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CHANGING ROMA IDENTITY

A New Kind of Double Identity and How To Model It

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The Roma Revival Movement, which started in the mid-20th century, exhibits several peculiar features as a social phenomenon, each of which contributes to the formation of a new identity of the Romani people, both individually and on the group level. One of the most important results of the Roma Revival Movement is the birth of a new religious Roma identity. In this new identity form, in contrast to earlier known ethnic identity forms, religion (through conversion and community membership) operates as a filter, as a new frame which can eliminate several handicaps of the ethnic or double identity (which are laden with negative feelings on the personal and group level), and establishes a new, mainly positive, identity form, the Religio-Roma Identity (RRI). In our study based on representative data, we first present the two sources of the new identity form, the rapidly growing ethnic movement as a social phenomenon and the radical change in the lives of newly joined community members. We then describe the new identity form and compare it to other known forms of ethnic double identity.

Keywords: ethnicity, Gypsy, identity, integration, religion, Romani

Veränderung der Roma-Identität: Eine neue Art der doppelten Identität und wie dieses Phänomen modelliert werden kann: Die am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts beginnende Roma Erweckungsbewegung, als gesellschaftliches Phänomen, dient mit mehreren Eigenschaften, die zur Neubildung der Identität der Zigeuner beitragen, sowohl auf der Individual- als auch auf der Gruppenebene, und auch als Ganzes betrachtet. Eine der größten Errungenschaften der Bewegung ist die Geburt der neuen, religiösen Roma-Identität. In der erwähnten Identitätsform funktioniert Religion – im Gegensatz zu den bekannten ethnischen Identitätsformen – als eine Art Filter (durch Bekehrung und Zugehörigkeit zur Gemeinschaft), als Deutungsrahmen, der fähig ist, die erschwerenden Komponenten zu überschreiben, die aus der ethnischen oder doppelten Identität der Betroffenen folgen (und die mit unzähligen negativen persönlichen und Gruppengedanken beladen sind), zugleich zu einer neuen, hauptsächlich positiv beschreibbaren Selbstbehauptung führt, zur religiösen Roma-Identität. In unserer Studie zeigen wir erst zwei Quellen der neuen Identitätsform,

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durch repräsentative Daten (die schnell wachsende ethnische Bewegung als gesellschaftliches Phänomen und die radikalen Veränderungen im Leben derer, die sich der Gemeinschaft anschließen). Demnach skizzieren wir Charakteristika der neuen Selbstbehauptung, im Vergleich zu weiteren bekannten ethnischen Doppel-Identitätsformen.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Roma, Zigeuner, Identität, Religion, Integration, Ethnizität

1. Introduction

When we speak about the identity of Romanies, we are in fact speaking of a double or multiple identity. This type of identity, however, significantly differs from the known identity structure of other ethnic groups in Hungary. The most significant common characteristic of previous studies on this question has been that they have routinely considered the dual identity of Romanies as conflicting (or interfering) with their singular identity as ‘a Roma’, while such conflict is not even mentioned when writing about other dual ethnic identities (e.g. Slovak- or German-Hungarians), or if it is mentioned, less emphasis is placed on it. The most important reasons for this difference can be attributed to differences in integration levels and cultural embeddedness.

When studying Romani identity, it is important constantly to bear in mind that, while the dual knowledge of self and environment inevitably develops on the basis of the representation of the majority society and of their own ethnic group, there is almost always an irreconcilable conflict between the two identities. According to BINDORFFER (2001), the reason for this is due to the two sources (Roma and Hungarian) of identity of the Gypsies, which contain conflicting and competing elements. While there are exceptions, they are rare.

2. Different Romani identities: theoretical basics

Researchers have almost always focused on the dual identity of the Roma in two ways. First, they consider it an identity form which derives from their ethnic existence – that is, the base case, consisting of the double image of the innate cultural self-image and the image taken over from the majority society – formed from the duality of the majority society and the minority existence within that society. We will call this the Basic Roma Identity (BRI).

In this situation, the individual understands that he/she does not belong to one group only but to another as well, and it will also be obvious for him/her that the two groups differ from each other in many ways. The individual realises where they belong. They can feel their ‘otherness’. In the case of Romanies, they almost certainly feel how incompatible the two groups are, their practices, ways of thinking and culture.

The second important characteristic is that research is directed toward an analysis of what role the dual identity of Romanies (mostly those who are already or

will be artists or intellectuals) plays within the differing conflicting identities to affect achievement; typically, where Romanies have excelled in a variety of ways. Accordingly, we will call this the Intellectual Roma Identity (IRI). These studies are typically carried out in universities or vocational colleges where there are people from different family backgrounds who possess different social capital, examining Romanies who somehow emerged and stood out from this conflicting environment. The results and conclusions of these studies always emphasise the severity of the internal and external conflicts that accompany the participants' new social status. This is especially true of those who choose the intellectual path.

This is important to understand because every such study also emphasises the need to raise the educational level as the most important element in dealing with the identity conflict resolution, and as the primary element in achieving the desired integration of the Gypsy community. Nevertheless, these studies show that although raising the education level can go hand in hand with the desired development from the former system of practice and behaviour, the process of changing to the Intellectual Roma Identity exacts a huge cost (SZABÓNÉ KÁRMÁN 2012).

By contrast, our research, which began in 2012, found that there exists another dual identity structure that significantly differs from these two general identity forms. It is the changed dual identity of the Romanies in the Romani, or mostly Romani, churches, which we will call the Religio-Roma Identity (RRI). An important characteristic of the RRI, for example, is that it does not necessarily have a conflict and can significantly mitigate the negative impact of the inner conflict of the other two identity forms, while it contains positive elements that have been rarely observed previously, if at all. In this study we will describe and analyse this 'new kind of' double identity, the RRI, and offer a model of its structure and compare it to known multiple (Romani) forms of identity (and their models).

2.1. Identity

Before presenting our results, it is important to clarify how we interpret the concepts of identity and dual identity in this study. Identity is the sameness or oneness with ourselves, the awareness and the idea of where we belong. According to ERIKSON (1963), by our early twenties we have a consistent self-image and inner norms, by which we can evaluate ourselves to develop our individual identity; in other words, we can place ourselves in the world. ERIKSON (1968) drew the inference by observing entitativity, one of the major characteristics of the group – that one's life is determined by the group environment in which he or she was born because this indicates certain common social and cultural patterns. Group identity teaches them to become one with the identity of the group and shows their place in the world at the same time (RÉVÉSZ 2007).

According to TAJFEL (1978) the awareness that we belong to a group has a significant value – and it bears upon us with an emotional determination which bears

upon our identity. We systematise our environment into social categories by these values, and our and other people's place in this system determines the assessment of ourselves and others. Of course, different groups continually compare themselves to each other. In terms of identity, the most important dimensions of intra-group comparison pertain to cultural values.

Ethnic groups often distinguish themselves from other groups by their origin, common culture, behaviour and habits, religion, and the common spoken language. BELL (1975) listed the five most important reasons of forming group identity: nation, religion, ethnicity, class, and gender.

2.2. Dual identity

Dual identity is a construction in which a minority adopts those identity elements of the majority which are missing from or can be partially found in their own identity (SZABÓ 2007). According to BINDORFFER (2001), dual identity means the combination of individual and complementary identity elements from two different sources (ethnicity and nationality).

As we can see in both definitions, the sources on the one hand complement, and on the other hand correspond to each other. This is true generally in the case of non-Romani identity. However, the two sources of Romani identity (Hungarian and Romani) contain competing and inconsistent elements. Consequently, Romani identity can be described only partially with these definitions. In the case of Romanies, the conflict has a frequent occurrence (see BINDORFFER 2001; BOKRÉTÁS & BIGAZZI 2013; SZABÓNÉ KÁRMÁN 2012). Moreover, every type of dual identity contains value aspects and emotional aspects as well (SZABÓ 2007). For Romanies, it means negative emotional situations again and again. This dominant power (the negative effect) of dual identity is particularly strong in the case of Romanies.

BÁTHORY (2011) differentiates three kinds of identity strategy: the assimilative, ethno-central (mentioned by BINDORFFER 2001 as the dissociative strategy), and double or multiple identity. The first, assimilative, occurs when the individual begins to 'shape into' the majority; the second, ethno-central identity strategy, when he/she rather prefers his/her own group; and the third, double or multiple identity, when individuals picture themselves as members of both groups and try to balance between the two sides.

BINDORFFER (2001, cited from the definition by ERÓS 1998) speaks about four basic and two other (complementary) strategies: in addition to those just mentioned, the marginal identity and the long-lasting identity crisis. In the case of an identity crisis, the elements of the identity are manifold and not compatible, which may lead to cognitive dissonance. What can an individual do then? He/she may choose a positive strategy to solve the problem, or, with the multiple dichotomies and perspectives, he/she literally cannot choose a successful solution, and thus long-lasting disharmony may occur.

One speaks about hidden identity if the individual, although he/she does not give up his/her minority identity, in some situations hides his/her ethnic identity. HANCOCK (1999) and OKELY (1997) speak about this as a strategy that was sometimes used by Romanies for survival in England. SILVERMANN (1988) registered the same in the USA (they change their clothes, language and names, to hide themselves). This phenomenon is well known in Hungary in the context of the Gábor Gypsies. When the Gábor Gypsies cross the border they change their clothes. They dress up in more conventional clothes to hide, at least partially, their ethnic characteristics. According to SUTHERLAND (1975), in such cases the Romanies remain hidden for the public. It is only possible, however, if the racial tags of the minority do not differ significantly from the tags of the majority, or the original racial tags are not already so accented (because of racial admixture, for instance), as in England (HANCOCK 1976).

Identity is thus a kind of self-characterisation, a self-vision which is affected by our environment, and it also shapes the way our self-image develops. That is why we call identity social identity (TAJFEL & TURNER 1986). However, in the process of developing ethnic (dual) identity, we see, feel, think of ourselves on the basis of not only one particular group (nation, religion, class, culture, etc.) but we see, feel, and think of ourselves based on the interaction of at least two groups. Thus, this form of identity is nourished by at least three sources:

1. the majority of society's relation to, and value judgement of, the minority, and the way this relationship is expressed;
2. the self-image of the ethnic group and the value judgement that imposes on the group;
3. the self-image of the individual and the value judgement that imposes on the self.

Of course, identity itself is created and built from the interaction of these three essential sources.

3. Roma religiosity: a brief historical introduction

The Roma mission or Roma revival movement can be best understood from a historical perspective. Before the 1970s, no religious and/or church movement was able significantly to influence the religiosity of the Roma. It seems that mainstream churches did not put a big emphasis on this matter.

To understand the case presented, we will now briefly review earlier literature about Roma religiosity. Hungary was one of the first countries to publish scholarly material about the Roma minority. AUGUSTINI's article series (2009) about the Roma was the first in the world to sum up what was known about this community in his time (1775–1776). This was followed by the works of György ENESSEI in 1798 (2002). Later, Henrik WLISLOCZKI (1893) and Antal HERMANN (1895) also wrote about that issue, but by their time, there were Gypsy-related publications in other countries as well (e.g. Heinrich M.G. GRELLMANN, 1807, or later Rodney 'Gypsy'

SMITH, 1902, who himself was Roma, in fact, a missionary among Gypsies, and wrote a book about Roma religiosity, largely based on his own religious experience).

Although no researchers in the modern sense, they were the first writers to comment about Roma religiosity. Their books included religion-related references, sometime even entire chapters, giving some insight into the then prevalent view on Roma religiosity. Among these, AUGUSTINI's article series became foundational for the field. He describes the issue in a separate chapter, stating, 'they do not have a separate religion; hereabout they follow the traditions of the country and of those people among whom they live. . . . [A]s far as its contents are concerned, however, it lacks science and awareness as well as a true sense and experience of divine doctrines and regulations' (2009, 245, our trans.).¹ These lines and the whole chapter played a foundational role in what later authors had to say about Roma religiosity (see, e.g., the oft-quoted GRELLMANN 1807), while the question remained virtually unexplored in research. Not surprising, then, that 200 years later in his comprehensive work, VEKERDI still wrote the following: 'It is certain, however, that there is no separate Roma religion and there never has been. . . . Religion does not play a significant role in their way of thinking; it is practically limited to participation in spectacular church ceremonies (christening, jamboree)' (1974, 30–31, our trans.).²

Since direct data on Roma religiosity is scarce from previous centuries, it is difficult – but not impossible – to argue against such views. We must be careful at this point. As ACTON also notes, 'Gypsy irreligion is only the classical gajo academic view' (1997, 38); it is not the actual case. It seems certain, however, that there has been a largely ambivalent relationship between Romanies and Christian religiosity. The relationship is defined not only by the image that the majority society has of them but also by their self-image. The image is almost entirely negative in both cases. Historically as well as practically, therefore, both what there is of their written history and their negative cultural perspectives had a detrimental effect on the reconstruction of their identity both individually and on the group level.

Things, however, started to change in the middle of the twentieth century. The first well-documented religious initiative in Hungary was Miklós Sója's mission in Hodász in 1942. The young Greek Catholic priest began to evangelise at the Gypsy settlement (actually a ghetto), and established the first Gypsy church in Hungary. The first significant change impacting the RRI was recorded here. Miklós Sója's effort to bring 'repentance' – or, in other words, a turning away from the past life to a new Christian life as defined by his Greek Catholicism – had a great effect on the RRI. For the same reason, after 1972, Jenő Kopasz's mission in Uszka and the neighbouring villages received a lot of publicity.

¹ Original text: 'különálló vallásuk nincs, errefelé az ország szokásait követik, illetve azokét a népeket, akik között élnek. . . . [A]zonban, ami a belsőt illeti, a tudomány és a tudatosság éppúgy hiányzik belőle, mint az isteni tanok és előírások igaz átértékelése és átélése.'

² Original text: 'Az mindenesetre bizonyos, hogy önálló cigány vallás nincs, és nem is volt. . . . A vallás nem játszik jelentős szerepet a gondolkodásukban; gyakorlatilag kimerül a látványos egyházi szertartásokon (keresztelő, búcsú) való részvételben.'

We know about other initiatives as well, for example in the Methodist Church in Alsószolca and surroundings, from 1952, or the Pentecostal Roma Mission in Békés in the 1970s, which became the most effective evangelisation among Romanies in Hungary to this day. These were the beginnings, but the fastest growth in number and scale of Romani churches occurred in the post-1989 period because the former Socialist system had merely tolerated this phenomenon ('It is still better for them to go to church than to a pub'; RAJKI & SZIGETI 2012, 358, our trans.).³ The process accelerated after the end of the twentieth century when Romani churches started to mushroom. Most of them are about ten years old. It is clear that it is not just an outward appearance but a very real new phenomenon. It is so new that TÖRÖK (2004) refers to only two Romani denominations although his book is a full catalogue of churches in Hungary.

There are several reasons (which we cannot discuss in detail due to lack of space) why Christian missions among the Romanies developed dramatically under charismatic sponsorship. According to our database, 85.7% of Romanies belonged to charismatic communities in 2012. And in the light of developmental trends, this rate is likely to have further increased by now. ACTON writes,

What is distinctive about Romani Pentecostalism? Precisely that it has become distinctively Romani. This is not to say there is not authentic Romani participation in other faith groups, because there is. Nor am I arguing that the Romani Pentecostal churches are ethnically exclusivist, because most are not, but only within the Pentecostal stream of Christianity do we see denominations that are primarily Romani in their ethnic character *and* leadership. This chapter will argue that such a social innovation was only possible because of the way 20th century Pentecostalism effectively challenged the ecclesiastical authority structures that had arisen from the Protestant Reformation and opened the way (perhaps jointly with 20th century Socialism), to deconstruct the very roots of Roma exclusion in Europe. Unlike Socialism however, Pentecostalism proved capable of effectively being a vehicle of Romani ethnic identity. (2014, 11)

By 2012, there were 168 registered congregations in Hungary which may be considered a part of this movement. Thus, it is a very rapidly growing, specific movement which has a major impact on the self-image of Romanies.

4. Method

In the research, we used three data collection methods: participant observation, interviews, and quantitative questionnaire surveys. Over a three-year period between 2012–2014, we visited many churches, took part in worship services, took many notes, and recorded a number of interviews with members, leaders, pastors and missionaries. This was an important addition to the data collected in questionnaires, which constituted the main line of research. The main goal of the research

³ Original text: 'Még mindig jobb nekik, ha templomba mennek, mint a kocsmába.'

was to collect representative nationwide data, to see how the phenomenon of the Romani church in Hungary can be interpreted from a sociological point of view. The reason for the expansion of research beyond questionnaires is that there has not been any similar research with representative sociological data collection. Therefore our research was conducted and interpreted as basic, primary, descriptive research.

Data collection took place in Christian Romani churches. For methodological reasons, however, not every single denomination was included but only what are called New Protestant churches. The main reason for this is the significant difference between traditional churches and new Protestant (or Free Christian) ones. While in New Protestant (or Free Christian) churches church attendance and church membership are mostly the same, the two factors barely overlap in the cases of large denominations. The study focused on New Protestant (or Free Christian) churches because of the high correlation between church membership and church attendance. In the churches involved, 83.9% of respondents attend weekly, 9.4% fortnightly, 5.8% monthly, and only 0.9% go to church only on major occasions. While in the case of traditional churches, the majority go to church only on special occasions.

First, we searched for those churches whose profile met the inclusion criteria. By the end of 2012, there were 168 Romani Christian churches that answered to the research description, with mostly Roma members with the proper criteria. The sampling was carried out by using the order of church memberships or rosters, with a systematic sampling method. The churches were not always fully Roma-member churches. During the sampling, however, we considered only the Roma membership. Thus, the research is representative of the Roma community within the 168 congregations visited – approximately 6,500 people.

5. Results

To understand the new identity form we need to speak about two factors as sources of RRI: the movement as a specifically Roma phenomenon and the change after conversion in members' lives. This new form of identity, the RRI, and references to it by the participants, repeatedly came up during our research. It was impossible not to notice because, as it turned out later, this was the most distinctive aspect of this new phenomenon, the Romani church movement. As we questioned members of the Roma community, those progressing toward integration consistently justified their new form of consciousness and way of thinking (self-image) as arising from the existence of this movement and the radical life change it had occasioned. We came to the conclusion while observing the participants and during the interviews (and the questionnaire also supported these arguments) that these two key elements lead to change. We ultimately identified them as the two main sources of the RRI. We are, therefore, going to focus on these issues.

5.1. The movement's impact on the Romanies' self-image

The movement (as a phenomenon) that the churches are involved in is called by several names ('Gypsy/Romani mission', 'Gypsy/Romani revival'), and it strongly shapes the self-image of the membership, the image of the Romani community and the image of their place, role and values. The movement has a specifically ethnic-religious characteristic – targeting expressly the Romanies. The leading pastors and missionaries (who include more and more Romanies) – the driving force of the movement – only reinforce this impact. By the evaluation of the leaders, it appears particularly important to emphasise a specific sense of Romaniness with and for them. Thus, assessing the movement, they gave an absolutely positive feedback to members. This unique aspect of the movement reshapes the image of Romanies in the membership.

The movement and its rapid spread have such a decisive impact on the group image of the people involved that it can be interpreted as a semi-nationalist Romani movement. The fact that the movement is uniquely Romani can significantly affect and intensify the Romani image. They see this rapid spread as God's special blessing to the Romanies (Romani revival). Since the movement is predominantly ethnic-religious, this aspect has a very strong influence on the identity of those involved. Thus, the Roma revival movement, within this context, is absolutely positive in their eyes, reshaping the images of the group and themselves. These churches often mean a new cross-cultural connection system (90% of the membership belongs to churches that are recognised religious denominations in the country) in which Romanies worship with non-Romanies (and perhaps this is the only place where it is possible). The perception of this is also positively evaluated by those involved. Thus, the movement reshapes the image created of themselves and of the majority society.

An ethnically *mixed in-group* is often created as well. This has a very strong effect since in the current situation Romanies and non-Romanies can be in the same group at the same time, and Romanies do not have to give up their ethnicity. In fact, they can be proud of it. The denomination serves as a common denominator with other than Romanies. The evaluation of this aspect is also positive, and all this reshapes the image of the majority society and themselves. It is clear that Roma mission, and the Roma revival movement within it, becomes a very powerful source of identity formation.

5.2. Radical change

The other main source of RRI we identified is the radical transformation of personal life. Due to the radical change which Romanies undergo when they become members of the greater community, they almost rewrite their self-image and their personal image about the Gypsy community.

Our results indicate that, when converted Romanies report a radical change, it is not an isolated but rather a general phenomenon. This is the first time this has

been observed in a representative sample. Previous research had already drawn attention to change. However, they were either locally concentrated research projects without sufficient external data to draw generalised conclusions, or broad surveys carried out with interviews and some personalised data but lacking representative sampling (e.g., ATANASOV 2008; BLASCO 2002; GOG 2008; LUKÁCS 2008; PÉCELI 2013; PÉCELI & LUKÁCS 2009).

We asked, What kind of changes can be seen in the life of Gypsies after their conversion? We received the answers as displayed in *Figure 1*.

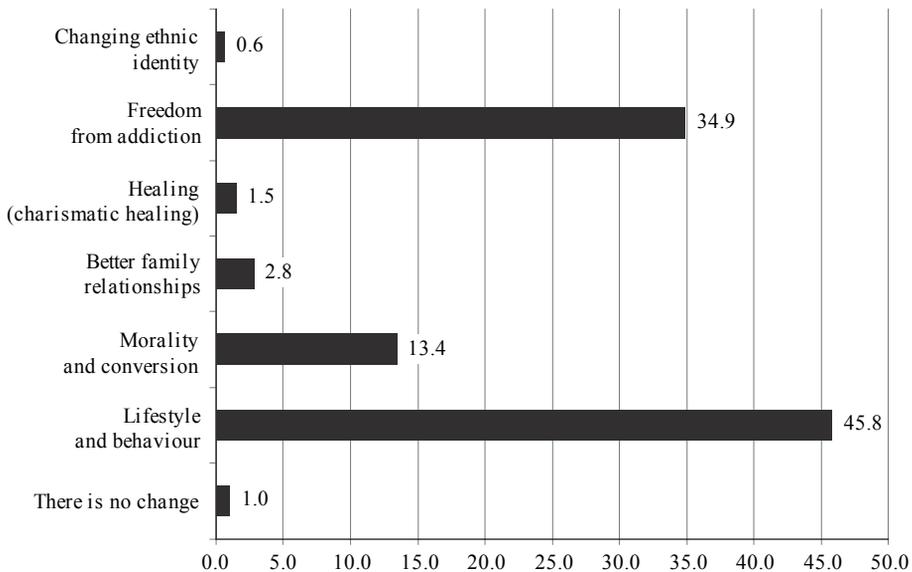


Figure 1

Changes in the lives of converts (%), N = 705

The most conspicuous is that only 1% reported no change among Romani converts. In other words, there is an overwhelming 99% of converted Romanies with serious life change. Perceived changes can be categorised into one of six groups. Among these, the two most dominant categories were Lifestyle and behaviour (45.8%), and Freedom from addiction (34.8%). These were open questions; none of the specific categories was given in the questionnaire. Rather, we asked respondents to tell us, in a generalised sense, what kind of changes they were able to see in the lives of converted Romanies. *Figure 1* shows the distribution of their responses.

In the category of Lifestyle and behaviour, we found answers such as new ways of thinking, not swearing anymore, transforming, changing their lifestyles, becoming friendlier, not quarrelling and fighting anymore, not tending to drop out, more hard-working, cleaner clothes and environment, more peaceful and so on. In the case of Morality and conversion we found answers such as crime-free life, less theft and burglary, honesty, godly life, moral life and the like. Successfully ending an addiction to drinking and/or smoking was mentioned frequently in the case of Freedom from addiction, as was successfully quitting drugs and gambling. Healing (charismatic healing), which is a general phenomenon in charismatic churches, was mentioned in only 1.5% of the answers. In the case of Better family relationships, they always reported positive changes and improvement: 'Family life has become much better.' The answers concerning Changing ethnic identity referred directly to the changes of 'Gypsy thinking'; for example, 'the progress of moving forward from the Gypsy lifestyle and behaviour'.

Discussing social identity, TAJFEL (1970) says that when constructing our identity, it is vital that people seek after a positively considered social identity, and for this purpose they compare themselves and their groups with each other and other groups. It is typical among Romanies to categorise within their groups as well: good versus bad Gypsy (PÁLOS 2010). This is an important part of building identity personally and is a factor in belonging to certain groups. During our fieldwork, we frequently encountered representations of the 'good Gypsy'. Converted members repeatedly emphasised that they were not the same as they used to be. Their lives had changed. They had achieved something. As we have already pointed out, their RRI developed and that changed their identity and self-image completely. However, their perception of Gypsies, including themselves, also changed. They mentioned all this in a humble way. They saw all this change as the result of conversion. Conversion was so important to them that we did not even have to ask about their conversion because they always mentioned it among their initial responses. Sometimes they volunteered the information even when we were asking questions not remotely related to it. It seems that religious conversion is a major motor of change.

The change that comes with church life creates a new situation in the minds of individuals, which is likewise mirrored in their families and later in the broader community as well (Romani ghetto, street, village). Along with it, the 'I'm a good example' image is formed. Thus we have the catalysis for RRI in conversion. The reason for this is that when, in their post-conversion situation, Romanies start to analyse their environment and compare their old self to the new, they see the difference. Moreover, the religious environment expects them to lead a consistent religious, moral life and to set an example, which is an important part of spreading the religious message (mission) (see also GOG 2008). The foundation of all is an unquestioned authority: the Bible, the word of God.

In the language of social representation, this phenomenon can be understood as the Romani community's anchoring of this new image in the 'good Gypsy' image.

By this, the self-image and group-image change radically, and, as a result, so does their identity. In other words, their RRI takes hold. Here we can see the big role of the Romani-majority churches targeted in this study.

5.3. Religious commitment

We have seen that conversion is the most important element of the RRI, and in fact appears to be its major catalyst. To understand the new identity manifested in the RRI, we have to discuss briefly what kind of religious commitment is associated with this conversion. We asked, ‘Looking back on the time when you joined your church community, what was the most important thing that made you decide to join the church?’ Results are shown in *Figure 2*.

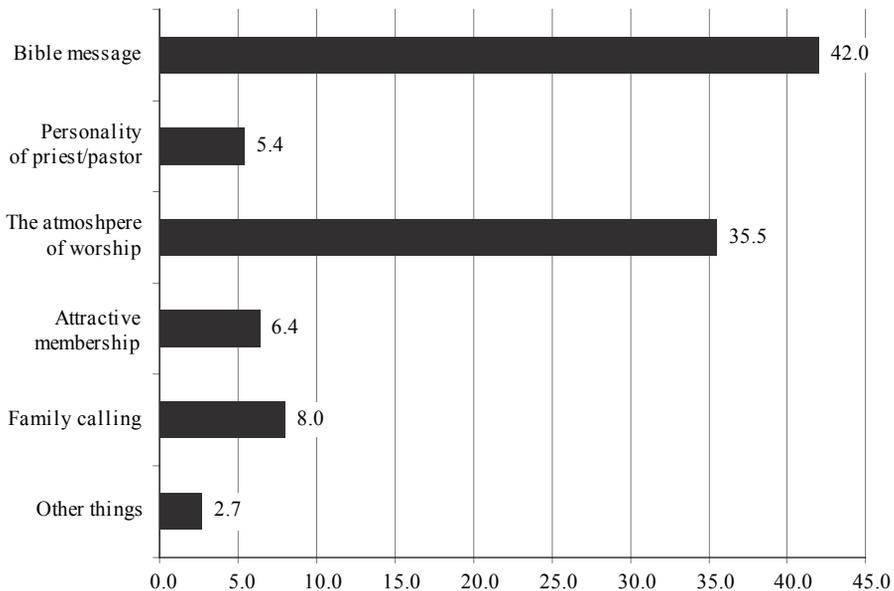


Figure 2

What attracted Romani converts to the church? (% , N = 705)

We chose this question format because it was a widespread view that even if they join a religious community, Romanies would be motivated only by some external cause (obtaining benefits or a forced integration in society – so-called mimicry

religiosity) or it could be a kind of faith mixed with superstition (rather pagan), etc. Unfortunately, this idea is still widely held about Christian Romani communities.

In the light of this mimicry religion it is particularly notable and illuminating that 42% of respondents admitted that they had joined a congregation because the Bible's message had touched them. This is almost half of those interviewed. In this way, a content of a spiritual-cognitive impact is clearly demonstrable. Not their mood or friends, nor family members made them go, but 'the message', the religious content is the primary element that 'touched them'. And this refers to the inner religious content rather than mimicry religiosity. It is clear that a genuine personal, cognitive decision underlay the conversion experience for the largest part of those converted. That is no mimicry religiosity, whose sole purpose is to hide in the great jungle of religion (that is, that under the guise of religion converts find their shelter among the difficulties of identity submerged in the majority population). When answering the question, respondents were allowed to mark only one answer. Now what we know is that almost half of the respondents considered the cognitive content of religion to be the main (or at least the initial) reason why they had joined a church. From our experience, however, we can clearly assume that for those who marked this answer first, it still may not have been the primary factor in their conversion. Our fieldwork shows that for the majority of those who had not considered the Biblical message a priority in the beginning, it still became one of the most important reasons later on.

The second most dominant reason is the mood/atmosphere experienced in church. This was the primary reason for 35.6%. Objectively, it would seem, however, that the mood/atmosphere can only be partly attributed to Romani characteristics because the specific atmosphere, music targeting the emotions, the sermon, the mood and emotional fervour, and emotional self-expression are all part of charismatic communities. Yet an undeniably significant difference among the targeted churches is that the Romanies incorporate their own music into the liturgy, which makes the services specific and more attractive to other Romanies. This unique musical atmosphere rooted in Romani culture, together with a liturgical schedule equally rooted in Romani culture and integrated with Romani social concepts, created a unique worship atmosphere. This, in turn, became the vital first reason to join the community for approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of the converted members.

The impact of the family is also significant, and so is the influence of the pastor (who is often also Romani) and members of the congregation. This proves that respondents' religiosity is significant not only in its content but also in terms of the commitment to the Romani community. It is particularly noteworthy in terms of the RRI, in which the commitment is increased not just through the liturgy but through a sense of belonging to the community. Church attendance figures, cited above, clearly reveal the importance of this factor. According to ROSTA (2011) the frequency of church attendance has been decreasing in Hungary since the 1990s. By 2008, only 9% of the population said they were weekly church goers (or even alternate or fewer weeks); monthly attendance stood at only 15%, and 42% did not go to church at all.

In the field, we found that this factor was interpreted by church goers as a factor of moral superiority, which would obviously have a significant impact on their self-image. The result can be that the RRI is creating an ever-rising religio-moral basis over the general population, quite opposite to general perception. We asked, 'How close can God come to a Romani's life?' 'Very close', the majority answered. The ratio of those believing in more distance was very low: 'He can watch only from the outside': 0.4%; 'He can have a say only in religious matters': 1.5%. Meanwhile, 18.6% think that God has the authority to interfere in non-religious matters. 71.1% say that God can even ask a converted man for the greatest sacrifice. Only 8.4% were unsure of the answer. More than two thirds of the respondents can be considered deeply religious based on their answers.

By contrast, in 2008, only slightly more than one in three Hungarian people (39%) said that they always believed in God, while only 12% considered themselves converted (GERÉCZ 2009). And the ratio of steady believers had decreased from previous surveys (from 48% in 1998 to 39% in 2008). Thus, neither the practice of religion nor the religious content are strengths of the Hungarian population, and the trend is decreasing. The inverse direction of these trends is a topic for future evaluation.

We also probed respondents' praying routine. 91.6% of them pray daily (even several times), which strengthens the religious content. 5.4% pray at least once a week, and only 2.8% pray occasionally. Based on Bible reading habits, we came to similar conclusions. Approximately two thirds (65.5%) of the respondents read the Bible daily. About a quarter (23.8%) read it at least once a week; 8.5% only occasionally, and a total of 2.1% said that they did not read it at all.

A good indicator is the habit of listening to Christian music. 77.2% of church members listen to Christian music daily. Our own experiences suggest that it is even more prevalent to listen to Christian music in charismatic churches (and the majority of Romani churches are charismatic). 14.2% marked on the answer sheet that they listened weekly, and only 6.4% said they did not listen regularly, while 2.1% said that they typically did not listen to such music at all.

Their changed lifestyle, changed way of thinking (and especially the most important fruit of their conversion, the good Gypsy image), their growing RRI guarantee a moral superiority in their own judgement. The 'I was able to make such a big change' way of thinking is extremely important in the case of identity, to which religious conversion leading to the RRI made a significant impact.

5.4. The impact of conversion on identity

The individual and radical change is positive in their value judgement, and it reshapes their self-image. It develops and consolidates the 'good Gypsy' image, thus establishing a unique RRI and creating a value system that underlies positive personal change. Since the change brought about by the RRI is not just individual but a

community-based experience as well, the Roma group image is also reshaped. Their value judgement of the present state becomes absolutely positive against the background of pre-conversion life. Many non-Romanies consider this change positive, which makes the image of the majority society appear more accepting, less judgemental, and more sophisticated toward the Roma community, which is the beginning of a feedback loop reinforcing the RRI.

The changing RRI forces a stronger contrast in the good versus bad Gypsy dichotomy. However, due to the moral demands of the new RRI ('love your neighbour as yourself') a new standard of self-identity is developing as well – the 'I have to set a good example', which strengthens the self-image and a sense of belonging to 'my own group' within the context of the larger society.

Before we start drawing the model, we must briefly introduce how others see the phenomenon. However, due to lack of space, we can only mention a few appropriate examples. Rózsahegyiné Juhász cites an experience written down by parish priest Miklós Sója:

In my early days in Hodász, naked children clothed in mucilage ventured from Lake Scabby to me on the shore. Forty years later, at the door of the chapel built on the shore of Lake Scabby, little Gypsy girls, dressed up as Sleeping Beauties, are waiting, like lovely fairies and water lilies of the lake and holding bouquets in their hands and poems in their minds, for the bishop and representatives of the UN, and they say their poems and give their flowers. Compare them with the children covered in hair-weed. Only the outside! Let alone comparing the inside, what distance we can see!
(Our trans.)⁴

Romani Pentecostalism in BLASCO's interpretation (2002) is the Romanies' attempt to recreate the meaning and experience of Romanies for the Romanies themselves, and for others as well. It can be perceived as an emerging lifestyle. In his view, there is an obvious parallel between the activist Romanies (diaspora-type activist) and the movement. He registered a similar change among Spanish gitanos: more common outer-relative relationship; dramatic forgiveness of irreconcilable relationships (and later they are even proud that they were able to solve the conflict by a conversation), questioning traditional Romani community values. The new order can override the material, kinship hierarchy; which is a positive change in the converts' lives.

According to PÉTERFI and SZŰCS (2004), one reason for responsiveness to faith can be found in the process of searching for identity. Because of the rootlessness of the ethnic community, Christianity can be a new canon in the everyday life of Romanies, and it lays new cornerstones for self-interpretation. They write, 'In the

⁴ Original text: 'Kezdő hodászi napjaimban a Rühes-tóból meztelen, illetve nyálkaruhájú gyerekek merészkedtek ki hozzám a partra. Negyven évvel később pedig a Rühes-tó partján épült kápolna ajtajában Csipkerózsikának öltözve, mint a tó csodás tündérei, tavorózsái, cigánylánykák, kezükben csokrot, eszükben köszöntő verset szorongatva a püspökre, ENSZ képviselőkre várnak, verselnek, csokrokat adnak át. Hasonlítsuk össze a hínáros gyerekekkel! Csak a külsejüket! Hát még a bensőjüket összehasonlítva, mekkora távolságokat fedezhetünk fel!' (E. Rózsahegyiné Juhász, 'Sója Miklós öröksége Hodászon', manuscript, 2003, 23, retrieved 29 April 2015 from the <http://docplayer.hu/3380672-Rozsahegyine-juhasz-eva-soja-miklos-oroksege-hodaszon.html>).

free Christian churches the requirement of moral commitment is extremely significant'. Expectations fall into one of three categories: '1. devoting more and more time to matters of faith, prayer, reading the Bible, and building and serving the community; 2. secular pastimes must not become addictive (like watching TV); 3. what is harmful to health must be refrained from' (158, our trans.).⁵ A 55-year-old man says, 'The past two years of my life have been better than all the rest before. May the Lord keep me for the remainder of my life that I may follow Him because then I will have a new life. I gave 53 years to the devil' (159, our trans.).⁶ Another Romani person says, 'At that time, there was a lot of drinking here, and theft too. It is amazing what got stolen: chickens, vegetables, fruits were all picked. There was no evidence against those who had done it, but people were angry. After Jenő Kopasz's mission, it all changed' (164, our trans.).⁷

SOLT (2009) reports the following: their lives significantly changed after the appearance of the Church of Faith. Drinking and theft declined, people behaved differently, they liked to live there. In another village, where people went to the free Christian Church, the same was reported. In every one of the 14 villages studied, the most important negative features included violence, marital discord, cheating, theft, fighting, hopelessness, dirtiness, disorder, alcohol abuse, smoking, usury and increased segregation. According to the report, these all significantly declined everywhere where religion appeared.

'The main point in revitalisation theory is the need for people "to find a dynamic equilibrium in which they may achieve mutual harmony and dreams of a new tomorrow"' (Burnett, cited by ATANASOV 2008, 23). It

can give them a greater satisfaction in life and better coping skills. They may have different beliefs and cultural nuances, but their basic structure is the same. . . . If successful, the movement reduces the stress, provides hope and a more meaningful existence, and becomes part of the social order. (2008, 23–24)

What is the secret?

The new faith should be somewhat adaptable and compatible to the old family structures, emotions, worldviews, mentality, and religion. If the new religion is extremely or radically opposed to the convert's original one, then he/she is not likely to become a stable follower. (RAMBO 1993, 60–63)

⁵ Original text: 'A szabadkeresztény gyülekezetekben rendkívül jelentős az erkölcsi elkötelezettség kívánalma. . . . 1. minél több időt szentelni a hit dolgainak, az imádkozásnak, a Biblia olvasásának, a gyülekezet építésének és a szolgálatoknak; 2. a világias időtöltések egyike sem válhat szenvedéllyé (tévénézés); 3. tartózkodni kell mindattól, ami káros az egészségre.'

⁶ Original text: 'Ez a két év az életemből jobb volt, mint az összes előző. A hátralévő életemben tartson meg az Úr, hogy tovább is őt követhessem, mert akkor lesz új életem. 53 évet az ördögnek adtam.'

⁷ Original text: 'Abban az időben nagy volt itt az italozás, meg a lopás, fantasztikus, milyen lopások voltak: a tyúkot, a zöldséget, a gyümölcsöt felszedték. Rájuk bizonyítani nem lehetett, de dühösek voltak az emberek. Kopasz Jenő térítése után mindez megváltozott.'

This is one of the explanations why the liturgy containing Romani elements is so important to the success and stability of the movement, and why Romanies have not been able to join other denominations in a similar fashion and to a similar degree as in the churches surveyed. LUKÁCS, studying the role of religiosity in the integration of Romanies (2008), found similar changes. She studied the Baptists in Tuzsér (in NE Hungary) and concluded that among the Romungroes, who did not have strong traditions and language, the Baptist religion served as a framework for creating a new identity.

After all, the new religious identity can be so strong that members sometimes would rather choose a financially detrimental situation with losses attending, because of religiosity, and even to be the objects of ridicule, than to abandon their religious principles. After reviewing our results, we will now show how the model of new Roma double identity can be developed.

6. Discussion

6.1. Models of double identity

How can we model the new double identity and describe its features? As we have mentioned earlier, ethnic or double identity comes from three sources and, necessarily, from their interaction:

- the evaluation of the majority society (out-group);
- the evaluation of the subject's own group (in-group, now the ethnic group);
- the evaluation of self.

What follows is a reconstruction of their interaction, schematised in *Figure 3*.

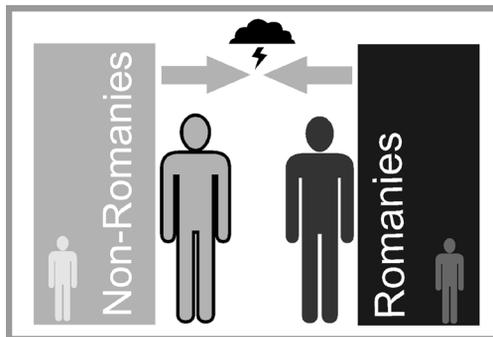


Figure 3

A simple model of Basic Roma Identity without moderating influences

In *Figure 3*, we can see a simple portrayal of dual ethnic identity. We can see the three sources of identity, and the arrow indicates a conflict between the two groups of identities, which is (almost always) an integral part of the ethnic identity of Romanies. The two dominant groups (in-group and out-group) contain competing elements (BINDORFFER 2001). The typical relation between them is repulsion. Between the two, in the centre of the conflict, stands the individual (directly experiencing the dichotomy of the situation in his or her two opposite mirror images). Typically, the closer the individual gets to their group, the farther they move from the majority group, and vice versa. There is no overlap between the two groups; nothing attracts the groups towards each other. Separation is the most typical position; hence, a situation of constant tension and even conflict persists.

What happens if, for example, a new dual identity is created by education or, in other words, an Intellectual Roma Identity is established (*Figure 4*)?

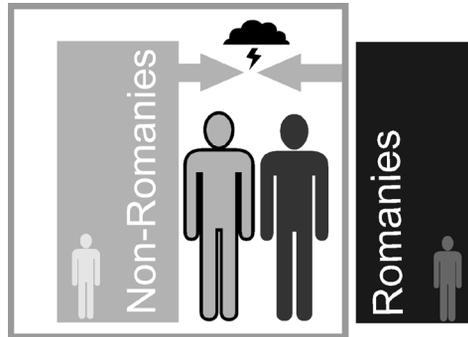


Figure 4

The effect of education on identity (Intellectual Roma Identity)

A new frame of reference is established, in which, however, the group of origin does not fit in most of the time. Most often, the ethnicity is excluded. The strings connecting the individual to their own group, to the past, present and future, snap in the process of their advancement towards an intellectual life – instead of a stable reality, they find themselves in a vacuum. Frequently, the old community marginalises them, and the new one, toward which they are gravitating, does not accept them (BOKRÉTÁS & BIGAZZI 2013). According to JOVCHELOVITCH (1996), this negative social representation determines the identity of Romanies so much that he no longer considers it a dual identity but rather a threatened identity. According to FLEISCHMIDT,

In the subjective reading of the main characters of the stories, the demand for a rejection of identification (both subjectively as identifying oneself and objectively as being identified) becomes increasingly stronger. Mobility goes hand in hand with acculturation and therefore with an accompanying exclusion from the Romani community and relationships, with an evasion of inherited or received identity categories, which may be realised in different ways: from self-stigmatisation through concealment to a denial of Gypsy origins. The cause of identity conflicts in most such cases is the tension between the desire of assimilation and a rejection, encoded in institutional discrimination and/or everyday racism, by the majority. (2008, 97, our trans.)⁸

Lewin (cited by FLEISCHMIDT 2008) considers it vital that those who come from lower status groups, while trying to identify themselves with groups of higher status, devalue their origin and lower status groups. The border crossing is rarely trouble free, he warns. There is a price to pay to fit in the majority society. And that is the root of conflict. SZABÓNÉ KÁRMÁN's findings on the overall mental status of Romani intellectuals (2012) can be better understood in this light: 8% did not have any positive goals; 20% of men and 33% of women were affected by neurosis; 57% of men and 72% of women were in mild depression; 2% of women had moderate depression.

What changed when the Romanies converted? This can be seen in *Figure 5*.

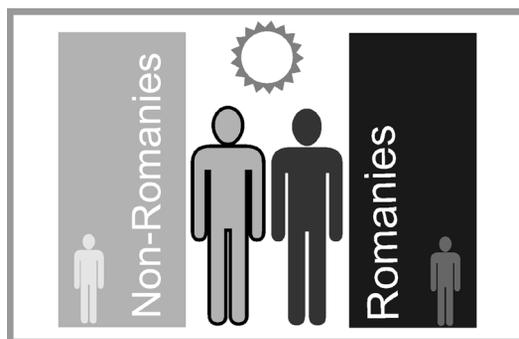


Figure 5

A model of the new identity type, the Religio-Roma Identity

⁸ Original text: 'A történetek főszereplőinek szubjektív olvasatában egyre erőteljesebb az azonosulás és az azonosítás elutasítására való igény. A mobilitás akkulturációval és a cigány közösségből, kapcsolatból való kiilleszkedéssel, az örökölt vagy kívülről kapott identitáskategóriák „kijátszásával” jár együtt, ami különféle formákban valósul meg: az önstigmatizációtól a rejtőzködésen keresztül a cigány származás tagadásáig. Az identitáskonfliktusok oka legtöbb esetben az asszimilációs szándék és az intézményi diszkriminációba és/vagy mindennapi rasszizmusba kódolt többségi elutasítás.'

The most important characteristic of the new identity, the RRI, is a new frame of reference. This, our study finds, is religiosity. Its central element or, rather, catalyst is conversion, but it also includes religion, experience of God and community, and a novel, re-shaped experience of Romaniness. Through all these, a new frame of reference is established, which includes all areas of the convert's life and thinking. The new reference system is so dominant that it overrides the former points of reference and framework. Everything that happens, everything that comes from any source of identity formation is made sense of within this framework and interpreted through this filter. Positive feedback is self-contained in the new frame (there are no perceived conflicts). The new frame therefore mitigates ongoing conflicts and contradictions. Through the subjects' new group (their church community, new religion in which they are generally together with others, including non-Romani members) a new common ground is created with the majority society, which reduces tension between the two identity-creating groups (this is the common ground of the in-group and out-group). The tension between the majority group and the minority and/or ethnic group, in a practical sense, is not completely eliminated. However, what is important is that the tension is often marginalised because another element with the capacity to dominate the social transactions and tensions has become more important (and that is religion). The new frame, RRI, now operates as a filter; it creates a new benchmark system and becomes a new behaviour, thinking and ethical frame.

6.2. Key features of the new identity (RRI)

Its centre part or catalyst, as we have previously called it, is (religious) conversion which creates a new frame of reference that affects the individual's entire life, way of thinking, decisions and moral choices. In almost every case, it strengthens converts' attachment to the new group (the non-Romanies). It does not normally make for conflict between the different sides of dual or multiple identities, but, on the contrary, tends to neutralise the conflicts existing in the two previous models, creating a situation where positive feedback loops can be created within the frame. Similarly, the RRI tends to mitigate ongoing conflicts with the subject's own group, so prominent in the IRI model. In fact, it often creates a unique new commitment to the 'in-group', the Romanies. Otherwise the rapid development of the movement within the Roma community at large could hardly be explained.

It creates a 'good Gypsy' image in the individual, reinforcing self-acceptance and acceptance of the subject's own group. It also reinforces the 'I am a good example' image. It reinforces bonding to and within the majority society. About 90% of Romani church members belong to congregations which are organised and accepted in non-Romani communities, thereby resulting in many non-Romani relations and, more importantly, in explicitly accepting and tolerant relationships, creating positive feedback loops. The majority society establishes a joint own-group with another prominent group, which strengthens the self-representation of Romanies and their

bonding to the majority society. The significant change in lifestyle and morals has a positive impact on families and non-religious Romani communities as well.

According to JOVCHELOVITCH (1996), social representations are interwoven with the processes of identity formation. Creating social representation includes an identity statement and a reality interpretation. Both identities and representations, says LÁSZLÓ (2005), arise from the overlapping space of self and non-self. The change elicits a totally new identity statement and interpretation of reality – and, along with them, a new representation. The religious experience in question divides converts' lives into two strongly distinct parts: the periods, phases before and periods, phases after their religious conversion. (These two parts stand in irreconcilable contradiction.) The supreme God is the key actor of the new experience, who accepts them as they are, without any judgement, and who at the same time is above all of those who might discriminate against them. The God experience (among the Romanies we identify this as the catalyst, religious conversion) serves as a kind of bridge that reduces tension between the Hungarian-Romani identities. Their identities were, in the pre-RRI period, anchored in the Hungarian and the Romani sides (and in the conflict which occurred between them). Now, in the post conversion period, it is anchored in the supernatural, in a God who loves every one of them. As they confess, before conversion they lived without any moral guidance, sinfully. Now, however, after conversion, they stand on a solid moral base on which they judge themselves and others. It is important to note that this moral base is absolute; it does not change with time, space, ethnicity. It is firm and strong – so strong, in fact, that it overrides the innate conflict of two opposite identities in the BRI. Technically, converts test and evaluate everything through this RRI filter after conversion, and that is the final word. It legitimises their decisions and life; it even overwrites some previous customs, traditions of the Romanies and negative feedback from the majority group (e.g. prejudicial job situations, unjust persecutions, etc.)

The two most important elements in the construction of new identity are not the things of the world (e.g. the non-Romanies) and the self, but the supernatural and the self. It is a new kind of partnership. Hence, the identity is constructed not from other pre-existing sources in which there was inherent conflict, but from a new evaluation system, a frame, the RRI with a dominating new catalyst, conversion. And this evaluation system promises that the subject will never be deceived (which was previously quite possible due to the tension and imbalance caused by the conflict of the previous models, in persons or churches or institutions, etc.). In this way, the supernatural is a determining principle which feeds the catalyst, religious conversion, which results in the RRI.

In this religious frame, Romanies accomplish everything that was previously denied to them by religions, denominations, communities, institutions (even their previous denominational and/or ethnic-centred churches), pastors, religious experience, acceptance and the like. The religious togetherness creates a strong bond, a sense of community, which then gives them a kind of power and influence among

the local Romanies. Egalitarian communities are established where the importance of kinship and previous hierarchical systems are substantially mitigated.

7. Conclusion

The Roma revival movement (as Romanies call it) is unprecedented in history. It is unparalleled not just in terms of its rapid pace of growth or its strong ethnic characteristics but also in terms of its impact that rewrites the lives of the Romani from one day to another. Nor did we find another example of the conflict-filled Romani (dual) identity (BRI) changing so radically, especially as the observed change was so consistently positive. The speed and power of change in the minds of the subjects of this study are also exceptional. Studies, carried out in other fields, did not detect such changes.

The new identity construction, the RRI, creates an absolutely dominant new frame of reference and life management, after which a ‘new life’ begins. It is like a person who draws a line and says that from now on everything is going to be different. This does not mean that what we have tried to describe briefly always happens, nor does it mean that results are always positive. However, the results, objectively quantified, are indeed positive most of the time; even if the change observed is not always lasting. However, by now we can clearly state in a general sense that the movement has made a significant, lasting change, even passing this new form of identity, the RRI, on to several generations.

In this study we have presented a new form of identity, the RRI, which has an unprecedented impact among Romani converts. It comes with a radical change in the majority of people’s lives who are affected by this identity. The change is so overwhelming that the previously known Romani identity hardly compares. Similarly, earlier those strategies by which Romanies tried to reduce tension arising from their dual origins pale into insignificance against the effectiveness of the new RRI.

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