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The role of religion in several Roma communities

Sorin CACE¹, Cristina TOMESCU², Daniela COJOCARU³

Abstract

After falling of communism, in Romania, different religious denominations came in order to find new followers. Most Roma in Romania are Orthodox Christians. Roma have generally adopted the religion of the country and they are strongly influenced by religious beliefs of the majority. The data show that the number of converted Roma people to these denominations, as a percentage of the total declared Roma ethnics is larger than the number of converted Romanians. For converted communities, several social implications have emerged: an increased birth rate, but also a positive decrease of crime rate. The article presents several communities as case studies for these conversions, based on qualitative data gathered in 2010 and draws conclusions upon social effects in these communities.

Keywords: roma communities; denominations; social implication; birth rate; delinquency.

Characteristics of non-Orthodox denominations and their role in communities

Acceptance of religious pluralism was a challenge for countries with traditional Orthodox religion, in the context of sudden opening for entering new denominations, after the fall of communism. Orthodox Church was accustomed to the status of the national Church, with privileged relations with the state (Cace et al.,

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2011). There is a civil religion in every nation, defined as a system of beliefs and rites by which society maintains socialization and collective piety in order to protect its own order (Reimer, 2011). It is a way of preserving the nation. In this regard, the national Church and the vast majority of society that legitimizes itself as Orthodox tend to reject new denominations, which come from abroad (Williame, 2001; Fren dreis & Tatalovich, 2011). Another challenge facing the Christian Church is secularization. Sociological literature speaks of a decline of religion in modern society. People are starting to show passivity or even a certain lack of interest in religion as it is promoted in traditional organizations (Cherata, 2010). Traditional practices undergo erosion or aging and no longer meet practical needs of everyday challenges that modern man is subject of (Chau, 2011). Also as part of the phenomenon of secularization, should be seen the tendency of some people to shift to other forms of religiosity than traditional ones (Remond, 2003; Frunzã & Frunzã, 2009). In this context, the new denominations attract new followers. Modernity subordinates several principles which are under the sign of secularization: (1) Public space is under the sign of secularism; it is not modeled according to religious values, superstitions and beliefs of individual; (2) The state does not favor any religion against the other and no religious organization against other organizations; (3) The political decision is not achieved based on religious choices, public policies derive from the rule of law and not from religious principles assumed by organizations; (4) Options related to religious freedom are guaranteed for each individual, having an important role only at the private life level (Frunzã & Frunzã, 2009).

Despite the emphasis upon secularization, communities still need to promote consensus factors, said Bryan Wilson, and religion is a source of integrative values and normative orders that give communities cohesion. The church still plays an important role especially in rural communities, where people know each other, the priest or pastor advises them, traditional values are better preserved than in urban areas. Religion still retains another function: stimulates basic human emotions (altruism, love, sympathy). At the same time, the religion has the function of social control, social consensus, and goodwill in relationships, maintaining a social balance. People, even in modern times, need these values. Last, but not least, humans understand easier the coordinates of their life through religion (where do they come from and where do they go after death, what is the purpose of their life here) and their enhance capacity to assess and emotionally deal with life challenges based on this set of values (Wilson, 2000; Cojocaru, 2005). Various specialists in sociology of religion (Wilson, 2000; Williame, 2001; Mayer, 1998) try to explain preference to conversion to denominations and withdrawal from the national Christian Church. Sorescu (1999) states that these abroad denominations promote a functional religion that is dedicated to filling the void, fulfilling the desires, reinforcing the feeling of belonging to a group and intensified cohesion.

Also according to Sorescu, one of the causes of proliferation of these denominations in Romania is their emphasized proselytizing. Each denomination follower is considered a Messenger of God, meant to bring others to faith (Bopp & Fallon, 2011). There are several categories that these denominations (Adventists, Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses) easier attract worldwide, not only in Romania: (1) Poor, disadvantaged groups; (2) Immigrants, excluded ethnic groups; (3) People with a low level of culture and education; (4) People with a low adaptation to a fast changing modern society; (5) Young people, easier attracted to new and unique experiences. Constantine Cuciuc (1996) also states that trend for these denominations mostly appear at marginalized people, socially non adapted people of several types, people that are pushed to the periphery: the unemployed, the sick, the poor, the abandoned, those who feel persecuted, misunderstood. Peripheral boundaries can be social, financial, and professional, of authority, prestige or spiritual. Social instability periods increase the number of marginalized people. They are attracted by the freedom of expression that it is offered to stimulate participation in these denominations (Schwadel, 2011); they are made feel important, useful, special, because they are chosen by God.

Among the motivations often invoked by those converted are: (1) Fascination for a group that is warm, fraternal, and looking for a community of support; (2) Revolt, protest against unfair order and poverty in society and against traditional (national) Church. New, coming from abroad denominations are perceived as not part of the former national system: they do not have a national history and do not have any kind of fault for current unjust social system; (3) Enthusiasm of practice; (4) Material aid from "brothers" (Sorescu, 1999). Wilson also shows that the probability that these denominations attract parishioners through detachment from the national Church, because of differences of opinion in matters of faith or religious practice is reduced. In general, they attract people outside the Church or people without a close connection with it.

According to Wilson (2000: 106), these denominations have the following characteristics: (1) They are exclusive- no religious affiliation duality admitted; they require recognition in a single body of religious teachings and a single membership; (2) They claim to have a monopoly on religious Truth in its entirety. This Truth provides the framework to define all aspects of faith, religious, social practice, ethics and other spheres of life; (3) They tend to be secular organizations. A body of professionals of bureaucratic type developed inside these organizations; (4) In terms of religious practice, they reject religious division of labor, based on the idea that certain people would be storage of special religious virtues, besides the leaders or founders, in some cases; (5) Religious obligations are the same for all those who accept the Truth; (6) They are characterized by voluntarism. An individual decides by himself to join. However, in communities, proselytizing determine increased pressure on individuals, especially on poorly educated, marginal people; (7) They are concerned with maintaining high moral standards

among members. They apply penalties for those who behave inappropriately. Penalties can go up to the expulsion; (8) Pretend total devotion from their members. To outsiders, there is a very visible mark of religious affiliation in all life aspects of the followers; (9) They can be protest groups. In the context of industrial, modern, pluralistic, tolerant society, they are no longer standing their protest against the Church, but the protest is directed against secular society. These denominations require certain standards in their religious actions, with implications upon human relationships, responsibility for others, social involvement. The protest is directed against the social situation (Wilson, 2000: 108). Some special features of these denominations distinguish them from national Church. First of all, it is the intensity of devotion and proselytizing of members. In terms of moral values, the teaching of these denominations is not always fundamentally different from traditional moral guidelines of Christianity, but the moral demands imposed by these denominations are more intense, more stringent. Charles Glock (apud. Wilson, 2000: 110) developed the thesis of relative frustration, which sees a possible compensatory reaction of frustrated people. Frustration refers to facilities and well-being enjoyed by others, and their own expectations about future prospects. This reaction manifests itself differently, depending on the degree and type of frustration felt by different groups. Glock shows that the bigger the frustration is, the more intense the propensity to be attract to religious denominations is.

Some characteristics of these religious movements are closer to modernity and they attract members through their facilities and modern practices. These denominations are: (1) Modern in terms of organization but also spreading techniques; (2) Modern in religious practice: easy, exciting songs; an important role given to expressing emotions; (3) Individuals are less invited to join to a body of doctrines, but rather to experience a form of wisdom that brings practice welfare; (4) Religious power is subtly exercised (individual practices are encoded and individual is reported incessantly to himself); (5) They are less clergy and rather laity denominations; (6) Are world-oriented, secular (refer to the existing social order); (7) These movements are international networks, like multinationals for true salvation goods. There are departures abroad, networking and contact between converted communities; (8) Voluntary membership, mobility and movement from one group to another; (9) They reconcile the opposition between individual and society; (10) Give a significant importance also for physical health, not only for moral one (Williame, 2001: 83). Some denominations, such as Jehovah's Witnesses became very bureaucratic organizations in Weberian way of defining bureaucracy. Some go in the direction of conservatism and defending moral values considered to be threatened and some are progressive, combining religion and socio-political protest. In some cases, it is not only about theoretical production that reinterprets the Christian tradition, based on preferential option of the poor groups, but also about popular movements. It can be a critique of society, of the

inequalities and social injustice, of its immorality, but also a critique of the national Church's actions, ineffective in relieving the poor's needs (Williame, 2001: 93).

In Romania, some of the new denominations have a good rate to attract followers. Among the best known are: Adventists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses. In the spirit of the above theories, we can say that Romanian society due to poverty and dissolution of values has provided a fertile ground for recruitment of persons with social problems, with low level of education, in risk of exclusion or already marginalized. Offering material aid to the poor people and increased proselytizing were two ways to attract them. Adventism comes from the English word Advent, which refers to Christ's coming for the reign of thousand years. It is based on the preaching of American William Miller, in the early nineteenth century. Seventh-day Adventist Church was organized around 1860. It honors Saturday as a day of rest, blessed by God. Although insist on upcoming return of Christ, does not specify day of the event. For Adventists, very important is social action. Man is a whole and the body should not be despised. Therefore, they set up clinics, do humanitarian acts, act to combat alcoholism, smoking, etc. They are social active and visible. Jehovah's Witnesses are a branch of Adventists. They come from "learners of bible" created by American Taze Russell, in the second half of the nineteenth century. They reject the idea of Trinity and believe everything changed since 1914 onwards and Jesus is present. He took power in the royal kingdom of God. This kingdom being in heaven and not on earth, we could not witness his enthronement. Jesus has not come on earth yet, because the news regarding to his coming should be preached to all nations. On this basis, Jehovah's Witnesses practice proselytizing, going in the remotest corners of the world to give the news and directing people to determine repentance, until it is not too late. Their action is systematic, organized: they divide cities and regions and hold series of statistics on the number of followers. Seventh-day Adventist Church and Jehovah's Witnesses are part of millennial groups. They believe that Christ will establish on earth the second coming after a reign of a thousand years (millennium) as a literal interpretation of the prophecies of Revelation says.

Millennial movements describe salvation with these attributes: collective (all believers enjoy it as a corporate body), earthly (not heavenly), imminent, full (because radically change life on earth) miraculous (committed by supernatural factors). Pentecostals are convinced by few fundamental Truths: the forthcoming return of Christ, salvation in Christ, divine healing, baptism in the Holy Spirit. Other gifts they believe in are: healing gift, the gift of prophecy, the gift of interpretation of languages (Mayer, 1998). Speaking of social assistance actions of these organizations, we must recognize their social activism in helping those in need. In a state with major problems in social assistance, social activities of these religious groups are even more visible and praised by the population that does not feel protected by the state or national Church, from which expected more. It is

also the case of compact communities of Roma, who live in poverty, often feel marginalized by the large community they belong to.

On the other hand, some charitable organizations in Romania, after 1990 have had a former but lost in time ecumenical side, according to Cojocaru et al. Many of the Christian-origin transnational organizations that started working in Romania after 1989 as branches of a mother organization have adapted their mission statements, so that religious references became less clearly outlined. In time, the organizations' mission statements lost their religious content to the extent to which some of them became altogether secular. In order to be able to develop social services, transnational organizations have reshaped their mission statements, working in partnership with the Orthodox Church (Cojocaru et al, 2011: 72).

Conversion of compact Roma communities to these denominations

Roma people are still a social group in increased risk in Romania. Roma population faces some generalized problems: unemployment, low participation on formal labor market, low education and lack of stock of qualifications, large number of members per family with a direct impact on living standards, poor housing, communities living in disadvantaged, poor areas, high proportion of socially assisted persons (with impact on the image of the Roma population in the wider community)⁴. Communist policy brought an improvement in the situation of Roma in education and employment. Stimulation of school attendance in the same period contributed to intergenerational social mobility and increased capital of Roma education. Some earned a qualifying work experience and benefited from work in an organized setting. Marginal position in the labor market has made Roma employees very vulnerable at the time of 1989 with the abolition of agriculture cooperatives and industrial enterprises. Their capacity for retraining or pointing to other sectors was low and the Roma have remained outside a form of employment. Moreover, scarcity of jobs has been felt by a massive majority of people previously employed in factories. Majority turned to forms of survival as subsistence agriculture or early retirement. Roma were the most exposed to fall into poverty, since providing jobs in rural areas was drastically reduced, and subsistence agriculture was not specific for most of the Roma.

Low educational capital is a relevant factor of the current situation of Roma employment. Most Roma have not sufficient education to access skilled jobs existing on formal market and unskilled jobs are limited and poorly paid. Given that a large number of Roma women are domestic, that there are a large number

⁴ According to a study achieved by Institute for Quality of Life Research on a national sample, using quantitative and qualitative methods, inside POSDRU project "*Legal and egal on labour market for Roma communities*", 2010.

of children in their families and the man is the only supporter of family income in most of the cases, an unskilled job cannot get sufficient funds to maintain a family normal life standard. Roma enter into the labor market much earlier than the Romanians and there is an unequal access to education between boys and girls of traditional Roma families. Informal employment is prevalent for Roma. Problem in accessing employment for less qualified people is not only specific to Roma but in general to poorly educated population. The labor market is segmented: on the one side, a services sector which requires high skill and is better paid and on the other side, a temporary jobs sector, for low skilled, poorly paid and often at black market. Poorly qualified Roma population is engaged mainly in the second sector. We cannot talk about ethnic discrimination in employment, although isolated cases have been reported, but rather de facto discrimination resulting from the segmentation of jobs.

Minimum income, which often is granted to only Roma individuals in the community, is a sensitive issue in public opinion in some communities and attracts negative perceptions. Also, there are opinions that support the need for such a help. Given the low level of living, lack of aid would emphasize certain social tensions. In addition, to be qualified for the aid, individuals must perform community service hours in which idea of citizenship and community are inoculated. The crisis has exacerbated the problem of Roma employment by affecting the sectors that attracted labor force in temporary activities: as construction, for example. But there is no data on the impact of the crisis on employment of Roma on the black market or abroad labor market. The standard of living and housing conditions are influenced not only by lack of jobs but also by mentality and traditions of Roma. Their original status of nomadic population may be an argument in supporting their local behavior of "carpe diem". Individuals are currently living anchored in search of fast opportunities. Unlike Romanian who used to practice a self-consumption economy - by cultivating gardens - Roma were always more likely to work in trade, to sell or resell products or to practice traditional crafts: manufacture of silver objects, spoons, pots, caps and so on.

Most Roma in Romania are Orthodox Christians. Roma have generally adopted the religion of the country and they are strongly influenced by religious beliefs of the majority. Nevertheless, in the predominantly Hungarian villages (in eastern and northern Transylvania), Roma are either Roman Catholic or Reformed (depending on the Hungarians denominations). Also, in some villages that have (or have owned) a German population, there are small communities of Roma Lutherans (e.g. Uila, Mures County). Part of Roma from Dobrogea are Muslims (about 1% of all Roma in Romania, one of the largest communities being that of Babadag, Tulcea county).

In the last two decades, a part of Orthodox Roma converted to various neo-denominations. However, most adherents of these religious communities remain Romanians and not Roma. The Orthodox Church leads a fight against minority

denominations, considered as sects and a large part of the Romanian population rejects these denominations. But neo-denominations remain an attraction for a part of the people. The data show that the number of converted Roma as a percentage of the total declared Roma ethnics is larger than the Romanian converted ones. The number of converted Roma may be even higher than figures show, given that more than half of the Roma declare themselves as Romanian in the census.

Table no 1. *Population by ethnics and religion (%)*

Ethnicity	Total	Orthodox	Romano-Catholic	Reformat	Pentecostal	Greco-catholic	Baptist	7 th day Adventist	Other
Romanian N=19 399 597	100	94.08	1.78	0.08	1.42	0.82	0.55	0.4	0.87
Roma N=535 140	100	81,8	3,79	3.06	6.43	1.14	0.88	0.86	2.04

Source: Population Census, 2002

One has to wonder why Roma tend to move to these neo denominations (Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, etc.)? Could this choice lay in the actions of these denominations to material help them in order to attract potential followers, being known that the Roma is a very poor social group? Another explanation could lay in the need to find a social group that positively relates to them, in an integrated way, while Romanian community tend to isolate large, Roma compact rural communities to the edge of villages and sometimes disregard them. Neo-Protestant missionaries regard Roma as souls ought to be saved, as children of God, as equal members.

Is the passing of Cioaba family to Pentecostals an example to other Roma? Florin Cioaba, leader of the Roma is a Protestant pastor and exerts an influence on the Roma community, especially in the county of Sibiu. The church, Philadelphia was built in Sibiu, in 1995 and began operations in 2000. The church counts 150 members, only a small number in comparison with other rural communities of converted Roma, which number hundreds or thousands of members such as those of Toflea, Galati County or Slobozia-Voinesti, Iasi County. "People are united and they have found the change they sought. Jesus said that whoever wants to inherit the kingdom of God must be born again and that is the purpose of adopting the Protestant religion (...) Unlike the practices of the Orthodox Church, which attracts Roma only on holidays (Easter, Christmas, funerals, baptism), Pentecostals come to church even three times a week, because they are involved in the service by singing, evangelism, worship and feel closer to God. There is no competition between us and the Orthodox Church."(Roma leader, Sibiu)

Several roma converted communities⁵

Village of Toflea, Galati County

In Brahasesti, Galati County, 6000 persons out of 9000 moved to other denomination, especially Pentecostals, surprising area representative. Brăhăsești consists of villages Brăhăsești, Toflea, Corcioveni, Cosițeni, and is located in the northern county of Galati. Out of approximately 5,500 inhabitants of Toflea, 98.5% is Roma, and the remaining 1.5% is Romanian. There is no prominent leader to represent the Roma, the most significant personalities of the Roma community being declared the Pentecostal priests. In Toflea, there are no jobs. A lot of people are engaged in the manufacture of pots, iron items and in the sale or retail of various items they buy wholesale from large shopping centers. Part of Toflea villagers practice traditional crafts: blacksmiths, locksmiths, musicians. There is no local agriculture and more than 80% of inhabitants of Toflea are socially assisted by guaranteed minimum income. Toflea Roma community is a traditional one. Families are headed by oldest male. Family type in this community is the extended family. At the time of marriage, fathers built a house for the new couple next to the old household. Sons bring their wives in the new house, and daughters in law will help the new family housework (Cace et al, 2010). Marriages usually take place between young people from families with similar financial situation. But there are exceptions to this rule, when the boys from wealthy families fall in love with poor family girls and vice versa. When it comes to occupation, no matter whether the young couple is part of different craft tradition, from different generations of craftsmen: the job can be learned. Optimal age for marriage is considered to be 17-18 years old. Middle-aged residents have 8 years of education, the oldest are less educated. Parents want to be able to send their children to secondary education but 32 km away from the village high school implies high costs for the parents, since many families have a large number of children: 10-12 children. At first glance, Toflea does not seem a village of poor people because of the aspect of a part of the houses. Some houses are large, in different stages of construction, with PVC windows and metal doors, indicating a good level of living. The visible poor part of village Toflea is represented but covered with cellophane houses, where people are living in severe poverty, surviving only on social benefits. Whole village is social assisted. The difference between those living in huts and those living in good houses is that the latter, besides the state revenue, gains from the craft or different commercial activities. Homes, they say, were started in the days when Roma were doing better and no robberies were committed. Roma are not talking about the origin of these things,

⁵ The case studies were conducted by Echosoc Foundation, collecting qualitative data based on interviews and focus groups in 40 Roma communities inside POSDRU project Romano Cher: House of Roma

or about the sources of income from which they managed to obtain. Residents of Toflea are mostly Pentecostals. According to village leaders' statements, about 4,000 Roma were converted to Pentecostal denomination. Although there are voices who say that the transition to neo-Protestant religion was made before 1989, the Pentecostal Church officially came into being in 1992. Annually, there are converting to Pentecostal religion 250 up to 400 people in Toflea. Baptism takes place on a lake, on the shore of Siret, 35-40 km away from Toflea. One of the missions of Pentecostals is to "bring into the right way" those people who worship another denomination. Following the conversion, penitent people have abandoned previous lifestyle: they renounced to famous parties, but their homes have still retained architectural elements reminiscent of those parties: large halls for the dance. They also gave up alcohol and tobacco, adopting a way of life "in order to God's will." As a result of their conversion, the number of crimes in the community was considerably reduced.

"Penitence replaced robberies and beatings "... They do not speak bad words and no longer drink" (local councilor)

"For five years we know God.. I am converted! I was a person who liked short skirts, drank, and smoke ... I neglected my family a lot... Here in town, it was common for all generations to be alcohol consumers. Now we don't drink anymore. "(local informal leader)

Along with Roma conversion, an increase of birth rate took place in Toflea. Authorities declare that population number increased considerably since the last census, but only by natural growth and not by migration.

"Pentecostals have birth rate above average. They grow up to 12 children, while others have three to four. "(Local leader)

"It is said in our book that we must multiply as leaves and as grass and we aren't allowed to abort" (Pentecostal Roma)

Interestingly, the perception of converted Roma about the large Roma houses in the village is the following:

"I would not call them palaces, but garbage. Unfortunately these people do not think that they will not take them in the afterwards world "(Pentecostal Roma)

There is a church activism and cultural exchange with the United States Church. Toflea has a young singers Church choir and a band of religious music, conducting concerts for supporting various Pentecostal communities in the country. "Brothers of Toflea" as they are known, are good interpreters of religious songs.

Roma community of Deaj, Mures County

Before 1990, a small part of Deaj Roma community was working in Târnaveni Chemical factory or the local glass factory and a greater proportion as seasonal workers across the country, on farms: animal caretakers or building brick for stables. Being left several months a year from community was one of the factors that generated low level of formal education for now middle-aged Roma. Along with the old Roma from community, they have seldom completed at least 8th grades. Deaj Roma are “vâtrași” and their specific traditional trade refers to fabricate and sell bricks and weave twigs. They are also called silk Roma. The tradition of working in agriculture made traditional crafts rather an economic choice, favored by local opportunities rather than a manifest of ethnic and cultural specificities. Brick craft is practiced only in warm weather, and the craft of weaving the twigs was a source to supplement income during the winter. Deaj Roma community numbers around 600 Roma people, living in 245 households. Community was less numerous in the early '90s, when no more than 300 Roma were living here. Authorities' explanation of this demographic explosion is the shift of majority to the Pentecostal denomination, after 2000. This modified Roma reproductive behavior and led to almost a doubling of population in the last 10 years. The faithful Roma community is gathering in Pentecostal House, where religious service is conducted by a minister belonging to Roma community of Deaj. Most Roma are of neo-protestant religion. Some of them were Pentecostal even before 1990, but the largest part converted in the past 5-6 - years to this denomination.

Dobric community, Bistrita-Nasaud County

Dobric village is located in the north-west of the Bistrita-Nasaud County and has 1367 inhabitants. Romanian population numbers 98% of population and Roma only 2%, according to the latest census. Many Roma didn't declare as ethnics in the census, thus, authorities claim that the Roma community contains about 15-20 families and up to 13 Roma children per family. The two religions embraced by Dobric people are Pentecostal, 99% of the total population, and Orthodox, only 1% of the village. The majority of Roma people is Pentecostals and call themselves “Repented”. It could be seen that belonging to different denominations does not create divergence in the community. Few persons who remained Orthodox are well tolerated. Roma people explain in terms of faith their social state: their fate was decided by God, they had to be poor in order to be helped by rich people. Also the fact that they are Roma is a decision of God, when he divided the world. Between the Orthodox Church and monastery building already in place, the construction of a Pentecostal meeting house began since 2007. Representatives of the local Mayor state: “Pentecostal church has 700 seats! Do you know what this

means? And can cover up to 1500 standing up people! Where can you gather so many people from? “(local leader)

Community of Iara, Cluj County

An important feature of community of Iara is the homogeneity in terms of standard of living, Roma people were integrated but did not forget the ethnic group membership. Over time, the number of inhabitants of Iara was increasing and decreasing, reaching a peak in 1941, when the village recorded 6822 inhabitants. Since then the number of inhabitants has steadily declined, to a total of 4704 inhabitants in 2002: 4266 Romanian, 149 Hungarian, 283 Roma and 5 Germans. In the sixteenth century, Iara inhabitants were converted to the Unitarian denomination. Roman-Catholic confession was later embraced by some residents. Currently, in the village, there are Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Evangelical denominations. Orthodox denomination has existed since the thirteenth century, but the church was burnt along with the village during the Tatar invasion. Orthodox parish was established in 1929 without a church, but only a chapel in the house of the local priest. The new church in shape of a cross with seven towers, called “Assumption of Virgin Mary”, was built between 1992 and 2006 with the active involvement of community and parish priest. Roman Catholic Church was built by the inhabitants of Iara in 1332, since when the parish had dated. The current church was built in 1568, when residents were forced to embrace the Unitarian worship in the eighteenth century, being consigned to Jesuits. In 1787, the Roman Catholic parish is reestablished. During the war, the Catholic Church was bombed, as one can notice nowadays: the church tower is connected with wires to avoid collapse. Reformed Church was built in 1730 by Iara inhabitants through donation of money and land. The present church dates from 1820 at the expenses of a local count. In this church, it can be found a Bible printed in Budapest in 1805 and an organ of 1893. Neo-protestant denomination developed especially after 1985, the first converts were few older women and a family of capper. Currently, the local evangelical church has a private house on the road, where Romanian and Roma families gather for church services.

Roma community of Iara village consists of several types of Roma:

Type 1: Silk Roma: they live in better conditions, have more money and invest in the education of children. Some of them are integrated in institutional work and local public institutions or enterprises, and pay taxes and bills regularly. Is the exception rather than the representative type.

Type 2: Brick makers are the middle-class Roma communities in Iara. Generally they try to complete their income with unskilled illegal jobs in construction sites or sanitation area by day work.

Type 3: Young people with some education and who have managed to find better work in the village or town.

Type 4: “Geambașii” - poor Roma, who live by gathering metal, plastics or other materials from garbage in order to sell them or to use them as material to manufacture or repair different objects. The lowest part of this hierarchy is occupied by Roma living in austere conditions, dealing with mushrooms and fruit gathering.

Type 5 - Those gone to work abroad; in the village there are about 5 to 10 such families (Germany, France, Italy, Spain were the main destinations). There is not a widespread type.

Economic level of the Roma is low in the area, because of lack of qualification. During the communist period, Roma lived based on their crafts. Today, these arts are seasonal, offering occasional income. Product “cap” has a reduced demand in today’s market and the short sales result in low incomes for Cappers. Many of them borrow money to live in summer and to buy merchandise for fabricating the caps, in order to pay their debts at the winter time. In addition to numerous pagan practices, the Roma have generally religion of the majority: they are largely of neo-protestant religion. A Roma Capper says: “I have repented since the last 32 years ...” and relates the way he embraced the Pentecostal denomination. He and his family were among the first converts. Faith in God contributed heavily to the transmission of the craft, he states. “such a job is left by God”. Currently Roma Pentecostals of Iara meet Romanians within a private house for pray, located to the main road. Roma plan to purchase a building for neo-protestant church just for Roma community. Currently, the project is delayed due to lack of funds on the one hand, and discrimination, say some of the Roma, on the other hand: “I have repented for 30 years and do not want to sit with the Romanians, but to buy our church... Discrimination is in the Church, in the school, on the street “(Roma from community)

Concluding on social consequences of the conversion of Roma communities

Some common elements were found in the studied communities, as an effect of Roma conversion to other religions. First of all, there is an increased birth rate. Converted Roma families have a larger number of children: up to 12- 13 children. Direct consequences of this increase in number of family members are poverty and reduced chances that these children will attend supplementary form of education after primary school. Families with many children cannot afford the costs of keeping them in school. A second consequence of the conversion is changing the social behaviors of Roma in a positive manner. It is about the adoption of moral behavior, in accordance with the principles of these denominations: quitting smoking and drinking, no partying, no exchange of bad words and cursing,

decrease of violence in family and outside the family and decrease of other types of crimes (robberies, frauds, murders, other types of violence). The authorities recognize the decrease in crime in studied communities. We noted also the lack of conflict between Orthodox community and the other denominations. There are no conflicts of religious nature. Communities tolerate each other, both in terms of ethnicity and in terms of religion. Another interesting phenomenon is the recognition by Roma of denomination membership. As regarding declaration of ethnicity, Roma are reluctant to this, in census and surveys, in terms of denomination membership declaration, there are no restraints. Asked about the perception of their conversion to these denominations, the Roma declare a sense of integration, of belonging to a group where they feel good and feel helped, in solidarity. At a recent Roma parade in Sibiu, Roma sang "Jesus loves Roma! Jesus is the Savior. Alleluia. Jesus loves Roma. Hallelujah ". Yelling all over the city, along the caravan, these words show that Roma are not ashamed to show their faith.

People who join these denominations affirm that they are consistent in terms of frequency on the religious service and this is largely due to the fact that besides fulfilling the duty to God, they feel good in the group. Belonging to a particular religion is based on how you are accepted by that Church. May not Roma people feel included in the community of the dominant church? This is a delicate matter. In 2004, a study about Roma traditions (Alexandrescu, 2004) that presented Budiuh Mic and Reghin communities, of Mures County was showing that most Roma people have converted to Adventism. Interviewed Roma explained their reasons of conversion: among these people we are called brothers, we feel useful, and we do not feel discriminated. Also, there are interesting examples mentioned in the study regarding integration/discrimination in some communities. A reformed priest whom villagers asked not to receive "Gypsies" in the church decided to do religious service for Roma separately at Roma leader home and translated a short form of the Bible into Roma language. Can discriminating attitude of the community be explained on disturbing behaviors during service that Roma would have had like begging, noise, etc., or on their low level of education and poverty status? Beyond the community attitude, the position of priest is commendable, and it leads to further meditation of Roma state in some communities.

In the context of national policies addressed to Roma inclusion, it would be of interest further assessments of the effects upon Roma communities of insertions into denominations and how these insertions could be used to improve policies, communications, inter-communities relations. It could be taken into debate the possibility of cooperation with these cults for large compact communities in order to carry out non-governmental programs of education or professional conversion (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). In the studied communities, the Roma still practice traditional crafts, but traditions are gradually lost in the absence of sale markets and other types of support. We might also consider regeneration of these crafts and education for Roma, using these religious support groups. We must bear in

mind that these religious groups hold a series of facilities in communities: large enough buildings in most cases for meetings, necessary technical support for communication, audio equipment.

On the other hand, we must recognize social activism of these groups to be a good start in increasing social solidarity and community spirit in compact Roma communities. Roma people who travel by groups to spread Lord's words in other communities or who sing in the church choir, performing tours, learn to relate to group actions. Also, extended families, specific to this ethnic group, are a source of sharing help in the communities. This type of already developed spirit community should be used to run programs in area of social integration.

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