a piglet' placed in her hand because her daughter had promised to buy her one before her death. In a general way the 'normal funeral' is the recognized way for both Roma and Hungarian members of the community to be buried, and normality includes the participation of the local pastor. In the village, no one would call an Orthodox priest from the neighbouring Romanian village to the funeral of a relative, and everyone can be buried in the same cemetery. Even emigrants are 'brought home' and buried in the village.

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[24] Michael Stewart (1997: 219) argued that the *vlax*-Roma he worked with 'handed over' most of the work during funerals to the priest and his assistants, and they were seen as polluted. In the case of Kata's funeral there was no such belief, but the pastor was seen as an outsider who performed 'his work' (Rom: *lesri butji*) and was not otherwise involved in the lives of the mourners.

[25] Lay eulogies given at the grave by elder Rom were formerly part of Roma burials in this village. The practice was widespread in Transylvanian Hungarian and Roma communities but was forbidden by some Reformed pastors on religious grounds (Nagy 1992; Keszeg 2002). In this village I heard of no attempts by pastors to suppress this custom. During one burial, I witnessed a lay eulogy recited during the funeral meal.

Albi's Funeral

Albi, a Rom who was born in the village, moved to the city in the 1970s when he was in his early thirties. He worked first in the construction industry and later for the street-cleaning company. In the mid-1980s he started attending a Pentecostal assembly and eventually was baptized, together with his wife. The company gave Albi a flat, and the couple led a decent life in a neighbourhood of the city.

Trouble began for Albi after his wife died. He married another Romni, but his two adult children were dissatisfied with his new spouse. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis and separated from his second wife for a while. Under pressure from his sister, who said it was better to have somebody to take care of him, he 'took back' his wife, but his children were even more dissatisfied and now were angry at his sister, too. Because of his illness he had to quit his job and received a small pension. This took place in the last days of the socialist regime.

In the first postsocialist years Albi was still living in the city, but he soon recognized that he was unable to maintain his flat because of rising maintenance costs. He sold it and bought a house in the village, where he was expected to pay only for electricity. He died in the village after a few years. His burial was organized by his children; his siblings did not contribute much because they were not on good terms with the children. The son invited neither the Reformed pastor nor the members of the Pentecostal assembly in the city, from which Albi had effectively dropped out. Albi's body was prepared according to custom, but his son, insisting that the deceased was a convert, did not organize a wake with drinks. Some women came and stayed overnight, but most men preferred to pay just a short visit to express their condolences and give the usual money. After the second day, Albi's brother tried to convince the son to go to the Reformed pastor and ask for a service. When the son disagreed, the brother did not pursue the matter.

On the day of the burial there was no bell toll, but people nonetheless started to gather for the funeral. The local Pentecostal preacher called an ordained pastor from the neighbouring village to celebrate a service, but as the pastor approached in the company of some female converts, Albi's brother, who was still angry at the son for not calling the Reformed pastor, drove them away, saying that the pastor had been a thief in his youth. The

Pentecostals left, and only a Hungarian Reformed woman, a neighbour of Albi's, said a prayer over the body in the yard of the house. The coffin was brought to the cemetery and buried without further ceremony. Some commented that the grave was too shallow; others remarked that the wooden plank was missing. The feast afterwards was modest and without alcohol. Albi's son and brother still avoid talking to each other, and the burial is remembered as the one that took place without a bell toll.

This case can be interpreted as evidence of some degree of tolerance, because Albi was not denied a burial place in the cemetery. His grave was prepared, as is usual, among the graves of his dead relatives. Yet the divisions within the mourning family indicate different ideas about proper burial. Albi's son insisted on giving him the burial of a convert because he wanted to respect the deceased's faith, but also in order to save money. Most local converts considered the dead man to have 'fallen'. The son saved money on his own father's burial, which drew the anger of his uncle. Albi's brother was not alone in commenting on the son's avarice.

The Reformed pastor stayed out of the picture. He was not invited, and he probably also wanted to demonstrate that if someone converted, then he or she should bear the consequences. But the son was criticized for not even trying to talk to the pastor, who, according to local opinion, would have been open to reintegrating the dead under the usual conditions: the family would merely have had to pay a couple of years' retrospective contributions. Criticism of the son attributed his reluctance to talk to the pastor to his avarice. The neighbouring Hungarian woman who volunteered to pray and sing over the body was performing what she considered necessary to avoid a 'take him and carry him away' burial (Hun: *vegyétek és vigyétek*), as the locals call such short, unacceptable funeral services.

The two funerals I have described can also be contrasted in terms of their social consequences. Kata's relatives managed to unite in their effort to provide a proper funeral, which later was remembered as beautiful and continued to enhance the family's prestige. After Albi's burial, pre-existing conflicts among family members deepened. In such processes, the community plays a role: people can take sides and echo others' opinions. In this case the son carried the blame for failing to arrange a proper burial. Although there are several ways of organizing a burial, a proper ceremony is expected to be connected with some religious institution. In the light of this example, it is evident that the local Reformed pastor was the most important religious authority in the village. Local Pentecostals dealing with an ambiguous situation (Albi's affiliation was contested) accepted that the unconverted brother of the deceased had the right to refuse their services. In the memory of the local community, the burial without a pastor remained a failure. Either Albi should have been reintegrated into the local parish or the incipient local Pentecostal assembly should have been allowed to play a role.

Conclusion

During the twentieth century, successive states and religious institutions in Romania have dealt with religious and ethnic pluralism at the level of legislation and public discourse. 'Minority denominations' were legalized following the unification with Transylvania, but 'sects' were prohibited. After the Second World War, when Romania became a secular people's republic, freedom of religion was proclaimed, but one of the national churches was abolished: the Greek Catholics were forced to 'return' to Orthodoxy. New denominations, previously banned as sects, were legalized, and properties of the 'historical churches' were confiscated. Denominations were subordinated to the state and controlled, if not persecuted, by the authorities. After the end of socialism, religious freedom was again proclaimed. Greek Catholics re-emerged and, along with the other historical churches, reclaimed their nationalized properties. Although the new law for denominations has still not been passed, steps have been taken to promote greater freedom and equality for all denominations.

At the level of discourse, however, distinctions persist between the historical churches and the 'new denominations'. The historical churches are widely considered to be more legitimate because of their affiliations with majority and minority ethno-national groups. Beyond the formal proclamation of equality, churches still attempt to monopolize the loyalty of a segment of the population through exclusive ethno-religious ideologies. The metaphor of the 'religious marketplace' thus has its limitations. However, I have shown in the latter part of the chapter that crossing denominational boundaries is not uncommon at the grassroots level.

The case of the Roma of the Cluj area provides a good illustration of the interplay between ideological expectations and local socio-economic conditions. In this religiously plural and multi-ethnic region, possible religious choices are multiple, in both the city and the surrounding rural area. Religious funerals among the Roma show that inviting a priest or pastor from another denomination to celebrate a funeral service is not uncommon in the urban context, where burials are more likely to be seen as private affairs. Although this indicates a degree of tolerance on the part of the clergy, the family must bear all the costs of the burial; the neighbourhood is not involved. In villages, on the other hand, religious funerals contribute to the maintenance of local communities through expressions of rural civility. The local community actively supports the grieving family. My conclusions, based on evidence from Protestant denominations, supports Vintila

Mihailescu's (2000) observation concerning Romanian Orthodox Christians, namely, that there is more tolerance at lower levels of the hierarchy.

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