

**The religiosity of the Gypsy/Romani people
– from „mimicry religiosity” to the Roma Evangelical
Movement, with special emphasis on the religious attitude
of new religious entities**

Doctoral thesis

Gellért László Gyetvai

Semmelweis University

Doctoral School of Mental Health Sciences



Supervisor: Péter Török, Ph.D

Official reviewers: Eszter Kovács, Ph.D
Kinga Szabó-Tóth, Ph.D

Head of the Final Examination Committee:
Ferenc Túry, Ph.D

Members of the Final Examination Committee:
Zoltán Hidas, Ph.D
Ágnes Nyitrai, Ph.D
Éva Susánszky, Ph.D

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INTRODUCTION

Although the Roma Evangelical Movement sprang from France and spread all over the world since the 1950's as a phenomenon, started in Hungary in the 1970's as well, there had not been any comprehensive mainstream studies considering the connection between the gypsy religiosity and the native conditions of the Christian church before my research.

Probably this is the most important reason why up to the 1980's the thesis of mimicry religiosity was acknowledged as the paradigm of Roma studies. It was known as a homogeneous feature of this ethnic group, using the Roma religion only as a mask. However, in some more objective cases, it has been admitted that no statement can be made definite due to lack of data.

Two crucial statements existed considering the religiosity of Romanies until the last third of the 20th century: 1) the Romanies do not have a particular, original religion; 2) if religion appears among them, it is surely mimicry, a mask, without inner contents (identification). The first monography that declared that the Romanies can be religious with faith as well, was only published in 1988 (Diósi 1988).

Publications not in the theme of dissertation:

1. Goldmann R, Gyetvai G, Mester D. A szociális ellátórendszer jellegzetességei, korprofilja és területi megoszlása. In: Kolosi T, Tóth I Gy. (szerk.) Társadalmi Riport 2016. TÁRKI, Budapest, 2016: 358–367.
2. Gyetvai G. Kis Fehér Könyv a szociális (jellegű) foglalkoztatásról. Szent Lázár Alapítvány, Békés, 2012
3. Gyetvai G, Kovács I, Duma K. Árnyéksereg – Elvi és logikai dilemmák, anomáliák és megoldások a megváltozott munkaképességű foglalkoztatásban. Szent Lázár Alapítvány, Békés, 2011
4. Gyetvai G. Munka? Terápia? – A fejlesztő-felkészítő foglalkoztatás egészségmegővő hatása a pszichiátriai ellátásban és foglalkoztatásban – ennek kapcsán a szociális foglalkoztatás mai modelljének továbbgondolása, új elvek lehetséges megjelenésének vázlata. Szent Lázár Alapítvány, Békés, 2010
5. Gyetvai G. Roma integráció Békés városában. Szent Lázár Alapítvány, Békés, 2009

Most studies dealing with this topic appeared only after 2000. However most of them are unpublished or only limitedly published, like university theses. Although other studies have more publicity, they examined only a smaller aspect (eg. identity, or only one church). None of them dealt with the phenomenon nationwide, they analysed the content of religiousness only partly and/or locally.

For this matter, I had two important reasons to conduct a research:

- 1) It was time to collect the unpublished, partly released data (archives, publications), systemizing and analysing them to get closer to answering the question: What attitude could Roma have had considering the Christian doctrines, churches? That is the past.
- 2) It was time to examine, what kind of religious content is present in Roma Evangelical Movement, what happens with members when joining to churches. This is the present.

My study is based on the two following definitions:

1) *Mimicry religiosity*

The phrase is from Antal Herrmann, originally used as „mimicry-like” (Herrmann 1895:48). According to him, the gypsies took on the marks of religiosity, however only to hide their real life-style, and due to the expectations of their surroundings, while they did not identify themselves with its content (and they did not even want to). They protected themselves against the disfavour of their environment. Many authors also concluded that Gypsies are unable to identify with the meaning of faith, that this feature is a homogeneous character of the group.

2) *Identified religiosity*

Identified religiosity is when religiosity is determining motivation, a so-called master motive (Masters 2013) in life. In this case the members see their religion as a frame that determines their whole life, lifestyle, thinking, and behaviour, thus he/she strives to live consequently by faith: his/her life is dominantly determined by following religious rules.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE CANDIDATE’S PUBLICATIONS

Publications in the theme of dissertation:

1. Gyetvai G, Rajki Z. (2016) Features of Roma Religiosity: Is It Only Mimicry? In: Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe, 2016/9: 50–67.
2. Gyetvai G, Désfalvi J. (2016) Changing Roma Identity: A New Kind of Double Identity and How to Model It. In: European Journal of Mental Health, 2016/11/1–2: 36–59.
3. Gyetvai G, Rajki Z. Cigánymissziós mozgalmak hatása Magyarországon. Cigány Módszertani és Kutató Központ, Békés, 2014
4. Gyetvai G. (2013) Keresztény roma gyülekezetek Magyarországon – általános jellemzők. In: Confessio, 2013/37: 45–57.

mogenous feature of Romanies. The change of paradigm regarding Roma religiosity is essential.

2. Some gypsies had been part of Christian churches in the early periods of ages. There could be a streak or group among Gypsies in which some or many have lived a religiously integrated life continually through the centuries.

3. Among the religiously integrated Romanies, many could be found groups in which some or many lived lives with real faith, they had an identified faith. The Roma Evangelical Movement had an antecedent, we can speak of historically continuity.

4. We can conclude following many religious elements found in the membership of the movement (eg. change of way of life, habits of Bible reading, praying, connection to the transcendent), that a significant part of the membership identified with the faith, with content of his/her denomination's theology, principles. Based on this, we can justify the religious identification among them.

OBJECTIVES

My aim was to examine...

- whether we should maintain the thesis of mimicry-religiosity and irreligiosity as a homogeneous feature of the group in the past and present of Gypsies?
- If not, can we confirm the existence of identified religiosity by historical sources in Gypsy groups before the 20th century?
- Can we detect the religious identification in the Gypsy membership in the evangelical movement?

Hypotheses

Thesis 1 – The thesis about the irreligiosity, false religiosity (mimicry-religiosity), which was determining until the last third of the 20th century, is only partly tenable. In light of new sources it is inevitable to modify the previous statement about this being a homogeneous feature of Roma religiosity.

Thesis 2 – Gypsies partly integrated into Christian churches in early times, and we can assume that streaks or groups of Gypsies could have continuously lived religious lives in church.

Thesis 3 – The church integrated religiosity sometimes had to be filled with real faith (identified religiosity). This suggests we can speak of historical continuity in the Gypsy Evangelical Movement.

Thesis 4 – We can conclude based on religious elements of the Gypsy Evangelical Movement (like the change of life, Bible reading and praying habits, connection to the transcendent etc.), that a significant number of the members have identified faith. They live their life by the principles and theology of their religion. The identified religiosity among them can be verified based on that.

METHODS

To verify the hypothesis, I researched two fields. Due to the lack of sources in this topic, I tried to open up sources which have not (or only partly) become known and which were appropriate to reconsider the statements regarding the religious life of the Romanies. I concentrated on contemporary parochial and ethnical publications, notes, administrative sources, fragments which could be connected with the mission of churches

ning, how close he/she feels God to himself/herself, how much God can have a say in their life, and what kind of changes can be seen in the lives of the repentants, etc. All tables showed, that the religious connection of Romanies is very strong in the majority, the most important frame in most of their lives is faith. For example: 42% of them joined the church because of spiritual interest (Bible), according to 71,1% it is acceptable that God asks for the greatest sacrifice from a member.

At last we examined the changes in their lives. Most importantly: 99% of responders see a positive change in the lives of repentants, which rooted in religious faith. A radical change can be observed in lives of members after joining a church. Their thinking, life-style, behaviour, morality, the whole way of life changes, and shows a deep religious commitment.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The mimicry thesis about the irreligiousness of Romanies, which determined professional literature and public speaking until the last part of 20th can be only partially upheld. In the light of new sources we can see that mimicry religiosity was not a ho-

whole country. These data are incomprehensible without some kind of religious identification.

Empirical resources

We examined the religiosity of the Roma membership through 73 questions, focusing on how consistent their faith is with lifestyle, habits, and religious activities. Due to space, in the study I analyzed only 35 of them.

We examined the religious practices using frequency questions: the frequency of Bible reading, praying, church attendance, how often they speak about faith with others, or how often they meet other member etc. Every response structure shows a strong religious bonding, life-style consistent with faith and religious practice in the majority of majority the membership. For example: 68,1% speaks about faith, 91,6% prays, and 65,5% of them reads Bible daily.

An other group of questions examined the religious senses, religious commitment, and cognitive elements etc., under which I could make well grounded decisions about members' conviction. We asked how the connection of the members started with his/her church, what or who was the main motivation for joi-

(for example sheets of parochial schools, magazines including missionary reports, (eg. *Ethnographia* magazine), digital archives (eg. MOL ARCANUM). I reread the well-known mainstream books, publications, source collections dealing with Romanies to collect them to reinterpret (or often interpret for the first time in religious aspect) the data and writings that could be related to religion.

Collaterally with this we started a nationwide empirical data collection to discover how the Gypsy Evangelical Movement spread in the country, and how its membership could be characterized with special emphasis on the religious attitude.

The denominations/entities in the movement

There were 51 denominations/entities in Hungary in 2013 in which we could find churches with Gypsy members (Gypsy or ethnically mixed churches). We found 169 churches in these congregations which met the criteria (formal churches with at least 10% of Roma members). 6 of the 51 fell out due to methodological and other problems, 27 of the remaining 45 were cooperative in the query. The *ethnic membership* of these 27 assemblies/entities gave the population of sampling.

Sampling

Based on the co-operating denominations' data, we made a sampling plan for 4400 people, and 1100 questionnaires were sent to survey at the end. The data collection was based a one-step systematical random sample, without stratification. Every 4th of the Roma members listed randomly into the sample. The starting point was determined by random based on the sampling interval (4 steps) in every church. 705 questionnaires were analysed after cleaning the data. The sample represents that active *Gypsy* core of churches of the 27 co-operating denominations (who are over 16-year-old, accept belonging to the Roma/Gypsy ethnicity, and were baptised). According to the answers, the maximal error of the survey on 95% confidential level is $\pm 3.6\%$.

RESULTS

Exploring sources – from the beginning until the 1970's

I collected and systemized hundreds of sources that could be more or less related to the religiosity of Gypsies. They made it evident that shortly after the arrival of the Gypsies in Hungary, there were existing churches in which completely or partly

Gypsies practised their religion (1583, Tisza-Ujlak, reformed church – Szabó 1862:1006–1008).

According to the sources, a lot of non-gypsies considered it important to „proselytize”, or evangelize among Gypsies (and cure souls), and made efforts to make it happen. For example, we can read in a deed of gift from 1628 regarding Ferenc Batthyány, that the shireman of Sopron donated land only with reservation to Pál Kölgyesi, pastor of Szava. He made pastoral care of Gypsies his duty (Landauer 2011:2).

We have data about the first Gypsy protestant (Calvinist) priest (Dávid Grausser) from 1687 (Lukács 2013).

The sources since the 1700's – 1800's give us a comprehensive understanding of the religiosity of Gypsies, their connection to the Christian churches and faith, denying their irreligiousness and the exclusivity of mimicry religiosity.

In the 19–20. century the sources multiplied in number and scope as well, showing that the evangelization of Roma was widespread. The first (modern) Gypsy church was established in 1909 in Arad (Mészáros 2009:121, as a Baptist church). Since 1972, many have joined charismatic denominations, the mission has spread. In our days they are present throughout the