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Gypsies in Lom: the Case of Gypsies who Convert to Protestant Christianity

This paper deals with the conversional life of a local community of Evangelical Gypsies in Lom, a town in the Northwest of Bulgaria.

I have previously defined the conversion¹ among the Gypsies as *Roma Protestantism* (Slavkova M., 2003: 168-169). As historically developed tendency, Roma Protestantism is defined as the mass conversion of the Gypsy groups to Evangelism over the world. Defined as a process, it is the specific way of acceptance of Evangelism by the *Roma*. It displays the assimilation of some models by the *Roma* with their ethnic culture and system of values, until these models start functioning with their own forms. This means that Gypsies accept the main dogmas of Protestantism although in their specific environment they attain a different aspect and meaning. My aim here is to investigate a local variant of Roma Protestantism in Bulgaria. The fieldwork was carried out in the Gypsy neighbourhoods in Lom, during a four-year period (2001-2004). Terminologically I will use Evangelical and Protestant (as synonyms as well), to notify the most common Evangelical churches among the Gypsies in Bulgaria. For the sake of clarity it is better to use the term *New churches* instead, especially in the countries, where Evangelism/Protestantism is the predominant or official state religion and where the terms function with another sense.

After the end of the socialist regime in Bulgaria, the conversion to Evangelism among the Gypsies tends to rise to mass levels. Religious processes among them are very dynamic as a whole therefore I pay special attention to this period. In the previous years, Gypsy communities and churches existed almost illegally. Unlike the period after the

¹ About the process of conversion, from the theoretical point of view, see Snow D., R. Machalek, 1984: 167-190; Barker A., 1997: 31-40; about new religious movements in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of Socialism, see Barker A., 1999: 49-74; see also one of the recent collection of articles, published in Eastern Europe, dealing with the subject of Protestantism, Todorović Dr., 2004 etc.

collapse of Socialism the influence of Evangelism among the Gypsies then was not so popular.

There exist numerous and diverse reasons for the adoption of Evangelism from the Gypsy groups. The reasons for the appearance of the phenomenon should be sought in the social and economic situation in the country, after the collapse of Socialism, or in the successful work of western missionary groups among the Gypsy population. On the other hand, we should bear in mind that Gypsies are a particular ethnic group with their own life-style and ethnocultural features.

During the first several years, after the transition from Socialism, which began in 1989, Bulgaria is in a state of complicated transition to a 'modern' democracy. The social crisis affects all ethnic communities in the country. According to a number of authors, researching the Gypsies, (Tomova I., 1995; Tomova I., 1998: 329-355; Ringold D., 2000; Szelenyi I., 2002; Ringold D., M. A. Orenstein, E. Wilkens, 2003 etc.), the deep crisis applies to all parameters of the individual and group existence of the Gypsies. Its end result is a tendency towards an increasing disintegration and marginalization of the Gypsies, and due to this they remain at the bottom of the social scale many years ahead. In other words, increasing severe poverty among them has been one of the most striking developments.

According to sociologist I. Tomova, there exists a direct connection between the 'marginalization' of the Gypsies and 'evangelization' (i.e. the widespread influence of Evangelism among Gypsies). The author seeks the reasons for the influence of Evangelism among Gypsies in social situation in Bulgaria (Tomova I., 1998: 343-344).

The Bulgarian Gypsyologists E. Marushiakova and V. Popov have explained the success of Protestant missionaries among Gypsies primarily with inter-community factors: the simplified ordination of ministers (after a very short training) from the community midst; a very appealing religious service for Gypsies (discussion of problems faced by the members of the community and services with a lot of music and hymns); satisfying the need for miracles (the most common reason given for having joined the church is the miraculous cure of the sick who have 'accepted God') etc. One of the main reasons according to the authors is the desire to fill the vacuum with those forms among

the groups who have lost most of their main characteristics [traditional occupations, group identity, communal life etc.] (Marushiakova E., V. Popov, 1997: 127-129).

In my opinion the conversion to Evangelism among Gypsies could be explained on the one hand, by the social, economic and political situation in Bulgaria. On the other hand, we should bear in mind, the internal structure of Gypsies as an ethnic community. Indeed, during the first several years after the collapse of Socialism, Evangelical churches have centered their attention on the poorest and most underprivileged members of the Gypsy community, segregated not only from the macro-society but also from the rest of the Gypsies. After the mid-1990s the processes of dissemination of Protestantism begin to stabilize and a constant number of converts is established.

The Influence of Protestantism among Gypsies in Bulgaria as tendency is a part of the worldwide Gypsy Evangelical movement (Acton T., 1979: 289-295; Williams P., 1984: 49-51; Lazell D., 1997; Liégeois J.-P., 1999; Gay y Blasco P., 1999; Gay y Blasco P., 2000: 1-22; Williams P., 2002; Lange B.-R., 2003 etc.). The Evangelism enables the establishment of Gypsy churches and organization – ‘Association of Roma churches and communities in Bulgaria’ etc., which do not play a religious role only. The ministers are ordained from the community midst. The church structure allows increasing the prestige of the pastors in the church and in the community midst. A new community comes into being for the church members, in which they can rely on the members understanding, friendly advice and mutual aid. The Bible is translated into the mother tongue² and the church members have an easy access to it. On the other hand, Evangelists sing the songs in their mother tongue – Bulgarian, Turkish or *Romanes*³. The services are with a lot of music and dances. There are discussions on the problems faced by the members of the community. Thus the need for miracles is readily met.

Chronologically, Roma Evangelism in Bulgaria began its spread in the early 1900s, initially covering the territories of Northwest Bulgaria (the towns of Bercovitsa, Montana, Lom, Vidin and the adjacent villages) and the capital city, Sofia. Three basic periods can be defined – from the beginning of 1900s until 1944; 1944-1989; and from

² See one of the recent translations of New Testament in *Romanes* (Gypsy language) by S. Metkov (Metkov S., 1995).

³ In Bulgaria these are the languages, in which Gypsy groups speak.

1989 until today. This chronology follows the periodization in the political government in Bulgaria.

The First Gypsy Baptist Church in Bulgaria was found in 1930 in the village of Golinci (today it is quarter of the town of Lom) (Evangelist, 1930, No.7, p.12). The believers gathered for services in their houses with a pastor of Gypsy origin P. Punchev (Evangelist, 1920, No.3, p.15).

Gradually, the process of appearance of new church bodies has been going on till the present moment, covering the whole territory of Bulgaria. As a result of the efforts of the western Protestant stations (mainly American and English pastors) for dissemination of 'the word of God', a whole network of Gypsy religious societies have appeared, setting up in turn their own function models. In the course of time these communities have developed as independent prayer houses, headed by Gypsy pastors.

Two main stages could be outlined in the period after the collapse of Socialism:

- Mass dissemination of Evangelism among Gypsies in the beginning of the 'New time'. The reasons for this could be found out in the religious freedom, 'revival' of the Evangelical tradition, social and economic crises etc. Two main tendencies have been observed since the transition from Socialism – strong influence of Evangelism among the poor and marginalized communities and individuals. This tendency is readily associated with the social environment in Bulgaria, and alongside with it, the influence of Evangelism as a part of the worldwide Gypsy Evangelical movement.

- Stabilizing the processes after the mid-1990s and establishing of a constant number of believers. We cannot speak here of mutual influences between the processes of marginalization and evangelization. This second stage is characterized by the segmentation of the Gypsy churches under the influence of certain Gypsy pastors who declare their authority with the believers.

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Nearly half of the population of Lom is of Gypsy origin. According to the most recent census, conducted on 1 March 2001, the whole population was 35 077

(www.nsi.bg). Two Gypsy communities live in Lom, the *Vlaxički Tsigani*⁴ (nomadic group) who used to be Orthodox Christians, and the *Kalaidžii* (tinsmiths), who used to be Muslims. Gypsies in Lom live in four neighbourhoods, the neighbourhoods of Mladenovo, Humata, Stadionna and Momin brod. The *Tsutsumani* live in Mladenovo and Humata, and the *Kalaidžii* in two other neighbourhoods. The *Vlaxički Tsigani* speak the Vlax dialect of *Romanes* and the *Kalaidžii* speak the Balkan dialect of *Romanes* (Matras Y., 2002: 5-13; Kyuchukov Hr., 2003: 29-36). In the 1920s, 1930s and later some of the *Vlaxički Tsigani* gradually adopted a settled lifestyle, mainly in the urban 'mahalas' (Marushiakova E., V. Popov, 2000: 13-14). In comparison with them, the *Kalaidžii* had settled there long before. At present, both Gypsy groups do not practice their traditional occupation (more about Gypsy traditional occupations see Marushiakova E., V. Popov, 1997: 105-122). Today most of the Gypsy population in Lom are adopters of Evangelism. There are about ten Gypsy churches, but there is not a constant number of prayer houses. The Roma Evangelical Churches in Lom belong to the Baptist Church (BCh), the Pentecostal Church (PCh), Bulgarian God's Church (BGCh) and United God's Church (UGCh). There exist also various local churches who try to be self-dependent – God's Church (GCh) "Sinai", God's Church (GCh) "Vetil" etc. There are Protestant Churches, outside the Gypsy neighbourhoods, who are attended by Bulgarians and Gypsies – BGCh, Bch, Adventist Church (ACh) etc.

There exists and functions in Bulgaria the Protestant Alliance, uniting part of the existing Protestant churches. It includes - the Methodist (MCh), the Congregationalist (CCh), the Baptist (BCh), the Pentecostal (PCh) and Bulgarian God's Church (BGCh). Outside the Protestant Alliance remain the following churches: United God's Church (UGCh) and the Adventist church (ACh). The Gypsy churches are registered in all officially recognized Protestant denominations. The churches that belong to different denominations have doctrinal and ritual differences. Churches like BGCh, UGCh etc. practice rhythmic movements during services, falling into trance and glossolalia (the state of speaking unknown divine languages) etc, in comparison with churches like BCh, ACh

⁴ The *Vlaxički Tsigani* are called by the other Gypsy groups as "Tsutsumani". The elderly population identify themselves as *Rešetari* in some cases, because in the past they were sieve-makers. The *Vlaxički Tsigani* often use the appellation of *Tsutsumani* as self-appellation (endonym).

etc, which do not accept dancing during services and speaking ‘unknown languages’. There are differences in the services with each church as well (more for the various churches that belongs to the Protestant Church in Bulgaria, see Petkov T., 1998; Assenov B., 1998: 139-330; Koen E., R. Karapetrova, 1998: 309-328; about the history of God’s Church in Bulgaria, see Velev V., 2002 etc).

After the christening, the convert identifies himself as a part of the community of believers. The world in which the believers live is a world of the good Christians who are blessed because of their acts. Converts emphasize this fact: not only does one continue being a Gypsy once one has become a believer, but one also becomes a better Gypsy. They change their lives, they give up everything that “God does not accept” and “does not find pleasing for Him”. There starts a new life for them, a better one. The Believers oppose the present life to the life of the past when they were a part of the World⁵. All converts believe in Jesus Christ who is called God in *Romanes – Del, Devel* etc. and Holy Ghost. The worldly life that brings disappointments and misfortunes remains outside the world of pious Christians. In this world live people who do not have fear of God and because of that they commit unreasonable acts. The less the believer Gypsies contact with the worldly life and the wordly people, the less they might be defiled. The converts are self-conscious of their being different religious people when they compare themselves to the non-converts and they oppose their life-style to the worldly one. The converts form their confessional self-identity, the identity of believers⁶. For that reason I have defined initially the Gypsy believers’ community as a confessional community. Gypsies in Lom realize to a certain extent their belonging to the community of all Gypsy believers. According to Spanish anthropologist P. Gay y Blasco, after the conversion, Gypsy believers (Aleluyas, or Gitano converts, among whom she has carried out her fieldwork) become a part of a new ‘political-religious diaspora’. The Evangelical religious (also called political-religious by the author) movement transforms the lives of Gypsies everywhere, bringing them together as God’s chosen people (Gay y Blasco P., 2000: 3).

⁵ The Believers define the world of non-believers like “the World” as byword.

⁶ See the theory of F. Barth (Barth F., 1997: 211-259) who defined in his study has ethnic boundaries as the most important aspect of identity. According to him the groups’ boundaries are the ones to be handed down through the years, not the group culture. Inner substance changed, but the boundaries remain. Ethnic identity has formed and it has been preserved namely by a contact with other ethnic groups. For that reason the ‘ethnic’ is experienced first of all as an opposition identity/ non-identity.

Evangelism transforms all Gypsy believers into a community, which could be defined as an ‘imagined community’⁷. I accept the author’s idea, about the formation, under the influence of Evangelism, of an Evangelical Gypsies’ community, called ‘imagined community’. It could be noticed that in most cases the groups’ boundaries between Gypsy communities are preserved. The creation of a new community of Evangelical Gypsies does not exclude the preservation of the groups’ boundaries between Gypsy communities, nor the boundaries between the Gypsy community as a whole and the surrounding population (Gypsies/ non-Gypsies). Gypsy identity is preserved and the Evangelists continue to be Gypsies, but they are better Gypsies.

Similar to the division between the worlds of God-blessed people and the worldly people, is the traditional division of the world by the Gypsy group worldwide into two parts: Gypsies/ *Gagde*⁸, i.e. *romania/ marime*⁹. After the conversion Gypsies oppose the world of believers to the world of non-believers.

After the conversion the converts identify themselves as believers, believers in Jesus Christ and rarely Evangelists or Repentants. The name ‘repentants’ is used also in case when you have repented, but you have not been baptized (in water and/ or with the Holy Ghost). The term Protestants is rarely used. As vocative address ‘brothers and sisters’ is often heard. The use of these addresses marks the range of the ‘new religious kinship’, which does not always coincide with real kinship ties. For example if the respondent calls someone ‘my brother’ that means they both are believers and they both attend the church services. In case when the respondent wants to indicate his blood brother, he says ‘my carnal brother’. Usually as ‘brothers and sisters’ are called the believers from the same church whereas the converts from the other churches are referred to as ‘there are in the faith too’. This distinction is sometimes hard to delimit, marks the influence of the different churches in the Gypsy neighbourhoods. ‘Brothers and sisters’ is a form of address for the believers of God’s churches (UGCh, BGCh etc.) who to some

⁷ See the B. Anderson’s theory of ‘imagining the communities’. The author spoke about an imagined communities, because in every member of communities exist an idea for their commonality (Anderson B., 1998: 21).

⁸ See the J. Yoors’ monograph who tells the story of his live among the Lovara Gypsy group. - Yoors J., 1987; see also Okely J., 1983; Sutherland A., 1986; Silverman C., 1988: 261-275; Stewart M., 1997; Gay y Blasco P., 1999 и т.н. Compare with Bulgarian Gypsyologist literature. See, Marushiakova E., V. Popov, 1997.

⁹ In this case I use the A. Sutherland’s terminology (Sutherland A., 1986: 8 and further on)

extent distinguish themselves from the Evangelists of some other churches (BCh etc.), on the basis of that 'the others dance during the services' or 'it is not pleasant at their services, because they do not dance' etc. The people who 'are not in the faith' are called 'worldly people'.

Both *Tsutsumani* and *Kalaidžii* preserve their group identity and on this basis they continue to identify themselves as *Tsutsumani* and *Kalaidžii*. The Believers do not cease contacts with their relations, who 'are not in the faith'. Preserving the group boundaries between *Tsutsumani* and *Kalaidžii* can clearly be seen in the situation, when the both groups attend different churches. For example the *Tsutsumani* go to church in their neighbourhoods, because it is close to their houses and there go all *Tsutsumani*, not at the services of the *Kalaidžii*. '*Tsutsumani*' and '*Kalaidžii*' has the pejorative meaning of someone belonging to the other group.

The community of Evangelical Gypsies is a social community, because of almost everyday contacts between the members at the church services, and their participation in the activities in the prayer houses, the constant exchange of mutual aid etc. Lead by their religious leader, the community is one of the active centers, which models the public opinion in the neighbourhood or the settlement. The formation of this opinion is achieved by silent control over the members of the community. In Lom there is more than one church and the social circles are several and every social circle forms its public position. New circles of endogamy are formed under the influence of Evangelism. The believers prefer a daughter-in-law (son-in-law) or husband/ wife who 'are in the faith'. The young meet and get to know each other at the church sermons, at the Evangelical conferences or seminars in Bulgaria or abroad, during the Bible training etc.

The Evangelists have a similar way of expressing. They do not say curses, especially in public places. After the conversion the language of expression of Christians changed, they do not use obscene words and they often talk about God and Jesus Christ. Gypsy language that is used at the church services also changed. A lot of Bulgarianisms enter their songs like - biblia (Bible), ljubov (love), slavina (glorify), te promenines (to change) etc. Part of used words remains by terminations in *Romanes*: slavina-av; te promenina-es etc.

Gypsy Evangelists in Lom as well as in the whole country have a possibility to listen or to watch broadcasts in *Romanes*, cable TV's programs, web-sites on the Internet (see for example www.hristiyanskoradio.net). In Lom one of the preachers (pastor of BCh in Mladenovo) has been a radio presenter in the Trans World Radio for many years.

The existence of autonomous legal system and proper potestary institutions and their specific structure is one of the most important and primordial characteristics of the Gypsy community, which clearly displays their ethnic specificity (Yoors J., 1987; Sutherland A., 1986; Marushiakova E., V. Popov, 1997: 155-165; Marushiakova E., V. Popov, 2002: 33-44; Marushiakova E., V. Popov, 2004).

The Roma church has created an original form of religious as well as social organization, which regulates the interaction among the members and directs their social behaviour. In this sense it is an Institution although it has not been accepted by the Bulgarian society as Roma Church. The Gypsy Church is an effective mechanism of self-government and ethnosocial organization. The prayer houses in Lom have their managing structure. The bigger and authoritative churches have more civil servants and better material equipment. The managing staff of the churches is the preacher, assistant (s) – deacon (s), cashier (s), evangelizator (s), praiser (s), musicians, usherer (s) etc. Home churches function only with a preacher (and an assistant). The religious council includes a part of the church servants and it is a governing body. Some of the churches have Bible schools. A person of importance in the church is the preacher or 'pastor', as he is popular among believers, notwithstanding the post he was ordained to (Slavkova M., 2003: 168-177). The more authoritative the pastor is, the more influence he has among members, possesses greater personal charisma (about religious leader, see Weber M., 1992), the more popular the church is and better equipped. We can easily judge at first sight only about the influence and popularity of each pastor by the looks of his church. In Lom there are churches, which possess their own church buildings. Ever since 1989 religious communities have been allowed to possess and freely hold services at their own church buildings. Before that, the only church, which functioned and had a church building, was

the first Gypsy church, which continues to exist until today (see in the book of Kolev G., 2003: 181-187)¹⁰.

The authority of the preacher is influenced by his ties with international religious organizations. For example the fact that the pastor of GCh 'Sinai' in the Humata neighbourhood, holds up relationship with Centre Missionaire Evangelique Roms International (CMERI) (www.chez.com/cmeri/roudjimos.htm), has brought him a great popularity and at this moment he is one of the most well-known Bulgarian Gypsy pastors in Bulgaria and abroad. I can claim that to some extent, the pastor of GCh 'Sinai' with all his activities exercises considerable influence on the other Gypsy preachers in Bulgaria. Following suit, other pastors have started to organize meetings of Gypsy preachers, although their conferences lack the same size and popularity. An expression of the authority of the GCh 'Vetil's pastor in the Mladenovo neighbourhood was the organized Sunday course for leaders (i.e. religious leaders) at the end of 2003. This course considerably popularized the pastor's name.

The Church, led by the pastor, plays not only a religious role, but it takes active part in activities from the worldly life. In the summer of 2003, the preacher from GCh 'Sinai' organized international religious meeting in Lom and guests from CMERI were invited. The preachers from CMERI have promised to finance the construction and further function of a bakery in Mladenovo neighbourhood. For some time there was an open conflict as to who would manage the bakery, the church or the local NGO 'Roma', although the church, according to religious rules, cannot exercise any economic activity. Music business with religious songs is also an example of how the church penetrates the activities from the worldly life. However apart Evangelists disassociate from the worldly life, there are still examples for the continuous interaction between the two worlds and about the participation of the churches and their leaders and members in activities, which are not religious. After 1989, my informant from Lom started his career as a pastor's assistant in GCh 'Vetil' and he attended with his wife the Bible courses in Sofia. He gave up this career and he enrolled as student in law at New Bulgarian University in Sofia. The respondent received a scholarship as a Rom student at the University. After that he joined

¹⁰ The author's standpoint as a member of the CC of the BCP is interesting, although the reader could be careful about some possible errors in the chronology offered.

the non-governmental sector and found his own NGO 'Psychic Health about Roma' (at the moment registered as 'Independent Life – Roma'). Later on, he worked for the American organization 'Catholic Relief Services' (CRS). Meanwhile he did not stop going to church divine services. When he was not in Lom, he attended the Evangelical church in Sofia. An indicative example for the inclusion of believers in the worldly life is also the election of church members for municipal councilors at the local administration of Lom for example at the last elections in 2004. Gypsy pastors within the neighbourhoods in Lom are in constant confrontation, because of the struggle for distribution of the Gypsy religious space. This confrontation takes place on the level of pastors who manage churches from the same Protestant denominations, for example the confrontation between the BCh in Mladenovo and BCh in Momin brod neighbourhoods. It is more frequent, however, for confrontation to take place between churches which belong to different Protestant denominations. Since the end of the 1990s a tendency has started for periodical gathering of pastors and churches. They try to solve significant problems for the community. In September 2002, and in January 2003, suggested by one of the believer from Lom, who has worked at CRS-Bulgaria, several seminars were held under the motto 'Church and Parent Presence in Education'. Pastors from all over the country were invited at the seminars, but mostly members of United God's church, Bulgarian God's church and the Pentecostal church, and their subdivisions, because he adhered to this Protestant trend, the so-called charismatic trend in Protestantism (these are all prayer houses registered with the Pentecostal Church). He initially wanted and demonstrated his intention in front of friends to invite preachers from all Gypsy churches in Bulgaria, no matter to which denominations they belonged to. The constant process of segmentation of the churches is also an example of the pastor's authority. For instance my respondent found his own church in Stadionna neighbourhood after a several-year-long work as an usherer at GCh 'Vetil' in Mladenovo neighbourhood, under the same name.

Another interesting tendency becomes obvious in Lom, the hereditary management of the church. That is clearly seen in the history of the first Gypsy church in Mladenovo settlement. Signs of this tendency can also be seen in development of other churches. For instance the pastor of GCh 'Sinai' is training one of his sons to hold the position.

The community of Evangelical Gypsies in Lom participates in common holidays and rituals. The most important holidays for Evangelists are Christmas and Easter. The birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated at Christmas. The feast begins on 24 December evening with a holiday sermon of the pastor, as it is celebrated with a lot of songs in all prayer houses. In some churches a program with children is organized, as they present various plays with biblical messages. The children also recite poems, which were memorized at the Sunday school etc.

Easter is celebrated in a similar fashion as Christmas. The pastor presents his special sermon on Saturday evening before the real holiday, e.g. on Sunday morning. A program with the children from the church is organized. Some Gypsy prayer houses in Lom (for example the first Gypsy church, PCh in Mladenovo, GCh 'Sinai' in Humata neighbourhoods) organize feast rounds within the settlements when the festive divine service is over. During the rounds they sing religious songs in *Romanes* and in Bulgarian¹¹, congratulate the hosts by 'Jesus has risen!' and the hosts give the believers money or sweets as gifts. The creation of such forms of assistance among the Gypsies is an adequate answer to the economic instability in the society and helps preserving significant forms of their self-government (in this case, the church). On the other hand, both feasts are celebrated with the whole family as well. The holidays are a cause for family gatherings, even with these relatives who are non-believers. During the holidays most of the elderly believers go to the first Gypsy church, because their parents used to go too. Young people, however, prefer churches where their friends go and where they can dance. Young believers from all over the world congratulate each other by the Internet, by telephone, by sms etc. In 2002 a believer from Lom sent to me a sms for Easter: 'Jesus has risen! Let our hearts be filled with love similar to that Jesus had'.

Gypsies in Lom are the first Evangelical Gypsies in Bulgaria. Several generations' converts have lived in Lom until today. Some of them reject from the faith, others return to the church, yet others change the prayer house where they go for sermons. I must point out that for several generations, under the influence of Evangelism, a community of Evangelical Gypsies has been formed. I analyzed the community's life

¹¹ For example – 'Жив е Той, жив е, смъртта Той победи!' ('He is alive, He is alive, He defeated death!'), 'О, Del, mulo amenge' ('Jesus died for Us') etc.

after the collapse of Socialism. There exists the sense of communality between the believer Gypsies. Besides, a new communal identity is created (religious, but it cannot be distinguished from the ethnic and/ or group awareness). A new form of self-government is created – the Church. The believers participate together in everyday divine services, feasts and rituals etc. The group of Gypsy believers in Lom is an example of how a community is formed under the influence of Evangelism, the so-called ‘imagined community’. This community is a confessional one – a community of Gypsies who are Evangelists. It is an ethnic community – a community of Evangelists who are Gypsies. The community is also a social one – a community of Evangelical Gypsies who are in continuous social interaction (mutual aid, social contacts, exchange of information etc.). The converts have the self-conscious of being different from the worldly people and thereby they create their identity of the believer Gypsies. They identify themselves as better Gypsies. The processes, provoked by Evangelism are interesting and dynamic. According to me, more and more Gypsies will convert to Evangelism and Evangelism would play a social and emancipating role rather than purely religious. Evangelism will continue to have the idea of integration, however, total erasure of the group boundaries is unlikely. Evangelism will be yet another means for Gypsies to distinguish themselves from the *Gadge* and for various Gypsy groups to create boundaries between them.

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