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The Romani Diaspora: Evangelism, Networks and the Making of a Transnational Community

As a scattered population without a homeland, the case of the Romanies is interesting and very relevant for the study of how a dispersed and diasporic group may try to achieve autonomy without establishing a state with its own territory. At the same time, it invites us to consider in what ways the scattered and very diverse Romani groups can create a transnational community, since they have shown very different features and needs. This paper focuses mainly on Brazil, where many Romanies from different backgrounds live, in order to analyze the Romani Evangelism development of intra-state and trans-state networks among co-ethnics, describing its spatial approaches and territories and comparing it to the notion of dispersion condition as a de-territorialized one. As a process capable of connecting Romani communities worldwide, Romani Evangelism can become an umbrella under which the various groups are brought together, enabling the rise of a transnational community.

Keywords: transnationalism, Romani, diaspora, Pentecostalism, Evangelism.

Romska diaspora: evangelizem, mreže in nastajanje transnacionalne skupnosti

Romi kot razseljeno prebivalstvo brez lastne domovine so zelo zanimivi kot primer, kako razseljena skupnost v diaspori lahko doseže avtonomijo, ne da bi ustanovila države z lastnim ozemljem. Po drugi strani pa ob Romih lahko proučujemo, kako razseljene in zelo raznolike romske skupine ustvarjajo transnacionalno skupnost, še posebej, ker imajo zelo različne značilnosti in potrebe. Članek obravnava predvsem Brazilijo, kjer živijo številni Romi iz različnih okolij. Analizira romski evangelizem in njegov razvoj znotraj države in v meddržavnem okviru s poudarkom na prostorskem pristopu. Primerja ga z uveljavljenim pojmovanjem razseljenosti kot deteritorializiranega stanja. Romski evangelizem kot proces, ki povezuje romske skupnosti po vsem svetu, lahko postane krovni okvir združevanja različnih skupin, kar lahko pripomore k nastanku transnacionalne skupnosti.

Ključne besede: transnacionalizem, Romi, diaspora, binokštništvo, evangelizem.

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1. Introduction

The geographical dispersion and the lack of cohesiveness among the various Romani (Gypsy)¹ groups is one of the main challenges to their identity recognition and global political mobilization. Centuries of dispersion and living under different rulers produced a rich mosaic of Romani peoples, so Romani groups have shown very different features and needs without any strong common trait able to connect them, leading Carol Silverman to assert that “discrimination is sometimes the only thing that seems to unify Roma, and this is precisely what Roma seek to eliminate” (Silverman 2012, 47).

The first signs of the Romani ethnic mobilization and the search for unification of their several and dispersed communities can be traced back to the Balkans in the 19th century (Marushiakova & Popov, 2005, 433). Since then Romani ethno-nationalism has experienced various stages of development: from the first attempts to unite Romanies worldwide in a single state by Roma from Eastern Europe until the global movement described by Marushiakova and Popov (2005, 433–455).

In this process, cohesiveness and leadership are essential for collective projects and to strengthen solidarity beyond national borders. Considering that the international Romani movement is in its early stages, one should expect only a partial success in creating a broad Romani transnational community requiring representation, leading some scholars and activists to highlight this challenge for future Romani ethnic mobilisation (Gheorghe & Mirga 1997, Sheffer 2003, Hancock 2010).

However, this seems to have been changed in recent years by the emergence of Romani Pentecostalism throughout Romani communities. In the shadow of the secular movement, the evangelization of Romanies was carried out by pastors and missionaries who started to unite Romanies, creating places of worship and establishing ethnic associations throughout Western Europe. Some years later, it spread to other regions through Romani networks, also reaching South and North American and Eastern Romanies. According to Manuela Cantón Delgado (2014), Romani Pentecostalism could be considered a process of modern ethnogenesis capable of connecting Romani communities and becoming an umbrella under which the various groups are brought together, even facilitating the rise of a pan-Romani community at a more global level through transnational activities and a sense of brotherhood. The Roma activist Jorge Bernal pointed out that

the Evangelical movement has given us not only a religious revival, but a revival of our culture and language too. It has brought about cohesion among the different Kalderash and Lovari groups and brought them closer to many other Romani groups (Bernal 2014, 204).

The Romani Evangelical movement has its roots in 1952 in France, where a non-Gypsy pastor called Clément Le Cossec founded the first religious transnational movement – *Mission Évangélique Tzigane* (MET) and started to spread it to other countries. In the Iberian countries, the diffusion was protagonized by the Spanish *Gitano* Emiliano Jiménez Escudero, and the most important expression is the Romani Philadelphia Church (*Iglesia Evangélica Filadelfia* – IEF). Created by and for Romanies themselves, its establishment took place in a time of opening to religious pluralism in the Iberian countries, and it was supported by the MET and Assembly of God that, according to Blanes (2008, 25), provided financial, logistical and human resources to its development.

In Western Europe the evangelical networks among Romanies expanded dramatically during the last few decades and it is spreading to other corners of the world. As a flourishing transnational movement, linking people on a religious basis beyond national frames of reference (Droogers 2014, 197), the Evangelical associative movement promises to overcome the obstacles faced by Romanies worldwide in creating a self-formulated transnational community. Forging an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991), the Evangelical movement is effecting a formal re-territorialization through places of worship, nurturing a Romani cultural revival, preserving the Romanies’ self-proclaimed uniqueness and partly succeeding in uniting Romanies from different groups in an ongoing process. As a transnational formation based on religious and ethnic – and partly linguistic² – elements, the evangelical Romanies espouse religious beliefs that are intertwined with and overlap their ethnic identity.

Notwithstanding its importance, the religious movement has been overlooked by scholars. Some works have been published on religion and its impact on Romani identification and social organization (Cantón Delgado et al. 2004, Cantón Delgado 2014, Gay y Blasco 2002, 2012, Ries 2007, 2009 and others), but more remains to be discussed. In a recent analysis on the disconnections between the Romani leadership and its communities, Anna Mirga asserted that:

One evident novelty, which is often treated marginally by scholars and Romani activists alike, is the emergence of religious leadership. Across Europe, the Evangelical movement has conquered the hearts and minds of numerous Romani communities, altering traditional patterns of Romani social organisation and leadership / ... / Often Romani religious leaders reach beyond their spiritual competencies to engage in social action, community initiatives and self-help programmes, combining their roles as religious and community/civic leaders (Mirga 2015, 31–32).

The Romanies can be considered one of the greatest contributors to the spread of Pentecostalism in Europe. Even though there are huge Romani communities on the American continent, especially in Brazil, Argentina and the United States, prior literature on Romani Pentecostal transnationalism has focused almost exclusively on European phenomena. It is generally known that Romani

churches are spreading where Gypsies live, but there are almost no studies on this topic focused on this part of the world. Hence, this article is a preliminary attempt to bring the Romanies from South America, firstly those from Brazil, into diaspora studies. Since some Romani communities operate globally, I must note that the geographical scope of this study is an important limitation. I also call for more integrated and comprehensive research between North and South American and European Romanies, and perhaps in Asia since Israel is already a site of transnational religious activities and India could become so in the near future.

In this article, I focus mainly on Brazil, where many Romanies from different backgrounds live, in order to analyze the development of Romani Evangelism intra-state and trans-state networks among co-ethnics, describing its spatial approaches and territories. I shall concentrate on an analysis of the spatial organization of Romani Evangelism in Brazil, comparing the spatial dimension of the two diasporic notions – secular and religious – and going beyond the misguided notion of the diasporic space as de-territorialized and ungrounded. Thus, I adopt a spatial approach, both physical and social, to analyze the Romani networks and places, aiming to understand the construction of a Romani religious territory and its contribution to the development of the community. The analysis will show how the spatial Romani Evangelism approach is contributing in a very relevant way for the formation of a transnational community.

In the first section, I will present some methodological considerations. In the subsequent section, I will give an overview of the Romani people in Brazil, describing the relations among different groups and the development of the Evangelical denominations among them. Then I will present briefly the concepts adopted in this article, enabling me to analyze the Romani networks and territories and the spatial pattern of the transnational associative Romani movement conducted by the evangelical Christians; this will be compared to the notion of dispersion condition as a de-territorialized one. The conclusions are presented in the final section.

2. Methodology

Many of the arguments and much of the information presented in this article are based on fieldwork undertaken during 2012 and 2014 in São Paulo, and on interviews conducted with Portuguese Calon and Brazilian Roma Pastors from São Paulo, Paraná and Minas Gerais, as well as with the Gadje (non-Romani) and Brazilian Calon pastors and missionaries that work in Paraná and São Paulo with Calon (2012–2015). Occasionally, I use examples from my own empirical work in Spain (2015–2016) to make my case.

I adopted a mixed method approach. The ethnographic data were collected by participant observation and interviews. I conducted semi-structured inter-

views with pastors and missionaries who used to carry out religious activities across Brazil. In addition, informal interviews were held during participant observations. The geographical boundaries of the research were determined in accordance to the spatial distribution of the religious organizations, reflecting the distribution of Romanies themselves, not following the well-defined boundaries of administrative regions. The locations chosen are in the southern parts of the country where Romanies are numerous and it is possible to find Romanies from the three different groups: Brazilian Calon, Portuguese Calon and Roma. In addition, this region leads the country in terms of both population and wealth. Moreover, the most important Evangelical organizations in terms of resources and connections abroad are concentrated in these areas. At the micro level, interactive social mapping was useful, so the locations of importance to the research were obtained from religious individuals. I added some information from fieldwork in Spain. With the largest Romani population of Western Europe, Spain is an important site to research Romani Pentecostalism because many ideas and structures are formulated and organized there. Furthermore, Spain is linked to Brazil and the Americas in general due to its imperial past. Huge waves of Spanish people, including Romanies, went to South America, and Brazil was an important recipient country. Hence, transnational contacts between the two countries are not unusual, even though the contacts between Portugal and Brazil are traditionally stronger.

The informants were chosen in order to obtain different viewpoints. They have different educational backgrounds, different socio-economic status and belong to different Romani groups. During the field research, conversations were held with Evangelical Romanies of both sexes and with different occupations and housing. The Gadje also have different backgrounds, ranging from those with basic levels of education to those who hold a master's degree.

3. Romanies and Evangelical Networks in Brazil

It is estimated that the Brazilian population of some 200 million contains more than 600,000 Romanies, dispersed throughout the country, but this is only conjecture, since there are no statistics classifying the population according to ethnicity. Major communities reside in the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Goiás, Bahia and Paraná. Roma activist Jorge Bernal, based in Argentina, describes the main groups in Brazil (Bernal 2014, 224–226): The Kalderash from Eastern Europe have been in Brazil since the turn of the 19th century. Many more came during and immediately after the Second World War, and there was an influx of Italian Kalderash in the 1960s. The Matchuaia, the second main group, came originally from the Mačva region in Serbia, whence their name. They are close to the Kalderash and have almost no relatives left in Europe. They are mainly found in Brazil and the USA. These two groups are

considered the most important and most prestigious, and some of them are wealthy. In addition, there are some Lovara and Xoraxane Romani families living dispersed throughout the country. Finally, there are Calon from the Iberian countries. This latter group was the first to arrive in Brazil, following deportation by the Portuguese from the 16th century onwards.

Kalderash Roma are very keen to distinguish themselves from Calon, as they consider themselves the authentic Romanies. For their part, Calon groups are unwilling to be associated with the Roma. Some of them simply know nothing about the Kalderash. Moreover, there are also some divisions within the groups. For example, some Calon born in Portugal distance themselves from the Brazilian Calon whose ancestors arrived from Portugal and settled in Brazil many decades or even centuries ago. Scattered throughout the country, they form a very heterogeneous group.

In Brazil, Evangelism has emerged via two different paths: from family contacts (old established networks) and through the efforts of religious missions. It is worth noting that these are almost completely separate groups with their own particular path of development, and they differentiate themselves regarding their evangelization: for the Roma group, it was the result of family ties, while for the Calon it was introduced, with few exceptions, by non-Gypsy pastors. Unlike Romani Evangelism in Western Europe, Romani Evangelism in Brazil is in its early stages. A Roma evangelical pastor estimates that less than 10,000 Romanies of Eastern European background have converted to an evangelical denomination in Brazil (Interviewee 3). I believe this is a conservative estimate, but it is still too early to know whether the evangelization of Romanies in Brazil will spread as quickly as it did in Western Europe. Additionally, I did not get any estimate about Calon groups, even though it is quite common to find someone evangelical or from a family where someone adopted the new faith.

Within Brazilian society more broadly, Pentecostalism has risen along with other religious movements, like the Theology of Liberation, gaining acceptance as an alternative to mainstream religion and practices. The Theology of Liberation acknowledges the agency of people to transform their environment, bringing about a new leading role for minorities, allowing the oppressed to take part of the church: the notion of an option for the poor began to become more prominent as well as the possibility of collective projects and political action created within the local communities. As a process of total liberation, the Theology of Liberation encourages people to become active agents of their own destiny in order to liberate themselves from resignation, economic exploitation and evil/sin, addressing the struggles of the impoverished and enabling them to transform their lives and social identities.

The similarities between the Theology of Liberation and the major Pentecostal churches which have been successfully introduced by pastors to the marginalized people in Brazil are, however, limited. Notwithstanding their

targeting marginalized, segregated and impoverished people living mainly in the outskirts of the big cities, the two movements are very different in their nature and approach. Furthermore, the former emerged as resistance against the dictatorship in Brazil, while the latter flourished in a time of opening to religious pluralism subsequent to the political opening. Moreover, it is not possible to apply the same rationale for many evangelical Romani groups, especially the Portuguese, the Kalderash and the Matchuaia, which enjoy a high standard of living in Brazil. The flexible organization and autonomy offered by evangelical churches seems to be a more important factor in explaining the spread of this religious approach among those who prefer to remain separate, rather than taking part in non-Romani churches.

Following my attempt to map the Romani evangelical networks in Brazil, it is possible to offer a preliminary overview. The Roma Pentecostal network was founded by kinship networks of Matchuaia and Kalderash, with branches in at least seven cities, linked to some international evangelical networks. They are situated mainly in the southeastern parts of the country, where many Roma families live. It is an ethnic church in the sense that the religious service is open to members of the community and the language of worship is Romani. Unlike in some parts of Europe, the converted Roma are not granted any special status by their own community.

The main process of evangelization among the Calon began with the establishment in 2002 of a mission called MACI – *Missão Amigos dos Ciganos* (Mission of the Friends of the Gypsies), an interdenominational³ network. Years later, another mission was founded in Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul. In 2004, the Calon Project, which aims to evangelize Gypsies of the Calon group, was founded in Santa Fé do Sul. Together, they established a network called RENACI – *Rede Nacional de Apoio aos Ciganos* (National Network to Support Gypsies), which is comprised of various ministries that benefit from training and education in anthropology and transcultural activities considered useful to the mission. According to a non-Romani pastor (Interviewee 4), this is a transnational network with contacts in Europe, Turkey and India, which operates 16 offices throughout Brazil offering training courses about the Romani. There are also other Romani churches, like a Calon Presbyterian church and some branches of the church of Portuguese Calon. The Portuguese Calon, for instance, who are concentrated in the southern parts of Brazil, have their own places of worship and form a singular network connected with evangelical churches in their homeland⁴.

In addition to furnishing this descriptive presentation, my research suggested ways in which evangelical ideology impacts on the identity of the Romanies, presenting one possible way of bringing Romanies together. The heterogeneity of the Romani communities must be emphasized, and also that of the evangelical churches. However, despite their differences, there are some features common

to the various evangelical pastors who seek to change the Gypsies' traditional way of life. As elsewhere, they condemn some traditional Romani practices, like palm reading and fortune telling; however, most pastors refuse to enforce such strict rules. Generally speaking, they ask converts to sacrifice a part of their Romani culture/way of life, becoming a new individual with a new identity, but without losing all Romani cultural traits.⁵ They do not stop being Romanies. In general, Pentecostalism adds a new identity dimension to its converts, as children of God (Robbins 2004). The evangelical Christians emphasize the aspect of cultural revival through language, and have launched some projects to preserve the Romani heritage, such as an oral Bible translation project from Portuguese to *Chib* – the word used by many Calons to refer to the Romani dialect from Portugal and Spain – and encouraging the use of *Chib* during worship. This dualism represented by cultural domination and homogenization, and the transformative power of indigenous appropriation and differentiation, is a prominent characteristic of the Pentecostal movement in general, and as Robbins (2004) argues:

its tendency to preserve peoples' beliefs concerning the reality and power of the spiritual worlds from which they have broken. P/c preserves these beliefs in the sense of accepting their cognitive claims concerning the existence of spiritual forces, but it does not retain the 'normative presuppositions' about the moral value of the spiritual world that often accompany them (Robbins 2004, 128).

Paloma Gay y Blasco (2002) argues that in spite of changing some aspects of the Romani culture, the Pentecostals affirm the uniqueness and superiority of Gypsies over non-Gypsies, keeping the strong Romani ethnocentrism intact; while the secular activists not only adopt the institutional supports for identity offered by the non-Gypsies, they also rephrase the content of that identity on the basis of non-Romani values and cultural models, abandoning the radical ethnocentrism of the Romanies.

Pentecostalism also brings new hierarchical forms that transcend barriers of kinship and permit many members to have formal roles, offering an opportunity to serve in some capacity for most converts, although most lack the credentials to preach (Robbins 2004, 130). According to Manuela Cantón Delgado, "evangelical pastors have become favored leaders and mediators and their authority is rarely if ever questioned by their congregation or by those who support the work they do" (Cantón Delgado 2014, 79)⁶.

In Brazil, the Romani groups that I have contacted are all aware of other groups in Brazil and elsewhere, but share a weak sense of identity that connects them all. In practical terms, very few of them are willing to establish links with others in order to create one single community. During a meeting, one man from a Calon group complained about the separation among the groups, but at the

same time he considered the evangelized ones as part of the same brotherhood (Interviewee 2).

This mutual perception between the two groups was confirmed during a conversation with Pentecostal Roma with a Balkan background. Most of them do not consider the Calon as equals, though they recognize that they are Romanies too and thus related to them. The Roma pastor argued that it is very important to embrace them as part of the (evangelical) community, which sheds light on the emergence of a Romani Evangelical community in Brazil. Although only in its early stages, this phenomenon indicates a possible rapprochement between Calon and Roma groups in Brazil: while at present it is still restricted to Romanies, it now encompasses two different groups.

Internal divisions could be weakened by the religious teachings and approaches. A former member of the Romani Philadelphia Church of Spain and currently a very skeptical person with regard to Evangelism in Spain admits that "Evangelism was able to put thousands of Gypsies together in a way that was not possible before, when it was difficult to gather more than twenty people" (Interviewee 1). Against the fact that Romani groups do not usually intermarry, some missionaries encourage mixed marriage among converted Romanies from different backgrounds and it appears to happen already in a very limited scale, as I noted during my fieldwork in Brazil. In practice, it seems that they are starting to act like affiliated groups, forming a kind of evangelical Romani diaspora.

Considered by many scholars the two most important transversal and transnational structures, other than family groups and parentage, the Romani secular associations and the evangelical Pentecostalism have absorbed different diasporic narratives. Transnationally oriented Roma activists from secular associations learnt from non-Roma scholars the notion of Romanies as a people of Indian origin. Since then, some activists have had active contact with India. As an ethnic diaspora with an allegedly clear ancient land and a shared history and origin, the Romanies could ostensibly follow the conceptual model of other diasporas, like the Jewish one.

Evangelism, for instance, adds a new dimension to this diasporic notion, as reported by Paloma Gay y Blasco:

some converts look to the past but claim that all Gypsies are Jews that became lost during the forty years of exile in the Sinai desert /.../ and read the Bible in search of parallels between Gypsy and Jewish customs as described in Holy Scripture (Gay y Blasco 2002, 184-185).

I have heard from many Romanies in Brazil that they believe in an Israelite origin of the group, connecting Romanies to Jews and Israel. None accepted of the Indian roots, but to an origin similar to the Jews. In Spain, this narrative was found among converted Romanies. Without any exception, interviewees believe

that Romanies are a people of Israelite origin that came to Europe through India. In other words, they left the Middle East towards India and, after spending some time there, started a new migration westwards. A pastor from Malaga region in Spain contested the Indian origin, affirming that *Gitanos* are related to Jews, and Israel is a special land where some Gypsies are living in right now and others should at least pay a visit (Interviewee 7). A converted woman from Seville region also reported the same narrative, arguing that there are some many cultural similarities and a common history of persecution (Interviewee 8).

Aside from this new diasporic notion, the transnational ties are growing from below and the church offers institutional support. In Brazil, the first pattern found is that of Portuguese Romanies. They are used to shuttling between the two countries: many spend some years in Brazil, while maintaining close ties with their homeland. They can sustain an intense transnational lifestyle over many years facilitated by their occupation, i.e. trade, and language. Their transnational character can be perceived through the economic activities, cultural exchanges and social relations, like hosting other Portuguese in Brazil and staying in touch and helping each other in the new country. Like other migrants, they are able to link Portuguese Romanies with Brazilians in several areas, since they live parts of their social and economic lives across national boundaries. The religious spaces play a significant role in putting all member of this community together.

In a very different way, Brazilian Calon have only occasional cross-border contacts. But as Peggy Levitt pointed out:

One does not have to move to engage in transnational practices. Because people who stay behind are connected to migrants' social networks, they are exposed to a constant flow of economic and social remittances (or ideas, practices, and identities that migrants import) on a regular basis. Even individuals who have barely left their home villages adopt values and beliefs from afar and belong to organizations that operate transnationally (Levitt 2004).

Due to pastors' influence, some are starting to negotiate their relationships to other Romanies, since some are pushing to reconceptualize their experiences as transnational experiences. Their identities are been transformed by the presence of transnational actors, quite often religious, and their discourses of a single affiliation.

The third pattern is that of the Roma. Given their global dispersion, many of them have extensive networks of relatives and friends in North and South America and Europe, forming together a transnational social field. Since many have relatives abroad, some are used to transnational exchange visits.

Most Portuguese and Roma Gypsies are embedded in a social field but do not identify with it, maintaining their own distinction. At the same time, they express their culture and membership to the group, especially through language

and music. For example, in addition to speak Romani, some Roma usually play Balkan music – which they consider a Romani cultural trait – in order to express a kind of imagination of their own identity and origin. It could be a way of keeping alive a transnational perspective, and the space that it takes place is usually the evangelical church.

Armed with transnational knowledge skills acquired mostly by circulation, many evangelical pastors are thus able to play a significant role in shaping Romanies' perceptions of themselves, enabling a common identification in diasporic communities. Creating transnational spaces, they are in a unique position to bring Romanies together⁷ and to mobilize cross-border contacts, offering institutional support. These networks are sustained by meetings on the religious spaces, online communication and social media.⁸ Embedded within the groups is the religious identity that buttresses transnational ties, leading them to construct their identities in ways that encourage transnational practices and lifestyles. The already mentioned narrative on the origin of Romanies is transmitted in the churches. A booklet by Ravello entitled the *El verdadero origen de los Gitanos* (The True Origin of the Gypsies) has been distributed by an important pastor from the Romani Philadelphia Church, in which the author contested the Indian origin and argued in favor of an Israelite one. These ideas are flowing through transnational networks.

To summarize, the Brazilian Romanies are involved in different transnational networks: Roma are linked to other Roma groups, while Calons are indirectly linked to Gadje networks or to exclusively Calon networks. Until now, in Brazil, Evangelical denominations have not succeeded in bringing the various Romani groups together completely, although there is some evidence that this is beginning to happen, as demonstrated before. A well-known president of a Romani association, himself an evangelist stated that the churches are places where many Romanies from different backgrounds meet each other and the religion works as an umbrella which brings many Romanies together (Interviewee 6). According to him, there is already a sense of belonging among Romanies; religion is able to bridge the micro-identities of the various Romani groups. This interviewee related the evangelist's efforts in bringing Romanies together by offering exchanges between Brazil and Europe, and spoke about many encounters in the churches among Romanies from Romania, Portugal, Spain, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and the United States (Interviewee 6).

Rather than continuing to emphasize the agency of transnational actors on making a transnational community, undertaking a more detailed survey of the impacts on the identity, I shall concentrate on the diasporic territory-network formed by evangelicals that allows not only the Romani Pentecostal ideology to travel, but also Romani pastors and community members to travel and communicate in transnational circuits.

4. The Spatial Approach and the Development of a Transnational Community

I have outlined some elements that suggest a transnational Romani community is developing through Evangelism⁹, like the addition of evangelical ideology and practices, which has made it possible for individuals from different groups to acquire a unique sense of belonging that transcends their prior group affiliation. As a result, the converts constitute a new (sub-)community, an evangelical Romani community. However, I want to offer an additional analysis of the development of the community by considering its socio-spatial organization and territorial effects; after all, “space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation” (Massey 1993, 156).

As a scattered population, a diaspora has a distinctive, rather than an absent, relation to territory, as territoriality does not necessarily entail exclusively the practices attributed to the modern territorial state. However, conventional thinking about diaspora geography relies only on the analysis of their relationship with their homelands or host countries, in which diasporas are considered to be challenges to the state. Since a diaspora’s connections exist at different levels, ranging from the local to the international, their members are enabled to participate in the activities of multiple countries (Hardwick 2008) and to formulate social, cultural and political expressions outside the framework of territorial states. In this sense, the geographical features of these ethno-national formations can be considered in terms of their own organization. According to geographer Rogério Haesbaert (2004, 358–359), the geographical features of diasporas are: multipolarity (dispersion, decentralization and non-hierarchical form), inter-polarity of relations (the centre is mobile in order to expand business or to obtain protection against crisis), and multi-territoriality (having multiple places of identity). These three geographical features can shed light on the territoriality of the diaspora as different from territoriality as understood in the framework of a state’s territorial dominance. Bearing this in mind, it will be possible to compare the different spatial approaches adopted by some Romani activists and religious organizations.

I will address the case of Romanies by considering the spatial dimension, offering one possible approach according to certain understandings of the relationship between territory and network.

4.1 Territory and Networks

A network can be conceived in accordance with Hardwick’s concept of the roles of networks in ethnicity:

Networks of ethnicity enhance the transfer of information among family and friends, co-workers, and co-religionists, and social networks shared by migrants with similar backgrounds may also help to cushion the impact of adjusting to life in a new place. Once in place, information that is passed back and forth within networks of ethnicity may lead to self-perpetuating chain migration flows (Hardwick 2008, 172).

Both of the associative Romani movements, religious and non-religious, construct endogenous connections almost exclusively with co-ethnics.

As for territory,¹⁰ conventional definitions consider it a straightforward concept. As Painter suggested, “the general assumption is that territories and networks are antithetical, representing contrasting or even competing forms of socio-spatial organization” (Painter 2006, 16). Territory evokes boundaries, land within limits, while networks involve connection, flows and mobility: “whereas networks enable flow and movement, territories inhibit them” (Haggett 1965, cited in Painter 2006, 16). According to this thinking, states are territorial, while economic and social activities are networked; networks are assumed to be de-territorialized. However, this concept is misleading, firstly because each de-territorialization implies a re-territorialization, and secondly because networks territorialize themselves. So networks are part of the territory, enabling the concepts of network and territory to be linked together. I am not merely arguing that territories and networks are interdependent; I accept that territories are composed of networks, or are an effect of them: “territories are a set of the ‘effects’ of the networks” (Painter 2006, 23).

Perlmutter depicts the world as being organized vertically into nation-states and regions, but horizontally by an overlapping, permeable, multiple system of interaction, creating communities of interest, trans-state religions, shared opinions and beliefs, trans-state ethnicities, etc. (Perlmutter 1991, cited in Cohen 1997). This system corresponds to at least two types of territorialization: zonal and netlike. The first is a closed type with fixed limits and borders. The latter is constituted by networks, being characterized by discontinuity, dynamism, mobility and overlaps (Haesbaert 2004). This netlike system, which forms a territory network, is pursued by some scattered ethnic groups as an alternative to a system of dominance that aims to establish a territorial state.

Some Roma activists, like the late Romanian sociologist Nicolae Gheorghe, adopted the cosmopolitan approach and have made claims for cultural rights instead of territorial rights, i.e., territorial autonomy. Though targeting almost exclusively European and international institutions and advocating a transnational federation, some first generation Roma activists recognized the need to work also at the local level and the importance of territory. He pointed out that

Roma are considered to be attached to land, a country or a state only in superficial ways and this disconnectedness gives them the potential for various kinds of mobility – as is happening nowadays when they migrate to Western European countries or Canada (Gheorghe 2013, 10).

However, Gheorghe does not deny the link between the Roma and territory, asserting that the Roma are connected to territory and that the concept of nomadism is not key to their specificity. As he argues, “different kinds of relationship to land and territory should be taken into consideration” (Gheorghe 2013, 11). In other words, some transnational activists were also aware of the importance of acting at different geographic levels; however, they did not draft a spatial strategy for the transnational nation they aimed to establish. With scarce human and material resources, they choose to invest their efforts at the regional and global levels, privileging the interaction with European and global organizations, instead of dealing with internal affairs.¹¹ In this regard, the religious movement is acting in a very different way, by combining different spatial scales and levels of interactions.

Rejecting the territorial state model as a fixed unit of sovereignty that acts as a container of the society and separates international and domestic dimensions, it seems that some Romani activists choose its counterweight: networks. However, they accept de-territorialization as cultural hybridity, multiple identities without a clear spatial reference – a “non-territorial nation” as some used to call it (Pietrosanti 1994). On this point, I observe the ambivalent role of networks by examining the construction and appropriation of networks by Romani transnational associations, resulting in two different forms of space control.

Receiving the support of some nation states when it is in the state’s interest, and acting only in international space, some secular transnational Romani organizations act like centrifugal and extroverted networks that disorder Romani territories. Moreover, I see no action towards territorialization by segregated Romanies – those who have no control over their own territories – but only outward flows, retaining the de-territorialized condition (a precarious one). The identity pattern is global and transnational, instead of local or regional, although some activists claim double recognition as a transnational and national minority at the same time. This strategy is based on the belief that being transnational means being a-territorial. The lack of a clear and shared spatial reference leads them to proclaim extraterritoriality – a transnational ethnic identity that offers a feeling of belonging to a non-territorial social body. The territory disappears in favor of a transnational identity. As a result, they are unable to offer refuge to those in a precarious territorial condition.

Like other Pentecostals, evangelical Romanies consider the Kingdom of God the ultimate home. However, to this de-territorialized notion they add a local dimension that is very much grounded. Hence, in a different way than the secular movement, some evangelical churches have a territorializing effect, since they act on different levels, from the local to the regional and global, shaping territories and enabling their appropriation by marginalized groups. Resulting from exogenous (non-Romani pastors) and endogenous (produced within the community) processes, they shape the new Romani-evangelical identity at all

levels. These churches are developing a territorial organization model that acts locally in order to facilitate the physical connection of Romanies and to enable collective projects. There are flows circulating through networks established and controlled by evangelical Christians. The recomposition of community ties is achieved through networks conceived as territories. Wrongly considered de-territorialized due to its discontinuous (non-contiguous) form, the Evangelical movement did not embrace the extraterritorial approach. Territory is important for this movement in reaching people, as being a successful missionary means taking responsibility for a place and its people. Such churches manipulate the particularities and needs of the place in order to reach people, hosting and offering empowerment and religious support. Rosendahl remind us that territory is built by the existence of religion, and by the existence of territory the individual and collective religious experiences can be strengthened (Rosendahl 2007, 195).

Each form of spatiality has a different consequence. Some approaches clearly target only international institutions, but an inadvertent side-effect is that their discourse can be exploited by those nationalists who consider Romanies as foreign intruders: "If they do not belong to any place, they can be expelled from every place", they might say. The religious approach towards territory, on the other hand, recognizes the inherent human condition of being attached to space and the implications this has on power relations. The temple is a physical space of connection, a Romani territory that maintains cultural values and nurtures relationships among its members, providing linkages and channels of negotiation with the outside world. In contrast, secular organizations are constantly leading to integration within the non-Romani structures, in which Romanies are treated like guests, not full partners.

In Brazil I observed that the evangelical churches have a complex multi-territoriality that exists at different levels, from local to international: the parochial form (temple), and the netlike form (transnational and kinship and communication networks) that can reach even the poorest territorialized clusters – those located in territorial reclusion – and establishes mobile and discontinuous territories (houses of worship). As Levitt pointed out:

What's more, religion doesn't just work locally, at the level of everyday experience at the temple /.../ the temple is often connected to national and international networks that link people to fellow believers as well as real and imagined landscapes far away /.../ it speaks to the transcendent and the ordinary at the same time. As such, its message resonates with people's everyday experiences, the global world they live in, and the cosmos that created it (Levitt 2007, 64).

I have visited a Roma church and participated in the service several times. Outsiders know little about it; among those I spoke to in the neighbourhood, no

one was aware of its activities or was familiar with the Roma. In fact, the members of the church rarely live near the church. However, the location of the church was not randomly selected, but chosen strategically to enable members to reach it from many places. It functions as a site of maintenance of the ethnic community and culture, since all members are Roma and the service is held exclusively in Romani rather than Portuguese. As well as a gathering place for family groups, it is also a socialization space among different families. Furthermore, the church is a key element in shaping transnational circuits, functioning as a meeting place for foreign members too.

For instance, a tent-church has been erected by a non-Romani missionary linked to a broader network in the middle of a Calon encampment and has become the main place of gathering and meeting with outsiders. Without any contact with people from abroad, the Calons increased their contacts with other Brazilian Romani and non-Romani persons through such religious networks. In addition, they are included in some projects established by evangelists, like the language revival project which aims to (re)introduce the Caló language in their daily lives and to show similarities with the language of Roma in order to induce them to believe they share the same origin and should act like a unified community. This view is also shared by the Romani pastors.

In both cases, churches are spaces for social meetings, economic exchanges and cultural reinvention, in which all Romanies and even some non-Romanies can engage. I have observed some doing business, while others make use of the time to socialize with co-ethnics. Interestingly, many Romanies that are not interested in attending the cults are also indirectly connected to them, since it is quite common to have a family member belonging to the church.

Since its inception, the Evangelical movement has created a territory-network with local and global aims. Acting on different geographic scales, evangelicals deal with issues pertaining to the local community, like internal solidarity networks, and moving beyond in order to form a cross-border community. Evangelicals are firmly rooted in the local communities, from where it is possible to formulate strategies of unifying expansion among Romanies from different backgrounds as well as geographically dispersed, and even to other Romani evangelical denominations. A pastor and coordinator from a Romani evangelical mission told me about their intention of launching a large-scale missionary action beyond Brazilian borders and admitted that they have already many transnational activities, mentioning meetings in other countries. A Spanish pastor from the Romani Philadelphia Church mentioned activities in Portugal, where according to him more than 300 churches exist, and his will to expand the mission in South America, where there are already some churches operating among Romanies of Iberian ancestry.

The first example also provides some evidence of the independent organizational model on which the Evangelical movement relies. While Roma

activism/secular associations depend heavily on non-Romani organizational structures which operate according to the rules of others,

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Pentecostalism differs significantly from these associations because of the fact that it has spread among Gypsies independently, that is, it is led, financed and administered by them. This has kept them essentially apart from the non-Gypsy world, from public subsidies and from the trappings of administrative power (Cantón Delgado 2014, 83–84).

It is not yet clear if the Brazilian Calon groups will take full leadership upon themselves in the control of the religious spaces and activities, as it is happening in Spain, for example, but there are increasingly more Calon pastors working on this.

5. Conclusion

Both movements – political secular and religious – are transnationally based in well-developed diasporic narratives that connects all Romanies in a single body. However, only evangelicals have been successful in reaching Romanies because they have acted locally and combined different spatial scales, from local to regional to transnational. While some activists tend to see multiculturalism and multi-territoriality as an almost insuperable drawback for the development of the Romani people in terms of unity, Pentecostalism seems to play a significant role in the development of some Romani communities, acting as a (trans)national link among them. As a global movement, Pentecostalism is part of modern, global, and transnational processes, being conducted by travelling evangelists that operate as transnational religious entrepreneurs (Droogers 2014, 197–198) and the Romanies make up a significant part of the movement's constituency.

The autonomy and leadership achieved by evangelicals are key issues. The pastors and missionaries are very connected with the places they are responsible for, resulting in a grassroots leadership. Unlikely the secular associations that are supported mainly by the state or formal institutions, evangelicals are not eligible to receive this kind of support, which results in a greater level of autonomy.

In investigating the development of a transnational community, I have suggested that territory is a precondition for any Romani movement, not in the form of a state but as conceived by the territory-network model. Stateless status cannot be equal to a de-territorialized condition; thus such a development must go beyond achieving recognition by other states as a dispersed and transnational minority.

I am not advocating the replacement of networks by the delineation and the domination of territorial forms. I mean the forging of a network without neglecting the place (a meeting point) – both symbolic and physical – as a way to

reach people. As Romanies are unlikely to demand a territorial and ethnic state in the near future, they can articulate their interests through a territory-network, overcoming the precariousness of exclusionary territorialization imposed by others. Rather than a substitute for territorial sovereignty, such a territory-network will represent an improvement in the territorialization of groups, forming a series of spatial webs that could facilitate the free movement of Romanies across diasporic networks. Targeting only international structures and accepting the extraterritorial fallacy will not alleviate the Romani condition. If the lack of financial resources is an obstacle for Romani activists, internationalization alone cannot compensate for the domestic failures of representation and obliteration.

Demands are addressed to political entities, like states, so the Romanies' voices should aim at these entities, since they cannot leave the states' political spaces, and the achievements of the Romani associations that act at the national level are very important. However, it seems necessary also to act at a level other than that of the state. One possible option is to launch shared transnational projects among people and communities on a local scale in a territorializing way, aiming to create a territory-network that will also enable face-to-face communication (highly valued among Romanies). The achievement of targets at one level will reinforce the other levels. Furthermore, simply eliminating traditional authority from the local communities and its norms in order to start something new will not provide a link between local and transnational actors. Such a link must be based on deeper dialogue among the parties.

The Evangelical movement, however, is developing trans-state networks with their co-ethnics in other countries with physical gathering spaces where weekly or even daily meetings take place, sustained by a common language – a religious one – and a shared diasporic notion. Religions have always crossed borders and Romani Pentecostalism is no exception. Evangelism and its actors not only create polycentric networks with key nodes in places with high concentration of Romanies, but also reaffirm some traditions and craft new ways of relocating the self and the community as part of a scattered group. The Brazilian and Spanish cases show how evangelicals are creating a transnational community based on a territory-network logic.

We should recall that besides scale and form of spatial control, another key element in understanding the processes shaping diasporic flows, including cross-border relations, is the political and social context in the countries investigated in this research. In this sense, the establishment of democracy in the Iberian countries as well as in Brazil, alongside economic constraints through space and time, should be examined carefully in order to highlight other dimensions of the emergence and perpetuation of these networks.

The present study raises a number of issues which is still too early to address. To what extent are the activists willing to recognize the importance of the religious socio-spatial organizations and networks and its capability of

uniting Romanies? How will the question of different leaderships and diasporic narratives evolve? How do re-diasporization processes impact on the emergence of collective projects, including political ones?

One possible direction for future research could be to examine Romani transnational networks on the American continent – linking to Europe as well – from various points of view, in order to identify how Romanies are dealing with diversity of identity and trying to achieve greater unity in order to act politically in a more effective way. At the moment, I am not aware of any ongoing research on this topic in the Americas.

Interviews

Interviewee 1 – Spanish Gitano, male, mid-forties, Madrid, Spain.

Interviewee 2 – Calon, male, mid-fifties, São Paulo, Brazil.

Interviewee 3 – Roma, male, pastor, mid-fifties, São Paulo, Brazil.

Interviewee 4 – non-Romani, pastor, mid-fifties, São Paulo, Brazil.

Interviewee 5 – Portuguese Calon, male, mid-sixties, Santa Catarina, Brazil.

Interviewee 6 – Brazilian, male, pastor, mid-thirties, Paraná, Brazil.

Interviewee 7 – Spanish Gitano, male, pastor, mid-fifties, Andalucía, Spain.

Interviewee 8 – Spanish Gitana, female, mid-thirties, Andalucía, Spain.

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Notes

- ¹ In general, I use the term Romani with reference to a clearly-defined ethnic community of allegedly Indian origin that migrated to the Western world, regardless of their way of life (Marushiakova 2008, 468–469). It is used alongside the term Gypsy (whose translation could be *Cigano* in Portuguese and *Gitano* in Spanish). Roma (and many subdivisions like Kalderash, Matchuaia, Lovari, among others), for instance, is the word which most Romanies of Eastern European background use to refer to themselves, and Calon (also called *Gitanos* and *Calé*) is used to designate Romanies whose ancestors came to Brazil from the Iberian countries.
- ² In Brazil, Roma people with an Eastern European background usually speak Romani (although not all of them) while Calon – Romani people from Iberian countries – speak Portuguese and sometimes a language that combines aspects of Romani and Portuguese (*Chib*).
- ³ In spite of being the most important denomination among Romanies, Pentecostalism is not the only one. In Brazil there are, for example, Baptists missionaries that operate in coordination with other Evangelicals.
- ⁴ I obtained this information through informal interviews with a Portuguese Calon (Interviewee 5).
- ⁵ An observant participation conducted in one Roma church and some meetings in a Calon encampment confirmed the cultural changes through evangelization.
- ⁶ As Anna Mirga pointed out: “Romani leadership patterns are complex and often include a combination of different social roles and positions / ... / In Spain, where the Evangelical church is especially well-rooted in the Romani community, Romani pastors often form civic associations, combining multiple roles – not just as spiritual leaders, but also as activists collaborating closely with the public administration” (Mirga 2015, 33).
- ⁷ Some pastors work with different Romani groups at the same time and claim to unite all of them.
- ⁸ There are many blogs, websites and social pages devoted to the evangelization of Romanies and evangelical community development. See, for an example, *Ciganos Evangelicos*.
- ⁹ For more on this, see for example Manuela Cantón Delgado et al. (2004) and Ruy Blanes (2008).
- ¹⁰ As Haesbaert states, “Place is to Anglo-Saxon geography what territory is to ‘Latin geographies’” (Haesbaert 2013, 147).
- ¹¹ There were some projects to support economic development in Roma communities in ways that contribute to Romani nation-building (Tanaka, 2015).