

## ROMA IN SLOVAKIA- SILENT AND INVISIBLE MINORITY (Social Networking and Pastoral Pentecostal Discourse as a case of giving voice and positive visibility)

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The contribution is meant to be a micro-case study to the issue of institutional production and reproduction of security of a selected minority group in Slovakia, through tracing the process of social networking and re-construction of the (ethnic) identity on a religious basis. Principal attention is paid to the analysis of the trans-social and trans-ethnic discourse and the concept of *New Roma* as a de-ethnicised and ahistorically constructed label with positive and non-ascriptive connotations. The Pentecostal concept of the *Family of God* is studied in connection with the perception of the increased feeling of security not only within *primary* (family) networks, but also within *hybrid* (religion-based) networks. The *New Roma* concept offered to Roma by pastors would increase the potential of Roma to enter also *secondary* (professional) and other kinds of networks within the mainstream society and allow them *positive visibility* at the mezzo-level of society. The new forms of social networking hand in hand with the new concept of de-ethnicised and de-essentialised identity would allow Roma to change the management techniques from making security through invisibility to a more emancipative and assertive technique employing the paradigm “more visible = more secure”.

The author points out the forced *ethnicisation* of the categories of Rom and Roma nation at the level of the practical discourse. From this point of view, the *traditional* type of *ethnicity* (based on traditional definitions of the nation) is often intentionally over-communicated. Both *ethnicisation* (excessive accentuation of the ethnic perspective) and *de-ethnicisation* (its intentional suppression) usually serve as practical (political) tools for an objective fixing of the unfavourable position of Roma ethnic minority. This may produce a strong feeling of cultural hostility and insecurity on “both sides”. The author picks up the cases from practice and turns attention to the analysis of the *deconstruction* a consequent *reconstruction* of the label Roma in the Pentecostal pastoral discourse among the Roma in Slovakia. She shows how it works with a positive concept of Romahood in an *ahistoric* manner, i.e. using the concept of “Family of God”. The comparative analysis of construction of (new) Romahood in pastoral discourse has shown that it is constructed as a *category of practice*, which is intentionally ethnically *emptied* to a large extent and creatively filled with specific content in line with the creed of good, moral, useful and decent life. This approach enables the “new Roma” to adopt new, socially and personally more favourable and secure positions in the new late-modern world.

*Key words:* ethnicity, social networks, cultural security, Roma identity, Pentecostal pastoral discourse, Slovakia

In their recently published paper on *security* and *insecurity* in the present-day global world, Ieva Jusionyte and Daniel Goldstein state that security is (pan)optical (Jusionyte, Goldstein, 2016: 3–13). According to them, it is necessary to identify threats and manage risks, states and other actors to whom security has been outsourced (Buur, 2005; Comaroff, Comaroff 2006; Jaffe, 2013) and to visualize insecurity through a set of shifting categorical lenses, marking and punishing those who fall through the gaps of a normative-legal grid (Jusionyte, Goldstein, 2016: 3). As a contribution to the development of the critical anthropology of security, Jusionyte and Goldstein explored the uncertain yet complementary relationships between *security* and *visibility*, coming to the conclusion, that for some sectors of the population of modern secure societies, *invisibility* has become their only mode of making everyday *security*. These invisible “sectors of the population” mean in their study mostly people with an illegal status (illegal immigrants in USA and Europe, but also in Brazil, South Africa, and China etc.). But this paradigm can also be extended to people with an official status and with a legally equal position as enjoyed by the mainstream population the members of which, however, face unprivileged or less privileged status in their practical life based on their race, ethnic, linguistic, religious affiliation or gender, age and socio-economic status.

All these *non-privileged* or *less-privileged* people learnt and developed certain management techniques (Stuesse, Coleman, 2014) of cooperation and non-cooperation with the mainstream society and the State through the selective deployment of invisibility (Jusionyte, Goldstein, 2016: 7). However, especially in ethnically segregated areas and “ghettos” with strict unwritten rules and invisible authorities, this security is often achieved at the cost of personal safety and health: since they have become wary of reporting crimes to the police, and as much as possible, they avoid other contacts with public service providers, including doctors (Gordon, 2007; Pallares, Flores-Gonzalez, 2010). The invisible and insecure are suspended in the state of exception, where they can be objects but not subjects of the law. They are also contained in spaces where they are invisible to citizen oversight (Jusionyte, Goldstein, 2016: 10).

The dimensions of cultural security are highly diverse and complex, since they are not broken down only into individual and collective actors’ levels, but they are connected with institutions and institutional support (Breton, 1964). Processes of collective identity formation (Niethammer, 2000) and their influence on the feeling of security of individuals belonging to minorities (Baumann, 2009) are the base for the defence of collective identity through external protections against the decisions of the mainstream society (Kymlicka, 1995), through a substantial level of institutional completeness (or other institutional mechanisms).

The contribution is meant to be a micro-case study to the issue of institutional production and reproduction of security of selected minority group in Slovakia, through tracing the process of social networking and re-construction of the (ethnic) identity on a religious basis. Several ethnographic and anthropologic studies on ethnicity have emphasised that religion and denomination play an important role in creating, maintaining and representing individual, communitarian and ethnic identities (Anderson, 1983; Barth, 1969; Bourdieu, 1986). I will focus on the analysis of the pastoral (institutional) discourse on Roma identity (“Romahood”) and Roma nation, searching the ways in which it forms individual and collective identity and the degree of employment of religious and ethnic vocabulary. I will rely here on recent discourse on Roma Pentecostalism in Europe (Cantón-Delgado, 2010, 2017; Gay y Blasco, 1999;

Ries, 2014; Slavkova, 2014; Thurfjell and Marsh /Eds./, 2014; Williams, 1993 and others). I will base my assumptions on my field work research, which has for more than 14 years centred on Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, their pastoral discourse and activities among Roma in Slovakia (see Podolinská, 2011, 2014, 2015; Podolinská, Hrustič, 2011). Principal attention is paid to the analysis of the trans-social and trans-ethnic discourse and the concept of *New Roma* as a de-ethnicised, de-essentialised and ahistorically constructed label with positive and non-ascriptive connotations and the introduction of new *modus operandi* in the frame of social networks within Pentecostal congregations as a place for achieving new forms of positive visibility and cultural security.

## 1. INVISIBLE AND SECURE

### 1.1 Contextualisation

The cultural security of ethnic/linguistic minorities covers the social conditions and institutional context that allow their members to develop a sense of belonging to their country and simultaneously strengthen their autonomy in cultural spheres. Cultural security would thus guarantee social stability and sustainable development for both the ethnic/linguistic minority and the majority. Cultural security therefore has a significant impact on conflict management between ethnic/linguistic groups in a multi-national state.

The Norwegian ethnographer Thomas Hylland Eriksen pointed out in his famous work *Ethnicity versus Nationalism* (1991) that ethnicity refers to the social reproduction of basic classificatory differences between categories of people and to aspects of gain and loss in social interaction (Eriksen, 1991: 264). Despite the existence of multi-ethnic societies and communities within modern states, we can identify the idea of “state nationalism”, which is symbolically linked to the collective identity of only one of the populations. Eriksen distinguishes between *nationalistic ideologies* (tendency to promote cultural similarities and wide-ranging integration of all inhabitants of the nation-state, regardless of their ethnic membership) and *ethnic ideologies* (tendency to promote cultural diversity and autonomy within the home state) (Eriksen: 263-4). According to Eriksen, the necessary conditions for peaceful coexistence of multi-ethnic populations within a nation, must also entail the right to be different, *the right not to participate in national society* in certain respects, not sanctioned by the State); furthermore, national identity should be available to all citizens regardless of their cultural differences and state policies should take account of possible ethnic differences in their definitions of situations. Naturally, these “ideal conditions” of peaceful coexistence are taken into account in different European countries differently, while the level of legislation and the lived practice can be completely different.<sup>1</sup>

The Slovak Republic is a multi-national state. Besides the Slovak majority nationality,

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1 Nationalism entails the ideological justification of the state, actual or potential. Judged on this criterion, *ethnicity* can sometimes be interpreted as a form of *stagnant nationalism* which may eventually, or periodically, become manifest as nationalism (Eriksen, 1991: 265). Moreover, Eriksen states that: “the nation is an invention; (...) to paraphrase Anderson (Anderson, 1983), it is an *imagined community*; it is *not* a natural phenomenon, despite the fact that the object of all nationalism isto present a particular image of society as natural” (Eriksen, 1991: 266). Towards the extensive discussion on primordialism in ethnicity and identity studies see article of Viera Bačová (Bačová, 1998: 29-43).



Billboard of Maranata from Spišská Nová Ves, 2014 (author of photo: T. Podolinská)

several national minorities and ethnic groups live in the country. According to the *Census of 2011*, Hungarian nationality was claimed by 458,467 (8.5%) citizens, Roma by 105,738 (2%), Ruthenian by 33,482 (0.6%), Czech by 30,367 (0.6%), Ukrainian by 7,430 (0.1%), German by 4,690 (0.1%), Moravian by 3,286 (0.1%), and Polish nationality by 3,084 (0.1%) citizens; less than 1% of citizens claimed Russian (1,997 persons), Bulgarian (1,051), Croatian (1,022), Serbian (698) and Jewish nationality (other: 9,825, i.e. 0.2%, Statistical Office, *Census of People, Houses and Inhabitants 2011*).

According to the latest statistical survey and the extensive research that mapped the Roma group on the ethnical principle using the ascribed ethnicity method (see *Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia 2013*, Mušíňka et al., 2014), in 2013, there were 402,810 persons in Slovakia who were regarded by the majority as Roma. In the context of the total population of Slovakia as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012 (according to the data of the Statistical Office SR, Slovakia's population was 5,410,836), the estimated share of Roma is 7.44% (Mušíňka, Matlovičová, 2015: 232). Approximately 3.54% of this number is constituted by the sub-ethnic group of Wallachian Roma (Mušíňka, Matlovičová, 2015: 246). What is noteworthy about this number is the fact that only a quarter of the estimated number of Roma claimed Roma nationality in the last census.

### 1.1.1 Macro-Level - Legislation

The legislative basis establishing the status of national minorities and ethnic groups in Slovakia is formed primarily by the *Constitution of the Slovak Republic* of 1992 and Constitutional Act of 23 February 2001 on changes and amendments to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic No. 460/1992 Coll. as amended. Slovakia ratified the most relevant international documents on human rights and freedoms, including on the



*Ecumenic open air Greek-Catholic mass at Romfest, Čičava, 2015 (autor of photo: T. Podolinská)*

rights of national minorities and ethnic groups. The concept of the constitutional protection of minorities in Slovakia is based on two principles. The first one is the principle of equality and non-discrimination. It is a general principle that guarantees “fundamental rights and freedoms to everyone regardless of ... race, colour of skin, language, nationality or ethnic origin...” (Article 12).<sup>2</sup>

The second principle guarantees special rights to members of national minorities and ethnic groups. Citizens belonging to national minorities or ethnic groups in the Slovak Republic are guaranteed their “universal development, particularly the rights to promote their culture together with other members of the minority or group, to disseminate and receive information in their mother tongues, to associate in national minority associations, to establish and maintain educational and cultural institutions”. Furthermore, the Constitution of the Slovak Republic guarantees citizens who are members of national minorities or ethnic groups, under the conditions laid down by law and in addition to the right to learn the official language, the right to be educated in their language, the right to use their language in official communications, and the right to participate in the decision-making in matters affecting the national minorities and ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup>

2 It should be mentioned in this regard that no legal norm in Slovakia defines the criteria for the identification of a person with a minority, and there is no formal procedure for the recognition of a minority by the State. According to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, everyone has the right to decide freely which national group he or she is a member of. No one shall be aggrieved, discriminated against or favoured on any of these grounds (Article 12).

3 It should be noted in this context that the exercise of the right of citizens belonging to national minorities and ethnic groups, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, must not lead to threat to

In connection with the Roma nationality, the Government of the Slovak Republic declared in its Resolution No. 153 of 1991 on the recognition of Roma as a national minority, adopted the designation 'Roma' in line with their demand,<sup>4</sup> and guaranteed their universal cultural and ethnic development. From 1991, Roma could for the first time freely claim their nationality. The Roma language is explicitly mentioned among regional and minority languages recognised by Slovakia for the purposes of the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. This suggests that there is a Roma national minority in Slovakia in legal terms, as well, and is therefore able to exercise all the rights granted to national minorities by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. In line with relevant regulations, in municipalities in which the Roma community constitutes over 20% of the population, Roma have the right to use their language in official communications, as well the right to bilingual signs. In 2000, there were 53 municipalities in which the number of citizens claiming Roma nationality reached 20% and around eight municipalities in which Roma constituted 50% of the population. The respective right was not exercised in any of them (Koptová, 2000).

### *1.1.2 Mezzo-Level – Institutions and Political Representations – Silent Minority*

Even though Slovakia's state policies declare the right to self-determination and equal opportunities regardless of the origin and affiliation to an ethnic group (minority) at the legislative level, for various practical and historical reasons it is disadvantageous for most Roma to claim the ethnic label "Rom". Among the general population, the ethnic label "Rom" is generally associated with many negative prejudices and stereotypes ascribed to the group as a whole. In this regard, the intentional substitution of the previous ethnonym "Cigani", used in Slovakia and the Habsburg monarchy for centuries in connection with various Roma subethnic groups (both as endo- as exonym) connected with pejorative context in the mainstream population discourse, with the "neutral" label Rom/Roma in order to prevent and cut off the negative contents and prejudices failed. The new ethnic label "Rom", in Slovakia started to be used from the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries on, rapidly acquired the meaning of the old term "Cigani" (Gypsy). The most common ethnical stereotypes include images of *a priori* negative attitudes to work, which result in accusations of the misuse of the social system and (voluntary) life strategy of living from social benefits, high fertility rate, inappropriate sexual behaviour, including family incest, poor hygiene and education, reduced intelligence skills, and high crime (for more details see Mann, 2015: 438-479).

The media in Slovakia commonly contribute to the production and reproduction of

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the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Slovak Republic and to discrimination of other population (Article 34). In Articles 12, 33 and 34, the Constitution establishes the rights of members of national minorities and ethnic groups in compliance with the international standards applied in European countries. The Constitution contains no definition of minority and makes no difference between the terms national minority and ethnic group, and the content and the scope of their rights are identical.

- 4 The label *Rom/Roma* in official and politically correct documents from this time is used as a contextually neutral ethnic label, a sort of umbrella term for all subethnic groups of Roma living in Slovakia, relying thus implicitly on their unity (at least at the territory of Slovakia). The former ethnic label "Cigani" used both in political and common language till the late half of the last century is considered to be politically incorrect now, contaminated with negative ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, and thus abandoned in politically correct discourse. Nevertheless, the term "Cigani" is still in use in official language, in pejorative context of discourse of a few radical and extreme right wings parties or as endonym, used by Roma themselves in internal local context, both with positive as negative content, depending on context, locality and the situation.

negative images about the Roma community as such, bringing “black chronicle” type of news from mainly segregated, socially excluded Roma communities. In connection with the faster increasing demographic growth index of the Roma population, constantly accentuated by the media,<sup>5</sup> and the image of their (alleged) inability and unwillingness to adapt to the standards of the majority society, the over-ethnicised and essentialised label “Rom” is becoming not only unattractive, but also extremely stigmatising. Even though, according to the last mapping results, most Roma live an inclusive way of life within urban or municipal environments and just a smaller portion of them live under socially excluded conditions in segregated settlements,<sup>6</sup> the media image is nurtured exclusively with information about “settlement Roma” living in urban or rural segregated areas with limited or no infrastructure. In spite of the fact that the estimated share of the Roma in the total population is 7 to 8% (mapping based on “ascribed ethnicity”; Mušinka, Matlovičová, 2015: 232–233), thus representing the second most numerous ethnic minority in Slovakia, these figures – since it is only an unofficial estimate – have no actual impacts on the creation of more pro-active and more inclusive systemic measures in the form of state policies or implementation plans detailing the strategic development plan of work with segregated Roma communities.

In this way, we could paradoxically consider Roma a *silent minority*. We face Roma almost exclusively as “subjects of government policies”; the Roma elites in Slovakia are reduced to a few artistic families of mainly violin virtuosos and music bands playing traditional or modern music, who managed to reach social recognition thanks to their commercial success. These Roma, however, represent a positive exception or “white crows”, but are unable to refute the stereotypical negative image. The Roma “middle class” is completely invisible. The relationship of the very Roma to such stigmatising ethnicity is therefore, for obvious reasons, extremely complicated – not only at the individual level.

There is still an absence of efforts to create a single political platform in Slovakia that would advocate the interests of the Roma minority in the creation of legislation and local policies, both in the top-down (on the side of the non-Roma majority population) and bottom-up (on the side of the Roma minority) direction. The efforts to integrate Roma, as declared by the majority externally, rather tend to continue with the assimilation of Roma. Most policies view the Roma “otherness” as a threat. Under the influence of the Central European environment with a strong and historically conditioned tendency to the “nationalisation of ethnicity” (Brubaker, 2010: 8), the general population assumes that Roma will organise themselves mainly in Roma political parties and will have single representation (Hrustič, 2015: 107).

Besides historical reasons, another significant factor is the insufficient ability of the Roma elites in Slovakia to conceptualise the Roma identity at a more global – national level (Hrustič, 2015: 104–142). As Vermeersch (Vermeersch, 2003: 881) suggests, many see the reasons for these attitudes in the fact that Roma form an extremely heterogeneous group and do not have a strong ethnic identity at higher levels (Barány, 2002: 203). The cause of failed ethnic mobilisation lies also in the lack of previous

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5 The recent demographical trends in Slovakia suggest that while the non-Roma population has 1.51 children per family, it is 4.2 children per family among the Roma population (Vašečka, 1999).

6 We do not dispose of exact data; the estimated proportion according to experts was 25% in 2001 (Radičová, 2001; Mušinka, 2002: 648–650). The majority of Roma live in rural areas; according to expert estimations, it was 62.53% in 2013 (for comparison, the ratio of the rural mainstream population in Slovakia is 45.64% (Mušinka, Matlovičová, 2015: 214).



*Roma violinist at a gospel music festival Romfest, Čičava 2015 (author of photo: T. Podolinská)*



*Young Maranata member showing his personal Bible, Spišská Nová Ves 2015 (author of photo: T. Podolinská)*

experience with political culture and insufficient network of political organisations. Another cause is not only low ethnic awareness, but also the poor factor of political organisation and discourse by Roma elites on ethnicity and the conceptualisation of Roma identity. Most Roma leaders who have played a key role in the shaping of the development of Roma policy have viewed Roma as a group that should act unanimously as a whole and should therefore naturally vote for a Roma party as a party defending its ethnic interests. In this sense, Roma as a group with ontological content was regarded as an entity which can be ascribed interest and agenda<sup>7</sup>. In the seeking of such “single interests and agendas”, however, the efforts to create a “Roma identity” by both non-Roma experts and Roma leaders and representatives of the elites have failed. As Rogers Brubaker notes, not all ethnic groups automatically have the ambition to nurture such level of social meanings and agendas; Roma, just like any other (ethnic) group, just have the *potential* to become a group as real actors, as a network of organisations and functioning agendas leading to a unifying platform covered by terms like “Roma nation”, “Romanihood”, Rom, Roma (Brubaker, 2002: 173).

The lack of visible actors, organisations and political representants that would mobilise, conceptualise and protect the Roma “groupness” on the ethnic, cultural, historical and linguistic basis means that most Roma in Slovakia have to deal with the essentialised concept of Roma as a homogeneous group full of negative ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, thus facing systematic discrimination, non-protection and

<sup>7</sup> For the concept of *groupism* as the approach to treat the groups as given “things-in-the world” see Brubaker, 2002: 164.



Gospel music festival Romfest organized by Martin Mekel, Čičava 2015 (author of photo: T. Podolinská)

insecurity when interacting and operating in the world of the majority population. Hence, *invisibility* at the mezzo-level is directly connected with immanent exclusion and non-participation in the distribution of not only power and potential benefits, but also protection and security. The *invisibility* and *non-potency* directly cause and strengthen *insecurity* for all silent and invisible minority groups which could thus be the target of any other *visible-noisy-group* (e.g. extremist parties) or *visible-group-with-voice* (mainstream political parties with strong influence on the media discourse). This is especially true in the case of minorities with a historically rooted “negative” track record in the eyes of the mainstream population.

### 1.1.3 Micro-Level – Individual and Personal Strategy: More Visible, Less Secure

Due to the negative stereotypes related to the ethnically perceived label of Rom/Roma, the sub-ethnic and status diversity of Roma groups living in Slovakia, as well as the early stages of the ethnogenesis of the Roma nation as such, three quarters of Roma in Slovakia choose the position of *silent* identification of an *invisible* ethnic group, which in their eyes, gives them more security. From the emic<sup>8</sup> perspective of a member

<sup>8</sup> The study applies the emic and *etic* approaches (for definitions see Headland, Pike, Harris, Eds., 1990). In principle, the *emic approach* refers to the lived, native, insider perspective, works in bottom-up direction and uses mental schemes and the vocabulary of the studied ethnic groups/individuals. On the other hand, the *etic approach* provides a perspective from the outside, and often works in top-down direction, while seeking to formulate and verify the validity of concepts across groups, ethnic groups and cultures.

of the “silent minority”, most safety at the individual level can be achieved within internally and locally defined communities based on unwritten rules, blood ties and unclearly (soft) articulated identity of a Rom or Gypsy. In this context, the crucial factor is affiliation and status within family (primary) networks. The knowledge of the language is still an emic criterion of Romahood in some communities, even though the Roma language has completely disappeared from many locations and the young generation speaks it only passively or knows just a few basic words. In the interaction with the mainstream world, they prefer civil identification (“I am a Slovak”), followed by family identification (“I am the son of that and that person”) and local identification (“I am from that and that place”).

In the world of the majority, most Roma face discrimination on the basis of the colour of skin.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted in this regard that Slovakia is a conservative and *de-facto* mono-cultural country where most inhabitants are able to ascribe Roma ethnicity to concrete people on the basis of their external anthropological signs or behaviour patterns without the need to ask a self-identification question. *Invisibility* by not claiming the Roma origin or ethnicity is then just a partially successful strategy which does not work as “situational mimicry” in direct contact with the members of the majority. While multi-cultural diversity in other European countries does not make it possible to clearly identify Roma, as they can disappear at first sight within communities of Indians, Pakistanis, Arabs and other ethnic groups with a “brown skin tone”, it is almost impossible in Slovakia and the sensitivity of the majority population to other skin colour is high. Besides isolated islands of internal safety within their own local Roma communities or more broadly defined local environments in which they move on a daily basis and where they can rely on their individual histories on the basis of direct experience and interactions with non-Roma neighbours, they can seek safety in the majority society solely by redefining the negative contents related to the ethnic categories of Rom and Roma and making this positive concept visible at all societal platforms through organizations, political parties and representants or other *image-makers-with-voice*.

## 2. MORE VISIBLE, MORE SECURE? SOCIAL NETWORKING AND NEW ROMA

Only visibility brings legitimacy that can translate into security. The equation between visible and secure can be attained only by applying the principles established in the legislation at the macro-level and their projection onto the broad spectrum of institutions at the mezzo-level (political parties, education, healthcare, media discourse), accompanied by the creation of *secondary*<sup>10</sup> networks of interlinked nature with the possibility of real entry for Roma, as well. The text below is an exploration of such attempt in practice. In the following part, I will search the restructuring of social networking within the Roma community after entering Pentecostal denominations and their proactive work with the production of a new Roma label filled with flexible and positive contents.

9 According to the surveys of Fundamental Right Agency (FRA) 41% of Slovak Roma respondents declared to be discriminated during the last 5 years, and 82% out of them do not know any institution to rely on in emergency cases or asking for protection. (<http://fra.europa.eu/sk>)17.2.2017]

10 For the definition of *primary* and *secondary* networks see part 2.1 of this paper.

## 2.1 Pentecostal Network as a Source of New Forms of Security

Pentecostalism has long been understood as faith that is relevant to the needs of ethnic minorities.<sup>11</sup> As a vibrant form of Christianity, it helps deal with problems of deprivation and marginalisation. Pentecostalism is part of the post-communist period in Slovakia, when not only the “political revolution” but also the “religious revolution” started. Pentecostals began their activities as a minority group, evangelising among the population in Slovakia of which most Roma (as well as non-Roma) were already adherents of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>12</sup> Even though Pentecostal movements in the country do not declare officially in most cases that marginalised groups (such as Roma) are the main focus of their evangelisation, the most active and stable Pentecostal congregations are to be found within Roma communities. Most of them are also found in the eastern region of the country, where the concentration of Roma people is the highest.<sup>13</sup> The number of adherents in these congregations is rapidly growing and Pentecostal missionaries have been successful in educating Roma religious leaders and in establishing Pentecostal congregations that are specifically directed towards Roma.

The extensive research in Slovakia demonstrated<sup>14</sup> that one of the reasons why, in general, religious missions are highly effective in bringing a social change to excluded Roma communities is the fact that they come with a special *modus operandi* within their social networks.

In general, people dispose of two packages of social networks which they can enter and in which they can be active. The package of so-called *primary* social networks is

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- 11 For instance: Brodwin, 2003 (for Pentecostal communities of immigrants in Haiti); Dow, Sandstrom, 2001 (for Maya/Indian Pentecostalism in Central America); Toyansk, 2013 (for Gypsy Pentecostalism in Brazil). For general insight see Anderson, Bergunder, Droogers, Laan, Eds., 2010. In European context see works of Manuela Cantón-Delgado (2010, 2017), Paloma Gay y Blasco (1999) (for Pentecostalism among Roma in Spain), Magdalena Slavkova, 2014 (for Roma Pentecostalism in Spain and in Bulgaria), Štěpán Řipka, 2015 (in Czech Republic), László Fosztó, 2009 (in Romania). For the scientific overview of the Roma Pentecostalism see edited volume of David Thurffjell and Adrian Marsh (2014).
  - 12 Four Pentecostal movements have recently been active in Slovakia: two of them (*Maranata* and *Devleskero kher*) directly focus on Romani population and are led by foreign Romani leaders (one is Czech and another is German by origin). Two other movements did not originally focus on Roma. They were established by separation from their maternal ethnically mixed congregations: *Romani Archa* (separated from ‘Dom viery – Poprad’) and *Slovo života – Modra* (separated from the Word of Life International). The last two focus on Romani evangelisation and are led by non-Romani leaders of Slovak origin.
  - 13 Pentecostal missions in Slovakia have been quite diverse and dynamic. Until recently, a variety of Pentecostal denominations have been active among the Roma in Rudňany, Letanovce, Košice, Turňa nad Bodvou, Sabinov, Spišská Nová Ves, Sobrance, Blatné Remety, Michalovce, Humenné, Plavecký Štvrtok, Galanta and Sládkovičovo (Podolinská, Hrustič, 2011).
  - 14 In 2010, the Institute of Ethnology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences conducted a research project focused on mapping the impacts of religious missions on the social inclusion of the Roma in Slovakia – Social Inclusion of Roma through Religion. We contacted 30 churches and organisations with potential religious activities in the Roma communities in Slovakia, and we found that 19 of them are active among the Roma. At that time, 14 registered churches and five non-registered religious movements were actively involved among the Roma in Slovakia, conducting missions in about 130 localities in total and reaching out to about 10,000 Roma people (actively participating members). For further research purposes, we selected 15 localities in which we subsequently conducted field research. For an English summary see Podolinská, Hrustič, 2011. The summary of the research findings is also available at the webpage of the Institute of Ethnology at Slovak Academy of Sciences ([http://www.uet.sav.sk/download/Religion\\_as\\_a\\_path\\_to\\_change.pdf](http://www.uet.sav.sk/download/Religion_as_a_path_to_change.pdf)). For a full version of the research findings see the Slovak publication Podolinská, Hrustič, 2010.



*The personal Bible of Roma woman from Rudňany, member of Maranata group. Rudňany, 2014 (author of photo: T. Podolinská)*

a system of relations into which an individual is born – their family and wider kinsfolk. The second package of *secondary* networks produces a society in which an individual lives – these are not based on blood bonds, but are built on a professional or interest basis. Another interesting feature of social networks from the point of view of social theories is openness or closeness.<sup>15</sup> A network is considered *open* if the entry into the network is more-or-less free (little determined by factors set in advance). On the other hand, a network is *closed* when the entry into the network is strictly controlled and determined by hard-to-influence factors defined in advance (sex, age, property, origin, education, relatives, ethnicity, etc.). Some social theories further divide social networks according to the type of prevailing ties. They differentiate between *weak* and *strong* ties, where *strong ties* (Keller, 2009: 21, 27–28, 123, 159) prevail in families and among people who have intensive blood or emotional bonds (they share common intensive experience); while *weak ties* can be formal and very superficial, and represent ties to more distant persons that we know little (casual, situational or professional acquaintances, etc.).<sup>16</sup> Socially strong ties (family ties or strong friendships) are extremely important for us at present; and their importance is even bigger if we live socially endangered. Such ties represent a kind of “confidential personal insurance” in critical situations because they do not allow an individual to hit the existential bottom.<sup>17</sup>

15 The expedience of *closed* networks was emphasised by Pierre Bourdieu (strengthening the dominant position of the group) and James Coleman (strengthening norms and authority). On the other hand, the expedience of open networks was advocated by Mark Granovetter (playing the role of bridges towards the outside, towards other groups) and by Ronald S. Burt (towards the general theory of networks see Lin, Cook, Burt, 2001).

16 In the mid-1950s, Elizabeth Bott examined the character of marital roles in a sample of 20 London families depending on the density of networks maintained by the individual families. Bott formulated the opinion that weak ties are characteristic for families with higher education, while blue-collar workers usually (but not always) limit themselves to strong ties (Bott, 1971: 105, 112; quoted according to Keller, 2009: 21).

17 In seeking a job, casual or more distant acquaintances (colleagues from former work, classmates, etc.) provide numerous, more valuable information than our close relatives and good friends are able to



Flag of Biblical School of Word of Life, Plavecký Štvrtok, 2003 (author of photo: T. Podolinská)

If this criterion is tied to primary and secondary networks, it is evident that strong ties prevail in primary networks, and weak ties are rather typical for secondary networks. Within the present mainstream population, the offer of a package with secondary networks is much bigger than that of a package with primary networks. On the contrary, the majority of functional social networks in socially excluded Roma communities have the character of closed primary networks with prevailing strong ties. Such social networks are an ideal space for acquiring an important feeling of personal security. In this space, however, an individual has minimum possibilities to obtain new resources, which significantly determines their social mobility and flexibility from the point of view of social inclusion of the socially excluded.

At present, religious (Pentecostal in our case) groups are often the only institutions in Slovakia which provide the inhabitants of Roma communities with an actual possibility of active engagement in a functional social network. They enter the socially excluded communities with a very specific package of social networks, which is a kind of intersection of the above-mentioned types of social networks.

With regard to the theoretical concepts, it is a kind of a *hybrid* of primary and secondary networks. A religious group could also be described as an artificially, i.e.

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provide us. They can connect us with a more distant and more diverse environment than the one we share with our closest ones (Granovetter, 1992). According to some social scientists, weak social ties are equally important to us thanks to them we can access better or different sources than through strong ties (Lin, 2006: 26). Moreover, through weak ties we try to get closer to people higher in the social hierarchy with whom we usually do not have strong blood or friend relations (Keller, 2009: 27). From this point of view strong ties represent the key factor for the stabilisation of our social status, while the development of weak ties integrates us into a wider societal context, opens new opportunities, and can compensate for our (initial) lack of resources.

secondarily built “family”.<sup>18</sup> The “openness” or “closeness” of the discourse can oscillate depending on the particular religious organisation or situation. A religious group with an exclusive pastoral discourse and type of membership can actually be an extremely closed social network, while a religious group with an inclusive pastoral discourse and type of membership can be a completely open social network.<sup>19</sup> As the religious network newly defines the types of relations that work within it (family-type of relations, but outside the primary/ natural family), the scope of contacts and acquaintances of its members extends considerably. Often, the activities of religious groups do not only have a local character (limited to the locality). For many members of these religious communities, it is a unique opportunity to establish weak social ties, i.e. new relations beyond the scope of their family and other members within the socially excluded community.

The establishment of such “bridging relations”<sup>20</sup> is considered to be one of the key factors of inclusion of socially excluded individuals/ groups. For many Roma, it is an opportunity not only to know their potential life partners, but also to share useful information and obtain contacts and new possibilities in seeking a job, for example. In connection with our case, we could state that religious groups are a *hybrid* type of social network; they can be open or closed, and are dominated by weak types of ties, but with a high potential to substitute strong ones. Hence, religious groups offer to their members *insurance in crisis situation*, while largely expanding their possibilities to obtain new sources or helping them compensate for their initial lack of resources.

Based on the successful introduction of what could be labelled a *narrative of coherence*, Pentecostals have created a feeling of community cohesion that has significantly changed its adherents’ sense of belonging to a metastructure, not based on family and blood ties. Membership in a new kind of “hybrid” social network thus definitively represents a new source of multi-layered security for excluded Roma. They can rely not only on extended family kin, but also on their “Brothers and Sisters in Christ”. These might be not only Roma from other communities and other ethnic subgroups, but also “White People”, representatives of the mainstream population. According to the interviews from qualitative research (SIRONA 2010), the belonging to and operating in these religious networks not only extend and expand their networking vertically, but also deepen their feeling of security within the existing families and communities. In many localities, the religious group with its local leaders is the only institution for many Roma to trust and rely on in difficult life situations (health problems, indebtedness etc.), which represents the only link they have to an institution mediating security at the vertical level.

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18 Religious groups are very specific even if we try to apply the concept of open and closed networks. In the recruitment of new members, many of them behave as open social networks; but after obtaining and stabilising the membership, the tendency to close may prevail.

19 A highly exclusive discourse can be the reason for the ‘closing’ of a religious network. If the imaginary dividing line member/non-member is identical with the dividing line Roma/non-Roma, then a religious group can contribute to an even bigger exclusion (segregation) of its members, it can deepen social polarization, and cause conflict. Thus it can increase the perception of security within the new faith based community; nevertheless, it can increase the feeling of threats and insecurity from the outer world (more in Podolinská, Hrustič, 2011: 33).

20 Robert Putnam speaks about a *bridging capital* (Putnam, 2000) that we build with the individuals of a group other than the group we come from.

## 2.2 Trans-Social and Trans-Ethnic Discourse

What is new in the discourse of most Pentecostal denominations arriving in Slovakia is the fact that they bring a Christian universalistic concept, which is not burdened by the ethnic or social status discourse. People are primarily seen as religious beings and all secular ascriptions are therefore of less importance. Hence, the idea of “People of God” or a “Family of God” without any ethnic, racial and social status identity is expressed through the transcendent discourse of baptism.<sup>21</sup>

Everyone, as claimed by the adherents, has the right to be not only happy and healthy, but also rich. Through this so-called “Prosperity Gospel”, Pentecostals introduce a theology based on the “faith economy”, reciprocity, calculative strategy and promotion of self-interest. Pastoral narratives often stress that there is a direct connection between conversion and material prosperity. Now, both the trans-ethnic and the trans-social discourses are highly attractive to the Roma, since they may be perceived as “easy” tools for the improvement of their human and social status. Stressing that all people, even those without knowledge and education, are important and valuable and by emphasizing that everyone, with the help of God, can manage whatever tasks they face, human dignity may be restored.

In addition to the trans-social discourse, Pentecostals also introduce the trans-ethnic discourse. Pentecostal churches do not seek to act as mediators between different ethnic groups, but offer a solution *beyond* any ethnic ascriptions; ethnic groups are ascribed diversity (i.e. they are not equal), though all are equal before God.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.3. New Roma – De-ethnicised and Ahistoric Label

#### 2.3.1. Individual Level

The trans-social and trans-ethnic pastoral discourse is oriented towards negotiating a better positioning of Roma in interactions with the outer world. Yet, Pentecostal pastors are going even further. They try to articulate the inner part of their adherents’ identity, they touch the corner stone of it by articulating and permanently answering the question: What does it mean to be a [good] Rom? or better said, “a Rom enjoying respect?”<sup>23</sup> If we look at the emic – internal – level inside the group, to be a “Rom” within a Roma community/group is then the matter of becoming a Rom each day, the

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21 The traditional Roma family unit functions within “extended patriarchal families” (Podolinská, 2011: 162) (so called *fajta*, nom. sing. or *partija*) consisted of several married brothers, their married sons and children (Horváthová, 1954: 285). The contemporary family unit (so called *famelija/ familia*, nom. sing.) is smaller and more independent than the traditional one. It would include, in many cases, a husband and wife, their parents and grandparents, with their married sons and their wives, and unmarried sons and daughters plus the grandchildren (Ibidem: 285), in many cases all living under one roof or in direct vicinity (as neighbours) in one yard. Towards the structure, typology and gradual change of traditional Roma family see Mann, 1990, 1992; Davidová, 1995.

22 Pentecostal conversion has had a fundamental impact on the attitudes of Roma towards all spheres of their former way of life. Qualitative research *Social Inclusion of Roma via Religious Path* (SIRONA 2010) carried by the Institute of Ethnology SAS in 2010 revealed that religious change amongst Roma in Slovakia is intertwined with significant social change (more than 14 indicators of social change were present in at least 80% of interviews).

23 I deliberately do not use in this text the simplified view Romanhood = “Roma identity” or “Roma identification” because these levels do not have to be important at all for the daily life of “Roma”, i.e. they are not necessarily “daily practice” categories. In my opinion, the use of “identification” (Brubaker, 2002, 2003) sometimes leads to a simplified views of the given group/ community/ society.

matter of daily decisions about how to negotiate and direct one's own life at many levels, in relation to other persons, institutions and circumstances (favourable and unfavourable ones), while they can define or identify themselves or be freely inspired by a common set of rules and norms of behaviour of their family, community or the majority society. In this case, "ethnicity" or the belonging to a nation or national minority does not have to play any role.<sup>24 25</sup>

Through a comparative analysis of the practical ways of construction of various "identity" forms within the Pentecostal pastoral discourses<sup>26</sup> of three selected denominations, I came to the finding that the *Romanihood* category is programmatically deconstructed and consequently constructed again on new principles as a *category of practice*,<sup>27</sup> or more precisely as a label, that is largely ethnically "vacant" and creatively filled with particular content according to the life goals and trajectories of specific users, either at the individual level or at the group and community levels in line with the creed of good, moral, useful and decent life [of a Christian = man = Rom]. In addition to the pastoral discourse concerning the personal, lived category of Rom (from the private perspective), I also observe the way of construction of the collective/group label, of the "Roma nation" at the national and supra-national levels within the Pentecostal pastoral discourse in Slovakia.

Despite of the trans-ethnic discourse, *ethnic sensitivity* is also present in the discourse of Pentecostal pastors who seek to cope with the social reality and ethnic or even racist categorisation practice in Slovakia. The members of their congregations face multiple collective stigmatisation by the general population and non-converted parts of Roma communities (Gypsy, sectarian, etc.), as well as a number of stereotypes motivated by ethnic, religious or social background that accompany the label "Rom/Roma" in the mainstream discourse.

In what way have Pentecostal pastors coped with this problem in line with theology and the discourse of their congregations? In what ways do they programmatically deconstruct and consequently construct on new principles the label Rom, Roma among their members, and with what new content do they fill this label?

Based on my interviews with three leading representatives of the Pentecostal congregations that I studied and a comparative analysis of the quotations from sermons, as well as an analysis of their official websites or printed and visual self-presentations, I came to the conclusion that, in general, they act almost in an identical

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24 For more information, see Belton, 2005.

25 At this level, Romanihood could be defined as the proper, good, decent, "proud" Roma way of life or the practice of behaviour in social time and space. In Bourdieu's terminology, we could speak about research within the *social field* and inspiration by the concept of the cultural *habitus* of a group/community, creatively performed and embodied by individuals and members of the group on a daily basis in their daily personal individual lives. The *social field* is defined as the space of objective relationships between positions with symbolic or open fights. The social field is a power field, and the actors entering it are influenced by the power of its structure (Bourdieu, 1993: 181, 183). Bourdieu defined *habitus* as an internalised social position, as a set of individual and individualised dispositions (1994).

26 For more information, see Podolinská, 2009 a, b (in Slovak); Podolinská, 2011, 2014 (in English) and Podolinská, Hrustič, 2014 (in English).

27 Rogers Brubaker claims, that besides "traditionally" highlighting the fact that we cannot approach groups as real entities and expect from them a real agenda, he also points out that national identity should be approached as an institutionalised form. According to him, national awareness is the result of the events principle, and nation should therefore be viewed as a *category of practice* (Brubaker, 2002, 2003).

manner.<sup>28</sup> Their pastoral discourse consistently contains the terms “Roma” (“Rom”) and related derived adjectives. First they deconstruct the ethnic category Rom/Roma both in the negative and positive manner (i.e. by defining themselves against other and by identifying themselves with others). Specifically, we can speak about the following four steps: (1) *emptying* the original (negative) content of ethnic category Rom/Roma as the category to which one is born and is predestined to die in, claiming that it is just a label to be filled by individual and personal life (2) *releasing* the convert from original ties and networks (mainly of primary nature), (3) *tying* the convert through new bonds and secondary or hybrid networks to a new institution (congregation/church), (4) creative *filling of* the label Rom/Roma with free content according to *new rules* (authority and the Bible’s moral code).

The first two steps (*emptying* and *releasing*) seek to negate the convert’s previous way of life and behaviour, and break him/her away from the “old world” discourse/narrative. The world of the traditional Roma community in Slovakia is viewed in the pastoral discourse as an environment which reproduces the cycle of poverty and low social self-confidence; literally, as an environment which passes poverty and social complexes down from the grandparents’ and parents’ generation to the children’s generation. This “traditional” discourse/narrative then objectively fixes and reproduces the unfavourable or dependent social position. We could talk about an “incarcerating discourse” and “incarcerating story”. Pastors seek to programmatically break this traditional narrative cycle through negation, emptying and untying.

The other two steps (*tying* and *filling*) focus rather on a positive projection of the new content of *Romanipen* by offering positive narrations, a positive self-image and a discourse motivating the emancipation of social self-confidence and the searching of new positions within the social field. Pastors do not get satisfied with a vision within the emic field of the Roma community, but encourage converts to take positions within a wider social space predominantly occupied by the majority.

### 2.3.2 “Liquid Romanihood” and Roma nation

Programmatic de-ethnicisation and liberation of the category Rom/Roma,<sup>29</sup> its systematic construction in a manner of label to be creatively filled with positive and moral content is in compliance with late modernity or *liquid modernity* which introduces *liquid* forms of *identity* and *ethnicity* (Bauman, 2009). This concept enables “New Roma” to leave the old, historically disadvantageous and stigmatised positions and adapt new, socially and personally more favourable positions in the new late-modern world. The normative framework of the reconstructed label Rom/Roma correlates both with the unwritten

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28 Differences, naturally, do exist. Each pastor is special and has a special pastoral discourse. Under this point of the analysis, I sought to capture the common framework in diverse pastoral discourses in the deconstruction of the ethnic category Rom/Roma. Here, again, we can observe differences, mainly when it comes to accents. Based on the data I worked with, I would claim that we can observe a link here between the accents of the pastoral discourse and the pastor’s ethnicity. Roma pastors have the tendency to “de-traditionalise” the *ethnic* category to a larger extent, i.e. they negate more strongly its original content and preach more strongly not only against the old hetero-image of a Rom, but also against the traditional self-image of the Rom, while radically deconstructing the traditional authorities in family and among relatives (parents and grandparents, etc.), as well as the unwritten habits and rules (the same pattern has been observed by Řipka, 2015 in the Czech Republic).

29 Manuela Cantón-Delgado speaks about ethnic and religious innovation in this concern (2017).

moral rules and with the written legal standards of the general population, which should be the prerequisite for their positive acceptance by the majority.

This positive, individual concept of construction of individually internalised personal “Romanhood” without predefined content could be suitably designated by Bauman’s term *liquid* as “liquid Romanhood”. Pentecostal pastors approach the definition of the collective ethnic category “Roma nation” in a similar, very up-to-date manner and in the spirit of late modernity, while using again the terminology of “rebirth” and “awakening” of the Roma nation at the national and global levels.

They only marginally raise topics with “nationalist rhetoric” and a historicising context: Roma as a persecuted nation, Roma as God’s chosen nation, Roma as a nation with Indian roots. Prevailing is the topic of *change*, change of the role of the Roma nation under God’s influence, unification of Roma groups as God’s nation, and change at the leading social positions (in line with the Biblical principle “the last will be the first”).

The way Pentecostal pastors’ positive reconstruction of the labels Rom/Roma and Roma nation in their pastoral discourses at the individual, group, collective and national levels is going largely beyond the traditional (modern) perception of the construction of ethnic identities on the basis of constitutive historical elements of origin, country, language, culture, etc. Pentecostal Roma movements have “untied” themselves from the definition of Roma nation, the practical application of which brings mainly disadvantaged social positions and pre-stigmatised labels to the members of the group designated in this way.

The new, *liquid Romanhood* breaks away with the past in terms of its programme, and talks about a new, historically unburdened present and equal future. Given the absence of support and systematic creation of a positive picture of Roma at the macro-level in Slovakia, it is more appropriate to view this phenomenon as internal dynamism of Roma and their active endeavours to find a decent human status. Whether the idea of the “Roma nation” is constituted from the inside (by Roma as such) or from the outside (by non-Roma), in a traditional or non-traditional (late-modern) manner, it is necessary to create at the practical level of application a sufficiently large as well as legally and financially secured space for its decent and equal self-determination.<sup>30</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Even though Slovakia’s state policies declare the right to self-determination and equal opportunities regardless of the origin and affiliation to an ethnic group (minority) at the legislative level, we can identify the idea of “state nationalism” here which is symbolically linked to the collective identity of only the mainstream population.

As a non-privileged or less-privileged minority within their homeland, Roma learnt and developed techniques of cooperation and non-cooperation with the mainstream society and the State through the selective deployment of *bottom-up invisibility*, which has become their prevailing mode of making everyday *security*. For various practical

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<sup>30</sup> Forced *ethnicisation* of the categories of Rom/Roma and Roma nation not only at the level of the practical discourse, but also at the level of the scientific discourse. From this point of view, the *traditional* type of *ethnicity* (based on traditional definitions of the nation) is often intentionally over-communicated. Likewise, we can encounter intentional under-communication of this topic. Both *ethnicisation* (excessive accentuation of the ethnic perspective) and *de-ethnicisation* (its intentional suppression) usually serve as practical (political) tools for an objective fixing of the unfavourable or unequal position of this ethnic minority not only within particular ethno-national European countries, but also at the supra-national-European level.

and historical reasons, it is disadvantageous for most Roma to claim the ethnic label “Rom”. Among the general population, the ethnic label “Rom” is generally associated with many negative prejudices and stereotypes ascribed to the group as a whole. National and local institutions selectively deploy the tactics of Roma *top-down-invisibility*, as well. In spite of the fact that the estimated share of the Roma ethnic group in the total population is 7 to 8%, representing thus the second most numerous ethnic minority in Slovakia, these figures – since it is only an unofficial estimate – have no actual impacts on the creation of more pro-active and more inclusive systemic measures in the form of state policies or implementation plans detailing the strategic development plan of work with Roma communities.

In this way, we could consider Roma a *silent minority*. Due to the negative stereotypes related to the ethnically perceived label of Rom/Roma, the sub-ethnic and status diversity of Roma groups living in Slovakia, as well as the early stages of the ethnogenesis of the Roma nation as such, the vast majority of Roma living in Slovakia choose the position of non-identification on the ethnic principle. To be *invisible*, in their eyes, is often the only successful personal strategy of reaching a certain degree of security.

Due to the lack of visible actors, organisations and political representatives that mobilise, conceptualise and protect the Roma “groupness” on the ethnic, cultural, historical and linguistic basis, most Roma in Slovakia have to deal with the essentialised concept of Roma as a homogenous group full of negative ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, thus facing systematic discrimination, non-protection and insecurity when interacting and operating in the world of the mainstream population. Hence, *invisibility* at the mezzo-level is directly connected with immanent exclusion and non-participation in the distribution of not only power and potential benefits, but also protection and security. Besides isolated islands of internal safety within their own local Roma communities or more broadly defined local environments in which they move on a daily basis and where they can rely on their individual histories on the basis of direct experience and interactions with non-Roma neighbours, they can seek safety in the majority society solely by redefining the negative contents related to the ethnic categories of Rom and Roma and by making this positive concept as visible as possible at all societal platforms through organisations, political parties and representatives or other image-makers-with-voice.

The activities of some Pentecostal churches among Roma in Slovakia were offered as a case study on how institutions introducing new networks and a new de-ethnicised label with positive contents can increase both visibility and security of a minority group at the micro- and mezzo-levels.

Religious networks are presented as highly efficient means to deal with (serious social and moral) problems as a guideline to multiply the strength of disadvantaged and non-privileged people by interconnecting individuals, or to renew the moral values of society (group) as a whole through new forms of social activity. In an insecure society, the relevance of those sources increases, which can be mobilised through variously patulous networks of informal ties and inter-personal contacts. In connection with our case, we could state that religious groups are a hybrid type of social network; they can be open or closed, and are dominated by weak types of ties, but with a high potential to substitute strong ties. Hence, religious groups offer to their members “insurance in crisis situation”, while largely expanding their possibilities to obtain new sources or helping them to compensate for their initial lack of resources. Membership in the new kind of “hybrid” social networks thus definitively represents a new source of multi-levelled security for excluded Roma not only horizontally, but

also vertically. In many localities, the religious group with its local leaders is the only institution for many Roma to trust and rely on in difficult life situations (health problems, indebtedness etc.), representing the only link they have to the institution mediating security at the vertical level.

The paper paid principal attention to the analysis of the trans-social and trans-ethnic discourse and the concept of *New Roma* as a de-ethnicised and ahistorically constructed label with positive and non-ascriptive connotations. The comparative analysis of the practical ways of construction of the labels Rom, Roma and Roma nation within the Pentecostal pastoral discourses of selected denominations has shown that it is constructed as a *category of practice*, which is intentionally largely ethnically *emptied* and creatively filled with specific content according to the life goals and paths of particular users either at the individual level or at the community level in line with the creed of good, moral, useful and decent life [of a Christian= Human= Rom]. Those *Re-borns* create a group of individuals grouped around an integral intermediary – God, thus forming a specific category – (global) *God's people, God's nation*.

The Pentecostal case is just one case of many possible of how to get rid of a negative track record, how to redefine stereotyped and essentialised ethnic label Rom/ Roma and how to let it work within media and political discourse and social practice of institutions and organizations. It is just one of many cases how to give Roma in Slovakia a “voice”, how to make them visible and culturally secure. At this point, it is extremely important to point out that only *positive visibility* brings legitimacy, which can translate into security. The equation between visible and secure can be attained only by applying the principles established in the legislation at the macro-level and their projection onto the broad spectrum of institutions at the mezzo-level (political parties, education, healthcare, media discourse), accompanied by the creation of secondary networks of interlinked nature with the possibility of real entry for Roma, as well. The *New Roma* concept offered to Roma by pastors is likely to increase the potential of Roma to enter also *secondary* (professional) and other kinds of networks within the mainstream society and allow them *positive visibility* at the mezzo-level of society. Hence, the new forms of social networking hand in hand with the new concept of de-ethnicised and de-essentialised identity would allow Roma to change the management technics from making security through invisibility to a more emancipative and assertive technique employing the paradigm “more (positive) visibility = more (cultural) security”.

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The study was supported within the national research project VEGA 2/0099/15 Label "Roma" – its emic and ethic reflections and social impact.

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