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■ Article ■

## “God Doesn’t Know about Nationalities”: Questioning Religion and Nationalism in Evangelical Communities in Romania\*

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### Abstract

A strong link between religion and national identity has been particularly important in the study of Eastern and Southeastern Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The study of religion and its changes came into the focus of anthropological and sociological research especially after the communist period. One of the most important aspects of change was “religious revival” which also included conversion to new forms of religiosity such as the Evangelical communities, the Nazarenes, Baptists, Jehovah Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, and Pentecostals. The majority of Serbs living in Romania belong to the Serbian Orthodox Church, but during the last decades a number of Evangelicals appeared among the Serbian minority. This paper is based on the results of qualitative ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2010 among the Serbian Evangelical communities in Romania. The research focuses on the influence of conversion from Christian Orthodoxy to Evangelicalism among Serbs, focusing on the Evangelical response to religion and nationalism discourses, changes in collective and personal identity of newly converted believers, and perception of converted co-ethnics by the non-Evangelical community. In addressing these issues, this article explores the role of religious traditions which do not overlap with any particular national/ethnic group, the relationship between religion and nationalism, and the presence of supra-national narrative emphasized in Evangelical communities.

■ **Key words** : religion, nationalism, Serbs in Romania, Evangelical communities, conversion

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*I was shocked by the question of a Serb from Timișoara. He's Orthodox. We're talking and so, talking, we think of having a drink. I take a non-alcoholic one. And he says to me, "You are Serb by name, but you're not Serb." "Why?" I ask. "Well," he says, "You're not Orthodox." "Well, my Serb brother, the way you see it, Serbs are very few." "How's that?" he says. "The way I see it, there are much more Serbs. There are Serbs who are Orthodox, then those who are Protestant, but they all are of Serbian stock. Let's not diminish Serbs that much; they are much bigger in my eyes than they are in yours." When I said that, he said nothing in reply. If someone's converted from Orthodoxy to another faith, he loses his Serbianness. We're tightening the belt of Serbdom, we're limiting it. (Baptist, Moldova Veche, Romania)*

## Introduction

In recent years religious and nationalism phenomena represent both theoretical and methodological challenges in anthropological research. Ethnicity and nationalism, according to Rogers Brubaker, "have been characterized as basic sources and forms of social and cultural identification. Like ethnicity and nationalism, religion can be understood as a mode of social organization, a way of framing, channeling, and organizing social relations" (2012, p. 4). The complex relationship between religion and nationalism has been a subject of many theoretical debates. One of the most significant studies dedicated to the question of religion and nationalism is Antony D. Smith's *Chosen Peoples* (2003). According to Smith, "Two of the nation's most important cultural resources and traditions are constituted by 'ethnicity' and 'religion'" (Ibid., pp. 28-31). Smith divides the interaction between religion and nationalism into three analytical levels: the "official" level of regimes, leaders, and elites; the "popular" level of religious beliefs and practices of the "people" or "folk"; and the third "basic" level of the *sacred foundations* of the nation constituted by four dimensions of the nation: community, territory, history,

and destiny (Ibid.). In the paper “The Religious Content of Ethnic Identities,” Claire Mitchell observes that religion is not just a marker of identity, but rather its symbols, rituals, and organizations are used to boost ethnic identity (2006, pp. 1135-1152).

The question of religion and nationalism has become especially important for scholars whose research is focused on those societies where religious and national identities are overlapping, such as the case with Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in most of the newly formed nation-states of Eastern Europe, autocephaly transformed churches into “national” institutions. In the course of modern history, according to historian Bojan Aleksov, “Confessional allegiance has often been interwoven with a sense of identity, especially among marginal or oppressed ethnic, national, class, or regional groups” (2006, p. 166). The changes in the religious landscape that occurred at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century in Central and Eastern Europe significantly influenced the relationship between religion and nationalism. Analyzing the relationship between Orthodoxy and nationalism in the case of Romania, Lucian Leustean argues that “Religious and political rulers have the mission to guide the people and the Church and state should collaborate harmoniously infostering identity. Political leaders refer to the nationalist discourse of the Church in order to induce national cohesion” (2007, p. 717).

The role of the Orthodox Churches was different from the Catholic and Protestant where churches tend to be supranational or sub-national (Ibid.). In this period of dramatic changes of borders, the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and Ottoman Empire, and the creation of new national states (the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Kingdom of Romania and the Kingdom of Hungary) traditional Churches were facing a number of challenges, among which were encounters with other religious influences. New geographical and population configurations together with socio-political changes had strong influence on the religious landscape as well. It was the period of continuous looming of new religious ideas, the “Evangelistic Awakening” of the European

society. Consequently, the first groups of Evangelical missionaries appeared in the area of South-East Europe and they were to change the existing religious picture of the society to a considerable extent.

## **Evangelical Movements among Serbs**

In the territory where various cultural, social, and religious traditions were intertwining, the first Evangelical groups of Nazarenes appeared among the Orthodox Christian population of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Serbs and the Romanians, during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in a period of vast socio-economic and political changes (Đurić Milovanović, 2015, p. 10). Although the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a distancing of believers from the official church, the separation between the church and the state, and the emergence of newly established religious communities, the development of secular nationalism was nonetheless accompanied by the growth of religious nationalism. In this period, marked by the rise of nationalism, the Orthodox Christian religion played an important role in the formation of the national identity of the Serbs because the discourse of the relationship between the nation and the Orthodox Christian religion was growing insignificant. One example given by Aleksov, illustrates how nation and religion were fused into one from one letter of a parish priest in South Hungary:

Thus, Serbian brother, you should love your faith as you always did, for this faith is sincere and courageous, it protected you from foreign threat; you should know that our nationality is bound together with our Orthodox faith in such a way that a Serb without faith immediately ceases to be a Serb (2010, p. 177).

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period when the Orthodox Church confronted many challenges: the secularization of modern society, the influx of liberal ideas from the West, and the appearance of new religious traditions. Some authors consider that the conversion of many

Serbs to Nazarenes was a clear sign that the Orthodox Church was losing its last dominion, the spiritual realm. However, the attractiveness of Evangelical religious services, the use of vernacular languages, and hymn singing influenced the conversion process that continued to last during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century. Protestant understanding of the priesthood of all believers is a completely foreign concept for an Orthodox Christianity. Luka and Angela Ilić point out that;

In Eastern Orthodoxy there is a huge chasm separating clergymen from the laity. Priests are 'specially trained to perform the mysteries' and to lead their faithful. In general, lay-people are not involved in affairs of the church and do not hold office on either the local or the national level. Most often, the laity does not understand the doctrines and liturgies of the Orthodox Church, and thus remain passive (2008, p. 468).

The appearance of Evangelical religious movements with very different ritual and doctrinal practices became attractive to people dissatisfied with Orthodoxy.

Through the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the significant socio-political changes that occurred had also strong impact on religious identity of people living in the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Nazarenes were the first Evangelicals to appear among Serbs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through the activity of German and Hungarian missionaries, Nazarene beliefs spread in many settlements with an Orthodox population. Established in Switzerland under the strong influence of German Pietism and Anabaptism, the Nazarenes were champions of pacifism, separation of the church from the state, conscientious objection, and refusal to take oaths, because of which they were strongly persecuted. Bojan Aleksov (2006) wrote an important study on the history of the Nazarenes in South Hungary entitled *Religious Dissent between the Modern and the National: Nazarenes in Hungary and Serbia 1850-1914*. His study portrays the origins and spreading of the Nazarenes, the first Protestant Serbs, and their influence

on the development of nationalism in the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>1)</sup>

Alongside Nazarenes among Serbs and Romanians, another Evangelical community had significant influence – the Baptists. In Romania, the Baptists established the first German Baptist church in 1856 in Bucharest. According to Earl Pope, in 1864 a group of Russian refugees established a Baptist church in Dobrogea, and during the following years, such churches were founded in Transylvania and Banat. The first Romanian Baptist church was founded in Bucharest in 1912, which would later contribute to the founding of the Union of Baptist Churches in 1919 (1995, p. 177). Most Romanian Evangelical communities were established due to missionary activities in the inter-war period. By 1923, as John David Hopper points out, the Baptist movement in Romania was well developed by early German settlers who had also worked actively among the Romanian population. At that time, “There were 800 German, 6,000 Hungarian, a few Russian and 17,000 Romanian Baptists in Romania (1997, p. 59). The Baptist historian Alexa Popovici emphasizes that the greatest number of Baptist churches were established between 1920 and 1925 during which 957 churches were founded (2007, p. 327). According to Popovici, the reasons for this expansion were the returning of hundreds of prisoners converted in Russia and the turning of demobilized soldiers to neo-Protestantism at the front in Hungary, Italy, and Germany. Having returned to their native villages, they converted their families and friends, and many new Baptist churches were founded.

### **Serbian Minority in Romania: a Short Overview**

After the end of the First World War and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, one of the most ethnically and confessionally diverse areas, Banat, was divided between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Kingdom of Romania, and the Kingdom of Hungary. New international borders were confirmed by the Treaties of Versailles (1919) and Trianon (1920). The region of Banat represented a unique

historical, political, and cultural area in which the co-habitation with different ethnic groups (Romanians, Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Serbs) influenced its multicultural, multi-confessional, and multilingual character. Thus, in the Romanian part of Banat, 50,000 Serbs in about fifty settlements found themselves within the borders of Romania. Gaining the status of national minority, Serbs had the right to their own schools, churches, and cultural organizations. This favorable situation continued until the end of the Second World War. The early communist period in Romania was marked by strong assimilation pressures; the state regime took control of religious life and cultural institutions. In the post-communist period minority rights were better protected by introducing new legislation concerning minority issues. Thus, from 1989 Serbs in Romania have been organized into the Union of Serbs, the leading organization of the Serbian minority based in Timisoara.<sup>2)</sup>

The position of the Serbian community in Romania has undergone significant changes which have also had impact on their number. According to the 2002 census there were 22,562 Serbs living in Romania. The area with highest concentration of Serbs is the Banat region (western part of Romania), where they mostly live in ethnically mixed settlements. The largest number of Serbs is in the settlements of the Danube Gorge region of southwestern Banat, along the border with Serbia. In this specific area, I conducted qualitative-oriented field research in 2010 among Serbs living in the five Danube Gorge settlements: Radmina, Liubcova, Moldova Veche, Divici, and Pojejena. This region was chosen because of its specific and dynamic religious history which included conversion of predominantly Orthodox Serbs to Evangelical communities.

Ethnographic field methods included participant observation and semi-guided interviews in Serbian and Romanian language with four pastors and 17 church members. Researched communities have from 15 up to 50 church members. Evangelicals included mostly members of the Baptist community which was the most numerous and a small number of Nazarene informants. The main topics included everyday religious practices, conversion, family histories, mixed marriages, and attitudes to-

wards the religious others. The main aim of this paper is to examine the influence of conversion to Evangelicalism on the Serbian ethnic community and their collective identity as well as to show shifts in their ethnic/national group identifications. Among my Serbian informants strong identification between national and religious identity has been replaced by a supra-national orientation of Evangelicals.

This case-study inevitably touches upon one of the important aspects of religion in contemporary societies – religious pluralism, interreligious relations, and the emergence of the new forms of religiosity. While religious pluralism is nothing new, the emergence of new forms of religiosity has been marked in the last decades. In Southeastern Europe, Evangelicalism is becoming an increasingly visible and important element of religious diversity.<sup>3)</sup> Conversion to Evangelicalism among predominantly an Orthodox population brought many changes not only in the irreligious identities but also in cultural and ethnic ones. Various Evangelical religious communities, such as Pentecostals, Baptists, Nazarenes, Christian Brethren, and others, played an important role in the religious life of different ethnic groups in Serbia and Romania especially in the post-communist period.

In what, Paul Mojzes calls the “religious topography of Romania” after the fall of communism, different Evangelical communities have seen a significant numerical growth, especially Pentecostals and Baptists (1999, pp. 7-43). According to the 2011 census, Eastern Orthodoxy is the largest religious denomination in Romania (81.04 percent), the second largest group are Roman Catholics (4.33 percent), then Reformed Christian Church (2.99 percent), Pentecostals (1.80 percent), Baptists (0.56 percent), Greek Catholics (0.75 percent) and others. Most denominations are ethnically marked in Romania today: Orthodox Christianity and Greek Catholicism are connected to Romanians, Calvinism with Hungarians, and Lutheranism with Germans. Although conversion to another religious tradition was less frequent among Orthodox Serbs than among Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, or Slovaks, i.e., members of some of the Protestant churches, during the twentieth century Evangelicals found a certain number of followers among Orthodox believers as well.

Thus, regarding the confession of Serbs in Romania, the majority belong to the Serbian Orthodox Church, while others belong to the Evangelical communities, among which the most numerous are the Baptists, Pentecostals, Nazarenes, and the Seventh-Day Adventists. Most Serbian Evangelical communities were established due to missionary activities in the inter-war period and the most numerous were the Baptists, who formed the first communities in 1936. The founding of the Baptist communities among Serbs is generally placed in the 1960s and 1970s, but the eighties and the post-communist period have seen a significant growth which came as a result of their missionary work, greater number of theologically educated preachers, and the legal status that some Evangelical communities obtained as recognized communities. Although the majority of Baptist churches were active during the communist period, they were not allowed to perform baptism publicly or to organize any sermon activities, while the distribution of the Bible was limited. Thus, the “expansion” of Baptists among Serbs in Romania is a recent process.

### **Religion and Nationalism in Evangelical Communities**

It could be said that “religious traditions have shaped particular forms of nationalism” (Brubaker, 1995, p. 108). Historically, the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church was important in the formation of national identity since the Serbs in Romania tend to base their national identity on religion and language. Thus, the Serbs who do not speak Serbian and are not members of the Serbian Orthodox Church are often perceived as not being “true Serbs.”<sup>4)</sup> Adherence to the “predominant” religion of an ethnic group may be particularly strong among members of ethnic minorities living in the immediate neighborhood of the “mother country.” Brubaker defines it as “triangular relationship between national minorities, the newly nationalizing states in which they live and the external national homelands to which they belong” (Ibid., p. 108). Thus, the adherence to Orthodoxy and membership of the Serbian Orthodox

Church provides a sense of “historical continuity and tradition” and ties the ethnic community with the religion that predominated in the mother country.

In diaspora communities, religion represents an important marker of identity and significant instrument for self-categorization. As Thomas H. Eriksen argues, “A diasporic identity implies an emphasis on conservation and re-creation of the ancestral culture.” Thus, diaspora often insists on continuity and on cultural purism (2002, p. 153). However, differing from large confessions, which are usually developed within nation-states, small religious communities often give more importance to the religious identity, while belonging to a certain ethno-national group is less important for them. Romanian sociologist László Fosztó claims that Evangelism represents a “culturally neutral form of Christianity” (Fosztó & Kiss, 2012, pp. 51-64). Evangelicals tend to be supra-national, having believers from different ethnic backgrounds and holding religious services in many languages. Thus, Evangelicals are against the “national idea” because they consider all people to be their brothers and sisters (independent from the believers’ nationality). Evangelicals do not attach importance to ethno-national affiliation invoking the Apostle Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians (3:28): “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

As the ethnic minority to which they belong is mainly mono-confessional (mostly Serbian Orthodox), it is the religious identity that dominates among other identity types among Serbs who are members of Evangelical communities. By choosing to examine how national identity is expressed and transformed in the lives and practices of Evangelicals Serbs, we aimed to analyze Evangelical response to nationalism through different discourses. Before beginning the research our initial hypothesis was that Evangelical Serbs would have different perspectives and views on their national identities compared to the Orthodox Serbs. Thus, one of the main questions was: what does it mean for their national identity if Evangelical Serbs in Romania find more common religion with

Romanian Evangelicals then they do with Orthodox Serbs?

The Baptists, as well as other Evangelicals, stress ethnic equality as an element of cohesion that on religious grounds plays a key role in the expansion of evangelical communities and the universal messages they transmit. In the Baptist theology, the emphasis is mainly on moral renewal, evangelization, and general disinterest in nationalism. In some cases the mono-religiosity of an ethnic group is considered to be the natural state of affairs. In the case of poly-religiosity, the confessional diversity is presented as an unnatural phenomenon, which should be eliminated. In such circumstances, religious minorities are often regarded as potentially or actually dangerous and converts to another ethnic group's faith are regarded as traitors to their own nation (Bauman, 1999, p. 234).

Members of the Serbian ethnic minority often find themselves torn between the religious identity of the majority, i.e., the Serbian Orthodox Church, and new forms of religion. Nearly all Evangelical Serbs reject a notion of Serbian national identity that is expressed through Orthodox religion. Another common reason given for Evangelical churches not being national or Serbian is that the Orthodox Church is already the national church. Being "Christian" means being "brothers and sisters in Christ." Evangelicals believe that being a Serbian church would mean excluding other nationalities, which is opposite to their idea of Christianity. In Evangelical communities everybody is welcome regardless of his/her nationality and inter-ethnic differences gradually become less important: "There is no difference in the church. It's important that we are in the faith, God doesn't know the difference" (ŽG, female, Baptist, Moldova Veche). "God doesn't know about nationalities, only if you are in the true faith, if you believe in the second coming of Christ" (SM, male, Baptist, Pojejena). "There is no difference; you can be Serb even if you are not Orthodox" (MH, Baptist, male, Moldova Veche). "There is no Serb, Romanian or Arab, we are all God's creation. We don't make differences in our church (ND, male, Moldova Veche).<sup>5)</sup>

In these cases, the religious elements of Evangelical identity are becoming stronger and ethnic or national dimensions are weakening (Mitchell,

2006, p. 1148). Thus, the meaning of the ethnic/national category is changed and their self-perception is constructed not more through the ethnic/national factor but through the religious factor.

### **“Toward a New Life”: Conversion and Collective Identity Changes in Evangelical Communities**

Evangelicals have two symbolic acts which mark the end of the old life and the beginning of the new: conversion and baptism. Building their new identity on the basis of the new faith as born again Christians and distancing themselves from the traditional religions, they embrace a different way of life. The majority of informants were baptized (mainly as children) in the Serbian Orthodox Church and through re-baptism as adults, they changed their religion. Conversion of Serbs to Evangelicalism in Romania can be seen also as a consequence of contacts and mixed marriages among the various ethnic groups, but also of contact with Romanian missionaries who have developed their missionary activity well over the last ten years. The following interview fragment illustrates the Baptist community growth which led to the establishment of a new church after communism:

From 1975-1988 there were no christenings, then three women converted from the Orthodox Church. In 1989 we were baptized and in 1993 the church had 20 members. We had evangelization; we had the christening in the river. There were many young people there. Then we started to make a new church (ŽG, Baptist, female, Radimna).

Many churches have been built with financial donations from Serbian immigrants who became members of the Baptist church while living abroad: “After Revolution we got a chance to build a new church. Brothers came from United States to help us” (MH, Baptist, male, Radimna).

It is very interesting to analyze the role of the Evangelical diaspora in the perception of “Evangelicals at home.” We often can notice that in the Orthodox perception of Evangelicals they are described as a “religion imported from abroad,” a “new religion,” a “religion of strangers” or as “invented religions.” However, such arguments are usually supplied with different material evidence: new church building, new musical instruments, financial aid for church members, and religious books and Bibles. Being a member of any Evangelical community is often accompanied with a strong reaction of the local community, which sees the conversion of their co-ethnics as unacceptable behavior, as a result of the stigma attached to Evangelical Serbs by the Orthodox majority.

In the conversion process, learning the new religious language of a group is very important. Anthropologist Manuela Canton Delgado defines this religious language as “narratives of coherence” which redirect the sense of belonging based on the new connections, reformulating the spaces for recognition, and weaving new networks of solidarity (2010, p. 256). Special rhetoric within the community includes different linguistic interpretations of their teachings. Repetition of religious language, as Dumont argues, can be interpreted as a confirmation of identity and marker of a membership of a religious community (2003, p. 377). Creating a new universe of discourse, this new language induces the feeling of demarcation from other groups, and they adopt terms which are unknown to, for instance, the Orthodox Serbs; examples of such are “friend of God” “new world,” “repentant,” and “worldly people.” Evangelical discourses, which are globally recognizable, provide a cultural resource around which religious collectivities can recursively reproduce themselves. Such elements of religious discourse can lead to a supra- or meta-ethnic self-categorization (Ibid.). According to Dumont:

(Supra-ethnic identity) means that the self-classification switches from the ethnic to the religious, the ethnic component disappears, and thus plays no longer the greater role in the life of the faithful. One stays no longer in the ethnic category. The ethnic category is

replaced by a religious 'pluri-ethnic' category. Regarding meta-ethnic identity, this means that one stays 'objectively' within the ethnic category. However, in the self-classification, people identify themselves no longer in terms of ethnicity, but in terms of religion (Ibid.).

In many interviews, converts stressed a negative reaction from their society which can also become a confirming experience and support the truthfulness of biblical prophecies. Members of Evangelical communities are often stigmatized by the broader community, which is especially marked in the using, the term repentant (Rom. pocaiții): "My father said to me, 'I'm ashamed to show my face because of what you did; you went over to the pocaiții'" (NB, Baptist, female, Moldova Veche). "It's the greatest sin to change from one faith to another. Nobody liked us being in this faith. We were driven out of our home twice" (GI, Baptist, male, Radimna). "How much I fought with them, when we went to work together in the field. When they saw me, they said 'Here is our sister. Peace, Peace' and they laugh (ŽG, Baptist, female, Radmina). "We are obtrudes for them. When they heard we have the Bible in the house, the priest came to take it from us" (SM, Baptist, female, Pojejena). From these interview fragments we can observe the strong reaction of the community, their families, and Orthodox Church members towards conversion to Evangelical communities. Belonging to another religious community, Evangelical Serbs challenge the "desirable" identity and local appearance of the "homogenous" Orthodox community.

Another important example of the distancing of Evangelical Serbs from "Orthodox customs" is the celebration of the family (or village church) patron saint's feast day or slava, specific to Orthodox Serbs, who consider it a peculiarity of their culture. Every house-hold observes one or two family saint's days a year and the custom is passed on from father to son. Evangelical Serbs do not celebrate slava or go to others particular celebration day. The fact that the slava is not observed by the Baptists frequently causes an adverse reaction of the Orthodox.

Answering the question, "Baptists Serbs do not observe the slava?"

an Orthodox priest told us: “No. They don’t. They’ll forget who they are. If you have no past, you can’t have a future either. These customs remind us of what we were. On the slava day, it’s compulsory to light a candle (PV, male, Serbian Orthodox, Moldova Veche). Although the Baptist Serbs do not observe the slava or go, as is customary, to the slava celebration of those who do, they remember that the practice was observed before and often mention it in their discourse: “We practiced that before, when we were Orthodox. But now, in these Evangelical cults, you don’t observe anything that doesn’t come from Jesus Christ, the birth, the resurrection and the ascension, and not Saint Elias or Saint Nicholas. It would be to deny our faith. We don’t go to a slava, or where censing is done or food eaten for the dead” (MH, Baptist, male, Moldova Veche). “The priest was against it. He went to the police to complain about us. We are like sectarians. We do not believe in the cross. We do not celebrate the slava on St. Demetrius’ Day, on St. Petka’s Day” (ŽG, Baptist, female, Radimna).

Distancing from and not participating in, for example the local Orthodox feasts such as the village patron saint’s day, Serbian folklore celebrations or Orthodox funerals, Serbian Evangelicals are no longer seen as “true representatives of their own ethnic group.” Fosztó and Kiss give an example of Adventist parents in one Hungarian community in Romania: “They refused to dress their children in folk dresses or to allow them to sing folksongs, thus scandalizing the local Hungarian community which sees this gesture as disloyalty to the ethnic group” (2012, p. 63).

Using different languages in their religious services, Evangelicals tend to emphasize the importance of native languages for the understanding of their dogma. In the Danube Gorge settlements included in our research in almost every Evangelical community the dominant language spoken in the church was Serbian. Since some communities are ethnically mixed, services were also bilingual, Serbian and Romanian. Religious books, Bibles and hymn singing books are often written in Serbian Cyrillic letters. My informants emphasized the use of Cyrillic script in everyday practice: “We write true Serbian, with Cyrillic letters”

(ŽG, Baptist, female, Radimna). From the collected interviews it is observable that the Serbian language plays a role of a key marker of Serbian identity, regardless of confession: “If you’re [married to] a Serb, you should be able to speak Serbian” (SM, Baptist, female, Divici). “My mother tongue is Serbian. We are Serbs; my great-grandfather was Serb, my father, my mother (ŽG, Baptist, female, Moldova Veche). Thus, language is a distinctive element that differentiates them from Romanians and affects their sense of belonging.

Both Evangelical and Orthodox Serbs celebrate the Christian holidays according to the Julian calendar, unlike the Romanians, who adopted the Gregorian calendar. This indicates that Evangelical Serbs perpetuate some elements of their previous religion, even though they do not explicitly figure in their teaching: “We celebrate the New Year Serbian style on 13th of January” (SM, Baptist, female, Pojejena) “The church in Liubcova exists since 1993. It has about twenty members, Serbs and Romanians. We hold services according to the old calendar, Serbian style, Christmas [on] January 7th, the New Year [on] January 13th” (SM, Baptist, male, Liubcova).

Evangelicals in Romania disagree about whether their churches are “Serbian” or not. Despite the supra-national orientation of the Baptist Church, Baptist Serb believers seem to feel the need to “symbolically” emphasize their national affiliation as may be seen from the inscription on the church building in Radimna, “The Serbian Baptist Church.” The arrival of religious freedom after communism led directly to the development of transnational linkages between religious organizations. For Evangelical communities humanitarian aid, religious colleges and seminars, and foreign missionaries led to the integration of these churches within transnational networks of churches. Most of the churches were built or renovated after 1990. In the Baptist church meeting hall in Moldova Veche we noticed American, Romanian, and Serbian flags. While Evangelical Serbs tend to avoid calling their church Serbian, they incorporate some elements of national symbols or identifications. This could also be seen as incorporation of some elements of civic nationalism

in their religious practice (i.e., flags, prayers for the state and the president). Thus, following Brubaker, “Religion does not necessarily define the boundaries of the nation, but it supplies myths, metaphors and symbols that are central to the discursive iconic representation of the nation” (2012, p. 12). From our research, we can observe how Baptist Serbs substitute religious elements of Serbian national identification with non-religious symbols which also defines their belonging to a certain ethno-national community. If we analyze the above cited interviews, we can clearly see a dichotomous relationship between the supra-national nature of Evangelical communities: “There is no Serb, Romanian or Arab. We are all God’s creation; God doesn’t know about nationalities...” and transformations of that concept when it “encounters” with some elements of nationalism: “We write true Serbian, with Cyrillic letters.” “We hold services according to the old calendar, Serbian style.” “My mother tongue is Serbian. We are Serbs.”

## **Conclusion**

In diaspora communities it is considered that several elements are very important in preservation of the ethnic/national identity: native language, religion, tradition, customs, and folklore. One aspect which is very important for the anthropological point of view is the fact that ethnic communities in the diaspora may no longer be considered ethnically and religiously homogeneous. Even though they are mostly Orthodox Christians, the Evangelical Serbs are a very good example of the religious diversity within a single, seemingly mono-confessional ethnic group.

After World War I and the Banat division, the Orthodox religion provided a certain solidarity and the Serbian Orthodox church played a significant role for the Serbian community in Romania. The appearance of Evangelicals among Serbs indicates that the encounter with different religious traditions has led to changes in religious identity which are taking place in many diasporic communities. As heterogeneity has re-

placed homogeneity in the religious sphere of Serbs in Romania, the close relationship between religion and national identity has been irrevocably broken. The adoption of a different set of religious beliefs by Serbs in Romania resulted in some changes in the cultural identity and sources of collective identity. Thus, the weakening of traditional ties and identifications can be noticed in new forms of cultural identity created in Evangelical communities. Their self-perception is thus religious rather than ethnic (Leman, 1999, p. 229). As Peter van der Veer stresses, “Religious identities are not ‘primordial attachments’ inculcated by tradition, but products of changing identities shaped over time by a number of factors” (1994). Despite their differences with regard to language, nationality, social status, age, etc. as members of “worldwide brotherhood,” Serbs within Evangelical communities chose different markers of their ethno-national identification, distancing themselves from Serbian nationalism based on Orthodoxy.

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- 1) According to Aleksov, Nazarenes influenced the emergence of the God Worshippers (Ser. Bogomoljci) religious movement in the Serbian Orthodox Church which is interpreted as Orthodox renewal movement, though they had many elements in common with the Evangelical Christianity, such as the use of vernacular language and hymn singing during religious service.
  - 2) For more detail historical data on the Serbian minority in Romania see Djurić Milovanović (2012, pp. 117-142).
  - 3) On Evangelicals in Ukraine and conversion in the last several decades see Wanner, (2008).
  - 4) More on developing of nationalism in the Serbian Orthodox Church in: Falina (2007, pp. 505-527).
  - 5) Transcribed material has partly been published in Djurić Milovanović (2012, pp. 117-142). All recordings were collected in August 2010 and are held in the Digital Archive of the Institute for Balkan Studies.

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