

RROMANIFE IN TRANSITION: PROTESTANTIZATION OF ROMA

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Abstract. *The expansion of Protestant teaching among Roma in southeastern Serbia, more intensely in the last decade and a half, has initiated the process of reshaping their collective identity. Traditional components of Romanipe are being reconceptualized and adapted to modernity. The former belonging to a unified and homogenous ethnic group is today raised to the level of religious identification, and the cultural identity is equated with the proclaimed values of religious communities, whose new members they are. The primary division into “Us, Roma” and “Them, Gadže” has evolved into “Us, believers” and “Them, Non-believers”. When choosing a partner, the “purity of blood” is no longer crucial, now it is the “purity in Christ”: the preferred choice of partner exclusively founded on the endogamic basis is substituted by a choice with a confessional basis, leading to a richer ethnic palette. The paper analyzes the replies of baptized believers of Romani nationality in several Protestant religious communities on the territory of southeastern Serbia (Christian Baptist Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Adventist Church and Evangelical Pentecostal Church) concerning the differences between the world of Protestant Roma and non-Roma and the world of non-believing Roma and non-Roma, as well as the possibility of entering friendly relationships and marriages with Roma and non-Roma who do not belong to a selected Protestant church.*

Key words: *Romanipe, protestantization of Roma, southeastern Serbia, “us, Roma” and “them, Gadže”, “us, believers” and “them, non-believers”.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Roma are a multireligious and multiconfessional people of the Balkans who have lost, somewhere along their historical journey, their original homeland religion while embracing that of the majority environment (Todorović 2011d). In Serbia they are practitioners of Christianity and Sunni Islam but their traditional Christian (Orthodox/Roman Catholic)/Islam

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religious and confessional being has been seriously modified by the upsurge of Protestantism, with the lasting implications for their identity (Đorđević 2009).

The Roma conversion into the Protestant religious corpus is transforming all the aspects of their everyday life by giving them dignity and respect, care and concern, hope and perspective as well as esteem in the majority environment. Visible effects have been achieved regarding the quality of life in the Romani families such as lessening of petty crime, alcoholism, drug-addiction and prostitution along with an improvement of their hygienic, working and educational habits.

Following the recommendations of the distinguished Serbian sociologist of religion and romologist, Dragoljub B. Đorđević (2007, 145) that

„there is no more urgent task for sociologists of religion than to study Protestantization of Roma... since the phenomenon is so complex, far-reaching and decisive that it subsumes in itself all that should be dealt with by the contemporary sociology of religion,“

we have undertaken the research of the process of the Roma Protestantization,¹ that is, the latest process of mass involvement of Serbian Roma into small religious communities of Protestant orientation, especially on the territory of Southeast Serbia.

The first part of the paper presents a theoretical framework of our research based on the rational choice theory in the sociology of religion and the rise of evangelical (Pentecostal) Christianity in the world at large; likewise, it reports on the scope of the Protestant influence among Romani people in Southeast Serbia. In addition, we will go into an inclusive presentation of *Rromanipe* as a traditional system of rules and values for the Roman identity pattern. In the second part of the paper we will show how the religious factor affects re-conceptualization of some of the constituents of the *Rromanipe* by analyzing the answers given by the Protestant Roma concerning the distinction between the world of Roma and non-Roma of Protestant faith and that of the non-believing Roma and non-Roma as well as the possibilities of making friendly and marital relations with Roma and non-Roma that do not belong to the chosen Protestant church.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

2.1. Rational choice theory (RCT) in the sociology of religion

Within the domain of the sociology of religion there is a question posed about the possibility of drawing any analogy between religion and market economy (Stark and Bainbridge 1987), that is, of narrowing down the relationship between the divine and the human only to a one-sided economic logic of “maximizing the reward” (Stark and Finke 2000).

The rational choice theory (RCT) identifies the religious with the economic environments: religions and religious groups are the companies involved in the competition for their clients who, after all, still make rational choices among the available products (Stark and Iannaccone 1997). In the religious sphere, individuals aspire to effecting concrete benefits, that is, ensuring

¹ Dragoljub B. Đorđević (2004c) is the author of the phrase *Roma Protestantization* as well as of the definition of the process itself.

the desired rewards which are otherwise inaccessible by natural means – such as, for instance, life after death – and this is the reason for their turning to *compensators*. Pluralist societies offer a far greater number of compensators, that is, they increase their offer of religious commodities (Iannaccone 1992).

The application of the economic models to the religious beliefs is initiated by an analysis of the rise of the churches on the American religious “free market”; that is why it was unduly thought that costs and rewards could explain increased levels of religious mobilization (Finke and Stark 1992). However, religions are not primarily based on the profit-wise activities; instead, they are based on the belief-based activities and beliefs are not to be chosen at will (Bruce 1993). The choice of belief is not equivalent to the ways of making choices in shopping; the belief itself represents an attachment to truth rather than an object to be simply bought.

The essence of the critiques addressed to the RCT can be summed up as referring to the lack of empirical verification based on the rational choice premises.

2.2. Pentecostalism – spreading of “fiery tongues”

A great deal of referential literature is collected dealing with the activities of the most numerous component of the evangelistic thriving in the world with hundreds of million followers from virtually every single world religion (Anderson 2004; Korten 2001; Cox 1995; Martin 1990, 2002; Nazo 2006; Hunt 2003). The demographic center that the Pentecostals are gravitating towards, is displaced from the countries in the West towards Africa, Latin America and some parts of Asia. More and more South Korean and Latin American Christian missionaries are in Africa; or African Christians are re-evangelizing West Europe and North America (Beyer 2007). With the fall of the Berlin Wall, Christianity of the “rebirth” has started to win over its followers among the Roma in the Balkan region (Đorđević 2004b, 2004c; Marčuk 2008; Ries 2004, 2005; Fosztó 2005). In his reference to the deeply-rooted stereotyped about Pentecostalism, Donald E. Miller (2007) singles out a wrong understanding of the researchers that the Pentecostals are so heaven-oriented that they do nothing good for the earth. The concept of the “integral” Gospel of the *progressive* Pentecostalism less and less perceives the contradiction between a strong emphasis on the dogma and the care about social needs of the people in the community. Christians are, indeed, called upon to be “good neighbors” and help other people.

More recent research (Miller and Yamamori 2007) anticipates that the greatest contribution of the Pentecostals in the future would comprise the making of voluntary, *alternative* cooperation-oriented institutions instead of confrontations with the civil authorities. The emphasis would be on the preparation and upbringing of a new generation of business and educated leaders coupled with the expectations that these individuals would later infiltrate into official institutions and thus exert an influence on a greater moral engagement of the society.

For Manuela Cantón Delgado (2010), Romani Pentecostal evangelism in the South of Spain is an example of ethnic reaffirmation by means of their cultural revival and the initiation of dialogue and practice. The converted Roma achieve a *higher level of integration* into the dominant culture; they are regular in participation in external markets regulated by local administration without giving up their developed kin networks and in-group solidarity. Local leaders of congregations and their most eminent members are recognized by non-evangelized Roma and non-Roma as local *mediators* between the Roma world and the authorities.

3. PROTESTANTISM IN SOUTHEAST SERBIA AND AMONG THE ROMA

3.1. Baptists in the South of Serbia

The missionary spiritual work of the Baptists in this region started in Leskovac in 1964; today it is a community with its center in Deligradska Street, by the Post Office and the Firemen's Home. Around 1970 it was joined by some believers from Niš who were gathered together in a community of the faithful, in 1980, by Čedo Ralević who had given up his duty, for the reason of his poor health, of the full-time mission worker in Macedonia. As an acknowledged religious community, the Christian Baptist Church in Niš has existed since 1985; now Baptism is professed by around 150 mainly older citizens of Niš though hardly thirty of them regularly attend the sermons. They have a charity foundation, "Love thy neighbor". In Bela Palanka there is the only Roma Baptist community; it has a dozen mostly adult members, though not all of them are baptized; it headed by the Roma Bojan Kurtić.

3.2. Adventists in Southern Serbia

In March 1923 the first church in Niš came into being (Đurišić 2009) while the regular religious service in the home for prayers at the present address, in Sedmog jula Street, No. 21, has existed since 1948. It is due to the activities of the believers of Niš Church that the sisterhood of the churches of Southern Region admitted two new member churches: the church from Prokuplje in 1994 and that from Pirot in 2004. Some thirty Roma, together with the Serbian majority, attend the religious service. The relief organization "Adra" is a recognizable marker of the Adventists in Niš, too.

In Leskovac, likewise, there is the Christian Adventist Church in the vicinity of the former Medical Center. For many years it had gathered together believers of Serbian and Roma nationality before the Roma formed their own community in Vinarac, near Leskovac, in the year of 2000 which is today attended by some twenty Roma men and women (actively no more than five or six). Those who have kept coming to the city are mainly rural Roma.

A similar situation is in Vranje. It is there that near the bus station, in late seventies of the 20th century, there was a building in which the believing people had got together before moving, in 1992, to a new building near the present Post Office. In the Roma *mahala* (city quarter) in Vranje, in 2004, the Roma Adventist Church was built in order to be more accessible to the believers who found it difficult to travel to the city center. It can receive some forty people; it is more or less customary attended by fifteen baptized Roma. Many decades of existence also make up the history of Adventists in Donje Brijanje where, in the courtyard of Života Mirković, a church building was built to be visited by some fifteen faithful Roma from this and neighboring villages. In Dragovac, a settlement close to Bojnik, the local Adventists also have a very beautiful building in which the believing Serbs and Roma from a close or far away region also get together.

3.3. Jehovah's witnesses in the South of Serbia

The believers of the *Christian Religious Community of the Jehovah's Witnesses* in Niš are gathered together in two assemblies – one, Niš-South and the other Niš-North, organizationally related to the area they belong to and to Vranje, Leskovac, Prokuplje, Aleksinac, Kruševac, Zaječar, Bor, Negotin and Kladovo. The baptized members and friends have been enabled to, since 2005, meet twice a week in the Hall of Kingship in Skopljanska Street, No. 3. The

preaching service in Niš communities is done by brothers and sisters of Serbian and Romani nationalities (of some two hundred believers there are no more than some forty Roma). The assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses also exist in Leskovac (25 baptized members) and Vranje (30 baptized members) while the groups for prayers are also in Alekinac, Prokuplje, Bojnik and Pirot.

3.4. Pentecostals in the South of Serbia

In the year of 1964, in Leskovac, a building was bought in Maksima Gorkog Street, No. 22.; to this was added, in the same street, in early eighties, an old pre-war villa, a family home of the town merchant Dimitrijević, No. 21. At about the same time a building in Lebane was also bought. The old building at No. 22 had served for Roma religious service until a tent was set up in the settlement Slavko Zlatanović, as donation from the French Sinta (Roma), which is today known far and wide in Europe as "the tent church". In 2005, there was a division into the Protestant Evangelical Church "Roma Community" and the Spiritual Center of the Evangelical Church "Light"; both these communities comprise some thirty believers each and at least as many sympathizers.

Besides Leskovac and Lebane, the communities of some twenty or thirty believers came into being in the neighboring villages. Today there is a group of the believing Roma, Pentecostals, in Bošnjac, Žitni potok, Razgojna and Pečenjevac as well as in Dubovo near Bojnik. Religious groups in the rented premises celebrate God in Vranje and Vranjska Banja. The prayer groups and mission stations also exist in Prokuplje, Surdulica, Vladičin Han, Bela Palanka, Pirot and Bujanovac.

Evangelical Church "Joyful News" has been Niš since 1996 and it has had in its possession a building, in Episkopska Street, No. 82, since 2005. As a separate community, in the *mahala* on the Jewish Cemetery, in Mramorska Street No. 11, there is the Protestant Evangelical Church Spiritual Center "Roma Community" with some thirty baptized believers and some hundred sympathizers.

4. CONCEPT OF RROMANIPE

In order to prevent any disturbance of the centuries-old principles of the inner social order, as well as the Roma attitudes towards the non-Roma world, the ideal and standard of the Roma life is embodied in an unblemished harmony with the tradition. There are similarities based on the character of the Romani culture with undoubtedly universal meaning for all the members of the Romani people. What does this store of common meanings gathered under the heading *romaness* or *Rromanipe*, comprise?

Referring to the definitions given by the American anthropologist and romologist Matt Salo, derived from his studies of American Roma, Mirga and Mruz (1997, 172–175) list seven criteria that constitute the concept of *romaness*. These are:

1. belonging to the group by birth, *full-fledged family* – by birth one enters a network of kinship and mutual obligations that give rise to privileges and group rights,
2. *group solidarity* refers to all the group members to the non-Roma, so that there is a clear distinction between "Us, Roma" and "Gadže, non-Roma",

3. use of *Romani language* – knowledge and use of the Romani language provide for the basic communication function within the group as well as a clear distance to non-Roma,
4. *phuripen* (old age) – old age denotes the possession of authority in accordance with the function one does leading to a special respect for elder members of Roma family,
5. model of economic activity which is not controlled by “Gadže“,
6. great mobility in space, and,
7. observance of the ceremonial purity rules (*magerdo* or *mahrino*).

For Rajko Đurić (2005) *Rromanipe* is the common denominator of all that is regarded or believed to be essentially characteristic for Roma as groups of people who, by their ethnic and historical origin as well as their social, cultural, linguistic and other idiosyncrasies, in addition to their historical fate and consciousness, represent a special social community. In a wider perspective, there are three kinds of characteristics that make up the common denominator of the *rromanipe*:

1. traits stemming from the compulsory adjustment to the basic Romani institutions and affecting a great number of members of the Roma community,
2. traits of the common cultural legacy, and,
3. uniform traits as a result of the common living and habits.

Reminding us that the term is agreed upon at the session of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 2003, Balić (Đorđević and Balić 2004, 52–54) stresses the following *elements of romaness*:

1. *language* – means of communication within the group and means for determining the position of an individual in the community,
2. *mutual communication* – dualism in speech, way of saying what one desires to say even when no direct communication is possible,
3. *nomadism, origin, tribe, “endaj” or “vica”* – extended Roma family (in addressing each other, they do not ask how they are but how their families are, “*Sar si ti familija?*”),
4. *music, dances, games, customs and a system of values* – respect as a value and way of behavior (self-respect, mutual respect, respect for the old, respect between sexes and generations, respect for Roma and respect for non-Roma),
5. *traditional professions* (an important challenge for the young Roma is the decision concerning what Roma traditions should be preserved and passed on to the future generations apart from others that should be left behind),
6. *traditional costume, marriage, role of woman and man in Roma family* (women play an important role in the traditional Roma family; their role is complementary to that of Roma men),
7. *children and inter-relations between generations within “vice”* – treatment of children and older Roma (not a single case of an older Roma being placed in the center for disabled persons or of a Roma woman leaving her baby in the hospital after the delivery),
8. *traditional medicine, solidarity* – solidarity as a survival strategy is the basic principle in the Roma family and community,
9. *sense of justice (“Romano criss”)* – Roma court,

10. *relation to God and religions* – Roma are members of almost all religions but what has been, for centuries and on all the continents, a “common red line” is *Rromanipe* as religion of Roma, as the Bible of Roma people, since it regulates life, behavior and relationships within and outside the Roma community.

Concerning the far-reaching influence on the *Rromanipe(n)*, at present, however, of special impact is Protestantization of Roma, a turbulent process that engaged them in Southeast Serbia, Macedonia and Bulgaria (Todorović 2011a, 2011b). Under the influence of the religious factor, some of its elementary constituents are being re-conceived of and adjusted (Đorđević 2004a); as for their importance, what must be singled out is *re-defining of the traditional division of the world into “Roma” and “Gadže (non-Roma)”* (Slavkova 2007), that is, the rejection of affiliation to one united and homogenous ethnic group as well as raising of identification to the level of the religious membership.

5. SAMPLE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research² was done on a sample of 60 baptized believers of Roma nationality (five Baptists, ten Jehovah’s Witnesses, fifteen Adventists and thirty Pentecostals – in proportion with their number on the site) as well as 14 Roma and non-Roma religious leaders.

The data are collected by the method of in-depth interview on the standard procedure basis with the *Roma believers and non-Roma and Roma leaders* of the Protestant religious communities in five counties of Southeast Serbia, of overall area of 14.010 km² with about 1,1 million citizens on average in the second half of the twentieth century. The interviews are realized between December, 2008, and March, 2009.

6. FROM “US, ROMA” AND “THEM, GAĐŽE” TO “US, BELIEVERS” AND “THEM, NON-BELIEVERS”

For the members of other nations the Roma have used, from times immemorial, a common name, *Gadže*, thus drawing a clear demarcation line between the Roma and the non-Roma worlds. This strict opposition against the non-Roma world is now letting up before a turbulent process of Protestantization in Southeast Serbia; it is embodied in the responses of the Roma believers to the issue of the differentiation between the world of Roma and non-Roma of Protestant religion and that of the unbelieving Roma and non-Roma as well as the possibility of creating friendly and marital relations with Roma and non-Roma who do not belong to the chosen Protestant church.

² The presented results are part of an extensive socio-empirical research project carried out on a sample of baptized believers of Roma nationality in a few Protestant religious communities on the territory of Southeast Serbia (Christian Baptist Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Adventist Church and Evangelical Pentecostal Church), Roma and non-Roma leaders of the given religious communities as well as religious leaders of the majority religions (Serbian Orthodox Church and Islam Community) in the ph. dissertation on “Protestantization of Roma of Southeast Serbia” defended by the author in October, 2011, at the Department for Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy of Belgrade University (more detailed in Todorović 2011c).

6.1. Differentiating 'one's own' from 'their' world

Firstly, we are interested in whether the believing Roma make a distinction between their own world (of Roma and non-Roma Protestants) from that of others (non-believing Roma and non-Roma).

“It is not that I myself am making a distinction but our very life itself, in the principles of the Holy Scripture, makes a difference, do you understand? You see, now, if I, for example, visit someone, he will make me a cup of coffee, or offer me a beer, or offer me a brandy, or a cigarette. I cannot accept his ways; I stick to my own ones. Or, when he comes to see me, I do not give him what he is used to. Now it looks it is normal, with all the people here, when someone comes to your home, you should socialize with him, make coffee, light up a cigarette and get involved in their gossips, like, some people say this or say that. That’s what is different between us.”

M. Č., 48, Adventist, Vranje

“We should be different. I can mix up with them and all this, but only to the point of my safety. When they start with some foolish talk, or get drunk, or start fighting, I go away before anything like that takes place. Imagine, a man who is a believer, who is respectable, who serves God, who teaches at church, imagine such a man sitting before the store with his friends who are not believers, drinks beer with them. What is not right, is not right. I can stand with you, with anyone, anywhere; I can talk to them, give advice to them, they can ask for my help. But, to get drunk with them or things like that... Yes, we are different.”

D. D., 32, Pentecostal, Vranje

Our interlocutors respond that they are aware of their being imperfect and sinful beings of our times but that they are trying, with all their might, to make the principle of faith penetrate as much as possible their everyday habits. *With new spectacles they measure* former habitual and widely-accepted verbal and non-verbal social relations: use of swear words and curses, gossips and intriguing, serving coffees and cigarettes, getting drunk, behaving lasciviously, gambling and playing cards, lying and deceiving, stealing and fighting, committing adultery, disrespecting family members, neglecting children, deprecating neighborhood, and the like. “Let’s live by what we are learning” and “we know Christ, they do not know Christ” are new slogans of mutual communication and common posture before unbelieving Roma and non-Roma.

The next question referred to the feeling of *possessing concrete advantages* regarding other people who do not belong to the chosen Protestant church.

“Well, man who knows has an advantage over one who does not know. Only because he knows. Anyway, everyone can have the same advantage, if he accepts and knows what expects him, what is it that he should know. For, regardless of whether we accept it, admit it or not, this will surely happen. We feel sorry for those who do not know; this is another reason why we would like to make them familiar with it.”

P. D., 58, Jehovah’s Witness, Žitkovac (Niš)

“Well, as believers, yes. Well, look at it this way. First of all, I feel sorry there are so few believers here, the baptized ones. Most of them lead their own lives, do whatever they want to do and what they can do. I consider myself as having an advantage over

them, that I am better than them. When I say better, I do not think something like having more money, or in the material sense and all this. I think about the state, that someone has opened my eyes for me, that He has given me light, that I know of God's truth, that I know all that God has created, I know how I should respect God's law, how I should behave. Thanks God that all that has changed me. That is my advantage over them, they do not know any of this."

P. K., 40, Adventist, Vinarce (Leskovac)

The Protestant Roma clearly perceive their own affiliation to the chosen Church, that is, their *difference* that the choice they have made brings along with it. There are "our brothers" and "people from the world"; this is more than obvious in the manners of speaking, behaving, posture, respect for the state and God's laws.

What the Roma, in their new faith, insist upon in their answers is *openness for getting to know the truth* for all those that have been denied this possibility so far for various reasons. "The world of non-believers" *is not rejected as less valuable*, the Original Sin is a burden on all the living human beings; still, there is a sorrow for their not being able to get to know about the doings of the Holy Spirit. *The mission activity* should confirm God's blessing and offer them salvation with no imposition or compulsion. The most agile in all this, thus creating an entirely peculiar approach to the issues of faith, are Jehovah's Witnesses.

6.2. "We" and "them" as friends

Firstly, we have analyzed friendly inter-relations of Roma, members of the given Protestant communities.

"It does not mean that I would not do it. I have not even tried lately. For two persons to become companions, I think they should have one goal. Once you have no such a single goal, you break up; you cannot be a friend to such a person. Both this person and I myself cannot be friends since we lack common talks; our views are different."

A. S., 29, Adventist, Niš

"For friends we are having people my husband works with, plays with in the orchestra. But mostly we socialize with people from the church. Thus I have no friends who are ignorant of God. I have no such friends."

S. Š., 43, Pentecostal, Leskovac

Similar missionary goals of small religious communities and a simplified view of their achievement among the Roma in public, within the centuries of affiliation to Islam and Orthodox Christianity in Southeast Serbia, means that the present inter-relations are regarded as of secondary importance. A clear situation regarding orientation to the proper religious pathway of non-believers and Roma of lukewarm traditional faith, does not find its equivalent when it comes to brotherhood and sisterhood of a somewhat different Christian course.

The hierarch of Baptists, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals are careful in avoiding the accusations for *internal proselytism*. The involvement of non-affiliated Roma ethnos into the pulsating Serbian religious market is an incomplete process, still ongoing; it demands cohesion and engagement of all available potentials in covering the

free mission space. Caution is also reflected in social contacts of ordinary people: foundation in Christ, of whatever Protestant branch, is still better than infidelity; it is rather the matter of discussion and using some spare time on strengthening personal religious capacities through an exchange of religious experiences with *the people of the same faith*.

Then the issue of common ground is extended to comprise Roma and non-Roma in Orthodox Christianity and Islam.

“With all of them. For example, my son-in-law is a Muslim; they are in Preševo; and his family is there. I do not interfere in their beliefs but I try to be friends with them. Everyone has the right to his own beliefs.”

T. V., 57, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Leskovac

“My family, mother, brother, they are not Christians but I mix with them rarely, rarely do I go to their patron saint celebrations, they celebrate everywhere while I do not go anywhere. I socialize, so to speak, less, with all people. I would prefer that they should come to celebrate Lord. I mix with the baptized ones; they come to me to pray; I have a neighbor, she is not a believer but I do believe that she is going to come to our Lord. She keeps on saying, ‘I beg my Lord, I ask...’ I take care to instruct those who are not in faith to get to know about believing in our Lord.”

G. J., 52, Pentecostal, Lebane

Similar attitudes are valid when it comes to Roma and members of other nations related to Orthodox and Islam: to behave as acquaintances do and to have civilized communication – all this not rejected; yet, what is lacking is *closeness* reserved for friendship with brothers in faith, irrespective of the national affiliation (a-nationality is already recognizable as a Protestant trait at international level).

6.3. “Us” and “them” as spouses

Our interlocutors are being directly asked if they would like to get married or allow their children to get married to a Roma, member of some other Protestant church. They are further asked to estimate the possibilities of choosing a spouse from a line of non-believers and Roma in Orthodox Christianity and Islam.

“No. Here it is, I will tell you openly, our first daughter married, in September this year, to a Roma from Ostrovica who is not in Lord. We have given up on her until she comes back. If she repents, comes back to the assembly, we shall forgive her since God is forgiving and so are we. It is true, she had the freedom to decide what she was going to do but our advice to her was that she should not do it. But she broke our rules, she went away and married an infidel who is not a member of our assembly. She has done something she should not have. She is now outside the assembly, she is not our member and we behave towards her accordingly, no matter she is our daughter. The same stands for our two other daughters. We do not visit her at all; we do not talk to her; she wants to come to us but we do not accept her. This is a matter of discipline; she did not accept it; she was disobedient and has to bear the consequences. She was a baptized believer; she entered the assembly and she was obliged to respect and practice what she had chosen. If she fails to do that, she is to be excluded from our community, from the Hall and in general.”

S. B., 37, Jehovah’s Witness, Taskovići (Niš)

“Listen, I will tell you openly, I would like best to marry an Adventist, regardless of his being a Roma, Serb, American... But let him be an Adventist.”

N. A., 58, Adventist, Vinarce (Leskovac)

“Listen, my daughter, she married an infidel; he does not let her go to church. They celebrate, they do all. He scolds her, uses foul language, and does what he wants. So, he let her go for a month, or two, even a year and then – no more. That was his strategy. She now does not go to church. She knows, she believes, she knows it all – yet, all in vain when you have a husband like this, she is not allowed to go.”

M. D., 49, Pentecostal, Lebane

Till recently the Roma family and marriage relations in Serbia were precisely delineated with a complex system of tribal and clan value-normative conventions: from more than rich wedding rituals to strictly defined sex, gender and age rights and responsibilities in extended families.

The inherited hermeticism and archaism are *partly disintegrated* by modern dynamism, penetrating the old with the necessary innovations while they are *radically transformed* by an onrush of Protestant teachings into Roma *mahalas*. *The preferred choice of spouse exclusively on the endogamic base is replaced by a confession-grounded choice, along with an extended ethnic palette:*

1. “blood purity”, that is, full-fledged Roma family is no longer an unconditional criterion in the choice of spouse,
2. for marriage vows before God it is more important that s/he is a Christian, that s/he is a follower of the suffering victimized Jesus Christ and advocate of the Holy Scripture legacy,
3. it matter that s/he is a Rom but is more important that s/he is from “the church”,
4. an ideal candidate for marriage life is a member of the same ethnic and religious group – Roma man or woman from the community.

Sexual relations with non-believers or active Orthodox and members of Islam are *rejected* since they imply temptations which may lead to the abandonment of the church teachings and return to “the world“, that is forefathers’ beliefs.

Similar expectations are also valid in the examples of mingling among different Protestant options: an indicator of successful accommodation and adaptation to a new family is considered to be *checking up*, that is acceptance of a new religious pattern rather than *simultaneous coexistence* of two different interpretations of the biblical writings. The most tolerant are, regarding their mutual acceptance, Baptists and Pentecostals while the insurmountable barriers are far more insisted upon by Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses, especially the latter ones.

7. CONCLUSION

Though Osman Balić says that “Roma culture – *Rromanipe* – has become dominant or parallel to religions, that is, that it is „the authentic Roma religion which is in the process of reformation“ (Đorđević and Balić 2004, 49), while Mirga and Mruz (1997, 175) add that it does ‘nor rely on religious and faith differences“, the customs and habits of Roma Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals and Jehovah’s Witnesses, in the cities and villages of

Southeast Serbia, leads us to questioning of the generally-accepted relations inside and outside Roma community.

The influx of the Protestant teachings among the Roma in Southeast Serbia, more intensive in the last decade and a half, has launched a process of *remolding their collective identity*. Their joining the “God Chosen people” that would gain salvation by believing in Jesus Christ, has fundamentally restructured their everyday world view and understanding of the future. That is how the *Rromanipe* – the “Bible of Roma people” – is being retailed and adjusted to the present times. Undergoing the process of shaping are “new Roma communities” (Slavkova 2007, 256) grounded in the Reformation legacy.

The collaboration with the “kin by Christ“ destroys the obstacles formed by the traditional allotment of the role of “impure“ to the surrounding peoples. It is now the faith which unifies, in their behavior, the believers of the same faith regarding numerous issues from the domains of health care, nourishment culture, behavior culture and the like. Former belonging to the unified and homogenous ethnic group is now elevated by the Roma to the level of religious identification while their cultural identity is identified with the proclaimed values of the religious communities whose members they have recently become. The original division into “Us, Roma” and “Them, Gadže” has evolved into “Us, believers“ and “Them, non-believers“. In their choice of spouse, the decisive moment is not “blood purity“ but “purity in Christ“; or, the preferred choice of spouse exclusively on the endogamic basis has been replaced by confessional argument along with an extended ethnic palette.

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RROMANIPE U TRANZICIJI: PROTESTANTIZACIJA ROMA

Prodiranje protestantskog učenja među Rome u jugoistočnoj Srbiji, intenzivnije deceniju i po unazad, pokrenulo je proces preoblikovanja njihovog kolektivnog identiteta. Tradicionalne sastavnice Rromanipe-a preosmišljavaju se i prilagođavaju savremenosti. Nekadašnju pripadnost ujedinjenoj i homogenoj etničkoj grupi, Romi sada izdižu na nivo religijske identifikacije, a kulturni identitet poistovećuju sa proklamovanim vrednostima verskih zajednica, čiji su pripadnici odnedavno. Prvobitna podela na „Mi, Romi“ i „Oni, Gadže“ evoluirala u „Mi, verujući“ i „Oni, neverujući“. Prilikom izbora životnog saputnika nije presudna „čistota krvi“, već „čistota u Hristu“: preferirani izbor partnera isključivo na endogamnoj osnovi zamenjen je odabirom sa konfesionalnim uporištem, uz proširivanje etničkog kolorita. U radu se analiziraju odgovori krštenih vernika romske nacionalnosti nekoliko protestantskih verskih zajednica na teritoriji jugoistočne Srbije (Hrišćanska baptistička crkva, Jehovini svedoci, Hrišćanska adventistička crkva i Evanđeoska pentekostalna crkva) u pogledu razlikovanja sveta Roma i neroma protestantske vere od sveta neverujućih Roma i neroma, kao i mogućnosti stupanja u prijateljske i bračne odnose sa Romima i neromima koji ne pripadaju izabranoj protestantskoj crkvi.

Ključne reči: Rromanipe, protestantizacija Roma, jugoistočna Srbija, „Mi, Romi“ i „Oni, Gadže“, „Mi, verujući“ i „Oni, neverujući“.