

FOSZTÓ, LÁSZLÓ. *Ritual revitalisation after socialism: community, personhood, and conversion among Roma in a Transylvanian village*. xv, 230 pp., maps, figs, illus., bibliogr. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009. €29.90 (paper)

Fosztó's book is a study of the changing religious landscape in Romania after socialism. It examines transformations in the post-socialist public sphere by studying various forms of ritual communication in a complex multi-ethnic and multi-religious region of Transylvania, with major focus on increased religious conversion of local Roma to Pentecostalism. The book addresses the following questions: what role does religion play in people's everyday lives, and how do people construct social relations through religion?

The region examined in the book is composed of a Hungarian majority, and Romanian and Roma minorities. Here the diverse ethno-national social fabric historically developed hand in hand with religious diversity. Religion became a field for the construction of social relations, shared visions, and a force for delimitation of social space. The ethnography is chiefly sited in a village community called Gánás, and yet it reflects upon overlaps with and flows towards the urban environment (the city of Cluj). The village is composed of Hungarians and Roma who have both traditionally been Calvinists. Significantly, the region itself has also been recognized by Hungarian ethnographers as an island of living Hungarian tradition. However, this has considerable consequences for the Roma. Indeed, the Gánási Roma are often categorized as of 'Hungarian religion', and sometimes perceived as 'Hungarian Gypsies'. Moreover, the language of the services in the church is exclusively Hungarian, as is the language of religious education. Hence, much as religion is inclusive, it also perpetuates ethnic differences.

Religion in Gánás has historically played a cohesive role in everyday life and sociality, described as cutting across ethnic boundaries. By contrast, there are enduring socio-economic inequalities underpinned by an ethnic division of labour, and there is a practised prohibition of mixed marriages. Following the collapse of state socialism, the majority of villagers lost their jobs,

the collective farm was dissolved, and the land was distributed among the villagers, who became smallholders. As a consequence, the socio-economic distinctions re-emerged again as local, largely landless Roma traditionally dominated occupation categories that have either disappeared or been taken over by Hungarians.

Fosztó's book explores how local life-cycle rituals (baptism, confirmation, and burial) continue to be crucial for re-creating and maintaining the local public sphere as they cut across ethnic boundaries. However, although Hungarians and Roma participate in the same rituals, their perceptions are not alike. This is well illustrated by the discussion on post-socialist revitalization of village rituals, in which Hungarians tend to be more involved. These rituals are focused on village traditions connected to their ethno-national community, and that reanimate them in the local public sphere as Calvinist (i.e. Hungarian). Gánás Roma, by contrast, are more receptive to the conception of rituals as a matter of personhood (e.g. oath-taking).

The post-socialist liberation of the public sphere brought more symbolic resources for alternative modalities of personhood. Conversion to Pentecostalism increasingly became a way for many Roma to escape symbolic and material marginalization. As the evocative 'conversion narratives' illustrate, conversion is as much a personal as it is a social act. It affects the forms of local sociality because it disembeds a person from local networks, and in the rural context in particular. Yet the act of conversion carves a space for moral creativity, and external symbolic resources through which alternative personhood is reassembled anew. Indeed, it generates spiritual relatedness between converts, and provides alternative support for the individual, and, more importantly, recognition. The importance of the latter is well documented by an analysis of transformation of the public sphere in Romania after socialism when Roma became emblems of alternative social worlds and hence were often targeted by the xenophobic imagination of the majority.

Fosztó's ethnography of post-socialist change is splendid and well crafted. None the less, I was perplexed by its focus on the anthropology of communication without any reflection on information and communication theory (e.g. entropy). I therefore wonder if it could shed light on the ways various practices and modalities of reasoning have not changed but rather continued. Also, it seems to be unfortunate from

a methodological perspective that the robust potential of network analysis wasn't fully explored in the analysis of distribution of aid among Roma converts, as the genealogies used in the book instead are rather inappropriate. However, these are only curious thoughts. All in all, this is a book that provides compelling insights into the lifeworlds of Gánás Roma, and changing public sphere and religiosity in post-socialist Romania, and anyone interested in the region will definitely benefit from reading it.

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