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**Ritual revitalisation after socialism: Community, personhood, and conversion among the Roma in a Transylvanian village**

*(The argument of the PhD thesis)*

Religious activities intensified in Romania after the fall of the socialist regime. My thesis proposed to investigate the role of religious rituals in maintaining social integration, tolerance, and civility in postsocialist Romania. The most apparent aspect of religious affiliation in Romania is its association with ethno-national divisions. Though this relationship has its historical roots, my main focus was on the present role of religious practices in processes of identification and social differentiation. I adopted the perspective of the ethnography of communicative practices. I view ethno-national and religious categories and the practices associated with them as idioms through which individuals understand, express, and enact belonging and solidarity. Religious rituals and practices are an important though not exclusive resource for creating and maintaining social boundaries and images of autonomous social spaces.

The main field site for my study is a village I pseudonymously refer to as Gánás inhabited by Hungarians (two third of the local population) and Roma (Gypsies) who form the local minority. I focused on the local Roma group called the Romungre (sg. Romungro). This group lives in a rural area and in a nearby city. The village is located in Transylvania, a religiously plural and multi-ethnic area: in its immediate vicinity there are purely Romanian villages, while the centre of the area, Cluj/Kolozsvár, has attracted attention because after the fall of the socialism it became the site of strong nationalist sentiments and ethnic tensions between Romanians and Hungarians. In the rural settlements local Romanians, Roma, and Hungarians are acutely aware of socio-cultural divisions, but peaceful coexistence is the norm. I describe and interpret the conditions of this coexistence in the context of the postsocialist order. I also address the problem of religious change through a discussion and analysis of the recent conversion of local Roma to Pentecostalism. While the relationship of villagers to the Orthodox Church is briefly discussed, this thesis chiefly aims to contribute to the anthropological analysis of the practical religiosity of two versions of Protestantism, Calvinist and Pentecostal, in present day Romania.

The body of the thesis is composed by eight chapters I briefly review these restating the main argument and showing how the different sections contribute to

the support it. My introduction to the work contains a review of the literature, a presentation of the field site (the setting) and the research methods employed. I draw upon three main areas of anthropological literature. First, I review the literature that has emerged since the 1970s on Eastern Europe as a region and on Romania as a part of it. The problems of understanding and theorizing socialist society, the 'transition', and postsocialist conditions will be addressed through a review of the major contributions. Here I reflect on the work carried out by socio-cultural anthropologists trained in Western institutions, and, to a more limited degree, on the literature produced by local scholars in related disciplines. I will point to some of the differences between these two bodies of literature. The second field I examine is research on the various groups labelled as Roma/Gypsies. I will relate this body of literature to the problems introduced in the literature about the region. The third part of the literature review is concerned with anthropological work on religion, ritual, and religious change (especially 'conversion'). Methodologically my analytical endeavour is focused on the ethnography of communicative practices and so I explore the relationship between ritual communication and the public sphere. Ultimately, I address the broader theoretical context and ongoing debates in other social sciences from the perspective of the anthropology of the communicative practices.

A historical overview of the research area follows. Present-day socio-cultural divisions in Romania originated in the distinctive development of the country's historical regions that today compose the state. I focus more on the history of Transylvania because this is the region in which I conducted my research. The religious diversity that is observable in Transylvania today has its origins in the Early Modern period. Before the religious Reforms, social divisions were severe though not underpinned by religious differences. The peasantry (both the Catholic and the Orthodox) was excluded from political representation. The conversions triggered by the Reformation brought about a diversification of the religious sphere. Nevertheless, conversions more or less followed divisions between the earlier status groups, the 'nations' or 'estates' (Hungarian nobility, the privileged Saxons and Szeklers), and religious divisions contributed to the maintenance of pre-existing social divisions. The gradual convergence of religious and ethno-linguistic groups was catalyzed by books printed in vernacular, rituals connected to these texts, and persistent status divisions among social groups. I outline briefly the changing relationship of the different churches and the state after the modern Romania came into being (1918), during the socialism and in the postsocialist period. At the end of this historical overview I summarise the latest official data on the ethno-religious structures of minorities in Romania indicating the direction of the recent developments.

The main ethnographic section starts with an analysis of the main life-cycle rituals among Roma in Gánás. Life-cycle rituals in Gánás are closely connected to the local community and are supervised by the local Reformed pastor, and these events are also linked with celebrations involving Roma and Hungarians alike. Baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial are the main rituals observed by

villagers. Throughout my analysis of the ritual of baptism, confirmation, and burial I demonstrate that, although the canonical aspects of these rituals (i.e. the religious services) are invariable, the self-referential messages (i.e. how actors represent themselves through these rituals) express extant social divisions and recreate differences between the segments of the local society. Therefore, the idea and practice of 'local community' is constructed in a different way during each of these rituals. Moreover, different segments of local society may prefer divergent forms of ritual expression and thus approach 'locality' in distinctive ways. As a general argument of this chapter I suggest that while Hungarians (supported by the Reformed Church) insist on the symbolic subordination of individuals to the community, and while this relation is clearly expressed in rituals controlled by Hungarians (e.g. confirmation), Roma have other ways of maintaining their community. Among Roma individualism and a more competitive ethos is expressed in their rituals as demonstrated in my analysis of baptism. I interpreted burials in Gánás as expressions of rural civility. While the denial of a religious burial can transform the ritual into a coercive tool in the hands of the local clergy, the funeral can also serve as a site of solidarity and tolerance.

Employing a more 'microscopic approach' I present the ethnography of the rituals of personhood among the Roma. The chapter develops further my previous discussion initiated in the analysis of the baptism about the importance of the ideas about moral personhood in creating and maintaining community among the Roma. Here through an analysis of a life-crisis ritual (the oath) I discuss how moral personhood is maintained and transformed in the Roma community. The performance of moral personhood is intimately connected with religious ideas and practices. Swearing an oath is considered a rather dangerous gesture, not only for the single person involved, but also to his or her family members. Nonetheless, oath taking remains a widespread practice. Drawing on a social anthropological view of the nature of language I considered the oath as a particular utterance with a strong connection to and impact on the immediate and broader social world of the speaker, as oaths make strong claims about certain past actions or create future obligations. I formulate a working hypothesis about the possibility of viewing oath taking practices and religious conversion in a common comparative frame. In this chapter I developed an analysis of oath-taking, looking at its linguistic structure, social organization, and the religious imaginary surrounding it. Most problems usually „cured” by oaths emerge from family conflicts and their impact is focused on the closest family bounds. In this sense, oaths protect the oath-taker from social alienation. The practice involves an emphasis on personal connections and the value of trust and solidarity inside the local community at a time when these virtues are increasingly scarce in the broader society.

In the context of new religious phenomena I follow up my previous discussion of rituals of personhood; I am concerned with the maintenance and transformation of the moral self among Roma in through religious conversion. Religious conversion results in a new form of ('born-again') personhood. I start with a case study of a convert and his narrative about his encounter with God. I

seek to demonstrate the role of narration in the performative transformation of personhood. I analyse the limitations of such transformative attempts through another case study. The third section is an analysis of a debate about a biblical passage and explores social constraints on conversion attempts through a consideration of the problem of social rejection of transformative narrations (together with the denial of the feasibility of a born-again personhood). The fourth section is concerned with the 'tangible signs' of actions or attitudes, which are not primarily communicative or are communicated indirectly. The fifth section focuses on emerging spiritual kinship-ties, practices, and ideals. My conclusions point to the importance of the changing social orientation of the converted self. The social life of a convert depends on communal recognition of the sincerity of the conversion. Pentecostal Assemblies provide a space for expression of emotions and verbal utterances that are repudiated by outsiders. Boundary-maintenance of these groups is realized by a small number of ascetic elements present in the Pentecostalism (i.e., non-smoking and anti-alcoholism) and to a certain degree in tangible representations of religious elitism. Apparently these groups rely more on the micro-dynamics of the local societies in which they are embedded than on any form of centralized structure. Loose connections to broader networks and occasional visits by and reassurances from outside figures allow local assemblies to persist as global entities.

Through the study of ritual revitalisation one can analyse the emergent structures of the public sphere. Doing this I address the post-socialist transformations of rituals in the regional and local public sphere of Romania. I am concerned with the revitalisation of existing rituals and the invention of new celebrations. I develop an analysis of transformations observable in the local public sphere; analysing Pentecostal missionary rituals and a recently emerged local celebration the Village Days. My primary argument is that, while an intensification and diversification of ritual practices can be observed since the fall of the socialist regime, not all local groups are equally affected by this revitalisation. In line with analysis developed in the previous chapters, I argue that Roma are more receptive to rituals focusing on personhood, while ethnic Hungarians tend to be more involved in revitalisation, focusing on village traditions and folklore celebration symbolically connected to their broader ethno-national community. Religion plays important role in revitalisation rituals in both cases. The impacts of these divergent forms of revitalization on collective identity are opposite, though not necessarily in conflict. Those revitalizations that canonize features of the local social order arguably contribute to a consolidation and reinforcement of particularistic identifications. The case of Village Days demonstrates that these identities are not encapsulated in the 'village traditions' they mobilise, but are rather connected to broader collective ideals and ideologies, most notably, to the Nation. On the other hand, 'rituals of the Spirit and of the open heart' such as those found in Pentecostal revivals appeal to people for whom direct access to ritual empowerment and a symbolic bracketing of the social order can produce and reinforce a universalistic orientation of the self. Universalistic symbolism promises a radical reversal of status hierarchies and immediate access to resources and social mobility.

I turn then to analyse the broader transformations of the postsocialist public sphere presenting a media case study. I focus on media representation of two events that unfolded in the autumn of 2003 and both of them involved religious rituals and were excessively covered by the national and international media. The two events are the coronation of a Romanian Roma leader as 'International King of the Gypsies of the World' in the Curtea de Argeş Monastery, and the wedding of the daughter of another Roma leader, Florin Cioabă. I argue that media content analysis can reveal something about transformations of the postsocialist public sphere in Romania, and the place of the 'Gypsies' therein. Therefore, this chapter broadens the context of the analysis offered in previous chapters. I seek to demonstrate that recent changes in ritual communication are not unique to the particular village in which I conducted my fieldwork and that post-socialist increases in exclusionary tendencies in the public sphere should not be treated as an isolated phenomenon limited to a small number of localities. Processes observable at the local level are connected to national-level changes of the postsocialist public sphere. I suggest that the mass media fosters exclusion, and that this is not only characteristic of the Romanian public sphere. The emerging European public sphere has its own exclusionary tendencies. Nevertheless, there can be no better solution to problems of social exclusion than open debate and increased communication.

To summarise my conclusions: I argue that postsocialist religious and cultural revitalisation has distinctive features in different communities; some groups are more receptive to revitalising communitarian rituals and 'traditions', while for others, revitalisation seems to be more effective when it is individually focused. In both cases religious practices play important role. My case demonstrates that segments of a single local community can opt for divergent forms of religious revival: at the one hand, the social stratum with relatively high status, with communitarian traditions, and in control of more resources, prefers rituals which are focused on the ethnic community. In these rituals external relations are involved in order to (both ideologically and materially) support a homogeneous appearance of the local community. On the other hand, Pentecostal conversion, a ritual focused on the individual, is likely to be linked to social positions regarded as lower in terms of status. Conversion promises to change this status position by transforming the moral personhood of the convert without requiring additional material resources. Conversion can be sanctioned by ruptures in local social relations, while simultaneously reinforcing translocal relations and involving external resources. Religion and ritual provide major resources for individuals and communities seeking to publicly assert themselves in postsocialist Romania. A need for public affirmation seems to be acute among members of minority groups, though the forms of ritual they adopt may differ. The postsocialist public sphere accommodates a variety of new rituals, which are increasingly influenced by translocal and global forces.