

**“I MUST LOVE THEM WITH ALL MY HEART”:
PENTECOSTAL MISSION AND THE ROMANI OTHER**

*Johannes Ries
Institute for Ethnology, University of Leipzig*

In the first week of my fieldwork in the Transylvanian, I got to know Cătălin while promenading through the village Trăbeș and he invited me to his small house to have a cup of coffee. Soon, his wife Claudia joined our chat in the kitchen. After some while she started to complain: “The Gypsies are very bad men, they always pilfer, cadge, booze and come to blows.” I was quite bewildered because I had proceeded from the assumption that I was sitting in a Romani house – now I heard such contemptuousness. After another half of an hour in which I learned much more about the “bad Gypsy,” I had the heart to ask: “You’re not Gypsies, are you?” “Of course we are,” was Claudia’s response, “but I’m a Convert!” Some days later Michael, a Transylvanian Saxon who had dedicated his life to Pentecostal evangelization of Roma, took me along on a missionary tour through Romania. “I’ll tell you my motto,” he said while we were driving from one Romani congregation to the next. “If God had asked me if he should create the Gypsies, I don’t know what I’d have answered. But if God created them without asking me, I must love them with all my heart.” These statements of a Romni and a Gadjo,¹ both converted to Pentecostalism, confused me a lot at the beginning because for me they were rather paradox. But after some more weeks of fieldwork, I realized that from the speakers’ emic perspectives, these seemingly paradoxical statements were absolutely consistent in their reference to a Romani ethnicity reconfigured by Pentecostal discourses.

From the 1950s on the Pentecostal mission has been increasingly successful in “saving souls” among Roma all over the world (c.f. Acton 1979). Conversion to Pentecostalism offers Roma access to a new hyperspace defined by shifted ethnic boundaries and relocated discourses. This essay introduces the case of the multiethnic Transylvanian village Trăbeș in order to illumine facets of this dynamic shift. I first show how the Converts reconfigure the Gadjo othering

and social exclusion of Roma. Next, I introduce central discourses that shape the social order of the Trăbeșian Corturar Roma, who generally do not convert. Finally, I illustrate the Converts’ discursive counter-concept and its attractiveness for the Trăbeșian Țigan Roma, who are not averse to conversion.

Gadje, Roma and Converts

Trăbeș was founded in medieval times by German Saxons who – apart from a few exceptions – emigrated to Germany after East European borders opened in 1989. Today, about a thousand Romanians live in the village and cultivate the close-by fields or work in the factories and bureaus of the nearby town. These Romanians, however, form only about 40 percent of the population and are slightly outnumbered by the some 1,600 Roma living in the village. These can be divided into two subgroups.

About 400 Trăbeșian Roma call themselves Corturari (tent-Gypsies). In former times they were nomads but from the 1960s on they settled down in the Western part of the village. Generally, the Corturari are rather conservative and place high value on cultural codes. As I will show later, their community is divided along patrilineal lineages and abides “typical” Romani institutions such as arranged marriage, the kris, the rom baro, or the purity complex.² All Corturari work as mobile coppersmiths, traders, and service providers. They speak a special Romani dialect, and Corturari men, women, and even children wear a “traditional” costume. All Corturari set great store on strict endogamy and cultural exclusiveness. They are proud of being the only “true” Roma and – apart from economic interaction – restrict their contacts to both Gadje and other Romani groups.

The second and larger Romani group in Trăbeș does not have much in common with the Corturar cultural profile and lives strictly separated from Corturari and Romanians. At what time these Țigani (Gypsies) came to Trăbeș is unclear, but all

¹ *Romni* is the Romani-language term for a female Rom, while *Gadjo* refers to a male non-Rom.

² As discussed below, a *kris* is a Romani court, trial, or interrogation, and a *rom baro* is a big man.

Trăbeșians remember that there always have been Țigani living in the village. In contrast to the Corturari, the approximately 1,200 Țigani do not practice any specific craft but are on welfare and try to find work as farmhands in the agricultural sector. Most Țigani definitely live on the edge of survival. They do not speak Romani or wear a “traditional” costume; “typical” Romani cultural institutions are absent in the Țigan community. The Țigani try to assimilate to modern Romanian culture because they seek for integration into Gadjo society (they even do not sanction exogamous connubia). Tragically, the Țigani are victims of consistent social exclusion: the Gadje among whom they live leave nothing undone to maintain ethnic segregation.

Since the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime, the Converts, who formed as a local congregation in the beginning 1980s, are very much sought-after. Saxons, Romanians and Țigani (but no Corturari!) meet twice a week in order to celebrate emotional services dominated by the experience of the Holy Spirit and a dogmatic interpretation of the Bible. Every day of the week, different smaller circles read the Bible, pray, sing or educate themselves. Yet the Converts’ congregation, lead by two Saxons, consists of about 120 baptized members and roughly 200 sympathizers and children. More than half of them come from the Țigan quarter and more and more Țigani decide to convert. In 2002, the Converts built a modern faith complex that consists of a large assembly hall, a dining hall, offices, group rooms and a playground. Moreover, the Converts have at their disposition a children’s house in the Țigan quarter, a guest house, a storehouse, and a radio station. The Trăbeșian congregation serves as the Romanian outpost of a German mission organization and supervises a wide network of congregations all over Romania. Additionally, Michael (the Saxon missionary) is the head of the Romanian “Gypsy Mission,” which is also financed by its German counterpart. He undertakes many trips all over Romania in order to look after Roma in many mono- and multiethnic congregations and to spread the gospel among Romani “non-believers.”

Officially, Romania claims to have a civil society that guarantees equal rights for every member. Nevertheless, in rural Transylvania in general, and in particular in Trăbeș, all ethnic groups still live strictly separated and have different privileges. Formerly, the Saxons were regarded as the top of the ethnic hierarchy. Today, the nationalist struggle between Magyars and

Romanians on the hegemony of their homeland increases. Nevertheless, Saxons, Magyars, and Romanians ally as Gadje in their definite demarcation from Roma (c.f. EDRC 2001). Even if the Romanian Romani spectrum is composed of many subgroups that significantly differ in their cultural profiles (c.f. Burtea 1994), the Gadje have clear stereotypes about the Gypsy (c.f. Woodcock 2005). Even the Gadje in Trăbeș (i.e., Romanians and Saxons) repeat the typical picture of Roma as dangerous thieves and lazy beggars, dirty poor and squandering drunkards, suspicious heathens and immoral seducers... in short: as the Other par excellence. This stereotypification or othering (c.f. Pickering 2001) perpetuates the order of ethnic separation and social exclusion of Roma although every Gadjo is used to day-by-day interaction with Roma.

The Converts share the secular Gadjo stereotypes of Roma, but the Pentecostal othering of Roma is legitimized through other discourses and leads to a different social practice. “If God had asked me if he should create the Gypsies, I don't know what I'd have answered...” In the beginning of my fieldwork I was struck that Roma missionaries like Michael and Țigan Converts railed even louder than all others at “the Gypsies.” The Converts’ Romani othering produces dirty fellows who get drunk and then quarrel in their chaotic huts. Jealously, Gypsies begrudge their neighbour's smallest success and at the same time show off and talk big if they have achieved something. The othered Gypsies gather up what they can get and if they have really made their mark, they look down on all others with conceit: They dedicate themselves excessively to their sexual drive, even if they do not have enough to feed a child. Their poverty roots in their lust for excess: if there is money at home the Gypsies spend it on booze and smoke. Generally, the Gypsies are too lazy to get up and work... Lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride – the Seven Deadly Sins are the stereotypical Romani characteristics. According to the Converts’ othering, Roma are the greatest sinners. Their quarters are strongholds of Satan's sinful realm. At the same time it is important to note, however, that the Converts see the secular Gadjo world dictated by the same sinful principles. In their eyes, Roma represent the climax of the entire secular world ruled by Satan. And Satan reigns likewise over secular Roma and Gadje. “...But if God created them without asking me, I must love them with all my heart.” Michael’s motto proves that the Converts’ othering of Roma differs from that of the

secular Gadje in just another point: The secular Gadjo othering of Roma serves to maintain the Gadjo/Roma-separation and to discursively legitimate the social exclusion of Roma. In contrast, the Converts want to evangelize the Roma, i.e., to assimilate non-converts. They oppose the stereotypical picture of sinful Roma with a self-representation that allies converted Roma with converted Gadje as one people of God purified by repentance and penance.

In this way, the Converts fundamentally reframe the ethnic boundaries. They are convinced that every individual receives specific talents from God and that ethnic affiliation is only one such gift. A discourse of transethnicity does not mediate between different ethnic groups but argues beyond all ethnic ascriptions. It reduces every human being to its individual relationship to God and thereby levels all secular attribution. In fact, the Converts' congregation is multiethnic: Saxons, Romanians and Țigani sit side by side and share all activities without any ethnic conceit. The Converts question the secular order of ethnic separation by even touching the exogamy taboo. The Roma missionary Michael himself is married to Romanian and does not suffer any hostility or sanction inside congregation. There are several other ethnically mixed couples – Romanians and Țigani who met in the congregation, fell in love, and got married. On the other hand, the Converts replace the blurred secular ethnic boundaries by a new frontier: in a cosmological dichotomization they separate mankind into a sacred part (the transethnic people of God) and a secular part (the equally transethnic host of lost sinners). This separation manifests in sacred endogamy all Converts have to observe. For them it is irrelevant to which ethnic group bride and groom belong, as long as they are both Converts. The transethnic discourse overcomes not only the separation of Gadje and Roma but also the interior Romani fragmentation into different subgroups. Through conversion, every secular Rom (an ethnic ascription) is reborn as a sacred child of God (a theological ascription). On a local level the Converts open up a hyperspace of global affiliation and eternal significance.

The Converts' othering of Roma has another important function: it underlines the importance of radical life change as a precondition for true conversion. The Converts believe that conversion includes five basic steps:

1. Change of opinion: The believer becomes aware of his sinful nature.
2. Penitence: He identifies his failings as sin and repents them.
3. Avowal of sins: He avows his sins in front of God and all mankind and receives God's forgiveness.
4. Incorporation of the Holy Ghost: With his baptism the believer receives the Holy Ghost and gets born-again.
5. Reversal to God: The believer radically distances himself from his old life of sin and leads a new life agreeable to God.

Trăbeșian Țigan Converts have taken these five steps and the collective control of the entire congregation prevents them from returning to their old life. Among converted Roma, various authors identify the messianic motive of a rhetorical separation of the own biography into a blind vegetating before and an enlightened life after conversion (e.g. Gay y Blasco 1999:120, Lange 2003:33). Even in Trăbeș all converted Țigani distance themselves from their old sinful life, in quite similar way as one Țigan put it: "Before I got to know Jesus, I was an addicted boozier and chain-smoker, I got involved with whores and rushed from party to disco. Today I am healed, I have turned 180 degrees, praise the Lord." For the Trăbeșian Țigan Converts applies what Sato states for converted Rom in the United States: "they have to accept a degraded view of their Gypsy past" (Sato 1988:78). In fact, the Țigan Converts confess and affirm all Gadjo stereotypes. But at the same time they overcome them by insisting on their fundamental change through conversion. The darker the self-othering as a sinful Gypsy, the brighter the new self-representation as a saved child of God.

Thus, the Converts proceed from the assumption that a modified thinking is the only way to save Roma from their sinful nature and secular misery. They do not pity Roma as victims of society who need social aid; on the contrary, they stylize them as exceptionally great sinners who are themselves responsible for their misery and must save themselves through conversion. Conversion is the cure the Converts offer to the Roma. Simultaneously, it is the precondition for social inclusion. My case supports Lange's interpretation: "Possibly because they perceive Roma as sinful, evangelists have also regarded

them as ideal targets for conversion” (Lange 2003:38). The Roma missionary Michael clearly states: “We are no welfare project!” He and his comrades-in-arms primarily do not want to relieve the Roma from material need but rather to renew them as believers, so that God can free them from their sinful misery. To explain the concept of his mission among Roma, Michael chooses alcohol – one of the strongest weapons of sin – as an example: “You do not help an addict if you prohibit alcohol and destroy all stocks of booze. He will always thirst after this stuff unless you do not fight his alcoholism from his inner side.” In the same way as the alcoholic must subject his body and his mind to withdrawal treatment, the Converts demand from every born-again that he or she refrains from his or her old sinful life and confesses by heart the new life in God. In fact, he or she must execute a paradigm change (c.f. Wohlrab-Sahr 1999) and lead a life according to completely different discourses and social practices. In the following section, I show that the Corturari are not willing to execute this paradigm change. Picking up two facets of the Converts’ othering of Roma I explain that “sinful quarrel” and “peccable squandering” are key principles of a functioning Corturar social structure.

“Quarrelling” and “squandering” Corturari

Gay y Blasco designates Roma as “acephalous minorities” (Gay y Blasco 2002: 177) that follow a strict egalitarian ethos and prevent internal hierarchical structures. Quite similar, Stewart shows that the Hungarian Rom adhere to a concept of brotherhood which sets great store on the equality of its members (Stewart 1997: 55). The northern Transylvanian Roma Engebrigsten studied live in a “society without centralized leadership” (Engebrigsten 2000: 186). Even the Trăbeșian Corturar community is acephalous and follows an egalitarian mode. All men and women – strictly separated by gender – have the same rights and duties and no Corturar can occupy any formal status which positions him or her formally above his or her fellow group members.

But such an egalitarian ethos does not necessarily imply peaceful harmony. Gay y Blasco documents that the Gitanos in Spain are an extremely fragmented diaspora characterized by a “lack of social and political cohesion” (Gay y Blasco 2002, S. 177). The Gitanos of Madrid are torn into several kin-groups that are even embroiled in blood feuds. Stewart notices that the

Hungarian Rom suffer not only from the external pressure of Gadjo discrimination, but live in an internal “stage of siege” (Stewart 1997: 67). Even the Corturar quarter is dominated by rivalry. Every Corturar I talked to soon informed me about who is friend and who is foe. Many of my conversations with the Corturari were dominated by calumny and accusation of others. Corturari who were enemies refused to share any context and tried to prevent any meeting. Perhaps most strikingly was the fact that all Corturari affirmed that they lived in peace with all other ethnic groups of the village, but they subsequently spoke of “enemies” when they talked about certain other Corturari.

The internal enemy has a key function in the Corturar community because it is dominated by the principle of the agon. All community members are in competition with all other community members. Jan Huizinga has defined the agon as a specific form of play, as a competition in which the player aims solely at trumping all other players by relying on his own skills. The key focus of the agon does not lie on material profit or hegemonic power; its main goal is to win, to be simply the best (Huizinga 1998). The agon is based on enmity, but understands the enemy as opponent who must be defeated but, because of his function as co-player, must not be wiped out. The enemy is the basic prerequisite for prestige because prestige can only be achieved in relation to others. Without the internal enemy, no Corturar would be able to define himself and his position in the Corturar community.

Ergo Corturar “quarrelling” is not a sign of anarchy or anomy but follows emic rules. Moreover, the Corturar agon is supervised by an indigenous court, the romani kris (Romani court, trial, interrogation). Anyone who feels unjustly treated can appeal to a jury consisting of about 20 respected men. Parallel to Gadjo jurisdiction, the kris hears cases of adultery, unpaid dowry or debts, exceedingly violent action or other violations of Corturar norms. The jury is instructed to find a consensus and usually fixes a fine of compensation. It does not dispose of any formal force to execute its verdict, but it can threaten the convict with ostracism. All Corturari emphasize that this punishment is equal to death penalty. In fact, a Corturar woman who broke the exogamy taboo with a Țigan was expelled from the Corturar quarter; even her family broke off the contact.

To use a sport metaphor: The Corturari not only have an indigenous book of rules and a

collective referee; they are also team-players. Their quarter is subdivided into several kin-groups that have massive impact on all actions of their single members. According to the segmentary principle (Durkheim 1997), different patrilineal kin-groups flexibly ally or oppose in the Corturar agon without accepting any central authority. Every family knots a close-meshed net of cognate and affinal relatives through strategic marriage policy. The Corturari exchange sisters, marry cousins and arrange other close connubia. When a child reaches the age of about five years, the father will look out for a proper marriage partner and will 'promise' his child to the child of another father. When the children are about 15, the fathers meet again and negotiate the dowry the bride-givers have to provide. The dowry depends on the prestige of the bride-taking kin-group and is usually so high that the bride's father has to collect money throughout his entire kin-group. The groom's father commits himself to building a new house for the young couple and even he must borrow money from his relatives. But the entire kin-group's involvement in the marriage is not only financial: the morality of the young couple, especially the bride's virginity, are crucial for the prestige of the entire kin-group. To a great extent, the prestige of every Corturar rests upon the social reputation of his kin-group in the collective "quarrel." On the economic level, a Corturar's prestige depends on his dealing with money.

Engebrigsten argues that the Transylvanian Roma follow an "ideal of [external] exchange and negative reciprocity" (Engebrigsten 2000: 70). Various authors have shown that certain Romani groups interpret their economic relations with Gadje as "ideally exploitive" (Salo & Salo 1977: 73, see also e.g. Okely 1998, Sato 1988, Stewart 1997). For the Corturari, earning a maximum of money with a minimum of time and energy is most prestigious. In contrast to the Romanian peasants who relate economic success to hard labor on the field, the Corturari are proud of being clever hawkers and skilled craftsmen. From their perspective, economic success depends on the intelligent use of *baxt* (luck). Their rather flourishing economy bases on trade, craft, and service in economic niches. Today, the Corturari trade clothes and shoes from second-hand deliveries or factory sales in Western Europe. They also buy junk at flea markets and resell it to Western antique dealers after they have refurbished it. To Transylvanian Gadje they sell pigs, which they raise and feed with bread they collected on their hawking tours or from the

dustbins in the nearby town. Additionally, the Corturari sell all kinds of copper products that they forge from recycled or cheaply bought metal. Many Gadjo peasants still call the Corturar tin-smith if a gutter or trough leaks, and let them take away empty bottles, scrap metal, or rags for recycling. In all these sectors, the basic economic achievement of the Corturari is to transform rather useless material (e.g., rags, junk, scrap metal, broken things, bread from dustbins) into valuable goods (e.g., clothing, antiques, copper products, repaired goods, pig fodder) and to benefit financially from these transformations (c.f. Stewart 1997). From this perspective even scrounging, begging and stealing from Gadje is in no way shameful but a rather perfect exploitation of the Gadje social environment.

In contrast to this external sphere of production the internal consumption of money follows a totally different discourse. Many scholars of Romani cultures state that Roma live a subsistence economy and are "consumption-oriented entrepreneurs" (Voiculescu 2004: 161, see also e.g. Gay y Blasco 1997). Stewart documents that the Hungarian Rom must share all economic surplus inside the brotherhood of men (Stewart 1997, see also Engebrigsten 2000). My interpretation of the Corturar internal economic ethic goes one step further: I argue that in the Corturar community the surplus is not only shared, but must even be "squandered" to yield prestige. According to the French philosopher Georges Bataille, in certain societies all productive accumulation is (discursively) subordinated to "useless" expenditure (Bataille 1988). Bataille's characterization of such societies fits perfectly with the Corturar community in Trăbeș. Again, this seems to confirm the stigma of the "squandering" Roma. But similar to "quarrel," the Corturar "squandering" is a social practice that follows an emic rationality.

In order to convert economic into symbolical capital (Bourdieu 2002), many Corturari concentrate on the in-waste-ment of surplus rather than on its productive investment. One form of such in-waste-ment is the accumulation of luxurious items which can be demonstratively exhibited. Honorable Corturari wear large golden rings and outfit their women and daughters with dresses, aprons, and headscarves made of expensive cloth. Silver goblets passed on from generation to generation have high symbolic value and massive impact on family prestige. In former times, Corturar women wore necklaces with golden coins until they were dispossessed by

the Securitate. Naturally, these items can be regarded as reserves for hard times; but the crux is that the transformation of money (accumulative production) in gold or silver (extravagant luxury) ties up the money and prevents every economic growth. These items do not celebrate their owners' wealth but his expenditure of property. Paradigmatically, every Corturar emphasized that he never ever would sell his goblet because he essentially needs its embodied symbolic capital to be respected. Moreover, many Corturari tear down the peasant houses they took over from the Gadje in the 1960s, and construct new palace-like villas. In contrast to Transylvanian rural architecture, these villas have two floors (or at least a higher base) and high gables. Their architecture includes spiral pillars, arched windows and small torrents. Paradigmatically, the whole family still shares one single room; all other rooms are solely used for representative purposes – they are, so to speak, squandered. Another prestigious item is the horse. It was essential for pulling the Corturar wagon in nomadic times but today it has lost that function. In contrast to the Gadjo peasants, who put in their horses for hard work on the fields, the Corturari “use” their horses primarily to collect admiration by promenading them in the Corturar quarter. All Corturari love to visit horse markets and are passionate in buying and selling their animals.

In addition to such luxury items that withdraw money from financial growth by materialization, the Corturar expend financial surplus to nothing by excessive feasting in order to win prestige. All passage rituals such as baptism, marriage, or funeral must be celebrated by projecting feasts and conspicuous consumption. The whole quarter is invited to gather around a long table filled with large bowls of pork meat, big buckets of wine and two-liter bottles of spirits. Expensive musicians (who ostentatiously receive high tips) are engaged to play maneles, Gypsy pop songs which demonstratively affirm all Gadjo stereotypes of the quarrelling, squandering, criminal, drunken, immoral Gypsy. The Corturar crowd is expected to get heavily drunk and dedicates itself to excessive dancing for hours, sometimes even for days. At the end of the feast, the organizer patronizingly distributes a lot of leftovers among the poor Țigani who wait at the doors of his court. In public the guests judge his prestige according to the length of the feast, the amount of food and drink and the musicians' name recognition.

On first sight the Corturar economic and social order seem to be paradox: The Corturari

share the ideal of an egalitarian community (horizontal equality) but at the same time compete for prestige (vertical difference). This paradox dissolves if the leading principle of the Corturar community is regarded as an agon of adaptation: it is not based on giving in the sense of sharing but on giving away in the sense of expenditure. Those Corturari who give away more than others in order to keep the eye level with their fellows, enjoy better reputation.

Only a man who is known as good feast-giver, comes from a prestigious kin-group and behaves according to the Corturar norms, has the ability to become a rom baro (big man). It is striking that the Melanesian big man and the Corturar rom baro share more than their very designation:

Big-men do not come to office; they do not succeed to, nor are they installed in, existing positions of leadership over political groups. The attainment of big-man status is rather the outcome of a series of acts which elevate a person above the common herd and attract about him a coterie of loyal, lesser men. It is not accurate to speak of ‘big-man’ as a political title, for it is but an acknowledgement standing in interpersonal relations (Sahlins 1968:163).

The Corturar rom baro has no legitimate power, he is nothing more than a primus inter pares: the first among equals. He cannot rely on any power structure but must base his influence on his prestige, which always depends on the acknowledgement of his group. The rom baro must serve as an example by meeting all demands of Corturar norms. At any time, his followers can cancel their loyalty and choose to support another big man if they expect more benefit from him. The rom baro thus must continually reinforce the loyalty of his followers. His leadership is always temporary, fragile and threatened by rivals. Even if this informal office exists in the Corturar quarter, no one has occupied it for at least 30 years. At the moment, at least four Corturar men claim to be the rom baro but none of them has managed to win the support of all Corturari. This fact proves the functioning of the acephalous and egalitarian Corturar order, which is kept vital by the continuous agon for individual prestige.

The Corturari do not convert because – as the following section will demonstrate – their vital social order is in discursive antagonism with the Converts' ideals of living together. Every member of the Corturar community is integrated in a close net of kinship affiliations and a functioning system of prestige. As every deviation from the Corturar leading discourses, conversion implies a massive loss of prestige – not only for an individual but also for his or her entire kin-group.

Țigan Converts in the union of charity

Reports such as the World Bank Report (Ringold et al. 2005) show that in contrast to the conservative but successful Corturar cultural profile, many Romani groups suffer harsh poverty and worse conditions. The Trăbeșian Țigani match with this sad picture: generally they try to adapt to Gadjo lifestyle but Gadje consistently exclude them. They do not speak Romani but only Romanian, they try to dress according to the latest Gadjo fashion but can only afford worn out second-hand clothes, they have been settled for centuries and work in the agricultural sector but do not own any land. The Țigani are definitely far below all Gadjo standards in regard to housing, education, labor market status, health, and other indicators.

The overcrowded Trăbeșian Țigan quarter consists of a muddy road and a shady valley on the village outskirts and is inhabited by roughly 1,200 Țigani. The number of inhabitants significantly increased in the last years due to high birth rates and the massive moving in of Țigani from other villages. Even the Țigan community is acephalous and fragmented, but in contrast to the Corturari who live in “regulated anarchy” (Sigrist 1967), the Țigan community is dictated by sheer disorder. In the Corturar community nobody is allowed to rule over others because ethos and sanction prevent all hegemony; in the Țigan community nobody is able to rule over others because there do not exist any ethos or sanction instruments. To put it simply: the only cause why the Țigani form a group is their common fate of being labeled and socially excluded by Gadje and other Romani groups. Because of the harsh poverty in which the Țigani live, the agon looses its playful character and corrupts into sheer fight of individuals for survival. The Țigani have adjusted to modern Gadjo modes of individualization and do not focus on any kin-group but solely on core family. They do not have any cultural institutions – such as contract marriage, the romani kris, or a rom baro – which

control the norm, sanction contravention or serve as an example.

After 1989, the Țigani were the first to lose their jobs in the re-privatized state cooperatives and factories. So today, most of them are formally unemployed and depend on welfare. To secure their surviving they must indebt themselves as day laborers in Gadjo fields and must take over donkey work for a pittance. The Gadje definitely capitalize on the Țigan misery and exploit the Țigani as cheap serfs. Consequently, the Țigani cannot dispose of any surplus for the prestigious expenditure of luxury items. Tragically, many Țigani chose the cheapest form of (self-)expenditure and spend large amounts of money on alcohol and cigarettes. Hunger is a common companion of the children who lack any perspective of breaking the poverty cycle. In contrast to the Corturar community, the Țigan “quarrel” and “squandering” definitely lack any symbolic embedding.

It seems to be understandable that many Țigani clutch at the straw the Converts offer them. The Converts interpret both the Corturar agonistic expenditure and the Țigan rivalry in poverty as expression of the general wickedness of secular man. Envy, showing off, concurrence and quarrel are the sinful base on which Satan erects his secular realm. When a proselyte receives baptism, all Converts welcome their new “brother” or “sister” with the following simple one-versed song:

We are a united family

We are a real family

The family of love

The family of the Lord Jesus

This song shows that the Converts see their own community pervaded by the opposite principle: charity unites the family of God.

Love is the most dominant discourse in the Converts' congregation and the emic explanation for all actions. Michael disagreed with all my (secular) interpretation of why people convert: “The only cause why we convert is because we love Jesus!” he responded. “Jesus loves you!” is the most common sentence and inside and outside the congregation every convert expresses how much he or she loves Jesus. Loving God is thereby even more important than loving a neighbor. This is one reason why the Converts

insist on sacred endogamy. If a convert married a non-convert he or she would place his or her secular love above his or her love for God.

“I love you and that's why I want you to accept Jesus as your savior. My heart aches when I think of not meeting you in heaven.” This was Michael's explanation why he constantly tried to make me a “true Christian.” In the Converts' eyes, mission is an act of charity since it aims at saving people from their very fall. Many Țigani take the offer of conversion because they want to join the family of God, which preaches to overcome all rivalry through love and all individualized desolation through sacred unity. Even non-Converts note that the Converts are “a big family whose members support and help each other.” Țigan Converts can rely on the charity of their new brothers and sisters. Gadjo and Romani Converts help each other out if they have financial problems, they assist each other at building new houses, they share contacts for work in Western Europe with each other, and they pray for each other in times of difficulties. Moreover, the Trăbeșian Converts perceive themselves as a local family with (sacred) kin in the global people of God. They obtain close contacts to other evangelical congregations in Romania (e.g., Pentecostals, Baptists, Brethren, and even Adventists) as well as to Converts in Western Europe. Regularly, Western evangelists visit the Trăbeșian congregation to strengthen the international bonds and to help their spiritual relatives with relief supply deliveries. On a global and local level, Gadjo and Romani Converts are united by the “ideal of ‘holy brotherhood,’ embracing all fellow adherents as close companions” (Lange 2003: 5).

As a universalistic religion, Christianity focuses on the individual irrespective of origin and status. In fact, the Converts' mission addresses the single individual. By conversion, the Țigani enter a (normative and utopian) *communitas* of united individuals (Turner 1995), which establishes an anti-structure in contrast to the secular social structure. The *communitas* transcends the individual's secular status and integrates every Țigan into a homogeneous transethnic community of equals who unconditionally love each other. All Converts feel different in their individual gifts they received from God but they feel united in their inalienable love to God. This transethnic union of charity must reject all competition for individual prestige.

Similar to the Corturar community, the congregation of Gadjo and Roma Converts shares a common economic ethic, which guarantees social cohesion. Especially for the Țigani who struggle against harsh poverty, the economic aspects of conversion are of major interest. Nevertheless, the following interpretation will not affirm the general stereotype that Roma convert in order to benefit solely financially. It argues instead that a shift of economic discourses helps the Țigani to transform their own poverty.

In contrast to the Corturari, the Țigani cannot prestigiously squander any money because they do not make any surplus. Therefore it is understandable that many Țigani convert to Pentecostalism, which preaches a totally different economic ethic. First, the Converts offer theological explanation for Țigan poverty: for them it is the consequence of sinful life. As already mentioned, the Converts perceive the Roma as especially sinful; in their eyes it is quite ‘logical’ that they live in worst conditions. Second, the Converts promise spiritual help. They see conversion and confession to God as the only solution to break out of the poverty/sin circle. “... and the last shall be first” (Matthew 19:30) – this verse from the Bible promises eschatological prosperity for all poor Țigani who convert. After resurrection, a paradisiacal realm without any scarcity awaits the true believer. This is definitely spiritual comfort for the Țigan secular misery and motivates Țigan Converts to work on their own salvation. But the Converts are convinced that God will help every poor, sick, and sinning man even in the secular world if he does not lose his faith.

Generally, the Converts demand from all believers to recognize their “spiritual poverty.” Without God, man is “poor and nothing,” but with God he is spiritually rich. This has important discursive repercussion for the Țigani: their material situation facilitates their capability of salvation. The spiritual poverty of every man places the rich Gadjo landlord beside the Țigan day laborer. In front of God they both have the same preconditions to become spiritually rich. But the rich man is even more in danger of sinning because his wealth incorporates sinful temptation as it binds to the secular world. For the Converts, amassing wealth is absurd because all the material world will be blown away the day when Jesus returns. Every Convert and non-Convert must face God with nothing than his or her soul in the hand.

Consequently, the Converts preach an ascetic lifestyle. In fact, Țigan Converts stop

squandering money for alcohol or nicotine and do not attend any bars, discos or secular parties. They do not watch television, play computer games in Internet-shops or buy manele-cassettes. Instead they pay attention to plain "clothes of humility", polite speech and disciplined behaviour. Generally, they abandon begging and stealing as their sources of income. This has two important effects: Țigan Converts save money, which they can use to improve their living conditions (some Țigani even manage to leave the Țigan quarter and buy a house in the Romanian quarter) and they are more highly esteemed by the Gadje.

Even if the Converts perceive wealth as tempting and potentially sinful they do not demand that a true believer must give away all his property. They preach a "Protestant ethic" and uphold a "'spirit' of capitalism" (Weber 2003). If a convert is blessed from God with wealth he must use all surplus to increase God's glory. A discourse of work replaces the paradigm of expenditure: "God does not need lazy employees. He needs workmen!" one evangelist put it in one of his sermons. The large Trăbeșian assembly building (which is perfectly equipped but lacks all luxury) was built in record time by the Gadjo and Romani Converts themselves. Every member committed himself to work for a certain amount of hours or paid a substitute. The entire congregation with its missionary team, orchestra, choirs, bible courses, women's circles, children's groups, and the like could not exist without the honorary commitment of its members. Even the Converts' missionary concept focuses on the hard working believer. It provides strong spiritual and sufficient material aid for labor-intensive self-help. Individuals and congregations receive money and relief supplies only if they proved that they reinvest God's capital and do not squander resources for sinful purposes. In fact, Țigan conversion generates the same discursive and practical "shift from requisite one-sided taking to a fair or even compulsive insistence on material reciprocity" (Sato 1988: 88) Sato observed among converted Roma in the United States.

It may have already become clear that the leader in the Converts' congregation must achieve authority in a different way than the Corturar rom baro. He must personify paternal love, uniting charity and an active working spirit. The Converts' ideal leader is a pastor (shepherd) in harmony with the Holy Scripture. He achieves authority by positioning himself below all those he claims to lead. Even if no Convert in the Trăbeșian congregation is formally ordained, everybody who

takes on responsibility over certain areas, feels obliged to the ideal of the pastor. This ideal consists of certain personal prerequisites and duties. First, a pastor must have charisma. He must have received God's gift and call to serve, must be eloquent and optimistic and must serve as an example for the congregation. His duty is to promote every member according to his or her individual gifts for the benefit of the congregation. Second, the pastor must prove his servility: he must be in ready devotion for service at any time and must be trusted to take his part in the team. His social obligation is to establish a personal relationship to all congregation members and to preserve their unity. Further, every pastor must know the Bible by heart and must prove his faithfulness in everyday life. It is his religious duty to do missionary work and to help Converts to establish a close relationship to God. To serve as a leader, the pastor must act as a "spiritual father" and radiate God-given authority, which must be confirmed by all members. It is his obligation to lead his flock in the political and the spiritual sense, to supervise all norms, and to sanction deviation.

Țigani who convert can oblige their pastors to serve according to this paradigm. As day laborers on Romanian fields they are used to serving. But in contrast to the secular world in which the Gadjo employer insists on the permanent division between himself as master and the "eternal" Gypsy servant, the Converts' pastor can only legitimize his authority by himself being a servant. On the other hand, the pastoral discourse promises Țigan social rise without any prerequisites than personal talent and individual action. Ethnicity, kinship, and wealth (which are central prerequisites in the secular world of Gadje and Corturari) do in no way help to become a good pastor. In fact, many Țigani take on responsibilities as pastors in the Trăbeșian congregation: they function as ushers, lead a children's group, head a bible circle or even preach on Sundays. In other village congregations the Trăbeșian mission looks after, Roma serve as elders and congregation leaders or even as regional mission organizers.

Finally, the Converts offer theodicy for the Țigan suffering. Through religious legitimization, they can reason and make understandable anomic phenomena not attainable through everyday knowledge (Berger 1967). The Țigani suffer from extreme poverty and multiple stigmatizations. Most secular Țigani answered my question for the cause of their misery with words

such as “It’s just like this.” In contrast, Țigan Converts had an explanation for their misery and could give their suffering a meaning. The cause of suffering is original sin, conversion the way out. In their eyes, the servile hero Jesus Christ has suffered for all men at the cross, in the same way every true believer must be ready for transcendent martyrdom. As the leader of the congregation put it: “The Lord Jesus Christ died for you. How easy is it then for you to cope with mockery and rejection. Let the others say what they want – all this cannot hurt you anymore.” The Converts’ theology can transcend and eschatologize Țigan suffering by giving it teleological meaning: discursively, Țigan Converts primarily do not suffer from the Gadje but for Jesus Christ; their suffering, moreover, will be rewarded after resurrection. Converted Țigani are not primarily Roma who have to abide Gadjo hostility, but children of God who fight against Satan’s attacks. Gadjo stigmas and exploitation are discursively linked to transcendent martyrdom and by that are disarmed.

Conclusion

In Trăbeș the Converts disrupt ethnic separation by transcending all secular boundaries. They aim at saving Romani and Gadjo sinners by converting them into children of God. The basis of this re-conversion is a radical life change, which accompanies the adoption of completely new discourses. This case shows that the Corturari are not willing to convert because their discourses and social practices contradict those of the Converts. The Converts perceive the Corturar way of living as leading to abyss; but from an emic perspective it is a “functioning” system basing on egalitarian acephality, collective agon, and prestige economy. Corturar individuals do not convert because conversion would imply the rejection of cultural autonomy the Corturari seek. It would mean a great loss of individual and collective prestige.

The alternative the Converts offer shares certain features of the Corturar social system but nevertheless is based on contradictory paradigms. Both Corturari and Converts set great store on kin: the egalitarian Corturari are dominated by kin-groups and the Converts establish a spiritual family of equal brothers and sisters. But while the Corturari focus on (collective) agonistic differentiation, the Converts emphasize uniting charity. Both Corturari and Converts reject saving money. But while the Corturari celebrate the in-waste-ment by the sheer expenditure of all surplus,

the Converts work hard to invest all surplus for the increase of God’s glory. Both rom baro and pastor represent informal leadership positions whose authority rests upon personal qualities. But while the Corturar rom baro must prove to be the primus inter pares by monopolizing prestige, the pastor must act as a servus inter subiectos and must reject all prestige in favor of heavenly salvation. Both Corturari and Converts establish an anti-structure to the secular Gadjo social structure (c.f. Turner 1995). But while the Corturari achieve sovereignty and follow a philosophy of laughter (Bataille 1991) the Converts subordinate their lives under Jesus Christ and his spirit of charity.

For the Țigani, conversion is definitely more attractive: Socially excluded by the Gadje, they are lost in the modern world of individual rivalry and are seriously battered by harsh poverty. The Converts promise a theodicy and a cure for the Țigan misery. Their *communitas* supports every Țigan member in his or her individual needs. The Converts’ economic ethic of asceticism and productivity is not only a precondition for the Țigani to receive material aid but also a strategy of self-help to break the cycle of poverty. The spirit of pastor-ship allows Țigani to assume responsibility in the Converts’ congregation and to be easily promoted. Finally and perhaps most important: By converting, the Țigani overcome their secular othering and social exclusion. In contrast to secular Gadje, the Converts support the Țigan striving for integration: They actively call the Țigani to join their congregation.

After these reflections, the introductory statements of the Țigan Convert Claudia and the Gadjo Roma missionary Michael win consistency: According to their faith, both must exclude the secular Roma because their belief preaches intolerance against all but the Converts’ way of life. Nevertheless, both Claudia and Michael must aim to include Roma. But this inclusion has one fundamental prerequisite: conversion – a radical change of thought and habit, assimilation to the Converts’ dogma and rite. The Christian love Michael and his brothers and sisters are ready to spread unconditionally addresses every human being; but it is far from being without conditions.

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