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Evangelical Christianity and
Roma Communities
in Post-Socialist Bulgaria

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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My dissertation asks whether, when, and how the adoption of Evangelical Christianity by multiply stigmatized Roma (or Gypsies) in post-socialist Bulgaria has affected the status and engagement of Roma women in their families, communities, and the larger society. Scholars have shown that Evangelical Christianity has facilitated women's advancement in some patriarchal societies in the developing world. This raises the question of whether it might have a similar impact among Roma in Eastern Europe. In 2009-2010, I conducted a year-long immersive ethnographic fieldwork in the town of Sliven, which is distinctive for its large and heterogeneous Roma population. Against the background of economic dislocation, complex hierarchical interethnic relations, an indifferent state, and a changing religious marketplace, I examined the dynamic interplay between outside religious actors (foreign and Bulgarian), on the one hand, and members of local Roma communities that vary in the extent of their

marginalization and in the degree of their adherence to traditional patriarchal attitudes and behaviors, on the other hand. I focused especially on the most marginalized Roma in the walled-in Nadezhda ghetto and the more integrated Roma in the Nikola Kochev neighborhood. I argue that participation in Evangelical churches has a minimal impact in the most marginalized communities, while it enhances women's status in more integrated Roma communities. The confluence of local and external religious actors in Nadezhda has created incentives for enterprising men to found and manage churches as a way of procuring external material resources in this extremely resource-poor environment. Manipulating the multiplicity of scales that characterize the Evangelical networks in which they are embedded, the Nadezhdan pastors have carved out a niche characterized by fluidity, ruthless competitiveness, corruption, and lack of bureaucratization and institutionalization. This has had significant consequences for the social dynamics in Nadezhdan churches and for their effects on gender relations. By underscoring the role patriarchal structures and practices play in the cycle of exclusion, and by illuminating the variable effects of religious participation, this research seeks to enhance the understanding of the persistent problem of the marginalization of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.

The dissertation of Stela V. Krasteva-McCauley is approved.

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2014

For my parents,
Kalinka and Vihar

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List of Acronyms

BCG	Bulgarian Church of God
BOC	Bulgarian Orthodox Church
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
DOW	Doctors of the World
HOR	Health of the Roma
PC2	Second Pentecostal Church
SDAC	Seventh-Day Adventist Church
SEE	South-Eastern Europe
UCG	United Church of God
UEBC	Union of Evangelical Baptist Churches
UECC	Union of Evangelical Congregational Churches
UEPC	Union of Evangelical Pentecostal Churches

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The central research question of this dissertation is whether, when, and how the adoption of Evangelical Christianity by Roma in post-socialist Bulgaria has impacted the status and engagement of Roma women in their families, communities, and the larger society. Answering this question has important implications for the more general and seemingly intractable problem of the social, economic, and political marginalization of Roma in the region. Against the background of a tough economic environment, complex hierarchical interethnic relations, Roma marginalization, an indifferent state, often ineffective non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a changing religious marketplace, and a patriarchal culture, I am interested in the effects of Evangelical Christianity – to which many Roma have turned since the change of the regime in 1989 – on the position of women in Roma communities. Although Evangelical Christianity is widely understood as justifying women's subordination to men in the public and private spheres (Diamond 1989; Ingersoll 2003), scholars have shown that it has, in fact, facilitated women's advancement in some patriarchal societies in the developing world (Brusco 1996; Dollar and Gatti 1999; Martin 2001). This raises the question of whether it might have a similar impact among Roma in Eastern Europe. I argue that the impact varies across Roma communities: participation in Evangelical churches has a minimal impact in the most marginalized communities, while it enhances women's status in more integrated Roma communities.

My original intent was to study the social effects of Evangelical Christianity on Roma communities more generally. Informed by comparative literatures in the Weberian (1996) tradition and examining the relationship between Protestantism and civic mobilization in developing regions (Hefferan, Adkins, and Occhipinti 2009), my initial hypothesis was that

conversion would impact marginalized Roma in two ways: first, by fostering a heightened sense of self-worth (Corten and Marshall 2001; Gifford 1998), personal growth and development (Martin 1990), and internal discipline and work ethic (Annis 1987); and second, by nurturing a culture of participation and facilitating civic mobilization (Huff 2007). However, in the course of a year-long immersive study during 2009-2010 in the Bulgarian town of Sliven, which is distinctive for its large and heterogeneous Roma population, I observed changes among more integrated Roma that were absent among the most marginalized Roma. In seeking to explain this, my attention was drawn increasingly to patriarchal family structures and behaviors. For example, I noticed that church leaders in segregated communities did not discuss school attendance, career planning, or household dynamics, because doing so would challenge traditional marriage practices and gendered roles and expectations. At the same time, local and visiting religious leaders in more integrated Roma communities did not hesitate to do so. Thus, I decided to examine the dynamic interplay between the uneven introduction of new ideas, social practices, and institutional models through the global spread of western Evangelical Christianity, on the one hand, and the social and cultural dynamics within local Roma communities that vary in the extent of their marginalization and in the degree to which they embrace traditional patriarchal attitudes and behaviors, on the other hand.

Organization of the Chapter

Chapter One is divided into nine sections. It begins by introducing Roma in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and in Bulgaria. Second, it briefly describes the family and gender dynamics in Bulgarian Roma communities and their consequences for Roma marginality (these will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Two and Five). Third, I discuss the changing

dynamics and the growth of Protestantism in the religious field in the CEE region. Specific attention is given to the interaction between traditional religions and the growth of Protestantism in Bulgaria. Fourth, the chapter addresses the large-scale conversions to Evangelical Christianity by Roma in Bulgaria, which has gone largely unnoticed by the public and by academia. Fifth, I introduce my research sites and the communities I have observed. Sixth, I provide a literature review and discuss the contribution of this dissertation to relevant bodies of scholarship. Seventh, I discuss my methodology and data. Eighth, I highlight some of the challenges I encountered while carrying out fieldwork among Roma. And ninth, I provide a preview of the organization of the dissertation.

Roma

Roma in Central and Eastern Europe

The labels “Roma”¹ and “Gypsy” are used to describe fragmented communities that vary substantially in terms of identity, language, religion, socio-economic status, culture, and lifestyle (Fraser 1995). The majority of Roma – roughly eight of approximately twelve million worldwide – are concentrated in CEE. Even though Roma groups have lived in this region for centuries, many of them have maintained distinct cultures, lifestyles, economic behaviors, religious practices, languages, and appearances (Basic, 2003; Giordano et al., 2003; Marsh, 2006; Petrovic 2003). They have been subjected to persistent stigmatization and marginalization

¹ “Roma” is a recently introduced label that has been adopted as the politically correct term to refer to individuals whom most people in CEE refer to as “Gypsies.” It is used by social actors such as NGOs, academics, state officials, and intergovernmental organizations, but many Roma continue to refer to themselves as “Gypsies.” I use the terms interchangeably. More specifically, I use “Roma” when I refer to Roma in general, but I use “Gypsies” when specific social actors refer to themselves as such.

by the rest of the population, albeit in different forms and to varying degrees (Kligman 2001; Merjanovic 2003; Silverman 1995).

The adoption of western-style liberal democracy and a market-based economy by the countries of CEE in 1989 caused a quick drop in the overall living standards of those societies, but these effects were particularly devastating on Roma. By 1995, the poverty level in the region was over 30 percent (Haney and Rogers-Dillon 2005, 329; Standing 1996, 235), but poverty was much higher for Roma, reaching 80 percent in Bulgaria and Romania (Ladányi and Szelényi 2006; Reingold, Orenstein, and Wilkens 2005, xv). And while in most countries the poverty rates gradually declined, they stayed high, or increased, for Roma (Reingold 2005, 1). The root of this disparity can be traced to the social and economic position Roma held in socialist societies. Even though the authoritarian socialist states violated the personal liberties of many Roma, among others, they also kept traditional prejudices in check, incorporated this marginal population into the labor force, and provided dependable social services (Tomova 1995).² In the context of a free-market economy, under-qualified and stigmatized Roma were the first to lose their jobs. To make matters worse, the shrinking social-services sector could no longer provide adequate support for unemployed Roma. The subsequent surge in the rates of homelessness, crime, illiteracy, and disease has isolated a large percentage of Roma into segregated ghettos (Mitev, Tomova, and Konstantinova 2001; Tomova, Vandova and Tomov 2001), where they survive through a “deviant,” “offensive,” and “uncivilized” lifestyle (Kenarov 2008). These maladaptive behaviors have become the subject of heated public criticisms, policy debates, and

²Roma were guaranteed (and often forced into) employment in state enterprises, such as factories and agricultural cooperatives. In rural areas, they often received personal plots of land, where they cultivated their own food. However, these plots were restituted to their former owners in the 1990s.

academic research, with a host of government, media, and other “expert” voices calling attention to their negative impact on society at large (Barany 2002; Peev 2000).

Roma in Bulgaria

Bulgaria’s last census puts Roma at about 4.4 percent of the Bulgarian population (National Statistical Institute 2012, 30-31); however, between 800,000 (Revenga, Ringold, and Tracy 2002, 6) and over a million (Silverman 1995) “Gypsies” – or between 11 and 14 percent of the population – are estimated to live in Bulgaria. Even though Table 1 suggests that the absolute number and the percentage of Roma of the total population in the country are declining, it is important to note that the number of people who did not respond to the question about ethnic self-identification is growing (630,590, or 9 percent, in 2011), and Roma are most likely to not respond to that question. Also, many people who suffer the consequences of being categorized as “Roma” by others self-identify as “Bulgarian” or “Turkish” in the census in order to avoid the stigma associated with the labels “Roma” or “Gypsy” (Ahmed, Feliciano, and Emigh 2007). In the mid-1990s, for example, two-thirds of residents of entirely segregated “Roma” neighborhoods identified as “Roma,” one-fifth as “Turks,” one-tenth as “Bulgarians,” and one-twentieth as “Wallachians” (Tomova 1995).³ According to a 2001 study in the Bulgarian municipality of Sliven, only 71 percent of people who were categorized as “Roma” by others self-identified as such. Seven percent of the interviewed “Roma” identified as Bulgarians, 5 percent as Turks, and 17 percent refused to self-identify (Tomova, Vandova, and Tomov 2001, 14). To the chagrin of nationalists prophesying the extinction of the Bulgarian nation and its eventual subordination to ethnic minorities (Krasteva 2007), the number of Roma in the country

³ Wallachia is a geographical region in Romania situated north of the Danube and south of the Southern Carpathians.

is actually growing, given a substantial difference in the total fertility rates of Roma and Bulgarian women (National Statistical Institute 2012, 33).⁴

Table 1. Percentage Distribution and Frequency of Ethnic Identity, Bulgaria, 1992 (N=8,487,317), 2001 (N=7,928,901), and 2011 (N=7,364,570)

Reported Ethnic Identity	% Distribution (Count)		
	1992	2001	2011
Bulgarian	85.7 7,271,185	83.9 6,655,210	76.9 5,664,624
Turkish	9.4 800,052	9.4 746,664	8.0 588,318
Roma/Gypsy	3.7 313,396	4.7 370,908	4.4 325,343
Other*	1.2 102,684	2.0 156,119	10.7 786,285
TOTAL	100 8,487,317	100 7,928,901	100 7,364,570

* In 2011, “Other” includes other ethnic and national categories (49,304), respondents who refused to self-identify (53,391), and missing responses (638,590).

Sources: Koytcheva and Philipov 2008; National Statistical Institute 2012, 16, 30-31

⁴ According to the 2000 census, the fertility rate was 1.1 for Bulgarian women, 2.1–2.3 for Turkish women, and around 3.0 for Roma women (Koytcheva and Philipov 2008). However, the fertility rate for Roma is likely to be higher, since Roma are underrepresented in the census. According to the 2011 census, 12 percent of the children in Bulgaria between 0 and 9 years of age and about 10 percent of those between 10 and 19 years of age are Roma (National Statistical Institute 2012, 33). This percentage is much higher than the percentage of Roma in the total population (4.4 percent), indicating that the age structure of the Roma population is heavily skewed toward younger age groups, and higher fertility rates of Roma. It should also be noted that Roma life expectancy is ten years shorter than that of ethnic Bulgarians (United Nations 2012, para. 42). The longevity and health of Roma has deteriorated due to a “dysfunctional” health care system, poor access of Roma to doctors, a lack of public health knowledge, and “institutional discrimination” (Dyankova and Ilareva 2012, 28).

The category “Roma” imposes superficial homogeneity on members of culturally-diverse and fragmented communities that often do not share origin myths and collective memories, language, religion, a sense of solidarity, or even identity (Marushiakova and Popov 1997). Until the recent large-scale conversions to Evangelical Christianity, those with Roma identity divided about equally into Bulgarian/Christian and Turkish/Muslim Gypsies, and they sub-divided even further into over fifty groups. The members of more established groups often use the label “Naked Gypsies” (“goli tzigani”/“голи цигани”) to stigmatize the most marginalized and dislocated Gypsies.⁵ Naked Gypsies constitute over 15 percent of all Roma, but they are often held responsible for the worst anti-Gypsy stereotypes and for damaging the image of all Roma. Conversion to Evangelical Christianity is currently going on in many types of Roma communities (Slavkova 2007).

Even though traditional folk beliefs have stereotyped Gypsies as “primitive,” “dirty,” “daft,” and “untrustworthy,” Roma used to be relatively integrated in the Bulgarian economy and society. Over the second half of the 20th century, the socialist authorities forced them to settle permanently, to abandon their traditional crafts for wage jobs, to send their children to school, and even to change their names. Subsequently, 84 percent of adult Roma were employed in the 1980s, even though they tended to occupy the least-qualified positions in factories, public services, and agricultural cooperatives (Tomova 1995). Over the 1990s and 2000s, however, a mutually reinforcing interaction between the difficult transition to a liberal economy, the growing exclusionary racialization of Gypsies (Kligman 2001; Ladányi and Szelényi 2006;

⁵ Even though it is a stigmatizing label, I use “Naked Gypsies” to describe one of the communities I studied in the town of Sliven. The rationale behind my usage of the term is discussed in Chapter Two, in the section describing the Naked Gypsy sub-ghetto within the ghetto of Nadezhda.

Bulgarian Helsinki Committee 2005),⁶ and traditional Roma cultures (Tomova 1997) dramatically changed Roma's socio-economic status, their relation to the labor market, and their position in civil society (Crampton 2007, 440; Mizov 2003).⁷

The reform in Bulgaria has been among the slowest and the most tenuous in CEE (Sotiropoulos, Neamtu, and Stoyanova 2003).⁸ In this difficult environment, low-skilled and racialized Roma were the first to lose employment. Many remain unemployed, given a shift to a post-industrial society premised on education and qualifications (see Table 2 and Table 3).⁹

⁶ For discussion of the difference between inclusionary and exclusionary racism, see Fredrickson (2002).

⁷ It is useful to contrast attitudes toward Roma with those toward Turks, and how those attitudes have diverged over the past two decades. The old conviction that Turks pose the biggest threat to the Bulgarian state and nation caused much turmoil in the early 1990s, when a powerful political party – the Movement for Rights and Freedoms – formed and demanded cultural and political rights for the previously-harassed and embittered Turks (Stamatov 2000). With the passage of time, however, anti-Turkish attitudes and the salience of “the Turkish threat” have declined. The opposite trend is observed in the attitudes toward Roma, which have deteriorated since 1990 (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee 2005).

⁸ After a decade of recessions, political course changes, ousted governments, decimated domestic industries, and an embargo on neighboring Serbia, the country experienced relative political stability and economic growth, which culminated in EU membership in 2007. However, the subsequent political instability and global recession have affected its fragile economy severely.

⁹ In 2012, 35 percent of Roma between 20 and 64 years of age had paid employment, excluding self-employment, whereas 55 percent of non-Roma respondents did so (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and United Nations Development Program 2012, 16). Close to 50 percent of Roma were unemployed in 2011, which was three times the national rate (Dyankova and Ilareva 2012, 15). Nearly 13 percent of Roma had permanent jobs and 13 percent had occasional or seasonal work (United States Department of State 2012, 22). Employed Roma earn less than members of other ethnic groups, with a wage gap between 30 and 33 percent (de Laat and Bodewig 2011, 2; United Nations 2012, para. 35). Around 88 percent of Roma in Bulgaria have an income below 60 percent of the national median disposable income, whereas this percentage is 51 for non-Roma (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and United Nations Development Program 2012, 24-25). Close to 42 percent of Roma households had a member go to bed hungry at least once in the preceding month, compared to approximately 6 percent of non-Roma households (ibid., 24).

Table 2. Percentage Distribution and Frequency of Highest Level of Education Achieved by Ethnicity (N=5,507,127, or people 20 years of age and older who responded to the question), Bulgaria, 2011.

Highest Level of Education Achieved	% Distribution Count				
	Bulgarian	Turkish	Roma	Other*	Total
College and higher	26 1,222,511	5 22,326	0.5 948	26 17,903	23 1,263,688
High School	52 2,499,327	30 135,620	9 17,917	43 29,844	49 2,682,708
Middle School	18 858,839	44 203,051	41 80,940	21 14,761	21 1,157,591
Elementary School	3 161,260	13 61,303	28 55,220	6 4,333	5 282,116
Did not finish elementary school	0.5 21,674	3 15,965	11 21,279	1 1,026	1 59,944
Never attended school	0.4 19,382	4 18,433	11 21,960	2 1,305	1 61,080
Total	100 4,782,993	100 456,698	100 198,264	100 69,172	100 5,507,127

* "Other" includes respondents who declared another ethnicity and those who did not identify with any ethnic group.

Source: National Statistical Institute 2012, 194-195

Table 3. Percentage Distribution of Economically Active Population by Economic Activity and Ethnicity, Bulgaria, 1992, 2001, 2007, and 2012 (partial)

Ethnicity	Employed				Unemployed				Inactive		Dependent on Welfare	
	1992	2001	2007	2012	1992	2001	2007	2012	1992	2001	1992	2001
Bulgarian	65	56	52	70	11	22	8	15	24	22	-	-
Turkish	59	40	40		20	39	27		21	21	-	-
Roma	47	18	26	41	30	60	48	52	23	22	30	60

Sources: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and United Nations Development Program 2012, 10, 17; Tomova 2009; de Laat and Bodewig 2011, 1.

Today, between 72 and 80 percent of Roma in Bulgaria live in segregated and overcrowded urban and rural ghettos, where the main source of income is meager social assistance (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2009, 12, 14; Tomova, Vandova, and Tomov 2001). The residents of these ghettos have “very limited access to basic infrastructure, security of tenure or essential services, such as public transport, emergency medical aid, garbage collection, policing and, for some, even without [access to] electricity and water supply” (Dyankova and Ilareva 2012, 19).¹⁰ With limited options, many Roma have resorted to practices that further fuel the cycle of exclusion, including permanent dependence on social assistance, petty crime, begging, prostitution, marrying in early puberty, having children for welfare provisions (Stoinev 2004; Vassilev 2004), shunning education (Slavkova and Erolova 2005),¹¹ ignoring utility bills (Kenarov 2008), etc.

Roma Families and Gender Relations in Bulgaria

A crucial element in the cycle of exclusion, especially among the most disadvantaged Roma groups in Bulgaria, is the persistence of patriarchal family structures and practices (Aleksandrieva 2003; Berliner Institut für Vergleichende Sozialforschung 2006; Ceneda 2002; Ivanova and Krastev 2008; Kyuchukov 2004). The customs of pulling girls out of school and arranging to marry them while they are “pure,” or pressuring teenage couples to have children

¹⁰ Seventy-seven percent of Roma lack at least one of the following amenities: indoor kitchen; indoor toilet; indoor bath; or electricity (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and United Nations Development Program 2012, 23). Forty percent of Roma lack running water and 60 percent of Roma houses are not connected to a central sewage system (National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues 2012, Sec. 2). Between 50 and 70 percent of Roma live in illegal housing and under the constant threat of eviction (United States Department of State 2012, 21; United Nations Human Rights Council 2012, para. 46).

¹¹ Over 20 percent of adult Roma are illiterate, compared with 1 percent of Bulgarians (Tomova 2009).

they cannot support, and of placing women under the control of their husbands' families and away from society and from the labor force contribute significantly to some notorious manifestations of Roma marginality: high rates of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, crime, domestic violence, broken families, and morbidity and mortality (Guy 2009; Tomova 2009). Still, most governmental and non-governmental "integration projects" avoid tackling directly these practices. I will discuss this further in Chapters Two and Five.

Religion

The Growth of Protestantism in Central and Eastern Europe

In addition to the opportunities and upheavals of political and economic restructuring, the transition from socialism has been accompanied by the introduction of liberal democratic practices, such as guaranteeing the freedom of religious expression. It also exposed the countries of CEE to global flows of people and ideas, including transnational religious movements. Despite some controversial decisions and a tendency to favor established churches, the new regimes have generally allowed religious competition, and eager Neo-Protestant "church-planters" from around the world have flocked to the newly opened region (Hajdinjak 2004; Luxmoore and Babiuch-Luxmoore 1999; Mojzes 1999).¹² In the Bulgarian context, I refer to them collectively by the all-inclusive label "Protestant" in order to distinguish them from the "traditional" religions in the country (Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam),¹³ because they all emerged

¹² I abstain from discussing Islamic missionaries from the Middle East proselytizing among Balkan Muslims because they pose a different set of issues – e.g., anti-Muslim nationalism (Irwin 1989), historical antagonism/ressentiment against "the Orient" (Todorova 1997), and the global discourse on terrorism (Ghodsee and Filipov 2005) – that would go beyond the scope of this research. The literature on this phenomenon is still slim, but so far, I have found little evidence that radical Islamic missionaries are proselytizing among Roma in the region.

¹³ Some of these denominations have existed in Bulgaria since the 19th century, so one could argue that they are also "traditional." However, they are not recognized as such by the vast majority of Bulgarians.

in the wake of the Reformation (albeit at different times and in different circumstances and forms), and to emphasize their Western Origin.¹⁴ Many times throughout this dissertation, however, I will specify that I am talking specifically about Evangelical Christianity, which falls under the rubric of Protestantism (or Neo-Protestantism) and which is particularly popular among Bulgarian Roma.

Neo-Protestant denominations have been relatively successful in attracting attention and converts in CEE. However, that success has varied across denominations, countries, and populations in ways that exhibit too little systematicity to allow for a summary that is both succinct and comprehensive.¹⁵ They display some similarities and many differences;¹⁶ however, since it is debatable whether CEE countries constitute a single “religious marketplace” (Bruce

¹⁴ There are over 30,000 Christian denominations in the world, and the majority of them have emerged in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. Depending on the criteria they choose to prioritize – e.g., time and source of origin, history, interpretation of the Bible, ritual practices, organizational structure, political views, etc. – scholars disagree on what should count as a “Protestant denomination” and how such denominations should be subdivided. For example, some insist that Adventism, Anglicanism, Mormonism, and Pentecostalism are not “Protestant” denominations. Alternative labels for some denominations – such as Pentecostalism and spin-offs from Baptism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, etc. – include “Charismatic,” “Evangelical,” and “Fundamentalist” (Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson 2001). Some authors also insist that one should distinguish analytically among Protestant “cults,” “sects,” and “churches” (Bastian 1993; Lalive d’Epiney 1969). In the context of CEE, some scholars divide denominations into “historical/traditional Protestantism” and “Neo-Protestantism.” The former include centuries-old Calvinism, Lutheranism, Reformed Calvinism, etc. The latter include Adventism, certain kinds of Baptism and Methodism, Pentecostalism, and other denominations that were introduced to the region between the 19th and the 21st century. In certain countries – such as Ukraine and Romania – Neo-Protestant churches maintained a strong following in dispersed small communities even during socialism (Mojzes 1999). Given that there is no clear distinction between traditional “Protestant” and “neo-Protestant” denominations in Bulgaria, however, I simply use the all-encompassing term “Protestant” when I discuss this particular context.

¹⁵ Pentecostalism, for example, has gained a strong footing in Ukraine (Wanner 2007), a moderate following in multi-religious Romania (Anderson 2004, 83; Rusu and Tarnovsch n.d.), and very few supporters in Catholic Poland (Anderson 2004, 100); the Jehovah’s Witnesses, on the other hand, have been relatively successful in Poland (.3 percent of the population, which trumps any other “Protestant” denomination), while they are nearly absent in Bulgaria (Bogomilova 2001; Grzymala-Moszczynska 1999).

¹⁶ One similarity is the tendency to emphasize a return to scripture and rituals that are more accessible and engaging than the esoteric teachings and rituals of some traditional churches (this is especially true for Pentecostalism, less so for Baptism). Second, they tend to adopt the individualistic and universalistic stance that all persons are equal in their relation to God and that most social divisions are irrelevant, which is especially true for Adventism. At the same time, they (more notably among Pentecostals, less so in the case of Adventists) are often willing to accommodate local particularistic cultures (Casanova 2001) and to support followers in dealing with quotidian problems by providing material assistance, social services, support networks, etc. (Brusco 1995; Wanner 2007).

1999), it is difficult to determine if their appeal across the region should be explained by accounting for their similarities, their differences, or both. Who converts to Neo-Protestantism in CEE depends on the context. In some cases – such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovenia – converts appear to be individuals from different walks of life (Mozjes 1999); in other cases, specific populations appear to be more available than others.

Especially in South-Eastern Europe (SEE), considerable numbers of Roma have been drawn to Pentecostalism, Baptism, Adventism, and small non-denominational Evangelical churches (Dawson 2002; Gog 2008; Krasteva 2008; Todaro 2008). The kinds of Roma who convert vary, just as those churches differ along important dimensions (Slavkova 2007). Still, their openness to Protestant churches distinguishes Roma as a whole from members of most major ethno-national groups in SEE, who tend to be more secular in their worldviews and/or to identify consistently with specific traditional religions that have been closely linked to their group identity (Bogomilova 2003; Foszto 2006; Krasteva 2008). Roma are additionally differentiated by the way in which traditional religious organizations have responded to their apostasy (Bogomilova 2003): while most of these institutions have been indifferent to the spiritual exodus of Gypsies,¹⁷ they have denounced vehemently the so-called “spiritual attacks” by foreign missionaries on members of the majority ethno-national groups (Center for Religious Research and Consultations 2009; Roudometof, Agadjanian, and Pankhurst 2006).

Scant scholarly attention has been given to the large-scale conversion of CEE Roma to western Protestantism. Historically, Roma have tended to adopt the religions of those around them as a means of social integration (Bogomilova 2003), and many groups have changed affiliations more than once. Between their traditional religious customs, the esoteric nature of

¹⁷ One exception is the supra-national Catholic Church, which has launched a special initiative for pastoral work among European Roma (Mlakar 2003; Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers 2007).

traditional religious teachings, past conversions, and exposure to diverse cultures, Roma have amalgamated various theological, ritualistic, and folk elements into distinctive syncretic and mythical forms of religiosity that deviate from traditional doctrines and practices.¹⁸

Subsequently, established religious actors have long stereotyped and marginalized Gypsies as insincere and fickle believers (Đurović 2003; Kolev and Krumova 2003 & 2005; Marushiakova and Popov 1999). This stereotype, combined with the historical nexus between ethno-national and religious identities, provides a likely explanation for the failure of traditional religious actors to (re)claim Gypsies (Bogomilova 2003). Little is known about how Roma religiosity and Protestant proselytizing interact to transform social dynamics within Roma communities, or about the implications for the socio-economic and political integration of Roma (but see Atanasov 2010; Slavkova 2007; 2004; 2003).¹⁹ This dissertation inquires about the effects of conversion to Protestantism on gender relations in Bulgarian Roma communities, which has consequences for Roma's integration in the larger society.

Traditional Religions and the Growth of Protestantism in Bulgaria

Post-socialist Bulgaria presents a contradictory context where the level of religiosity is relatively low, even though one's choice of religious affiliation is generally bounded to match one's ethnic identity; where traditional religious institutions are institutionally marginalized, even though they remain important in the public arena as symbols of ethno-national identity; and where the state has allowed a growing and increasingly competitive religious market, even

¹⁸ Such "deviance" takes the form of alternative renditions of scripture and of saints' lives (e.g., St. Basil in Bulgaria), in strong superstitions about supernatural forces and creatures (e.g., vampires and goblins), in making spells and fortune telling, in celebrating alternative religious holidays (such as the Bango Vasil on January 6th or Baro Ges on May 6th in Bulgaria), and in maintaining distinctive religious rituals. Because of their spiritual liminality, Gypsies are occasionally endowed with dangerous mystical powers in the folk imagination.

¹⁹ Acton (1979) and Gay y Blasco (2000) explored these issues in the context of Western Europe.

though the arrival of new religions has been met with intolerance and public condemnation. In order to understand how this came to be, one needs to turn to history.

The Ottoman administrative system divided the population based on religion, placing all Orthodox Christians under the jurisdiction of the Greek Patriarchate (Irwin 1989).²⁰ Over the 19th century, Slavic religious leaders embarked on a project to establish an autocephalous church, and they justified their demands by referring to ethnic descent, language, and history.²¹ The link between the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC) and Bulgarian ethno-national identity became an important theme in the *secular* struggles to establish an independent Bulgarian nation-state,²² generating a national cultural idiom of self-understanding that merged Orthodoxy and Bulgarian-ness (Bogomilova 1996; Krasteva 1996). In response, the Turkish minority that found itself “stranded” on the territory of independent Bulgaria created its own idiom of self-understanding, merging Turkishness and Islam.

The Bulgarian nation-state has been secular in its modernizing projects. However, a series of governments – including the socialist one – have used the symbol of the BOC in their

²⁰ Roma were bounded differently, in part because of their different lifestyle. Administrators were concerned that Gypsies were more difficult to follow and control.

²¹ It is hard to determine whether these religious actors were driven by ideological or instrumental reasons. According to Armstrong (1982), pre-modern autocephalous churches that were associated with specific kingdoms (such as the Bulgarian Orthodox Church that was established by King Boris I in the 10th c. and dissolved by the Ottomans in the 15th c.), the churches’ use of vernacular languages, and the conflict between Christianity and Islam facilitated the “incubation” of particularistic identities that were closely intertwined with religion. Yet, Slavs were often marginalized and slighted by the Greek leadership of the Patriarchate, and the former could have used the ethno-national discourse that was becoming increasingly popular across Europe at the time (Greenfeld 1992; Kedourie 1960) to gain leverage in their struggle for power and institutional independence.

²² In the 1860s, prominent cultural reformist Slaveikov declared: “Every nation should have its own independent church. Under the name of the independent Bulgarian church we seek the totality of our personal and national rights. We want our Bulgarian Patriarch, our Bulgarian synod, our Bulgarian council, which will represent our secular interests” (cited in Raikin 1989).

nationalizing projects (Raikin 1989).²³ The Church has gone along with the state, embracing nationalism as “a deeper faith [...] than the gospel truth” (Raikin 1989, 376) and surrendering its ambitions to provide *institutional* framing for communal life (Mitev and Matev 2003).²⁴ In the meantime, Islam/Turkishness has become a major symbol of “otherness,” and the state has often sought to suppress Islamic institutions and identities (Zhelyazkova 1998). In addition, the socialist state was especially diligent in persecuting the small Adventist, Baptist, Congregationalist, Methodist, and Pentecostal communities that had been established in the country since the second half of 19th century. Some Protestant leaders were sentenced as foreign spies, and most of the churches were disbanded or reduced to a handful of followers (Mojzes and Shenk 1992, 210-212, 216).

Given the legacy of nation-building and the assumed overlap between religious and ethnic categories in Bulgaria, it would be inaccurate to describe most Bulgarians and Turks as “religious consumers” who are free to choose their religious affiliation. In fact, their choices are very limited: while decades of socialism have made it acceptable for anybody to be an atheist (Need and Evans 2001), embracing a religion that does not correspond to one’s ethno-nationality is akin to a symbolic act of “treason” against one’s imagined community (Barker 1999; Kanev 2002), or to a profound “confusion” regarding one’s “true” self. For most of the 20th century, this “crossing taboo” pertained primarily to the Christian/Muslim divide (Doja 2008). However, its meaning and application have expanded since 1989, when the adoption of liberal democracy obliged the state to open the religious market to a host of old and new denominations that had

²³ The socialist government sent clergy abroad as representatives of the Bulgarian nation. In speaking to Bulgarian émigrés in the US in the 1970s, Patriarch Maxim said, “You are Bulgarians by ancestral faith, blood, and unbreakable spiritual bond of the mother church” (cited in Raikin 1989).

²⁴ Consequently, 82 percent of Bulgarians declared being Orthodox, but only 47 percent are “religious,” and 81 percent of Orthodox Bulgarians say that the Church “supports the nation,” but only a quarter think that it has a future in modern public life (Mitev and Matev 2003).

been persecuted or excluded. In response to the perceived cultural invasion, Bulgarian society and politicians have upheld emphatically the BOC's status as a symbol of permanence, stability, and national unity (Bogomilova 2005, 2; Hajdinjak 2004; Merdjanova 2007).

A significant portion of the new religions in the post-socialist Bulgarian religious market fall in the broad category of "Protestant" denominations (see Footnote 14). Alongside civil organizations with Western affiliations, these so-called "sects" are frequently framed as post-socialist "enemies of the people," intent on enabling the "colonization" of Bulgaria by dividing the nation and by confusing the vulnerable and the gullible (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee 1996; Siderov 2003).²⁵ Even though some "sects" have tried to claim legitimacy on the basis of having historical roots in the country (Mojzes and Shenk 1992, 218), they had been invisible to society for decades. In addition, their attempts to win more followers have often been assisted by foreign missionaries, whose presence is "new."

The literature on the role of religiosity and religious affiliation in post-socialist Bulgaria, on the relationship between religious institutions and state/political/cultural/civic institutions, and on the current state of the religious marketplace either discusses society at large (and they sometimes conflate ethnic Bulgarians with society at large), or it focuses on the two major ethno-

²⁵ In order to get a sense of why nearly 70 percent of Bulgarians believe that "sects" should be outlawed (Merjanova 2007), it may be useful to compare Bulgaria to Ukraine, the post-socialist CEE country that has exhibited the most religious tolerance. First, Ukraine used to be dubbed the "Bible belt" of the Soviet Bloc, given that Protestants there numbered in the millions (Wanner 2007, 1-2); by contrast, Protestantism has never had a prominent presence in Bulgaria (Ramet 1998). Second, a large Pentecostal Ukrainian Diaspora has formed influential transnational networks that facilitate the flow of people and money from abroad (Wanner 2007); by contrast, Bulgarian Diaspora are either secular, or they tend to embrace Orthodoxy as a link to their motherland (Raikin 1989). Finally, Ukraine has a long history of religious heterogeneity, as exemplified by the presence of three Orthodox churches in the country – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kiev Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (Wanner 2007, 131-2); by contrast, the BOC has been the monopolistic national BOC.

national groups in the country – the Bulgarians and the Turks.²⁶ Most major authors rarely mention – let alone explain – how these phenomena relate to marginalized Roma.

Large-Scale Conversion to Evangelical Christianity among Roma in Bulgaria

The extensive literature on Roma in post-socialist Bulgaria glosses over the issue of Roma religion and religiosity, including the phenomenon of large-scale conversions to Protestantism among Roma groups (Barany 2002; Ladányi and Szelényi 2006; Mitev, Tomova, and Konstantinova 2001). Table 4 shows little growth of “Protestantism” in Bulgaria since the early 1990s. However, as in the case of ethnicity, these figures should not be taken at face value. Because Roma are more likely to give blank or “ambiguous” responses about ethnicity and religion to census officials, because sometimes adherents to non-traditional denominations do not classify themselves according to standardized census religious categories,²⁷ because Roma “ethnic” identities do not always match their “religious” identities,²⁸ and because it is not clear how conversion should be measured, I argue that the census does not capture the substantial percentage of the Bulgarian Roma who are now “Protestant.”

²⁶ For example, in claiming that “sects” gained some following in Bulgaria in the early 1990s but lost it thereafter, Bogomilova (1996; 2001) and Merdjanova (2007) fail to note that the trend has been different for Roma.

²⁷ Many Roma who attend Protestant churches are not familiar with the word “Protestant.” They identify as “Christian.” Some may identify with a specific denomination, such as the “Bulgarian Church of God” or “Zion.” Many Bulgarian census takers, who are not aware of the large-scale conversion to Protestantism among Roma and who do not know how to categorize specific denominations, assume that “Christian” means “Eastern Orthodox.” “Christian” Roma may also refuse to self-identify when they do not recognize any of the categories from which they can choose.

²⁸ For example, a Muslim/Turkish Roma may convert to a Protestant denomination, but s/he may continue to identify *ethnically* as Turkish and/or Muslim Roma (Slavkova 2004, 47).

Table 4. Percentage Distribution and Frequency of Reported Religious Identities, Bulgaria, 1992 (N=8,487,317), 2001 (N=7,928,901), and 2011 (N=7,364,570)

Religious Identity	% Distribution (Count)		
	1992	2001	2011
Eastern Orthodox	85.7 7,274,592	82.6 6,552,751	59.4 4,374,135
Muslim	13.8 1,110,295	12.2 966,978	7.8 577,139
Protestant	0.3 21,878	0.5 42,308	0.9 64,476
Other*	0.9 80,552	4.6 366,864	31.9 2,348,820
TOTAL	100 8,487,317	100 7,928,901	100 7,364,570

* For 1992 and 2001, the category “Other” includes other known religious categories (14,937), respondents who refused to self-identify (283,309), and no responses (24,807). For 2011, it includes other known religious categories (60,389), other unspecified religious categories (9,023), respondents who claimed no religious affiliation (272,264), those who refused to self-identify with any religious category (409,898), and those who did not respond to the question (1,597,246). Of those who responded, 76 percent claimed to be Eastern Orthodox, 10 percent claimed to be Muslim, and 1.1 percent claimed to be Protestant.

Sources: National Statistical Institute 2012, 131.

Table 5. Percentage Distribution and Frequency of Religious Affiliation by Ethnicity (N=5,526,360, or people who responded to the question), Bulgaria, 2011.

Religious affiliation	% Distribution Count				
	Bulgarian	Turkish	Roma	Other*	Total
Eastern Orthodox	86.7 4,240,422	1.0 5,279	36.6 84,867	27.7 26,757	76.1 4,357,325
Muslim	1.4 67,350	87.6 444,434	18.2 42,204	13.1 12,695	9.9 566,683
Protestant	0.7 36,613	0.5 2,400	10.1 23,289	1.4 1,333	1.1 63,635
Other	11.2 546,011	10.9 55,502	35.1 81,263	57.8 55,841	12.9 738,617
Total	100 4,890,396	100 507,615	100 231,623	100 96,626	100 5,726,260

* “Other” includes respondents who reported other known affiliations (Catholic, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox, and Jewish, 50,569), other unspecified affiliations (8,898), no religious affiliation (270,862), and those who did not self-identify (408,286).

Source: National Statistical Institute 2012, 207

Once again, even though only 10 percent of Roma report being “Protestant,” many Evangelical Roma do not know the word “Protestant” (see Chapter Three), so many Evangelical Roma likely identified as “Christian” (and were hence recorded as “Eastern Orthodox”) or “other.”

Most Protestant Roma in Bulgaria belong to Pentecostal and Adventist churches, or to their spin-offs.²⁹ Fewer belong to Congregational, Methodist, and Baptist churches. With the exception of the Adventist church, the organizations listed above are part of a Protestant Alliance

²⁹ Examples of spin-offs include the Bulgarian Church of God, the United Church of God, New Generation, United God’s Church of Providence, Christian Church “Zion,” Life and Light, Church of God “Vetil,” Bulgarian Church of God “Agape,” United Church of God “The Source of Life,” etc. Even though there is much negative competition among Pentecostal pastors, some are connected through networks and work together to establish an independent Roma denominational structure. There is little interaction between Pentecostal and Adventist churches (Slavkova 2003).

(Slavkova 2004). Some Roma churches have also formed an Organization of Gypsy Churches. The Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses do not partake of these alliances, but they also have a very limited Roma following, possibly because they do not allow independent ethnic churches (Slavkova 2003; Bogomilova 2001; Chapter Three). The Roma churches range in size from a single family to large organizations with pastors, advisors, deans, treasurers, choirs, evangelizers, etc. Some of them are completely isolated, while other are embedded into extensive domestic and transnational networks.

Research Sites

Sliven

I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork in the south-central town of Sliven, which is located about 150 miles east of the capital Sofia (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of Bulgaria.



The municipality of Sliven encompasses the town of Sliven and 44 satellite villages. It has 125,268 residents, of which 93,421 are town-dwellers. Table 6 breaks down the population by ethnicity.

Table 6. Percentage Distribution and Frequency of Reported Ethnic Identity in Sliven, 2011 (N=125,268)

Reported Ethnic Identity	% Distribution
	(Count)
Bulgarian	70.8 88,750
Turkish	3.4 4,209
Roma/Gypsy	9.7 12,153
Other*	16.1 20,156
TOTAL	100 125,268

* The category “other” includes those respondents who declared “other” ethnic identity, who did not identify with any ethnic group, and who did not respond to the question.
Source: National Statistical Institute 2012b, p. 35.

According to Table 6, “only” about 10 percent of Sliven’s residents are Roma. However, due to the issues I identified while discussing the national census above, this percentage is actually much higher, with estimates as high as 40 percent, or among the highest concentrations in Bulgarian cities (Tomova, Vandova and Tomov 2000, 13). I discuss Sliven and its Roma in detail in Chapter Two, but I provide a brief overview below.

Starting in the 15th century, so-called Orthodox Christian “Bulgarian Gypsies” settled in the north parts of the town, while Muslim “Turkish Gypsies,” who call themselves “Turks,”

formed neighborhoods in the southern edges, or settled as agricultural workers in the villages. In the early 20th century, Muslim “Naked Gypsies” “invaded” the southern ghetto (Decheva 2000, 15).³⁰ During socialism, unusually high numbers of Bulgarian Gypsies became high-skilled workers, pursued advanced education, and even integrated and “passed” into Bulgarian society. Some Turks joined state enterprises or found employment in city services; others used their skills to form craft cooperatives. In an attempt to make “socialist citizens” out of the Naked Gypsies, the Zhivkov regime forced the men to join the factories in the capacity of unskilled workers and janitors. Some families were relocated to nearby villages to work in the agricultural cooperatives. Most of the women remained outside the labor force by adapting their reproductive behaviors to take advantage of a state policy offering lifetime support to mothers of three or more children.

After 1989, the backbone of the local economy – light industry – collapsed, turning Sliven into a depressed municipality with a faltering budget, above-average unemployment, a strained welfare sector, and an underfunded healthcare system. Naked Gypsies were promptly discharged from state enterprises and left to survive on state allowances for children. Twenty years later, they form a permanent racialized underclass, whose members lack the basic skills required to find or to hold a job in a liberal market economy (Tomova, Vandova, and Tomov 2000, 8). By the end of the 1990s, most of the high-skilled Bulgarian and Turkish Roma were jobless too. Currently, they have limited options, mostly in heavy industry and services. Few have managed to establish themselves as professionals or to revert to their old crafts.

³⁰ The Turkish Gypsies called them “Wallachians” in order to draw a sharper distinction between themselves and the newcomers; however, Sliven’s “Naked Gypsies” are not related to the Wallachian Gypsies (Tomova, Vandova, and Tomov 2000, 17).

To identify the conditions under which Evangelical churches have the most and least impact on gender relations, I compare two Roma groups in Sliven: the most disadvantaged Naked Gypsies in the walled-in Nadezhda ghetto and the most integrated Bulgarian Gypsies in the Nikola Kochev neighborhood. (I supplement this core comparison with analyses of Sliven's Bulgarian, Turkish and Musician Gypsy communities as appropriate.) I describe my research sites briefly below.

Nadezhda

Between 12,000 and 20,000 people live crammed within the confines of a tall concrete wall that encircles Nadezhda and separates the residents from the rest of the town (see Figure 2). The former head of the socialist regime, Todor Zhivkov, allegedly gave the order to construct the wall so as to hide the unseemly and embarrassing ghetto from the rest of the town and from the foreign tourists in the trains that pass here en route from Sofia to the Bulgarian seaside. Most houses in the segregated neighborhood – in spatial, social, and cultural terms – are built illegally and lack basic amenities (e.g., sewage, bathrooms, running water, garbage collection, refrigerators, etc.). Nearly everybody here gets married, usually in their mid-teens. Nuclear families are rare, as people rely on extended kin networks for survival. Alcoholism and domestic violence are the norm (Tomova, Vandova, and Tomov 2000, 30). The primary spoken languages are Turkish and two Romany dialects.

Relatively speaking, the wealthiest group in Nadezhda consists of so-called “Turks.” Even though they often drop out of school between sixth and eight grade to get married, some men pursue their own businesses in retail, taxi services, iron processing, and construction. Members of the “Musician Gypsy” subgroup are the second wealthiest group in the ghetto. The “Naked Gypsies” are the poorest and largest group, and their numbers are constantly augmented

by high birth rates and the in-migration of Gypsies from nearby villages. At present, the vast majority of Naked Gypsies are unemployed and living under conditions of extreme poverty, social dislocation, segregation, discrimination, and limited access to social services (Tomova, Vandova, and Tomov 2000, 11). Members of the group suffer from frequent outbreaks of tuberculosis, hepatitis, gastric and intestinal diseases, polio, muscular dystrophy, eczema, allergic and respiratory diseases, malnutrition and protein deficiency, rickets, etc.

The neighborhood does not have an Orthodox church, and a recently constructed mosque on its southwestern outskirts has been decried by Bulgarian nationalists and by Christian Roma in the ghetto.³¹ Conversion to Evangelical Christianity has affected all groups, as nearly all Musician and Naked Gypsies claim to be “Christian” and about half of the Turks have converted as well. In 2010, the ghetto had thirteen Evangelical churches (five Turkish, three Musician Gypsy, and five Naked Gypsy). Almost all of the residents have been to church at least once.

I argue that most Nadezhdans – and especially Naked Gypsies, whose long-term socio-economic and cultural isolation has facilitated the preservation of patriarchal family relations – lack structural opportunities, communication skills, and cultural predispositions to encounter, engage, and absorb more egalitarian ideas about gender and family practices. And while foreign sponsors and Bulgarian denominational leaders offer a plethora of social and economic incentives for locals to build many churches and to compete over their leadership, they take little interest in how religion is practiced, how churches are run, and what (if any) social agendas they pursue. This allows local religious leaders – who are personally invested in traditional institutions, and who wish to avoid alienating members in a very competitive religious

³¹ This mosque should be distinguished from the “Arab” mosques being built in the Rhodope Mountains by Islamist proselytizers from the Middle East (Ghodsee 2009). The chief Mufti wanted to build the mosque in downtown Sliven, but after a political battle, decided to settle for Nadezhda (Ataka 2007).

marketplace – to simply reflect and reinforce old cultural norms. They do not encourage women to participate prominently in organizational and worship dynamics, to build social networks in churches, or to pursue personal growth through learning, nor do they attempt to change patriarchal attitudes, practices, and relations outside of church.

Nikola Kochev

Nikola Kochev is inhabited by over 6,000 descendants of the Bulgarian Gypsies who first settled in Sliven centuries ago and labored in the textile industry. They are relatively assimilated and often speak Bulgarian along with, or instead of, Romany. Many have adopted the nuclear family model, marry past their teens, and have 1-2 children. The Bulgarian Gypsies in Nikola Kochev were also hurt by the transition to a market economy, but later and less severely compared to the Roma groups in Nadezhda. The majority have permanent jobs, and only about a third receive welfare. The streets and houses may look increasingly shabby, and the children may drop out of school at increasing rates, but the neighborhood maintains a good level of social cohesion and control. It also has a much lower infant mortality rate and much higher life expectancy compared to Nadezhda (Tomova, Vandova and Tomov 2000).

A small percentage of Bulgarian Gypsies have converted to Evangelical Christianity, but participation in Evangelical churches by members of this relatively integrated community has affected women's lives more discernibly. Having better education, access to communication technology, and a familiarity with the Bulgarian and western cultures, men *and* women are more likely to encounter and absorb novel perspectives on gender and family relations. Also, while many Naked Gypsy pastors are almost illiterate, some Bulgarian Gypsy religious leaders – including a few women – train in elite theology schools in Bulgaria and abroad and help establish organizational structures that encourage women to participate, to form stable social

networks of support, to learn through discussion groups and seminars, to develop a sense of personal self-worth, and to revisit patriarchal ideas and practices (e.g., the expectation that young couples should live with the husband's parents).

Literature Review and Contributions

Scholarship on Roma in Central and Eastern Europe

The intensifying marginality of Roma in post-socialist Bulgaria and elsewhere in Eastern Europe has generated a vast literature. The central contribution of gender inequality to the dynamics of marginalization, however, has not been widely studied, with some notable exceptions. Kyuchukov (2004) sheds lights on the low educational status of Roma women, showing that too many Roma girls leave school at an early age. Pamporov (2010) focuses on the subject of arranged marriages that are often forced upon adolescent Roma. Timmerman (2004) argues that this cultural practice violates international human rights treaties and should be an impediment to Bulgaria's membership in the EU. The problem of early marriages is discussed further by Ivanova and Krastev (2008), who claim that Roma women "have a hard time overcoming the traditional vicious cycle: early marriage – early first birth – multiple births without any intervals in-between – the lack of education and opportunities for personal achievements" (285). Alexandrieva (2003) brings much-needed attention to the ubiquitous problem of domestic violence against Roma women, which speaks to the issue of the female subjugation to men in Roma families.

Roma religiosity, including the recent interest in Evangelic Christianity, has not been a central focus of academic concern either (for exceptions, see Atanasov 2010; Đorđević and Todorović 2004; Lange 2002; Marushiakova and Popov 1999; Slavkova 2007). Focused

research on Protestant Roma in West European contexts tends to overlook inter-communal cleavages and to over-generalize the effects of conversion by suggesting that it generates Gypsy ethno-national consciousness and national/transnational political mobilization (Acton 1979; Gay y Blasco 2000; 2004). So far, scant scholarly research has been focused expressly on this subject in the context of Eastern Europe. A few works discuss the locally contextual nature of Roma Protestantism, but do not explore its broader social consequences (Kuburic 2003; Marushyakova and Popov 1999). Notable, but partial, exceptions are Slavkova's (2007) comprehensive analysis of Evangelical churches as organs of communal self-regulation that allow Roma in Bulgaria to preserve and even purify their "Gypsyess" and Atanasov's (2010) work analyzing the various positive effects conversion has had on Roma communities. They do not address the issue of gender relations systematically, however.³²

Studies of the ties between ethno-national and religious identities in SEE consistently ignore Roma's anomalous place in the broad ethno-religious landscape (Bogomilova 1996; Raikin 1989). Analyses of the political controversies surrounding the arrival of western Protestant missionaries in Bulgaria (Cohen 1997; Hajdinjak 2004) and speculation about how they may change the role religion plays in a society undergoing profound socio-cultural transformations (Bogomilova 2001) fail to specify that these dynamics affect Roma the most.

Contributions

My research contributes to the scholarship on Eastern European Roma by bridging the literatures on Roma marginality, gender and patriarchy, and Evangelical Christianity. First, my research demonstrates that patriarchal structures and practices that persist in some of the most marginalized Roma communities intensify the socio-economic plight of Roma and deter them

³² Gay y Blasco (2012) explores the subject in the context of Western Europe.

from integrating into the larger Bulgarian society. Some of these practices include providing little encouragement to young girls to attend school, pulling girls out of school for the purpose of marrying them when they reach puberty, pressuring teenage couples to have children they cannot support, placing women under the full authority of their husbands and parents-in-law, and discouraging women from joining the labor force.

Second, my research contributes to the scarce literature on the large-scale Roma conversions to Evangelical Christianity in SEE. In doing so, it systematically addresses the social effects of those conversions, and particularly their effect on gender relations. My findings also contradict many of the conclusions in this small body of scholarship, as I show that in some situations, attending Evangelical churches has no, or even a negative, effect on members of Roma communities.

Third, the project contributes to the literature on the changing religious landscape of post-socialist CEE/SEE by showing that religion plays different kinds of roles in the lives of different kinds of communities even within the same country. Here, one of the main contributions of my research may be in showing how those macro-level changes have had distinctive localized effects on the most marginalized and stigmatized population across the region – Roma.

Scholarship on the Effects of Conversion to Evangelical Christianity on Gender

Relations

This project also contributes to the comparative literature on large-scale conversions of marginalized populations, and particularly women, to global Protestant denominations in the context of rapid transition to a market economy and liberal democracy. It contributes to studies of how Protestant institutions, as organizational structures that undergird shared worldviews, reframe social practices in converted communities (Annis 1987; Berger 2010; Gorski 2003;

Weber 1996; Willems 1967).³³ More specifically, I engage the literature on the effects of conversion on gender relations in patriarchal societies. In the Western World, Evangelical Christianity is widely understood as a conservative ideology and as a set of practices that stand in the way of modernity and social progress. However, a large body of literature has shown that the introduction of Evangelical Christianity has helped marginalized populations in developing societies in four major ways. First, the participatory and interactive worship rituals of Charismatic dominations – as well as their culture of voluntarism, personal engagement, and egalitarianism – have been credited with creating high levels of social cohesion, which has enabled dislocated people to establish communities of mutual support within the institutional frameworks of the churches (Corten 1999; Lalive d’Epinay 1969). Second, marginalized individuals have used Christian doctrine and their new religious identity to change the configurations and meaning of old social categories and to gain (a sense of) higher status, individually and collectively (Acton 1979; Gay y Blasco 2000; Hannigan 1991; Johannesen 1991; Paris 1985; Robertson and Garrett 1991). Third, as a cultural system, Evangelical Christianity has changed traditional worldviews and behaviors, so that converts have found it easier to adapt to capitalism and economic modernization (Annis 1987; Berger 2010; Brusco 1996; Garrard-Burnett 1998; Slavkova 2003; Slavkova 2004; Slavkova 2007; Willems 1967). Fourth, churches have also been shown to train grassroots leaders and to channel the social cohesion they generate into organized action on the political arena, often in order to oppose

³³ While the established religious institutions in Bulgaria tend to overlook quotidian issues (Mitev and Matev 2004), Slavkova (2003) and Atanasov (2011) argue that Protestant churches engender congregational solidarity, engagement, and discipline. However, converts are affected differently depending on the meaning “conversion” has for them, which may range from checking a box on a form, to adding new elements to one’s syncretic spiritual kaleidoscope, to undergoing a profound personal transformation. Personal life experiences, education level, and social standing affect the extent to which conversion alters one’s identity, outlook, and behavior.

traditional social hierarchies (Bastian 1993; Bonner 1998; Casagrande 1978; Fox 1999; Muratorio 1981; Paris 1985; Samson 2007; Stoll 1990; Whitten 1981).

A significant portion of the comparative literature focuses specifically on the effects of Evangelical Christianity on marginalized women. Women – especially lower-class women – have been crucial to the global Evangelical movement, as they are often the first to convert, tend to convert in larger numbers than men, and play a central role in the diffusion of the movement (Bowen 1996; Stoll 1993, 8). While the percentage of Evangelical women in their respective congregations has been declining in the developed world (Aune 2008), approximately two-thirds of Evangelical Christians in the developing world are estimated to be female, which has prompted some to call the global spread of Evangelical Christianity a “women’s movement” (Martin 1996, 52). Starting in the 1980s, numerous scholars have sought to explain why Evangelical Christianity has been “especially responsive to [women’s] needs” (Stoll 1993, 8) in developing societies, where women traditionally hold a lower status. Based on empirical research from around the world, this body of literature again identifies four ways in which participation in Evangelical churches has transformed women’s lives: (1) Churches embed women in religious communities, where they can gain prestige as leaders and form mutually-supportive relations. (2) The universalistic and individualistic teachings of Christian doctrine alter women’s self-conception, elevating their sense of self-worth and empowering them to take control over their lives. (3) As a cultural system, Evangelical Christianity reforms traditional gendered roles and behaviors, which has benefitted women in the domestic sphere. (4) As empowered individuals and members of cohesive communities, Evangelical women have found it easier to pursue economic, political, and social integration in the larger society.

The Religious Community

The most immediate way in which Evangelical Christianity benefits women in developing societies is by placing them within organized communities, where they can form emotionally supportive and economically useful relationships within prescribed boundaries (Gill 1990, 712). In many developing societies, patriarchal social organization and relations discourage women from participation in public life. At the same time, parents, husbands, and in-laws often allow women's engagement with religious institutions, partially because of the popular belief that female religiosity is conducive to virtue and chastity. Consequently, Evangelical churches emerge as a rare legitimate and safe venue for women to join social networks outside of home and work without openly challenging patriarchal structures and relations. Evangelical Christianity is especially conducive to building communities by promoting participatory worship and active engagement in the life of the church. In this way, Gill (1990) argues, it enables women to create "counter-hegemonic cultural forms" that introduce a sense of order in the face of alienation from mainstream society (709). Even though most religious communities are controlled by men, they are also at least partially "feminized," as they see themselves in the image of families (which are women's domain in patriarchal societies) and as they embrace ambiguous religious symbols, such as a God who displays traditional feminine traits and a Word/Spirit duality that ultimately privileges the feminized Spirit (Cucchiari 1990).

The need for supportive communities is particularly urgent during traumatic social transformations, such as violent conflict (which often leaves women alone and struggling to survive), natural disasters, economic restructuring, migration, urbanization, disintegrating family systems, and fracturing traditional communities. In the 1970s-80s, Indian women in Guatemala

experienced all of the above, which caused many of them to turn to Protestantism as a “religion of survival” and as a “a refuge from suffering and a space in which [they were] able to reclaim some personal control of their lives” (Green 1993, 162). Evangelical churches provided uprooted and isolated individuals with a much-needed sense of belonging, and they filled the vacuum left by the eradicated traditional institutions that had ensured social order (*ibid*, 174). Women’s church organizations were especially important in engaging impoverished migrants and in helping them deal with issues such as family values, alcoholism, crime, domestic violence, and household economics (Garrard-Burnett 1998, 122-124).

In addition to enabling women to build valuable interpersonal relationships, Evangelical communities also provide them with the rare opportunities to assume leadership positions (Flora 1975, 418). A number of studies focus on female church leaders and their potential to generate social change (Espinosa 2002; Soothill 2007, Chapter 5). Hackett (1993) credits the “new religious movements” in Africa with enabling women (who were relegated to a subordinate position by Western colonists and Christian missionaries) to regain their status as spiritual leaders. Despite claims about women’s moral and spiritual inferiority, the Charismatic community generally acknowledges women’s contributions to the movement, and it allows them to found and lead churches. Female lay church members also acquire prestige and leadership skills by overseeing crucial activities such as fundraising, charity programs, facility maintenance, event organizing, etc. In addition to building confidence as competent and autonomous individuals, women can use these honed organizational abilities in the secular sphere (Flora 1975, 424; Martin 2001, 52).

Individual Self-Conception

An important benefit of Evangelical Christianity to marginalized women – especially in contexts where the values of universalistic liberalism have not taken root – is that it prompts the individual to reevaluate her own self-worth in ways that enhance her self-esteem. One source of this empowerment is Christian doctrine, which advocates spiritual and moral equality premised on personal closeness to God. Here, Cucchiari (1990) argues that the very notion of “intimacy” between God and the human soul evokes traditional feminine values, which offers moral redemption for women. The bolstered sense of self-worth has profound effects for social relations. The newly acquired sense of “spiritual superiority” may even elevate one’s perceived worth above that of members of traditionally privileged social categories (Loreto Mariz 1995, 98; Green 1993, 174). Empowerment can also extend beyond the realm of spiritual self-esteem. Burdick (1998) shows that in the context of Brazil, Charismatic Christianity elevates black women’s physical self-image, which allows them to deal with their marginalization in love, marriage, and work. In the context of Sicily, Cucchiari (1990) demonstrates that while reaffirming cultural conservatism, Pentecostals also reformulate gendered notions of human worth, which imbue both men and women with a higher sense of value and prestige (700).

Another source of personal empowerment is the emphasis on “gifts” (such as spirit-ecstasy, tongues, and prophesy) and personal testimonies. Gifts are crucial markers of salvation, and in general, women appear to be more likely than men to “receive” them, which elevates women’s authority in the church (Martin 2001, 55; Maxwell 1999; Sjørup 2002; Soothill 2007). Cucchiari (1990) argues that whereas men tend to be associated with the Word, women are most often related to Spirit, the central distinguishing feature of Charismatic Christianity (703). Testimonies, on the other hand, provide a believer with a means of celebrating and reflecting on

her personal transformation within a supportive community (Gudof 2006). They also provide an opportunity to construct and interpret (shared) narratives of suffering (Burdick 1996, 108).

Further, Evangelical Christianity empowers the individual by demanding that she takes control of her life and by encouraging her pursuit of perfection and salvation (Drogus 1997).

Personal responsibility for one's own actions and destiny, in turn, predisposes a sense of freedom that has the potential to change gender relations (Flora 1975, 423). It replaces a fatalistic view that takes the world for granted with the belief that things can be changed (Loreto Mariz 1995, 95). It should be noted, however, that the individualism that Pentecostalism promotes is different from the one that liberal feminism promotes, as it focuses more on duties and less on rights (Loreto Mariz and Campos Machado 1997). In this case, the individual seeks actualization in the context of a partnership and a community, where people are responsible for each other.

The Domestic Sphere

Even though Evangelical ideology formally legitimizes gender inequities, in the context of some traditional societies, it may benefit women as it delegitimizes traditional male behaviors and family structures that are harmful to women (Gill 1990, 709). Brusco (1995) shows that Columbian women's participation in the Evangelical movement is, to some extent, part of a strategic effort to "domesticate" alienated, selfish, and irresponsible men into dependable partners and providers. Restrained by transvaluated notions of masculinity, men no longer need to prove their manliness through their distance from the "feminine" domain of the household, through alcohol consumption, through physical dominance, through conspicuous and selfish spending, and through sexual prowess (in the form of having mistresses); instead, they are called

upon to be authoritative but involved husbands and fathers, to abstain from alcohol and domestic abuse, to provide economically, and to be faithful. In a more general sense, Evangelical Christianity has advocated closely-knit nuclear families across a number of cultural contexts (Martin 2001, 55; Soothill 2007, 193), which has spared women from abuse within extended kin groups and empowered them as men's partners.

Focusing less on behavior and more on symbolic status, Cucchiari (1990) examines how Pentecostalism empowered women in modernizing Sicily, where the devaluation in women's traditional role as central figures in the household was not accompanied by a rise in prestige in other spheres (701, 703). Against the hegemonic "politics of shame," Pentecostal ideology allowed women to reclaim their lost power and self-worth through "domestic redemption" and "gender mutuality" in the home.

Ridicule and stigmatization from non-converts often make it difficult for prestige-seeking men to conform to the behavioral standards imposed by Evangelical Christianity. Consequently, many men opt not to convert, or they convert and then leave the church. But even if Evangelical women find themselves with a husband who does not share their values, they arguably have the means they need to stand their ground (Soothill 2007, Chapter 6). On the one hand, their sense of individual self-worth (discussed above) empowers them to challenge "sinners" (Drogus 1997; Flora 1975, 423). In such cases, men are typically no longer seen as masters to be obeyed or oppressors to be escaped; rather, they are sinners who need help (Loreto Mariz and Campos Machado 1997). On the other hand, women feel the moral support of their religious community in dealing with domestic challenges (Burdick 1993).

Engagement with the Larger Society

Finally, Evangelical Christian institutions may empower marginalized women in developing countries by enabling them to engage proactively with the larger society in various capacities, while retaining protections found in familiar traditional relations (Keddie 1999, 11). On the individual level, church activities may supply women with opportunities to develop skills that can be used for other public, professional, or political purposes (Drogos, 1997). A few examples of such skills and experiences include self-discipline, literacy, and exposure to the world through church-related travel (Flora 1975, 418; Loreto Mariz 1995, 99). Also, Evangelical churches are often embedded in larger organizational and social networks, which enables marginalized women to meet and interact with people outside of their community. Further, Evangelical Christianity may change women's economic attitudes and behavior, making them more assertive, proactive, and competitive in the job market (Annis 1987; Brusco 1996; Garrard-Burnett 1998). On the group level, church organizations can be a powerful mobilizing force behind female communal activism, although secular movements have failed to recognize and tap this potential (Burdick 1993; Burdick 1998; Green 1993).

Limitations of the Effect of Evangelical Churches on Women's Lives

Despite celebrating the ways in which Evangelical Christianity benefits the lives of women in developing traditional societies, some of the authors cited above also acknowledge that there are limitations to how far these benefits go. In relation to religious communities, Gill (1990) laments the fact that women are still formally relegated to the domestic sphere and framed as naturally inferior, submissive, and best suited to wifedom and motherhood (716). When it comes to enhanced individual self-perception, Flora (1975) admits that personal empowerment rarely translates into elevated collective status (424). Regarding the domestic

sphere, Soothill (2007) argues that in the Ghanaian context, “the gender discourses of Charismatic Christianity are used in multiple ways to challenge old cultural forms, to create new ones, and to generate renewed forms of legitimacy for ‘traditional’ gender norms” (26–27); despite strengthening marriage and family, however, these discourses do not “challenge the structures that reinforce and perpetuate gender inequalities” (63). As far as community activism goes, the effect of churches remains largely a matter of speculation about future potential (Burdick 1998).

Some of these context-specific reservations may be traced to stubborn indigenous attitudes, but a host of thinkers situated in the tradition of Enlightenment, rationalism, and/or Western feminism would argue that Evangelical Christianity can never solve these problems completely because it carries the same biases. They point out that because of their strict adherence to scripture, Evangelical “fundamentalists” assume essential and divinely-ordained differences between men and women which justify patriarchal structures and the subordination of women to men in the public and private spheres (Keddie 1999, 22-23). Consequently, Evangelical Christianity limits the meaningful expressions of womanhood to motherhood and wifehood (Balmer 1994, 48-50), and gender discrimination remains endemic to its institutions even in liberal-democratic societies committed to universalistic principles of equality (Ingersoll 2003). Some even suggest that turning to conservative religious ideologies represents a misdirected psychological response to the vicissitudes of modernity, where “gender roles are the most basic building blocks of social organization” and where “keeping women clearly under the control of men makes the world seem more orderly and more comprehensible” (McCarthy-Brown 1994, 189). While acknowledging that Evangelical Christianity gives women (and men) a sense of spiritual empowerment, Gebara (1996), Lalive d’Epinay (1968), and Stoll (1990)

similarly claim that it misdirects believers from fighting real material, social, and political oppression.

Contributions

My research contributes to the scholarship on the effects of Evangelical Christianity on gender relations by showing that in the Nadezhdan context, churches have not advanced the status of women in the same way as they have done in other societies. First, Nadezhdan women are not empowered through participating in church organizations. They do not assume leadership positions nor do they form strong communities of support because they remain passive during solidarity-building church services, they do not establish church groups, and they fail to build informal social networks outside of their kinship circles. Second, I show that Evangelical women do not develop a strong sense of personal worth and empowerment because patriarchal gender roles make it unacceptable for women to claim that they have spiritual gifts, to use testimonies as a means of celebrating their personal transformation, and to embrace notions of personal responsibility for their own lives. Third, my findings demonstrate that the Nadezhdan churches have produced a mixed effect on women's lives in the domestic sphere. On the one hand, the churches have, indeed, encouraged men to change some aspects of their behavior in ways that benefit women. More specifically, churchgoing men have stopped drinking alcohol, smoking, gambling, womanizing, and (excessively) beating their wives and children. This does not necessarily mean that men have become more involved in the lives of their families, however. On the other hand, church leaders have done very little to change patriarchal practices that limit young women's choices and opportunities in life. They have also taught women to be even more docile and subservient. Fourth, I argue that Nadezhdan churches do not facilitate the economic, social, cultural, and political integration of women in the larger

society. They do not provide their members with new practical skills, new attitudes toward education and employment, social capital, and opportunities to organize in collective action. The picture is very different in Nikola Kochev because the Roma who live there are not subjected to the same degree of spatial and social segregation and stigmatization. Their relative integration has enabled them to abandon patriarchal beliefs and practices that subject women to systematic domination, exclusion, and subordination.

Scholarship on Strategies of Extraversion, the Position of Brokers within Social Networks, and Religious Economies

A final contribution of this project is situated at the conjunction of the literatures on resource flows in resource-poor environments, the position of brokers within social networks, and competitive religious fields. I reserve a detailed engagement with the literature for Chapter Three, but a few points can be made here by way of anticipation.

The comparative literature highlights several factors that contribute to the rapid spread of Evangelical Christianity in developing societies. These include the missionary imperative to spread the Holy Word, to plant churches, and to demonstrate Christian charity among the most downtrodden children of God (Cox 1995, 101-2; McGee 2001, 73); the propensity of impoverished, uprooted, and disenchanted people to seek comfort and order in Evangelical doctrine and in the community and organization of Evangelical churches (Anderson 1979; Lalive d'Epinay 1969; Willems 1967); the exuberant, eventful, and exciting character of the Evangelical worship style (Corten 1999, 42-43; Blumhofer 1993, 210-11; Kiernan 1976; McGuire 1982; Robbins 2004; Stringer 1999, 159; Thompson 1966, 368-69); and the compatibility between some communities' traditional beliefs and practices and key aspects of Evangelical Christianity,

such as the latter's emphasis on participation, giving witness, dreams and visions, and miracles and healing (Cox 1995, 101-2; Hollenweger 1984, 405; Martin 1990).

Chapter Three, however, tells a different story. It accounts for the proliferation of Evangelical churches in post-communist Nadezhda by examining the way in which the particular confluence of local and external religious actors created incentives for enterprising men to found and manage churches as an ingenious way of procuring external material resources in this extremely resource-poor environment. This has had significant consequences for the dynamics in Nadezhdan churches and for their effects on gender relations, which are the subjects of Chapters Four and Five, respectively.

Methodology and Data

Sofia

In 2009 and 2010, I spent fifteen months collecting primary and secondary data in Bulgaria. The first three months were spent in Sofia conducting preliminary and supplementary work. As the country's capital and largest city, Sofia is the central hub of political, administrative, educational, cultural, media, civic, and religious institutions and networks. I gathered qualitative and quantitative data from the Sofia City Court,³⁴ from the National Statistical Institute, from the Religious Confessions Directorate, from the Bulgarian Academy of Science, and from the National Library. In addition, I conducted informal open-ended interviews with different kinds of social actors, who provided valuable information about phenomena associated with the large-scale Roma conversions to Evangelical Christianity and diverse

³⁴ All denominations in the country are required to register with the Court, even if they are located elsewhere. This makes this registry the most up-to-date list of religious organizations in the country.

perspectives on these phenomena. First, I sought the scholarly expertise of Bulgarian academics who study the ethnic and religious dynamics in the country. Second, I spoke to government representatives in order to understand how various state agencies have responded to Protestants' proselytizing in Bulgaria in general, and among Roma in particular.³⁵ Third, I asked Roma intellectuals and NGO activists what they think about the effect of Protestant churches on Roma culture and traditional gender practices. Finally, I spoke to representatives of Protestant institutions of national prominence – such as the Pentecostal Bible College and the Adventist Bulgarian Union of Churches Conference – in order to understand if/how they legitimize their presence in “Orthodox Bulgaria,” maintain universalistic cultural neutrality amidst entrenched inter-ethnic divisions, bridge the social distance between believers of various ethnic groups, provide social assistance to marginalized populations, and establish connections between domestic and foreign churches. Many of these actors had personal and professional ties to individuals and institutions in Sliven, which enabled me to establish contacts there.

Sliven

I spent the remaining twelve months in Sliven, where I immersed myself among various groups of Roma, especially the most isolated and marginalized Naked Gypsy community in the Nadezhda ghetto.

Interviews

One major component of my ethnographic work entailed conducting informal, open-ended, and semi-structured interviews with a wide range of social actors, such as different kinds

³⁵ Some of these agencies include the Department for the Integration of the Roma at the National Council for the Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues, the Religious Confessions Directorate at the Council of Ministers, and the ministries of Labor and Social Policy, of Health, and of Education.

of Roma, church leaders, government representatives and experts, NGO leaders, academics, intellectuals, artists, etc. I interviewed and spoke with over four hundred informants. These interactions provided me with a sense of the state of local interethnic relations, of the factors that determine who converts and who does not, and of the impact Evangelical churches have on Roma communities. The vast majority of the interviews were with Roma of different ages, genders, and levels of affluence, with special emphasis on Naked Gypsies. Interactions assumed various form, ranging from casual chats and “hanging out,” to semi-structured and informal interviews, to focus groups. The length of my engagement with specific individuals ranged from brief exchanges about faith and God, to an eight-hour interview about an informant’s conversion experience, to spending time with a friend for three consecutive days. Many of my informants were uncomfortable being recorded, so I mostly took hand-written notes during my interviews, conversations, and participant observations (yielding over 3,000 pages of notes). I also took photographs and recorded some interviews and church services. I found that informal settings were the most conducive environment for interviews, usually over coffee and sweets.³⁶

I typically initiated interviews by asking an open-ended question and letting my informants choose what they believed was most worth sharing (Snow and Machalek 1984, 173-174). However, over the course of the interviews, I often posed semi-guided questions as well. In the case of Roma churchgoers, for example, these questions inquired about their prior religious identification; about their reasons for, experience of, and perceived benefits of conversion; about their attitudes toward Bulgarians and toward other Roma groups; about their level of education; about their employment status and occupation; about their marriage status;

³⁶ In order to win Roma’s trust, it is important to accept their hospitality by eating and drinking with them, since most Bulgarians are disgusted to do so. With some non-Christians, I also discovered that it helped to make them feel comfortable if we conducted interviews over coffee and cigarettes, so I picked up the habit of smoking for the purpose of having better interview experiences.

and about the number and educational status of their children. I usually obtained information about gender dynamics during less formal interactions with informants I had known for a while. In the case of local Roma pastors and foreign missionaries, I asked about their personal biographies, about the history of their activities in Sliven, about their future goals and plans, about their religious and secular philosophies (e.g., views on leadership style, church autonomy, and an array of cultural beliefs and practices), about navigating the local ethnic group divisions, about their relations with other local religious and non-religious actors, about charitable initiatives that may or may not be funded by other domestic and international institutions, about establishing connections between local and foreign churches, etc. In the case of government representatives, I asked whether they interact with Roma and with Roma church leaders and about their opinions on whether members of various Roma communities exhibit different attitudes toward stable employment, reliance on welfare, the value of education, and gender relations.

I have protected the identities of all of my informants by using aliases rather than their names and by withholding their exact ages. In many cases, I cite informants or refer to them without using aliases. This may be because I cite this particular informant only once or twice, because the informant did not want certain statements to be attributed to him or her, or because the dynamics I discuss cast the people involved in unfavorable light and I want to take extra steps to protect their identities. Appendix A provides some basic information on key informants whom I quote or to whom I refer more than a couple of times. It includes their alias, approximate age, gender, ethnic group, and other relevant information, such as whether they attend church, their occupation, and their relationship to others who have been cited.

Participant Observation

While in Sliven, I also conducted participant observation in the contexts of churches, homes, public performances, youth camps, seminars and congresses, water baptisms, and private celebrations and funerals. I spent a substantial amount of my time visiting different churches in order to understand patterns of attendance, worship dynamics, and social interactions. I observed what kinds of people attend, how often, on what occasions, with whom, etc., as well as whether members speak “normally” or in tongues, listen quietly or participate, look bored or animated, stand at the back or at the front, ignore or engage each other, sing, etc. Differences in expressing commitment and spirituality in churches indicate the various forms religiosity assumes, which is not always easy to recognize immediately in interviews (Taylor 1978). Further, social dynamics in these settings show how religious institutions frame social interactions across various symbolic boundaries and status distinctions, such as ethnicity, gender, age, families/clans, occupations, educational levels, etc. I chose to focus on four Naked Gypsy churches, three Musician Gypsy churches, four Turkish churches, one Bulgarian Gypsy church, and four Bulgarian Protestant churches, though I attended about a dozen other churches in and around Sliven, as well as the local mosque, intermittently.³⁷ Depending on their prayer schedule, I attended at least one Evangelical church every day of the week, making sure to rotate them, especially on Sundays and on holidays.

I also conducted direct and participant observation of routine interactions among Roma and between Roma and non-Roma in the confines of private homes, during special religious and secular events, and in public places. I was routinely invited to Roma homes on an informal

³⁷ I attended Orthodox churches infrequently – once or twice per month, at most – as the bulk of my time was dedicated to Protestant organizations. However, I made sure to go there during Orthodox holidays that attract some Roma (such as Epiphany on January 6th). In the course of my interviews with Orthodox priests (discussed below), I asked them to introduce me to Roma members of their churches as well.

basis, and I witnessed numerous birthday parties, weddings, baptism, funerals, and religious and secular events held publicly and privately in the community. This enabled me to observe everyday familial interactions between spouses, among siblings, between people of different genders, between parents and children, among different generations, and even among members of different religions. It also helped me to understand how conversion has transformed – or failed to transform – attitudes toward education, healthcare, stable employment, state agencies, politics, and, especially, gendered practices related to sexuality, reproduction, domestic violence, and alcoholism, among other things.³⁸

Outside of the home domain, I observed social dynamics in public settings such as streets, plazas, markets, buses, cafes, and government and civic institutions. Frequenting most of these kinds of settings simply required planning my travel routes and shopping patterns, being constantly mindful of my environment, and incorporating certain practices in my research. For example, I volunteered for two food programs for impoverished children, one run by a Bulgarian Gypsy church and one by a Naked Gypsy church. I also observed the dynamics between health mediators and Roma at the Nadezhdan health center, as well as the interaction between staff and Roma at the local labor bureau. This also provided me with numerous opportunities to carry out quick interviews with visitors who were willing to speak to me about religion.

³⁸ In the past, prominent national members of the United Church of God, the Bulgarian Church of God, and the Pentecostal Church have worked with foreign institutions and with the Ministry of Education on plans to promote the value of education (Slavkova 2003); however, I will show that these efforts have little resonance on the level of local communities.

Challenges of Doing Fieldwork among Roma

I encountered seven major challenges to conducting fieldwork in Roma communities and in Roma Evangelical churches.³⁹ First, there was the challenge of establishing legitimacy and gaining access to the churches. In the case of each church I attended, I introduced myself to the pastor first. In this endeavor I was aided by a local male Christian Naked Gypsy health mediator, Toncho, who volunteered to accompany me and to introduce me personally. I described my project, making it clear that I wanted to understand how the church affects the daily life of the respective community. I requested the pastor's permission to join the meetings on a regular basis, and I asked him to introduce me to the church members. At the same time, I avoided becoming too close with him and his family at the outset so as not to appear associated with the church's leadership. Instead, I tried to interact with a wide range of people, especially women, and to enter the community through befriending ordinary families. Some people were suspicious of my motives at first. I was not allowed to take pictures for several months until they started trusting me. Also, the women did not accept me immediately. I gained easiest access to the Bulgarian and Musician Gypsy congregations, whereas I found it hardest to win the trust of Naked Gypsy female churchgoers. I spent at least a month going to Naked Gypsy churches before one woman, Mina, finally smiled at me and invited me to her house. She then introduced me to other women and families.

Second, I encountered challenges related to religiosity and religious affiliation. Christians assumed that since I went to church every day, I was a Christian myself, even though I kept

³⁹ When it came to observing the attendance, worship, and interaction patterns at local Orthodox churches, I encountered no challenges. To begin with, I was raised Orthodox, so I felt comfortable in this familiar context. Further, the members of Orthodox congregations tend to worship quietly and in the role of spectators. Their responses to the esoteric rituals performed by the priest are highly formalized and impersonal, social interactions are discouraged, and a "low profile" (even anonymity) is easy to maintain.

explaining that this was not the case. This assumption was further exacerbated because I avoided showing disrespect for their religious beliefs and practices by emulating the basic behaviors of the vast majority of church members (e.g., standing up, lowering my head, humming), unless this involved acting in overly exuberant ways. On the one hand, this endowed me with an aura of respectability, as I was consistently called “sister” and became an authoritative figure in the ghetto. For example, on one occasion I was called to arbitrate a dispute between a battered wife and a husband who was believed to be possessed by evil spirits (see Chapter Five). On the other hand, I was often put in uncomfortable situations, as many people asked me to pray and to interpret the Bible for them, pastors asked me to speak to the congregation, and some women started endowing me with supernatural powers, such as the ability to make “barren” teenagers conceive. In order to navigate the religious boundary between Christian Roma and myself, I tried to discuss my beliefs and affiliations in neutral terms, emphasizing that my primary goal was to understand how religion changes Roma lives.

Third, I addressed the challenges posed by my Bulgarian and American backgrounds by playing them off against each other. I emphasized that having lived in Bulgaria for eighteen years in my youth decreased my “alienness;” meanwhile, having lived in the US for the last fourteen years made me different from those Bulgarians who discriminate against Roma. Many of the Roma with whom I interacted were extremely poor, and they had received material assistance from foreign missionaries and other “outsiders” before. Thus, I was often asked for money and for other kinds of assistance, such as driving people to funerals and nearby villages.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ This happened even during an interview with the chairman of a prominent Roma foundation in Sofia in 2005. He no longer asked me after we discussed the possibility that I had “Roma blood,” and he assured me that he knew that I did, based on my appearance, interest in everything Roma, and my high comfort level communicating and bonding with Roma. My olive skin and dark brown hair and eyes often gained me acceptance by Roma, who perceived me to look like them and, therefore, to be like them. On the other hand, ethnic Bulgarians were often suspicious of me, wondering if my appearance and the fact that I was doing research among Roma meant that I myself was a Rom. Even my family in Bulgaria was uncomfortable with my research. My grandmother, who has commented on my

For example, on the first day I visited one of the Naked Gypsy churches, the pastor publicly announced that he had had a dream that I would arrive and help somehow. In the interview that followed, he tried to nudge me into paying the electricity bill of the church (and his house on the second floor of the church). When that did not work, his wife started to bring up a number of other urgent purchases that needed to be made – nobody had eaten that day, she was feeling weak because she had no medications, the boys did not have any clothes to go to school. Growing increasingly uncomfortable, I finally broke down and got us both coffees just to make the pressure stop. Eventually, I learned how to navigate this precarious boundary, explaining that as a student on a modest fellowship and no other income, I was not in the position to provide financial aid. I was personable but firm.

Fourth, my gender posed a problem. Roma of both genders find it uncommon and threatening for a woman to be “running around” unattached to a man (Troc, personal communication, February 2009; Pamporov, personal communication, July 2009). Therefore, I tried to establish a modest identity by wearing gender-neutral attire. I befriended women first in order to allay any suspicions about my motives vis-à-vis the men. Also, I assured everybody that I had attachments elsewhere, and when my partner visited the country, I brought him into the ghetto and introduced him to the residents. As I mentioned earlier, befriending the women was not always easy, since they tend to be shy around outsiders. Men, on the other hand, were comfortable interacting with me, and as heads of their families, they expected that I would exclusively deal with them. I used the gender dynamics in the ghetto to demand access to the women, however. I explained that as an attached woman, I did not feel comfortable being alone

dark appearance throughout my entire life, made excuses about my work with Roma to her friends, telling them that the American government sent me against my will; and my cousin repeatedly told me that she could not understand how I was not disgusted living around Roma and, especially, touching them and eating with them.

in the company of men only, and asked for women to be present every time I was introduced to a new family. Then I made sure to engage primarily the female members of the family. This won me respect in the community, as it indicated that I was of good character.⁴¹

Fifth, I often found it difficult to navigate rivalries and hostilities among local churches and among informants. Having an outsider – especially a semi-foreigner – as a friend was perceived as a coveted source of social status in this isolated community. The problem was exacerbated by the interpersonal strife endemic to all ethnic communities in Nadezhda. Thus, most churches and many informants hoped to claim me as “theirs” and became jealous when they perceived that others did so. When it came to churches, I dealt with this challenge by ensuring that I distributed my time evenly among congregations, with the caveat that I focused the most on the Naked Gypsy churches. I was very open with the pastors about my research plan. When it came to informants, however, things became more complicated as time progressed and as I formed genuine friendships. Based on personal compatibility, I made one close female friend in each ethnic group I studied. In the case of my Naked Gypsy friend, Mina, and her husband, Dancho, our friendship posed a problem that affected them worse than it affected me. Mina and I “clicked” from the very beginning – she was the first Naked Gypsy woman to approach me, she always had a smile on her face, and she was very warm and caring. I felt at home in her house, and I often went there to recharge between engagements when I was tired, hungry, sleepy, cold, or hot. I enjoyed spending time with her and Dancho so much that I stopped by to see them almost every time I was in the Naked Gypsy part of the ghetto.

Eventually, however, their neighbors and church-mates became jealous and started spreading

⁴¹ As a lone woman, I was under the protection of the churches I attended. On one occasion, a group of Naked Gypsy teenage boys heckled and groped me on the street in front of witnesses. When news of this incident spread across the neighborhood, “brothers” from seven different churches took turns visiting their families to inform them, rather forcefully and without my consent, that I was never to be bothered again.

rumors that I was giving them money. At first Mina took the rumors in jest.⁴² When they heard that people were saying that I had “become their God,” however, Mina and Dancho felt genuinely hurt and isolated, and they stopped talking to a number of people, including some of their relatives and church-mates. I was torn about my course of action at this point. If I continued to see them, I would be contributing to their continued social isolation. If I stopped seeing them, I would be offending them and hurting their feelings. I continued seeing them, but less frequently, which still did not go unnoticed by them.

Sixth, throughout all observations and interviews, I used the Bulgarian language. The vast majority of Roma speak Bulgarian, but the women often do so poorly. They sometimes used Romany or Turkish amongst themselves, which left me out of the conversations. I asked a group of Naked Gypsy women to teach me Romany – this was yet another pretext for spending time with them – but I did not learn quickly enough. In such cases, I relied on body language, on the tone of voice, and on the context to interpret what I was observing.

Seventh, certain players – such as local pastors and leaders in the broader Protestant field – avoided discussing phenomena and events related to Roma Evangelical churches because they would be embarrassing to them or because they could give non-Protestants ammunition to criticize the Protestant field in general. This occasionally made it difficult to gather data on corruption and the lack of accountability and transparency in the Nadezhdan, the Sliven, the national, and the transnational religious fields (see Chapter Three). I dealt with this challenge by gathering data from alternative sources, such as lay church members and other social actors familiar with these dynamics.

⁴² Having a mischievous sense of humor, Mina played pranks on those who spread the rumors, showing them a fake \$100 bill and “gold” earrings, watching their reactions, and then telling them the truth while laughing.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into six chapters. The descriptive Chapter Two introduces the reader to Sliven, the Nikola Kochev neighborhood, the walled-in Nadezhda ghetto, and Nadezhda's three sub-divisions. In addition to providing a sketch of the locale, the chapter also paints an ethnographic portrait of four ethnic communities that inhabit it: the relatively integrated Bulgarian Gypsies, the Nadezhdan Turks, the Nadezhdan Musician Gypsies, and the most marginalized Nadezhdan Naked Gypsies. Special emphasis is given to gender dynamics.

Chapter Three analyzes the transformation of the Nadezhdan religious field over the past two decades as a result of the interaction among local Roma, non-Roma Bulgarian, and foreign religious actors, each pursuing their own agendas. It shows that after Evangelical Christianity was first introduced to Nadezhda by a handful of women, entrepreneurial men hijacked the churches upon realizing that they provided access to external resources. Many Nadezhdan pastors have been living off religion (or trying to do so) based on a symbiotic relationship with extra-local Bulgarian denominational leaders and heads of faith-based foundations who use the plight of Roma for their own purposes, in order to attract foreign missionaries and their money. Unlike the local Bulgarian Protestant actors, who demand stricter accountability, these distant actors have accommodated two of the pastors' key demands: (1) local autonomy, which allows the pastors to run their churches without being accountable to anybody; and (2) access to foreign resources, albeit indirectly. I conclude the chapter by comparing the dynamics in the Nadezhdan religious field to those in the religious field encompassing the Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical churches in Sliven, showing that Bulgarian Gypsies are more likely to approach foreign missionaries as mentors rather than as sources of material benefits.

Chapter Four describes the social dynamics of Nadezhdan churches. This is primarily a

descriptive chapter that starts by exploring the role of Nadezhdan pastors, arguing that they assume authoritarian positions that allow them to run their churches as family businesses without being accountable to anybody. It then explains why most Nadezhdans join churches, showing that that they do so primarily in order to seek tangible benefits, especially healing. Based on their motivations, believers establish a transactional relationship with God, where they assume that if they go to church and adopt certain behaviors, they will receive certain blessings from a higher power. Nadezhdans' relationship with God informs their understanding of what it means to be a believer, which is framed primarily in behavioral and prohibitive terms: one mostly needs to abstain from certain "secular" practices, such as drinking alcohol, smoking, dancing, swearing, wearing provocative clothes, etc. The chapter then explores the worship dynamics in the churches, demonstrating that they are not as participatory and engaging as they have been shown to be in the comparative literature on Evangelical churches across the world. The social dynamics of the congregations outside of worship are examined as well in order to demonstrate that once members leave services, churches provide them with few opportunities and incentives to interact in the context of Bible study and discussion groups, Sunday schools, charity initiatives, social gatherings, etc. The chapter concludes by comparing life in Nadezhdan churches to that in Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical churches, where relationships between pastors and the congregations are more egalitarian; where people join churches in search of spiritual growth; where believers pursue a deep personal relationship with God; where being a Christian is defined as a continuous process of pursuing one's calling; where worship dynamics are participatory and engaging; and where the church encourages its members to engage with each other outside of services in the context of various groups and activities.

Chapter Five analyzes the interaction between the structure, practice, and effects of

Evangelical Christianity, on the one hand, and Nadezhdan gendered ideas and practices, on the other hand. To begin with, it shows that in contrast to the findings in the comparative literature, Nadezhdan churches do not encourage women to participate actively in church life during church services or outside of them. Second, it demonstrates that conversion to Evangelical Christianity has not significantly boosted Nadezhdan women's concept of self by encouraging them to adopt a belief in spiritual equality, to claim authority through spiritual gifts, to give testimonies of profound personal transformation, and to develop a sense of personal responsibility. Third, the chapter shows that Evangelical churches have had a mixed effect on the domestic sphere. When it comes to the practice of arranged marriages, churches have increased the frequency of romantic marriages, but they have also expanded the social pool of potential daughters- and sons-in-law for the sake of arranging marriages. They have not, however, changed the practice of marrying young and they have barely made an impact on the practice of having informal marriages. The Nadezhdan churches have had a positive effect on churchgoing men's behavior, turning them away from alcohol, gambling, womanizing, wife abandonment, and domestic abuse. Christian men have also stopped spending money on "sinful" items and practices, but they sometimes spend their families' budgets on church-related items, such as keyboards, computers, and sound-systems. And while churches have not transformed the family structures in Nadezhda, they have alleviated some of the conflicts among members of immediate and extended families. Fourth, Evangelical churches have not enabled Naked Gypsy women to become socially, economically, and politically integrated in the larger society by helping them to acquire practical skills and experiences; by promoting the value of women's education and employment; by exposing women to new places, people, ideas and practices; and by engendering collective action. The chapter concludes by contrasting the effects of Nadezhdan and Bulgarian

Gypsy churches on gender relations and the status of women.

The Conclusion of the dissertation draws conclusions about the relationship between marginality, Evangelical Christianity, and patriarchal structures and practices. It also offers some practical suggestions for policy makers and faith-based initiatives.

CHAPTER TWO

SLIVEN AND ITS ROMA

For most residents of Sliven today, the only train station in town merits little mention. Cars and buses have rendered passenger trains mostly irrelevant, so the parking lot and unloading area outside are usually empty, while the waiting hall and the small “restaurant” inside are rundown, fetid, and desolate, save for countless flies and a few homeless regulars. In addition to having little utility, the station is a notorious landmark identifying the border between two worlds that are physically adjacent but continents apart in terms of social distance and way of life. One is the “Town,” whose residents’ lifestyle is not dramatically atypical of the modern developed world, even though many have experienced tough times since 1989. The other is Nadezhda, a segregated walled-in ghetto. From the perspective of the people in the Town, Nadezhda is inhabited entirely by Gypsies who live in conditions that resemble developing sub-Saharan Africa.

Chapter Two introduces Sliven and four ethnic minorities who live there and who are categorized as “Gypsies” by others: the Bulgarian Gypsies, the Turks, the Musician Gypsies, and the Naked Gypsies. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section paints a picture of two very different places, the Town and Nadezhda. I briefly sketch three distinct parts of the Town – the Center, the old neighborhood, and the “blocks” – focusing especially on the Nikola Kochev neighborhood, which is populated exclusively by Bulgarian Gypsies. Then I describe Nadezhda to the south of the train station, where the landscape is uninviting and showcases high levels of poverty. Starting from the outer circles inhabited by the most affluent Turks (in the context of Nadezhda), the narration guides the reader deeper and deeper inside the ghetto. As it

moves along, it describes the middle areas occupied by Musician Gypsies and poorer Turks until it reaches the sub-ghetto where the Naked Gypsies live. The living conditions here are the worst.

The second section highlights the socio-economic dynamics that characterize the four ethnic communities I studied. I show that while they still suffer the consequences of racial prejudice and marginalization, the Bulgarian Gypsies in the Town are relatively successful in managing the economic upheavals of the transition to a market economy. The section then shifts its focus to Nadezhda. It describes who leaves and enters the ghetto in order to demonstrate that the extremely marginalized Turks, Musician Gypsies, and Naked Gypsies are finding it difficult to navigate the new economic environment. As a consequence, they face high levels of school dropout rates, unemployment, poverty, and morbidity and mortality. Then the section discusses the socio-economic dynamics within each separate community, showing that the Naked Gypsies struggle the most.

The third section focuses on gender dynamics in the four communities under examination. While the Bulgarian Gypsies have adopted relatively modern attitudes toward gender-related ideas and practices, this is not the case for Nadezhdans. I examine such practices as arranging early marriages between young teenagers, staging “kidnappings” of girls to legitimize elopements against the wishes of parents, actually kidnapping girls to force them to marry against their wishes, having multiple generations live under the same roof, placing girls under the full authority of their mothers-in-law, pulling girls out of school and pressuring them to have children within months of marriage, spreading false rumors about women’s fidelity in order to undermine their husband’s honor, and child rearing approaches.

Sliven and Nadezhda: Introducing the Places

Figure 2. Map of Sliven. The Nikola Kochev neighborhood is nested within the Komlouka Quarter in the north-western corner of the map. The Nadezhda Quarter is to south of the railroad on the very bottom of the map.



The Town

The Town is to the north of the train station, extending all the way into the steep southern slopes of the Balkan mountains. The Burmuka and Turmuk Tarla ridges to the left are verdant and smooth; Sinite Skali (the Blue Rocks) to the right are bare and rocky. Together they frame and add dramatic beauty to the natural landscape. In general, this side of Sliven is a charming and inviting place, even though in the second half of the 2000s, the mayor – widely viewed as a "mafioso" and derided as “Lechkov the mole” – turned expansive swaths into “excavation sites” by running dozens of “infrastructure improvement” schemes all over town. Based on differences in history, appearance, appeal, and vibe, the Town can be divided into three areas – the “Center,”

the “old neighborhoods,” (or “mahalas,” which is an old Turkish colloquialism for neighborhoods), and the newer “residential complexes” (or the “blocks”).⁴³

The Center

The administrative, social, and commercial heart of Sliven is the historic downtown area. People call it “the Center,” even though it is squeezed between the Asenovska and Selishka rivers in the northwest quarter of modern-day Sliven. It features a wide and manicured pedestrian Main Street lined by higher-end shops and alluring cafes with outdoor seating. The Center also features attractive residential and commercial side streets, an expansive cobbled square with a monument of a local national hero, a centuries-old Orthodox church, concert halls and theaters, quaint parks, a large covered farmers’ market, and beautiful historical buildings. To have an apartment or a house here indicates luck, wealth, or association with the elite. Main Street is by far the major attraction in the Town. It is short enough to be traversed in less than five minutes, but people from all over Sliven spend hours here. During the day, the cafes attract groups of men whose clothes and demeanor suggest links to the criminal world. In the late afternoons, evenings, and weekends – when students are out of school and adults are off work – families, couples, and groups of friends inundate the area.

⁴³ The new villa zones extend to the east and southwest of Sliven. Affluent families – including mafiosos – who seek privacy, space, security, and beautiful nature have been building expensive luxurious houses in this area.

Figure 3. Downtown Sliven on Christmas Eve.



Figure 4. The Main Street Downtown Sliven on a Rainy Day.



The Old Neighborhoods

The old neighborhoods include “Komlouka” under the Barmuka Hill to the northwest of the Center, “Klutzohora” between Asenovska River and Urum Tarla Hill to the west of the Center, and “Novo Selo” to the northeast of the Center. These neighborhoods existed prior to socialism, so many of their inhabitants descend from the “old Sliven families.” The majority live

in single family houses on narrow sleepy streets, although the socialist authorities did put up some large apartment buildings close to the factories on the northwestern edges of town. In many cases, the appearance of the houses reflects the post-1989 socio-economic divisions in town.⁴⁴ The streets in these older neighborhoods see much less car and foot traffic than those in the Center, and commercial life revolves around family-owned grocery, retail, and hardware stores, auto-repair shops, and tiny “cafes” that remain mostly empty. Although living here is less prestigious than living in the Center, some people prefer it because it is quieter and calmer, there are more parking spaces, and the houses have yards. Also, large swaths of these neighborhoods are so close to the Center that their residents enjoy quick and easy access to the best the Town has to offer.

One part of the old mahalas where it is not prestigious to live is the Nikola Kochev neighborhood, which is inhabited primarily by so-called Bulgarian Gypsies. Embedded in the larger Komlouka mahala to the northwest of the Center, this is the last residential area before the Burmuka hill begins, but it is also a short walk from the downtown square. The “Gypsy mahala” is a poorer and more socially cohesive version of the other old neighborhoods. The streets are narrower and full of more and deeper potholes, and they are much steeper, to the point where some are hard to reach with a car. Yet, they are also livelier. Groups of men and women are always hanging around, chatting and people-watching; gaggles of children are running all over the place; and people in their home clothes are constantly making quick runs to the countless convenience stores situated on the first floor of private homes. The busiest area is the neighborhood’s own “Center,” marked by a small plaza, a mini-market, and a café.

⁴⁴ Some houses – especially those belonging to poor pensioners – look outdated and rundown; others are maintained, upgraded, or even rebuilt. It is particularly fashionable to imitate the architectural style of traditional Bulgarian houses, including the typical high stone walls and massive wood gates.

The houses in Nikola Kochev tend to be relatively large, as they accommodate large and extended families. In many cases, the land plots are big enough to fit two or more related nuclear families living in attached but autonomous houses that share the same yard. They generally seek to establish enough privacy so that they do not have to interact constantly.⁴⁵ The interiors tend to be contemporary, comfortable, attractive, and clean. A large percentage of the families have amenities that are taken for granted in the modern world, including cable TV, washing machines, landlines and cell phones, vacuum cleaners, and Internet access. Overall, there is very little to distinguish them from the houses of middle-class ethnic Bulgarians, with the possible exception of the brighter colors and flowery designs.

Above the old Gypsy mahala, a new sub-division has been growing for two decades. It is inhabited by very poor Gypsies from Nadezhda, who moved here because of lack of space or because they were running from debtors or enemies. I only visited this remote area once, but my impression was that their lifestyle is very similar to that of the poorest inhabitants of the southern ghetto. Their makeshift shacks are scattered at random, without even the pretense of aligning along “streets,” and they were clearly constructed quickly and with shoddy materials, offering little protection from the gusty cold winds beating down the steep mountain slope. The men procure money by illegally logging the forests above, and the women pick herbs in the hills. It is common to see both men and women rummaging through garbage bins in search for food and clothing.

⁴⁵ This is a poorer area within the old mahalas, but paradoxically, it does not have the vibe of dilapidation that characterizes some Bulgarian parts. For example, whereas the homes of poorer Bulgarians nearby may look abandoned, as their stucco is peeling, those of poorer Gypsies may look unfinished, as they never had the stucco on to begin with. And they always feel lived-in.

The Residential Complexes

Starting in the 1960s, the socialist authorities built eight residential complexes to accommodate the swelling workforce. They leveled the houses in the old neighborhood to the south of the Center and replaced them with large rectangular concrete “blocks” with multiple entries, up to eight floors, and three or more apartments on each floor in each entry. This became Dame Gruev neighborhood. More such complexes appeared to the east and to the south of the old town over the next two decades. The people who live here are mostly first and second-generation migrants from the villages and members of the lower and working classes.⁴⁶ Most westerners find everything about the blocks unseemly and depressing. The wide areas between the imposing gray buildings are undeveloped, unkempt, and poorly lit, and the residents often have to wade through mud and to evade a labyrinth of trenches dug up and left open by Lechkov’s business partners.⁴⁷ Once inside the blocks, one uses a worn, smelly, and rickety elevator – if there is even a working elevator – to get to tiny apartments shared by entire extended families, with grandmothers sleeping in kitchens and multiple generations sharing rooms. Many of these cheaply constructed buildings are aging poorly and crumbling, but their inhabitants cannot afford to renovate them. Advantages of the residential complexes are the ample space, the wide boulevards, and the big supermarkets, which are frequented by people from all over town and the nearby villages.

⁴⁶ Depending on their size, some of these blocks may house up to 200 people. Some residents of the old mahalas still joke that each block “packs a village,” and they point out that even today, the blocks get deserted on weekends and in the summers, as the “villagers” go home (Bulgarian Gypsy man, late 30s).

⁴⁷ An informant fell into two separate holes and sprained her ankle twice in the course of two months.

Nadezhda

To the south of the train station lies a ghetto whose name – “Nadezhda” (“Надежда”), or “hope” – comes across as a bitter joke. Between twelve and eighteen thousand people live squeezed into an area that covers about one square kilometer. The population keeps growing, but the space is limited and outward expansion impossible, because the ghetto is surrounded tightly by industrial facilities and the railroad tracks. The first row of houses is not far from the first row of blocks in Dame Gruev – all that separate them are a boulevard and a 25-meter-wide strip of wasteland that straddles the railroad. But in terms of social, economic, and cultural distance, the people who occupy the opposite sides of the tracks live worlds apart. In fact, they cannot even see each other, because of the tall concrete wall that encircles the ghetto, hiding it and making it easier for those outside to pretend that it does not exist.

There are only two ways to enter or leave the walled-in ghetto – one from the north and one from the west. The northern entrance is for pedestrians only, and taking it calls for a choice. One can risk rusty nails and twisted ankles by going through a hole in the concrete wall, passing the railroad tracks, and walking through the strip of land that is full of tall weeds and garbage. Or one can descend into a pass that starts next to the train station and re-emerges on the other side of the wall. The tunnel carries its own risks of injury – the lights are broken, the stairs and the walls are crumbling, and it often retains large puddles of water mixed with human waste. Walking in a dark narrow “tube” alongside ghostly shadows feels surreal if one thinks about it too much, but unlike what most ethnic Bulgarians imagine, a visitor will not get mugged, raped, or murdered there. At any time of day, one is surrounded by tens of people crossing over. Even late into the evening, one can still hear footsteps or see little cell-phone screens hovering around as poor substitutes of flashlights. In general, everybody here minds their own business.

The southwest entrance to Nadezhda provides access for cars as well. This has transformed the immediate area into the transportation hub of the segregated neighborhood, where shoppers and the sick wait for private shuttle vans zipping to and from the Center (if they can afford the fee), where grieverers get on funeral buses headed for the cemetery, where the occasional skittish visitors park, where many meetings are arranged, etc. Residents of the poorest southeast corner of the ghetto walk a kilometer or more to get here (and the walk to the tunnel is even longer), but it is objectively unpleasant and dangerous to drive along the streets of Nadezhda, so vans, taxis, or buses are unwilling to go inside and pick them up.⁴⁸ The southwest entrance is also the administrative hub of Nadezhda, where an unassuming row of one-story barracks house the local “mayor,” a police station, the local branch of the labor bureau, a medical office for visiting doctors, and the office of the health mediators. Some of these offices generate constant crowds, making the area one of the busiest in the ghetto, but very little about the surroundings generates a sense of respect for the representatives of the municipal government. There is garbage scattered everywhere, naked children run around in the summer, and the women in the houses across wash their carpets on the street, flooding the pavement with muddy water mixed with soap bubbles. Things are not much better inside the administrative buildings. The busiest wing of the barracks, which houses the labor office and the medical center, are particularly dilapidated and grim. The filthy corridors have no lights or seating, there is no heat

⁴⁸ I opted to drive inside Nadezhda on rainy and snowy days, or when the notorious Sliven winds picked up the dry dirt and turned Nadezhda into a dust-bowl; however, I generally preferred to avoid the screeches of the car’s bottom scraping against the broken “pavement,” getting stuck in puddles of mud, the careless pedestrians who had no sidewalks to escape onto, the ubiquitous “block parties” featuring drunk men and enormous speakers, or the challenge of having to back up so that another car could squeeze by me in an impossibly narrow street. In addition, I was the only female driver in Nadezhda, which – to my chagrin – often compelled male bystanders to yell unsolicited instructions on how to drive forward, take turns, park, etc. Finally, no matter how much various acquaintances assured me that it would be safe to park in front of their houses because they would “watch the car,” playful children still managed to sneak up and twist the windshield wipers, scratch the sides, and even leave shoeprints on the hood. So, like most other visitors, I parked my car at the west entrance, in front of the “administrative” buildings.

or air conditioning, tiles are falling off the walls in the exam rooms, and the “patrons” are not even allowed to use the bathroom, which is just as well because it has no hot water, no soap, no toilet paper, and no towels. Next to the dirty toilet sit large plastic water bottles full of used syringes, which remained “temporarily” stored there for an entire year.

The Turkish and Musician Gypsy Areas

The first four or five street blocks along the northern and western sides of the ghetto are by far the “nicest” parts of the ghetto. They are inhabited by relatively rich ethnic “Turks,” whose houses signify their wealth by their size and by the number of their satellite dishes. These houses – with their many extensions and additions – “evolved” through a process that was driven by necessity, with little pre-planning or predictability. Some of the houses are painted in bright colors, and a limited few have balconies and decorative elements, but beyond that, Turkish abodes look like boxy fortresses, where floors, rooms, and extensions were constructed ad-hoc in a series of iterations, as families grew and needed more space. Those ongoing additions are often designed and executed by the men in the household, with or without the help of self-taught “master-builders.” Consequently, most of the houses fail to meet safety standards and would turn into tombs in the case of a strong earthquake. Over time, the houses have rammed into the neighboring structures, and in search of a few more meters, they have started encroaching onto the streets. As part of such constant expansions, many residents take it upon themselves to dig up the pavement in order to change, add, and rearrange water and sewage pipes, which sometimes creates problems for the neighbors and causes them to start digging also. In some cases, the builders try to cover up the mess with a localized layer of asphalt or concrete, but this only turns the ramshackle street into a patchwork of variegated surfaces characterized by

different heights, degrees of lumpiness, consistencies, inclines, etc. In the end, all streets start to resemble lunar landscapes covered in mud or dust, depending on the season.

Figure 5. Turkish Houses in Nadezhda.



The Turkish areas in the northwestern corner of Nadezhda also encompass the only public square in the ghetto. Lined by small convenience shops, bakeries, ice-cream stands, and restaurants, this is the local equivalent of Sliven's Main Street. It is occupied by cars and street vendors during the day, by socializing youths and men at night, by wedding parties on weekends, and by politicians during election campaigns. The houses in this square are the most expensive and coveted in Nadezhda, both because of their location and because their owners are rich enough to make them relatively big and nice.

Very little about the streets here invites people to hang out – there are no trees or grass, the narrow “sidewalks” are few and far between, and the soaring bulwark of houses feels menacing. But women and men often sit and gossip, people-watch, and keep an eye on the children playing soccer or jumping rope. These groups of people are very alert to the presence of outsiders, whom they ogle and talk about in Turkish, and to most visitors that feels intimidating.

Toward the end of my fieldwork, for example, a German couple I had befriended asked to see Nadezhda. They had romanticized notions of “Gypsies” as happy and down-to-earth people, but we barely made it through the Turkish section, when they asked to leave because people were “acting” aggressively. I was taken aback – nobody had spoken to them or treated them badly; in fact, a fair number of people I knew greeted us warmly. But I used to feel the same until I managed to fit in by continuing my visits, by making eye contact (with the women only), by smiling regardless of the stony faces I got in return, by greeting and nodding in all directions, etc. And I quickly learned that regardless of appearances, if I ever needed assistance (e.g., locating an address, finding a place to park, etc.), people were prompt to oblige. Such occasions were also an opportunity for them to ask me who I was, where I was from, what I wanted, how old I was, whether I was married and had children, and so on.

As one ventures deeper inside the ghetto, the landscape gradually changes. The streets get a bit wider, busier, and dustier or muddier, depending on the season. Walking around is less awkward, as most people here are less likely to drop what they are doing to stare at strangers, and they are also friendly, approachable, and willing to help outsiders. These central parts of Nadezhda are inhabited by a mix of less wealthy Turks and Musician Gypsies. In the context of the ghetto, one could say that they occupy the middle of the socio-economic scale. Their houses were also built in stages of extensions, but they tend to be smaller, shorter, and grayer on the outside. The differences in wealth are reflected in the interior as well. For example, while most Musician Gypsy houses still have outdoor sinks and outhouses, most Turkish houses have brought those indoors. While the floors of the Turkish houses are covered with tiles and bright new carpets, the Musician Gypsies still have not thrown away the vinyl and older rugs. And while rich Turkish families often usher guests into special rooms that somehow manage to feel

sterile despite being decorated with garish couches, armchairs, cupboards, and huge arrangements of artificial flowers, many Musician Gypsies host in cozy and practical kitchens that often double as bedrooms and where the furniture is used, older, and less intimidating.

The Naked Gypsy Sub-Ghetto

The transition from the rich Turkish parts into the Musician Gypsy/Turkish parts of the ghetto is so gradual as to be almost imperceptible. If one continues heading southeast, however, one will eventually reach a street that marks a sharp and very discernible boundary within Nadezhda. Crossing that street is akin to walking into a ghetto within a ghetto. The Turks and the Musician Gypsies call the people who live in the southeastern parts of Nadezhda “Lahovi” (“la’hoṽi”/“лахови”) Gypsies, but when the former speak to outsiders in Bulgarian, they usually use the terms “Naked Gypsies” or “Nakeds” (“goli tzigani” or “golite”). Members of the Naked Gypsy community told me that the term “Naked Gypsies” alludes to their extreme poverty, whereas the Romany word “Lahovi” means “disgusting,” “dirty,” or “low.” They usually referred to themselves merely as “Gypsies,” but when asked to distinguish themselves from the Turks and the Musician Gypsies, they most often used the terms “Naked Gypsies,” “Nakeds,” and, occasionally, “Lahovi” and “Wallachian.”⁴⁹ I have opted to use what appeared to be the least offensive and most commonly used label – “Naked Gypsies.”

Upon entering the Naked Gypsies’ sub-ghetto, one immediately notices the louder noises, the apparent chaos, the rotting garbage piled and scattered everywhere, and the noxious smell coming from the ubiquitous mud mixed with animal waste and sewage. In the winter, the air is also thick with smoke and with hints of toxic fumes from the plastics used as fire-starter. Alleys

⁴⁹ One Naked Gypsy argued that the name “Wallachian” (“vlashki”/“влашки” or “vlahovi”/“влахови”) may have been slapped on his community by others who heard the term “Lahovi” and assumed that “the stupid Gypsies” simply mispronounced “Vlahovi” (Toncho).

here are so narrow and crowded that it is almost impossible for cars to pass. Walking gets more challenging also. Year-round, pools of filthy water form in the middle of the unpaved streets, and getting places often requires forming a line and hoping and snaking around. Only young children like splashing across dressed or naked, even as temperatures drop close to freezing. The limited space does not prevent men and women from constantly hanging out, sauntering, and running errands. On nicer days, women may even do laundry and cook outside to people-watch and socialize. Numerous local resellers bottleneck traffic even more by arranging rotting meats, vegetables, and sweets in crates on the ground, where they get covered in unsavory splatter and flies.

Figure 6. A Street in the Naked Gypsy Part of Nadezhda



Figure 7. A Street in the Naked Gypsy Part of Nadezhda



Practically every day, multiple families celebrate birthdays, engagements, weddings, etc. According to unspoken local community rules, this entitles them to block off their street with rows of tables, benches, tarps, and massive sound systems. On bigger holidays – such as St. George’s day and Bango Vasil (St. Basil’s Day) – everybody does that, so the entire sub-ghetto turns into a big and jammed block party (see Figure 8).⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Turks and Musician Gypsies may also block off entire streets, but only for weddings – they tend to celebrate other private occasions and public holidays at home.

Figure 8. Naked Gypsies Celebrate St. George's Day.



But some Naked Gypsies do not even need an occasion to have a good time. As long as it is not freezing, and especially after welfare gets distributed, certain men like to bring out a table, to borrow speakers, and to re-play popular Chalga songs at a deafening volume.⁵¹ The women serve salad, bread, and bottles of cheap beer and homemade rakya (grape brandy). Given enough liquor, some men may take off their shirts and belly-dance/stagger around. Depending on the dynamics within the family, relatives of both genders and all ages may wrap fabric with dangling fake coins around their waist and join the dance. Such spectacles invariably attract crowds of observers. Since it is considered inappropriate to join in the festivities if one is not invited, they just stand around and watch idly. Every so often, a brawl erupts, which causes neighbors to rush over.

⁵¹ Chalga (or Pop-folk) is a fast-paced dance mix incorporating Bulgarian folk, Middle-Eastern, and Gypsy rhythms. The songs generally have overtly sexual content, the videos often feature scantily dressed women and licentious dancing, and its main audiences in Bulgaria are Roma and lower-class Bulgarians (defined in terms of cultural capital). Consequently, Chalga is rather controversial in popular discourse (New Bulgarian University 1999). For a sample of this genre of music, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_MHwRf0_Ok.

The houses in this area are discernibly inferior to anything on the way here, and they get even worse as one goes deeper into the sub-ghetto, where the constructions are newer and less “established.” Many of the homes are put together poorly using bricks, concrete, scrap wood and metal, crates, hay, tires, tarp, cardboard, plastic sheets, and blankets. It is common for families to start adding extra floors but to stop mid-way, which gives their houses the appearance of unfinished construction sites. Unsafe roof slabs provide extra space for chicken coops, for guard dogs, for cages to raise carrier pigeons, and for playgrounds. Typically, entire households share a single outdoor sink, which may freeze on cold days. In worse cases, there is no sink, so a hose both flushes the hole in communal outhouses and supplies potable water. And the poorest families do not even have that luxury, so they fetch water from their neighbors.

Figure 9. A Naked Gypsy House in Nadezhda.



The house interiors tend to be modest and shabby. The flooring is usually vinyl, old rugs, or concrete. This is the only area in Nadezhda where many hosts do not expect guests to take off their shoes. Consequently, the floors – where children crawl and some women cook – get pasted

with the same muck that is on the streets. Each winter, the wallpaper gets black from mold and soot, so in the spring almost everybody finds some way to repaper and repaint. Most furniture looks very old, broken, and cheap, and women hide whatever they can under bright covers. Chairs are rare, so people usually sit on beat-up concave beds or on the floor. It is not uncommon for guests to converse right next to a napping baby or a sleeping elderly woman. The walls are often covered with clusters of unframed and damaged wedding pictures, expired custom-made calendars with vanity shots of children, cheap tapestry reproductions of famous paintings (e.g., da Vinci's *Last Supper*), and re-prints of bucolic landscapes and Victorian portraits. The latter look surreally out-of-place, but they became a local fad while they were on sale at the square. Some may also find it surreal to come across extremely poor households with flat-screen TVs, satellite dishes, and even second-hand computers. In most cases, their owners have been and will be making payments of 50 leva (approximately 25 euros) per month for years (which is what many people make per month), but they are a major source of daily entertainment, especially for the females, and they provide a status boost, especially for the males. In the afternoons and in the evenings, women often gather to watch Turkish soap operas, and while there are no rules against paying neighbors unexpected visits for most of the day, if one walks into a room where a show is playing, she should either leave or join the audience without saying a word. Men and boys use computers mostly to play games, to listen to Chalga, and to watch pirated '70s Bollywood hits and American action movies.

Figure 10. Naked Gypsy Women Cooking Indoors.



The population density of this sub-ghetto is very high. Most families cannot afford to build new homes, and even those who can have no place to do so because the wall that encircles Nadezhda constrains them. Couples consider themselves fortunate if they can have a separate room for themselves and for their children. Otherwise, they have to sleep together with older generations and/or with siblings and the families of the siblings. In an extreme case, a single mother in her mid-30s shared a small room with her seven teenage sons, the minor wife of the oldest son, and their baby. They only had a bed and a couch, so most of the boys slept on the floor during the winter, and in the summer, they migrated to the rooftop or to the “kitchen” in the small courtyard they shared with another family. The mother could not procure wives for her other sons because of these living conditions. One of the boys was a high school student, unmarried, and the only person I met in this part of the ghetto who expressed a desire to go to college. It is clear that this would entail a monumental uphill battle.

Very few outsiders – including Turks and Musician Gypsies – ever come to these parts of Nadezhda. And if they do, they cannot pass without being noticed, examined, approached,

questioned, and potentially harassed. In fact, it would be best if a visitor seeks the guidance and company of a local during her first few incursions into this area, or until the residents get familiar with her. A female who is not under the explicit protection of locals, for example, may get catcalled by youth or cursed at by children. I was initially accompanied by a health mediator and subsequently “claimed” by male and female church members who protected me. Male intruders in nice clothes tend to generate mobs of people who assume that these are politicians and snatch the opportunity to voice discontent with “the state.” Visitors with cameras are especially at risk. They get accused of misrepresenting and exploiting the locals for personal gain, and in some extreme cases, TV crews have been expelled with stones and knives. The only ones who are given a free pass to shoot pictures are visiting religious actors. And once a camera owner earns the locals’ trust, she has an entirely different problem – now everybody asks her to take pictures of them, of their children, of their parties, etc. No matter how often an outsider comes, it seems that she can never enter unnoticed. Until the very last day of my fieldwork, every time I set foot in the sub-ghetto, some children would run toward me screaming my name, while others would run to their parents to tell them, “Dasni avela!” (“the Bulgarian woman came!”). By the time I made it wherever I was going, everybody knew I was coming, and if anybody wanted to talk to me, they somehow always magically knew whose house to try.

The Roma in Sliven: Socio-Economic Dynamics

I chose Sliven as the site of my fieldwork because here, I could find many and many different kinds of Roma communities that vary greatly in terms of lifestyle and degree of marginalization. I got to know four diverse local minorities, which were all categorized, stigmatized, and marginalized as “Gypsies” by Bulgarians, albeit in different ways and to

different degrees. One is the relatively integrated community of Bulgarian Gypsies. As mentioned above, most of its members live in Nikola Kochev, but many are also scattered across other old neighborhoods and the blocks. The other three are the extremely marginalized Turks, Musician Gypsies, and Naked Gypsies in the segregated Nadezhda ghetto. This section describes the socio-economic dynamics within each of these communities.

Bulgarian Gypsies

Bulgarian Gypsies have been a key part of Sliven's economic, political, and social life for centuries. Culturally, they are comparable to ethnic Bulgarians – they speak Bulgarian at home, they have dispositions and a lifestyle typical of the mainstream society, they often mingle with Bulgarians at work or in the Center after work, and with the exception of those who have recently converted to Evangelical Christianity, they associate themselves with Eastern Orthodoxy. Professionally, Bulgarian Gypsies have long been integrated in the local industrial labor force, and the community also boasts a professional and cultural elite—arguably the largest and the most influential in the country. Even in terms of appearance – phenotype, clothing, body language, hair style, and so on – many Bulgarian Gypsies would find it easy to pass as members of the ethnic majority, and a decent number of Bulgarian Gypsies who live in relative anonymity in the blocks have opted to do that. Despite their high level of enculturation and socio-economic integration in Bulgarian society, however, three factors help to sustain Bulgarian Gypsies' unwavering sense of belonging to a distinct and marginalized community: old family and personal ties, place of residence, and social exclusion. A large percentage of Bulgarian Gypsies appear to know (of) each other. Those who live in Nikola Kochev, especially, are exposed to these dense social networks on daily basis. And then, it is easy to feel like an “other” when one is a Gypsy among Bulgarians.

The attitude of the ethnic majority in Sliven toward Bulgarian Gypsies is situational. When comparing the Bulgarian Gypsies to “the Gypsies” in general or to the residents of Nadezhda, in particular, many would distinguish them as “our Gypsies” and praise them for being “civilized.” But if things go awry while doing business with a Bulgarian Gypsy, his “Gypsy-ness” invariably gets cited as a cause, and many Bulgarians refuse to do business with Bulgarian Gypsies – however qualified – as a matter of principle. Relationships in the personal realms are complex too. Everybody says that they have “friends” across the symbolic divide between the two groups, but those are rarely close. For centuries, Bulgarian men in Sliven have taken Bulgarian Gypsy women as mistresses (Tabakov 1911, 396), and some have even married them; however, many Bulgarian parents cringe at the thought of their children marrying a Gypsy, any Gypsy. Some Gypsy women who date Bulgarian men do not even mention their ethnic background, because everybody knows heartbreaking stories about families that pressured their sons into leaving Gypsy women and mixed children.

Bulgarian Gypsies in Sliven have experienced the same general kinds of economic and social problems that have plagued many members of the ethnic majority for two decades now. However, blatant and subtle acts of unrelenting exclusion in all areas of social life have tended to amplify their hardship. They have been quicker to lose their jobs and they have had a harder time getting re-hired. Facing long-term unemployment, some have opened small and struggling businesses. Others – even people in their 40s and 50s – have resorted to going abroad repeatedly as temporary laborers. There, they are also more likely to obtain “dirty” jobs, such as citrus pickers in Italy, hotel cleaners in Cypress, and strawberry pickers in Germany. Those who can get a job in the summer tourism industry on the Black Sea are considered lucky, because they are only a couple of hours away from their families. One of the hardest things about being a serial

migrant is the pressure it puts on families and the consequences it may have on children.

Migrants' children are often left with their aging grandparents, putting them at a higher risk for exhibiting emotional and behavioral problems, including taking drugs, dropping out of schools, and associating with the “wrong” kinds of people.

Even if the parents are around and actively invested in the future of their children, they can rarely afford reputable schools that prepare students for college and for good careers. In principle, those schools are public and free, but they screen the parents to handpick children from the economic and cultural elite in town. Most of the children from Nikola Kochev go to the mixed School #1 at the bottom of the hill, and those who live in other neighborhoods attend whatever school is closest to them. They come out literate, but the education is subpar – one student shared with me that her English teacher taught her how to cheat using the Internet. Concerned parents hypothesized that teachers are so worried about losing their jobs with the dwindling number of children in Sliven that they want to make it as easy and as enticing as possible for students to stay enrolled. Regardless, dropout rates among Bulgarian Gypsies have been on the rise, as youngsters say that there is no reward in getting a degree – jobs are hard to find regardless of educational level.

For a while, some of the educated Bulgarian Gypsy elite were able to make a decent living through engaging in the “Gypsy NGO industry” (Barany 2002). Locals still talk sarcastically about the crazy 1990s, when over thirty NGOs operated in Sliven. They used EU, US, state, Open Society Foundation, and other kinds of foreign funds to allegedly tackle problems associated with minority education, health, human rights, etc. The competition between them was fierce, especially as funds dried up and nearly stopped after Bulgaria's EU accession. Today, two major NGOs remain active, still locked in perceived competition and

mutual animosity. The better-known one is run by Mrs. Boneva, who is nationally famous for her family connections, authoritarian character, quickness in taking offense, and saviness in navigating the field of politics. She and her husband were city counselors during Lechkov's mandate, and for the Bulgarian authorities, they were the undisputed de facto Gypsy experts, leaders, and representatives, whether the rest of "the Gypsies" agreed or not.⁵²

"The Gypsies" of Nadezhda

It is rare for outsiders to wander into Nadezhda, and some Nadezhdans – especially young Naked Gypsy women – can go for days, weeks, even months without leaving its walls. Still, the neighborhood is not a closed system, and human traffic does flow both ways. Most Sliveners who live in the Town perceive and treat those who live in Nadezhda as a homogenous multitude of "Gypsies" whom they would rather not see, think about, or deal with. Yet, people from the ghetto haunt their lives. Grouped in twos or more, they can be seen every day walking down Main Street, waiting at the bus stop in front of Third Policlinic downtown, getting produce at the farmers' market for "zimnina" (home-prepared canned food for the winter), or shopping at the supermarkets amidst the blocks. Some Nadezhdans venture out rarely: the teenage wife who gets pregnant and needs a doctor downtown; the father who runs to the closest pharmacy across the train station to get antibiotics for his sick baby; the couple that goes to the courthouse to register their marriage because their pastor pressures them to do so. Others do it frequently: the women going to the closest ATM in Dame Gruev to withdraw their monthly child allowances; the middle-aged woman who is lucky to have kept her old minimum wage factory job. Some do it because they want to: the family that goes to purchase cake for a birthday party; the group of

⁵² As the self-proclaimed champion of Gypsy culture, she also organizes an ostentatious banquet for Bango Vasil every January. Being invited is a privilege to be earned and appreciated.

male youths who attend a free Gypsy concert downtown. Others do it because they have to: the people who are required to clean streets or public schools for at least two months of the year in order to qualify for unemployment benefits; the grandparents heading for the funeral of a child who died in a measles epidemic. In a consumerist society obsessed with fashion and looks, they are easy to recognize, because they generally look like they put little effort into their appearance and into taking care of themselves. Their body posture is rarely “composed” and confident. The men tend to wear dark clothes, baggy pants, and puffy short jackets; the females wear layers of multicolored pieces of clothing that do not necessarily match. Older women – many of whom are noticeably overweight – put on dappled long skirts and headscarves, and younger ones wear big golden earrings and collect their long hair under bright hairclips with large paper flowers and feathers. It is fashionable for the young women to dye their hair bleach-blonde or bright red. Gold teeth are a common form of decoration – I was once told that I could benefit from getting one myself.

The heaviest traffic in the pedestrian underpass to the north takes place in the morning, in the early afternoon, and in the evening, when children and women from the ghetto make the trek to and from school. Despite the large number of children, there are no educational facilities in Nadezhda, while Dame Gruev has two – Schools #6 and #8 – in close proximity to each other. Every day, female kin from across the ghetto coordinate amongst each other and take turns accompanying groups of children to one of those schools.⁵³ School #8 enrolls primarily Bulgarians, but in 2010, about ten percent of its students were from the ghetto, albeit from families that tended to be more affluent and sufficiently interested in their children’s education to

⁵³ They are motivated by the ongoing rumors about phantom outsiders who kidnap children and by the real dangers involved in dealing with car traffic. Two multi-lane boulevards merge in front of the train station, but there is no traffic light here, and Gypsies are lucky if any cars speeding by decide to give them right of way at the pedestrian crossing.

get them to take and to pass the required aptitude tests (Boreva; Dora). School #6, or the “Gypsy School,” only enrolls children from Nadezhda. No one can argue that teaching here poses challenges, as it requires dealing with children who come from a different environment, who often have a poor grasp of the Bulgarian language (with the probable exception of expletives), who can be timid and/or reactive in a foreign institutional setting, and who have rarely been expected to sit still and to keep their attention focused for longer periods of time. And it does not help that in some cases, parents themselves have little or no education and appreciation of education, do not work with the teachers, exercise poor authority over their progeny, and possibly only send them for schooling because otherwise their state-provided child support would cease (and that is assuming that the children would actually listen). At the same time, students told me about teachers who slapped them for going to the bathroom, who instructed them to keep busy during class by belly-dancing, who “meditated” in class, etc. And as I witnessed some children and their parents genuinely struggling to figure out homework that mystified them, I came to think that the material was inappropriately chosen and poorly explained. Ultimately, students, parents, and teachers in School #6 appear to have reached a kind of tacit compromise: whoever keeps attending graduates, regardless of what one has learned. Completing middle school here does not guarantee that one knows what “evolution,” “chemistry,” “university,” or “corruption” mean, to name a few common terms.

Certain categories of outsiders also find themselves compelled to enter Nadezhda with variable frequency and for various reasons. Some do it only once or twice: the French and Italian ambassadors touring demonstratively after Sarkozy expelled Romanian and Bulgarian Roma; the occasional TV crew in search of scandalous footage on the otherness of “the” Gypsy lifestyle; or the representative of a Roma NGO that wins a short-term EU project and needs to

register some effort. Others do it every day: government representatives and social workers stationed in the administrative buildings in the southwestern corner of the ghetto. Some enter willingly: visiting evangelical Christians from abroad; former residents who have moved north of the wall but still come to visit their loved ones. Others do it because they have to: suppliers for the local stores; teachers tracking down truant students; municipal representatives responding to public outrage about health epidemics; politicians seeking easy votes by offering empty promises and free meatballs.

An important category of outsiders who enter Nadezhda regularly includes those working at the administrative buildings at the southwestern entrance of Nadezhda in a theoretical attempt to make it easier for locals to interact with government representatives and to access social services. In 2010, the role of the Bulgarian “mayoress” of Nadezhda was ambiguous. Officially, she represented the absent mayor in serving the local population and addressing their unique problems, but she and her small staff of ethnic Bulgarians barely ever left the barracks. I witnessed a situation when a group of pastors and health mediators asked for her involvement in a campaign, whose goals appeared to have been legitimately important and in her domain: (1) to help settle a long-standing dispute with the head of the water utility company, who is also a “business associate” of her boss, Sliven’s mayor; (2) to appeal to the municipality to replace the old and inadequate water pipes in order to increase water pressure (so that the upper floors of the houses got water without installing expensive pumps and “stealing” even more pressure from their neighbors); (3) to make water available all day long, which was not the case for some parts of the ghetto (oddly, the richest areas); (4) to update the sewage system, especially in the poorest areas; (5) to fix the street canalization system everywhere. She attended, but kept repeating that “[her] hands [were] tied,” that she had no authority, that nobody in the municipality listened to

her, etc. In other words, she made it clear that this neighborhood was of little concern to mayor Lechkov, even though it contained a substantial number of active voters. During election summers, one or two streets might get repaved as a display of goodwill, and candidates might walk around, listen to the crowds of people shouting about their poor circumstances, visit a church or two, send in a truck of food, and even organize a spectacular rally concert featuring famous Roma Chalga stars; but once the elections pass, Nadezhda generally remains peripheral to the concerns of Sliven's city planners and policy-makers. In the winter, the municipality may hand out "assistance," such as allowances for wood or food packages (rice, sugar, flour, cooking oil, pasta). But mostly, the government is absent here, and the barrack of its official representative sees little foot-traffic.

The policemen of Nadezhda are ethnic Bulgarians, who also tend to stay in or around their station next to the mayoral office. In my wanderings deeper within the ghetto, I rarely came across them, for a number of reasons. First, Nadezhda has little serious crime, because people are too poor to buy drugs and guns. Also, in such a small community, one risks serious social repercussions if caught breaking the rules. Second, even when petty crime and conflicts occur, they tend to go unreported, because people prefer to settle things informally. Third, even if something does get reported, the policemen say that they have little recourse in enforcing order and punishing the perpetrators. They get numerous complaints about loud music and disorderly drunken behavior, but if the pandemonium is inside somebody's house and if the family refuses to open the door, the unarmed officers are not authorized to break in. They can hand out a citation, but nobody pays those, and the municipality does not go after the delinquents either.

The wing shared by the medical and labor offices is the busiest part of the administrative facilities in Nadezhda. These institutions provide services that are of central importance to the

lives of many residents here. To begin with, the majority of people in Nadezhda are unemployed, so working with the Labor Office for the purpose of receiving unemployment benefits is something many locals – especially the poorest ones – have to do on a regular basis. Bulgarians often say that “the Gypsies” are lazy and just want to receive without working, but in order to get 40 leva of government assistance per month, an unemployed person here is required to work for two weeks each month for the municipality, usually in street sweeping or in school cleaning. The minimum monthly salary in Bulgaria is 240 leva (approximately 120 euros), which means that the hourly wage of an unemployed Nadezhdan is over three times lower than that of the poorest employed person. To participate in this program, the recipient has to show up at the labor office on a particular day every month. If she fails to appear or to provide a medical note explaining her absence, she is disqualified for a whole year. Other reasons for disqualifications include presenting an ID with the wrong address and missing work. There is a general mystification amongst the populace about the intricate rules, requirements, and caveats in the labor law, and despite interacting with the Bulgarian Gypsy women at the Labor Office regularly, many locals still act as if the clerks are distributing arbitrary justice, as opposed to providing a service according to set regulations. For example, Nevena, a single Musician Gypsy in her 40s, was laid off from a local sock factory where she had worked for eight years. The owner kept postponing giving her the termination papers, and Nevena did not realize that she had to present those in the labor bureau within a week in order to qualify for unemployment benefits. She got the forms in two days late, and because the “girl” in the office was “not a good person,” Nevena went without assistance for months. It is common knowledge which women are “nice” and willing to cut people some slack (even help them read and fill out the forms), and which ones should be avoided and are collectively hated.

The offices of the general physician and the health mediators are situated deeper inside the building, down an unlit corridor. The Bulgarian general physician and the Bulgarian Gypsy nurse are here for a few hours per day and not all days of the week. They have no testing equipment, so in simple cases, the doctor just hands out a prescription, while serious issues are referred to one of the clinics in Sliven. Many sick residents just skip this step, gather their relatives, and head to seek medical help in the Town. Despite one Bulgarian doctor's assertion that Gypsies love going to the doctor "in packs" to get diversion from their boring lives, my impression is that in general, people in Nadezhda do so simply because they are anxious about the rules, regulations, and procedures of the medical establishment. A Musician Gypsy in her late 20s, Dora, suspected that her daughter was entitled to a free eye surgery, but finding out seemed so daunting that she had postponed doing so for five years. In addition, corruption, negligence, and dismissive attitudes among physicians are a countrywide problem, but doctors know that poor and uneducated Gypsies, in particular, cannot "tip" or retaliate, so they treat them especially brusquely and sloppily.⁵⁴ So, to the chagrin of Bulgarian doctors, Nadezhdans often show up in clinics and hospitals accompanied by "gangs" of family members, who come to provide moral support.

Right across the grim hall from the doctor's office in Nadezhda is the local branch of the health mediators. They are part of a municipality project ran by a small NGO called Health of the Roma (HOR).⁵⁵ In 2010, the organization had one team dedicated to Nadezhda and one to

⁵⁴ To make matters worse, in a country where laws are badly enforced and the concept of patients' rights is relatively new, a fair share of doctors suffer from a God complex that can intimidate, exasperate, and even harm patients. An extreme example of that was a relative of mine, a surgeon, who argued that doctors' mistakes (even ones resulting in fatalities) should not be prosecuted in court and that patients should not ask to know more about their illness, because the doctors are not "service-providers" but "experts" whose knowledge should not be challenged.

⁵⁵ The head is a Bulgarian Gypsy, Dr. Dobrev from Third Polyclinic downtown, where he handles exclusively Nadezhda clients at the end of a segregated corridor on the first floor. He is also a prominent figure in a tiny national field encompassing NGOs, doctors, and government officials who deal with the problems of Roma health.

the Gypsy encampment above Nikola Kochev, and it also oversaw nearby villages and towns as needed. All women and men in the teams were college-educated Bulgarian Gypsies in their twenties, with the exception of Toncho, who was a Naked Gypsy man with a high school diploma. Despite being only 21, Toncho was extraordinarily astute, cosmopolitan, and well-respected across the ghetto, so I was lucky that he was the one to first show me around, to introduce me to people and churches, and to give me pointers on how to avoid creating problems.⁵⁶ The mediators are not medical professionals. The original idea behind creating this job position was that they would assist minority members in interacting with the hostile medical institutions. However, over time they have shifted to a “projects” model, choosing to focus more on family planning, STD prevention, and monitoring epidemics. A gynecologist comes to the office once a week, and Nadezhdan women schedule appointments to get diaphragms for free.⁵⁷ Men, on the other hand, can get condoms at any time by going to the office or by approaching a mediator – usually Toncho – on the street (although in the case of early teens, the staff has to guess whether they are “for real” or just stocking up on “water bombs”).⁵⁸ In terms of STD prevention, the mediators have done some valuable work with a vulnerable population of about fifteen Naked Gypsy transvestite prostitutes. And finally, they try to be the first line of defense in responding to outbreaks of dangerous epidemics, such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, viral pneumonias, measles, scabies, etc.

⁵⁶ For example, he advised me to always specify that I was married as part of introducing myself, or otherwise people would assume that I was single and get “confused.”

⁵⁷ This form of birth control poses risks for less educated women, however, because they do not understand that those devices are not permanent and suffer complications after extended use.

⁵⁸ Having been seen with the mediators often enough, even I was sheepishly approached for condoms once.

For years now, a deadly combination of poor sanitary conditions, lack of basic health education, criminally negligent doctors, and an inefficient medical system have turned Nadezhda into a hotbed of contagious diseases. In 2009-2010, the ghetto had the highest rates of child mortality and one of the lowest life expectancy rates in Europe (Euthemia). This unenviable reputation prompted the trans-national NGO Doctors of the World (DOW) to open their only European office across the railroad in Dame Gruev. Bulgarian law does not allow doctors without domestic credentials to practice or to write prescriptions, so the DOW staff has designed educational projects related to women's health, family planning, personal hygiene, and child vaccinations. During my time in Nadezhda, the staff consisted of a rotating foreign director, a Bulgarian Gypsy man with excellent English, and three women and one man from Nadezhda. Even though the mediators were local, they represented higher-status groups, and this made it hard to engage the poorest and least educated residents, who needed the most attention. Their chosen mode of operation was to run small focus groups in Dame Gruev. While they hoped that having people go to them was a step in fighting segregation, it was difficult to get people to leave the ghetto, especially women, and especially if they were not getting anything tangible in return (and serving coffee and cookies only went so far). In the past, DOW and HOR had cooperated, but Bulgarian doctors in Sliven had lobbied against such joint projects, arguing that they amounted to a foreign organization helping a local doctor – the head of HOR – to gain a competitive advantage in acquiring clientele. The two organizations remained on good terms, however, and they even practiced a division of labor in times of epidemics.

Mrs. Boneva heads the third NGO that works with Nadezhdans on a regular basis. From her headquarters on Main Street downtown, Boneva runs a school integration program for a select group of extremely disadvantaged children who are bussed to Bulgarian schools,

supervised by educational mediators, and provided with supplies and clothing when possible. For a minimum wage, the mediators collect their allotted students from home, accompany them on the school bus, monitor their general wellbeing and academic progress, bring them back home, update their parents, and keep an eye on their home environment. It has not always been easy to find the right people, and some have not been the best role models. For example, one Musician Gypsy ex-mediator openly talked about despising her Naked Gypsy wards, about refusing to walk into their houses, about calling them names, and about forbidding them to touch her because they were dirty and had lice. Another mediator was a well-known alcoholic, who once passed out and got rolled home in a wheelbarrow by his mentees. Another problem the program faces are the high attrition rates of participating children. Some children disliked being dispersed among the Bulgarians and preferred to be with their friends in School #6, while others simply lost their commitment, got married, or were withdrawn by their parents. It also does not help that people here tend to be highly suspicious of others' motives, and nearly every outsider who claims that she is trying to help eventually gets accused of using the locals as a "bait" to get funding that does not benefit "the people." Thus, many suspected Boneva of pocketing funds, pointed out that she rarely set foot in the ghetto (but "lived off" it), accused her of selecting children as a means of building a "loyal" following, and resented her family's political clout as the self-proclaimed representatives of the "Gypsies."⁵⁹

So far, I have been providing a rough and generalized sketch of life in Nadezhda.

However, continuing to use such general language runs the risk of feeding into the popular

⁵⁹ Boneva is similarly disliked by many principals and teachers, who complain that she does not work well with others. Citing personal observations, two Bulgarian Gypsies also insisted that the program was merely for show, that the children only participated to get free breakfast, and that teachers and other students completely excluded and ignored them (for example, the Bulgarian students would be given a basketball in one end of the schoolyard, whereas the Gypsy children would be given a jump rope and sent to the other end). Effective or not, the program was in constant danger of losing its funding. In December 2009, for example, Boneva did not know if she could pay for the bus for the next semester. I do not know if the program continues to exist.

misconceptions that Nadezhda's inhabitants constitute a homogenous mass of "Gypsies." With the exception of Bulgarian Gypsies, the vast majority of Sliveners fail to realize that this is a complex hierarchical society of distinct ethnic communities divided by economic, social, spatial, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Three major ethnic groups live in Nadezhda: "Turks," "Musician Gypsies," and "Naked Gypsies," ranked in this order by wealth and prestige, as acknowledged by the members of all three communities.

Turks

After reading through historical and scholarly literature and talking to various categories of locals, I have resigned myself to the idea that I am unlikely to identify with certainty where Nadezhda's Turks originated. They could be the descendants of ethnic Turks who did not emigrate after Bulgarian independence from the Ottoman Empire was achieved in 1879; they could be the descendants of Muslim/Turkish Gypsies who arrived in Sliven at some point between the 15th and 18th centuries; or they could be both, if one were to believe stories about Turkish men taking Gypsy women into their harems (Kalina). There are cultural markers that set the Turks apart from others in the ghetto – they speak Turkish, carry Turkish names, celebrate Turkish and Muslim holidays, practice circumcision, decorate their houses differently, and even though more than half have converted to Evangelical Christianity recently, some have also rekindled their interest in Islam. Yet, while almost everybody who is "in" on the ethnic divisions within Nadezhda calls them "Turks" to their faces, they add behind their backs that, "They are actually Gypsies, only they don't want to admit it." Coming from members of higher-status groups, such claims could amount to assigning "guilt by association" (Nadezhda is the "Gypsy ghetto"); coming from members of lower-status Roma, they could be a reaction to perceived social exclusion on the part of the Turks. Unlike members of other groups here, Turks do not act apologetic about their ethnicity, and they exude a strong sense of localized superiority. It is

common to hear them express disdain about having to live with “these people,” and some even move to the blocks.

Turks are the wealthiest residents of Nadezhda. To begin with, they dominate the local commerce. Every fifth Turkish household appears to have a small convenience store set up in the basement or in a room facing the street. Here, one can buy anything from bread, to shampoo, to baby clothes, to hot coffee, to CDs. They are not always cheap, because some goods are sold piecemeal, but few people around have cars, and most prefer to pay a bit more for the convenience of walking across the street in their clogs whenever they realize they need something. I myself have chosen to buy aspirin by the tablet rather than making the long trek to the closest pharmacy in Dame Gruev with a headache. And when it comes to food in particular, the Turkish stores have the reputation of offering the best and the freshest things in Nadezhda, so pickier people from all over the ghetto come here. Some Turks have even taken their retail business to the flea market in the Town, and in the summer, they may move to the Black Sea coast to sell to tourists. The men procure the merchandise mostly wholesale in the region, but some travel as far as Turkey to get cheaper and different goods.

While the older members of Turkish families run local businesses, their children might opt to go abroad as seasonal agricultural workers. The most popular destinations are Spain and Greece. Often, men make their first trip right after getting married – alone or with their wives – in order to accumulate quick money, so that they could add their own annex to the extended family’s house, pay for their wedding, buy a car, etc. During the year I was there, however, the economic crisis was making it harder and harder to find jobs abroad, which was starting a ripple effect locally. One of the more wrenching examples involved a Turkish woman, Alev. She lived with her ailing parents, and even though the family was not especially affluent, they were a

vivacious bunch and their home was always open to guests, who were practically forced to eat and drink. Her husband worked in construction in France, and she used to gush about how much she loved and missed him. Around Christmas time, however, he lost his job and returned. The family finances were quickly depleted, as her father's declining health had undermined his taxicab business. When I was leaving, it was rare to see them laugh, they had no money to buy coffee or the kind of food Alev's frail daughter would eat, Alev's mother professed that I would not find her alive when I returned, and Alev talked about wanting to get rid of her husband because he had started to drink, cheat, and abuse her.

My emphasis on the relative wealth of the average Turkish family vis-à-vis the average Musician and Naked Gypsy family in Nadezhda should not obscure the fact there are also many poor Turkish families that hardly make ends meet. Many of them live in ethnically mixed areas alongside Musician Gypsies, and in fact, a dilapidated shack with a leaking roof at the very entrance to the Naked Gypsy sub-ghetto belongs to a single Turkish mother who works grueling hours ironing socks in a nearby factory to educate her three teenage sons and to give them a chance for a better life. She and another Turkish woman in a similar situation are much closer to the Musician Gypsy women in the area than to the richer Turks further west. Some entrepreneurial Turkish women have opened hair salons in their houses. I also met Turkish men who considered themselves lucky to work for low wages in factories and in construction. And the labor office sees its fair share of Turks who come every month to register in order to participate in the unemployment assistance program. A problem some unemployed Turks have, however, is that the municipality often sends investigators to inspect their houses, and if those homes appear "suspiciously nice," families may be turned down on the grounds that they "must" have an alternative source of income. This can be especially vexing for people who managed to

procure the funds to build a nice house in the past, but who no longer have a source of income. Also, unemployed youth who live in the nice homes of their parents or in-laws may not qualify, which makes them even more dependent on the older generations. Here, I should specify that the term “in-law” is misleading in most cases when it comes to marriages in the Nadezhdan context, since most couples do not formalize their unions in court.⁶⁰

Musician Gypsies

The Musician Gypsies (“muzikantski tzigani”/“музикантски цигани”) in Nadezhda are the descendants of Turkish Gypsies who have lived in Sliven for at least two centuries. They used to have Turkish names and they use many Turkish words, but they do not remember identifying with Islam or with the “Turks”/“Turkish Gypsies.” They usually refer to themselves merely as “Gypsies,” but when asked to distinguish themselves from the Naked Gypsies, they say that they are “the Musicians” (“muzikantite”/“музикантите”). As their name suggests, the traditional trade of the Musician Gypsies was to provide entertainment for all kinds of occasions.

Overall, Musician Gypsies tend to get along with others, with the prominent exception of Naked Gypsies, whom they despise. They tend to take the initiative and to approach outsiders with exceptional hospitality – two Musician Gypsy sisters, Dora and Veska, were the first Nadezhdans to invite me to their house, and they did so five minutes after they met me. Dora eventually became a close personal friend of mine. Musician Gypsy networks of friends and kin often include Bulgarian Gypsies, since members of the two groups find it acceptable to intermarry. They also maintain good relations with their Turkish neighbors, even though they allege that the Turks are “cold people” and while Musician Gypsies find it acceptable to visit

⁶⁰ People still use the Bulgarian words “svekur” (“свекър”) for father-in-law, “svekurva” (“свекърва”) for mother-in-law, “zet” (“зет”) for son-in-law, and “snaha” (“снаха”) for daughter-in-law, however.

each other without warning, they usually “schedule” visits with Turks. Turkish men occasionally marry Musician Gypsy women, but the popular perception is that such women are taking the risk of never getting accepted by their in-laws and of getting abandoned.

During socialism, many Musician Gypsies became low-skill workers in the factories, but today, it is fashionable for male members of the younger generations to revert to performing at weddings and banquets. In many families, at least one man is part of a band that travels across the country and Europe during the warm months, although almost every year the different bands recombine because of interpersonal jealousies and conflicts. Life for the immediate families of such men can be an alternating series of famine and feast – when they have money, they invest in costly house-improvement projects, purchase Internet access, get nice clothes, etc. Inevitably, however, the money runs out in the winter, so the construction is put on hold, the Internet is disconnected, and the women pawn their gold earrings for food. The wives of professional musicians do not try to collect unemployment benefits because the prestige of their husbands would be undermined. It is especially important for the men to maintain the impression that they are talented enough to provide an opulent lifestyle for their families. But they do take state child support. Members of Musician families without musicians tend to be more humble. Some continue to work in the factories, while others – young and old – join the waves of cyclical migrant workers who go abroad or to the Black Sea in the summer. Single mothers depend on their parents, on unemployment, and on child support.

Naked Gypsies

As is the case with “the Turks,” to make claims about the origins of the Naked Gypsies involves a lot of surmising. They could be descendants of a group of indigent Gypsies who showed up in Sliven at some point in the late 19th century (Tomova, Vandova and Tomov 2000)

and who were mis-categorized as “Wallachian” (“vlashki”/“влашки”). Or the community may have formed as people from nearby villages slowly accumulated around an initial core of migrants. Today, some Naked Gypsies continue to find spouses in nearby villages, and as a result, their kin networks span the region. At home, Naked Gypsies speak a dialect of Romany that is different from that of the Musician Gypsies. Most of the adults and the children who go to school communicate easily with Bulgarians, even though their vocabulary is limited. Some Naked Gypsies may have alternative Turkish nicknames in the context of the community, and they vaguely remember their grandparents going to imams for spells and circumcisions, which suggests that they used to be somehow associated with the Turkish culture and Islam in the past (Mina and Dancho). Nowadays, however, they do not speak Turkish and practically all of them call themselves “Christian” as a consequence of having converted to Evangelical Christianity (which does not necessarily mean that they go to church, as I will discuss in Chapter Four).

Naked Gypsies are extremely marginalized within Sliven and even within Nadezhda. When ethnic Bulgarians bring up the ghastliest stereotypes associated with Gypsies – “dirty,” “dark,” “primitive,” “animalistic,” “stupid,” “lazy,” “over-breeding,” and “clannish,” among many others – they usually envision the members of this (or some similar) sub-group, even though they may not realize that it exists. The Turks and the Musician Gypsies uphold the same stereotypes, and in addition, they are resentful about having to live next to the “Lahovi” and to suffer the consequences of being equated with them. The closer members of Nadezhda’s other ethnic groups live to the sub-ghetto, the more vocal they are about how much they despise their neighbors to the east and about how different they are from “that scum.” On numerous occasions, I was emphatically advised to not go “down there,” because it would not be worth it and I would surely catch diseases/lice/scabies or get hurt. Even the Turkish convenience store

“outpost” at the southwest entrance of the sub-ghetto gets shunned because Naked Gypsies use it. And many of the Musician Gypsies and poorer Turks who live in that vicinity are selling or talking about selling their houses to get out of the way of the growing Naked Gypsy community. At the time I was visiting, Nevena was trying to sell her two-bedroom house because she could not stand “the noise, the smell, and the filth” coming from her new neighbors. Her dream was to get a place in the villa zone and away from people altogether, but since that was not a viable option, the plan was to seek smaller accommodations in the quieter northern part of the ghetto, next to the wall. I could not really blame her for craving peace – I also found it impossible to nap here one afternoon, as the bed reverberated for hours with the beat of a single Chalga song:

*Millionaire, do not mess around,
Hand it over, reach deeper in your pocket
You have money, hand it over, pass it around.
Don't hold back, you are rich,
You have money, you get many women.
Hey, hey, hey, hey...*⁶¹

But the fact is that even though the rowdy residents of the Naked Gypsy quarters appear to dominate the social scene, most people who live here feel like captives and also crave peace and quiet. They often complain about the cacophony that keeps their children awake all night and about being scared of confronting their drunken neighbors; calling the Nadezhdan police about it has generally proved to be a futile exercise.

I came to sense that being on the bottom of the local class system provided a paradoxical sense of freedom for some Naked Gypsies, because they surrendered control over their status. When I was with Naked Gypsies and needed to make a quick stop by a Musician Gypsy house, for example, my companions seemed entirely at peace with not being allowed inside. They do criticize, stereotype, and make fun of Bulgarians, Turks, and other kinds of Gypsies. Many

⁶¹ To hear the song, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFqAe2wFigk>

women who live in the town, for example, would be shocked to hear that the Naked Gypsies – who are stereotyped as immoral and animalistic – actually look down upon them for having loose morals. But the Naked Gypsies do not try to engage others in arguments over status, and they do not have high expectations about receiving respect or courtesy. When an intruder ventures into their territory, they tend to assume the worst, and somebody – usually men and older women – will take the initiative to bluntly exact an explanation for her presence there. If the visitor approaches them politely and asks for their acceptance and friendship, however, they often turn shy, almost disoriented. As I mentioned in Chapter One, it took me over a month to get the women to relax, to make eye contact, and to talk to me, and that was only after the unusually confident and outgoing Mina took me under her wing and laughingly introduced me to different households. Laughter was by far the best ice breaker.

For the typical Naked Gypsy, life is characterized by dire economic hardship, uncertainty, and lack of control. Individual survival is impossible without having a solid safety network on which to rely daily, so the extended patriarchal household is the basic economic unit. Rare are the lucky families whose members hold low-skilled positions in industrial facilities or in construction; overall, finding full-time and permanent work for hire has been tough, and most people younger than 40 have never had it. Starting a business is similarly difficult, since very few Naked Gypsies have the necessary know-how, connections, or capital. They do not go abroad to make quick money, and apart from a couple of usurers who charge exorbitant interest, nobody would give them loans. Only a handful of local families have been able to follow the Turkish model and set up home-based convenience stores and outdoor clothing stands. A few others resell secondhand clothes, collect recyclables, or rent out audio and video equipment for celebrations, but the profits are hardly anything to brag about. In the end, the vast majority of

people here survive on unemployment benefits and child allowances, and even those sources of income are precarious. In one case, both members of a middle-aged Naked Gypsy couple forgot to check in at the labor bureau on their allotted day. Four of their nine children had already moved out; three were legal adults who were still unmarried and living at home; and one was a minor, which qualified the couple for 35 leva (approximately 17 euros) in child support per month. Then one of the adult children also forgot to check in, for which he was publicly beaten by his father. Thus, for nearly a year, a family of five survived on 115 leva (approximately 107 euros) per month. Relative to many other residents in Nadezhda, they were also at a disadvantage because their Christian beliefs had compelled them to legalize their marriage. Many couples here avoid that because “single” mothers may qualify for extra assistance, even though nowadays investigators visit houses to check where and with whom the purported single mothers really live. If they catch a woman lying about her address, she may lose her unemployment benefits.

My mother, who visited the Naked Gypsy part of Nadezhda with me once, aptly described “the social energy” there as “thick, chaotic, and charged.” To begin with, one can expect no privacy. Neighbors and relatives walk into each other’s houses at any time of the day, and it was entirely acceptable for them to see me chatting with the host and to sit down and listen without asking for her permission. Locals may have learned to ignore the presence of playing children or intruding adults, but the constant distractions can quickly overwhelm an outsider. In addition, navigating the interpersonal dynamics in the Naked Gypsy community is a complex task. No friendship is invincible and nobody is to be trusted with a secret. “I promise” is a situationally solemn phrase that often means nothing in a few hours, and many do not even find it necessary to apologize for breaking their word. As close and interdependent as people are, it is common to see residents accuse each other of lying and having ulterior motives. Somebody’s

financial or social success often generates jealousies and accusations of misdeeds, and some people have no qualms about making up random gossip, which is practically impossible to refute using logic or evidence (as discussed in Chapters One and Five).

The Roma in Sliven: Gender Dynamics

Bulgarian Gypsies

Overall, women in Sliven's Bulgarian Gypsy community are highly acculturated to the worldviews and lifestyle of local ethnic Bulgarian women. Over the past two centuries, the educational status of Bulgarian Gypsy women has caught up with that of men, they have gained a strong presence in the labor force, and many have improved their position in the domestic realm. That being said, even the most privileged ethnic Bulgarian women today continue to face challenges in a society, where – on average – men dominate the public and private spheres.⁶² Compared to their Bulgarian peers, female Bulgarian Gypsies tend to be at an even greater disadvantage, because the persistent external and internal community enclosure has been conducive to the perseverance of certain traditional attitudes and practices, including ones

⁶² While subscribing to general egalitarian principles, large swaths of Sliveners also uphold attitudes and practices that frustrate and disadvantage women in almost every aspect of their lives. To begin with, given the culture of the economic and political elite today, it is harder for women to ascend to real positions of power. And those who do so risk getting accused of sleeping with the right people to get there. In a culture where the sexualization of women is ubiquitous, women are expected to use or to have used their sex appeal to accomplish almost everything – from getting the gas-station attendant to check their tires to negotiating business deals. Even in formal and professional settings, certain men feel entitled to flirt openly, and women are expected to accept it as something natural and to feel flattered. When it comes to the domestic realm, some argue that women's position has deteriorated over the past twenty years (Dimitra). Many couples date for years before they move in together, if they do so, and even then, it may take several more years before they decide to get married and have children. It is usually the man who decides when it is time to take any of these steps. Putting life on hold while waiting for a man to feel ready carries more risks for women because every passing year comes with opportunity costs and shortens her window of opportunity to begin a family. Increasingly more single women simply choose to have a child on their own. When people do marry, most young couples want to live autonomously, but the economic reality does not always allow it. Inter-generational dependence may come in many forms. The struggling young couple may have to borrow money or take a room/section/floor in the house of the parents; a struggling parent may need to be taken into the apartment of her child and his family; or the young working couple may ask the parents to help raise the grandchildren.

affecting gender relations. Thus, many of the Bulgarian Gypsy women I met complained that on average, their community, families, and partners remain oppressively patriarchal. Gender dynamics vary depending on socio-economic class, family history, education, exposure to outside influences, etc., but traditionalism tends to be more pronounced among the older generations, whereas younger generations are struggling against it.

Over the past two decades, the vast majority of people in Bulgaria have been exposed to Western ideas promoting gender equality among sexual partners. Some of these notions come across tacitly through Western movies and books that portray Western men doing the dishes, shopping, picking up the children from school, and even preparing gourmet dinners. Others come in the form of explicit universalistic ideologies advocating gender neutrality and color-blindness, among others. I was surprised to encounter many Bulgarians of diverse walks of life who reacted against universalistic discourse passionately and almost “patriotically,” calling it “American” brainwashing and naïve obsession with political correctness that negates “nature.” Bulgarian Gypsy women in Sliven, however, were pronouncedly different in their fascination with Western culture. Some of them asked me specifically about the relationships between men and women and among family members in America. They clearly had formed positive impressions from watching movies and observing foreigners they had met, and they were searching for confirmation. During one such conversation I had with two middle-aged Bulgarian Gypsy women who were complaining about the dynamics in their families (we were talking about multiple generations living together), one turned to the other and exclaimed, “See, the Americans have it all figured out, and we are still stuck doing things the old way, and it just isn’t healthy!”

More and more Bulgarian Gypsies are refusing to continue doing things the old way, with

mixed consequences across gender and age. As recently as 20 years ago, for example, concerns about public image made it imperative for young people to marry soon after they started dating or after their relatives found them spouses. Today, young people demand to date for a while before committing, especially since newlyweds are expected to produce at least one child as soon as possible, after which they are free to decide if and when they want more. In part, the tendency to postpone starting a family can be attributed to anxieties about professional and financial stability, which may require better education and more time and effort, given the tough economic situation. In part, it is because men and women demand to know each other better before embarking on this trip together. And in certain cases, it can be traced to the rise of the machismo “thick neck” ethos, which compels impressionable males in their teens and 20s to seek higher status among their peers by claiming multiple “conquests.” Girls have also been exploring their “wild” side by becoming preoccupied with their “sexy” appearance, partying, and pursuing popularity in their social circles and on social media.

While taking one’s time to pursue education and a stable career, to weigh one’s tastes and options, and to have fun do not hurt men’s chances to eventually find long-term mates, this is not the case for rebellious Bulgarian Gypsy women who fail to secure husbands by their mid twenties. Anita proudly told me how she demanded that her live-in ex-boyfriend treated her as equal and contributed to the household chores, while she also refused to marry him and to have children until she was done with college. But he was “a slacker,” and she did not feel confident enough to join him when he emigrated abroad, where he eventually married another migrant. Although Anita was only 26, she was not optimistic about marrying locally. Even if she found somebody who was still single and whom she liked, many Bulgarian Gypsy men and their parents feel ambivalent about accepting a woman with known past relationships, especially if

those are not marriages. Often, there is less concern with the woman's morality, per se, than with the man's public image. Ethnic Bulgarian men are less prudish, but Anita said that she would never date them because, "If I marry a Gypsy, we will have a fight and he will call me 'a bitch,' but a Bulgarian will call me 'a Gypsy bitch,' and I don't need that little extra." For "spinsters" like her, one viable option is to meet somebody – usually another Bulgarian national – while temporarily working abroad. A more dubious course of action some Bulgarian Gypsy women choose is to befriend Bulgarian emigrants who use social websites or Skype to meet women from the homeland, but the Internet relationships of which I knew did not go beyond suspect invitations and declarations of feelings and honorable intentions. Finally, in certain cases, the anxious families of "aging" young adults may resort to the outdated practice of arranging marriages by looking for potential spouses elsewhere and hoping that the young people will like each other enough.

Once married, many Bulgarian Gypsies find it hard to depart from traditional family structures and practices that framed the lives of older generations, but contemporary attitudes and imperatives are having an undeniable effect on the nature and consequences of old customs. Young Bulgarian Gypsy families are less likely to live independently than Bulgarian newlyweds, and in some cases, a couple and their children may share a house or a small apartment not only with the husband's parents, but also with his siblings and their families. Such crowding of people from multiple generations and with different dispositions, understandings, and expectations might cause routine interpersonal conflicts. Tensions between daughters- and mothers-in-law frequently assume a familiar form. For example, some older women may feel entitled to their traditional "right" to exert authority over their sons and to boss around their daughters-in-law. The younger women, on the other hand, may refuse to be the "slaves" to their

in-laws but continue to embrace the traditional expectation that the latter should provide housing, financial support, and assistance with child care. This, in turn, may cause further resentment in grandparents who feel financially and physically exploited.

Whether they live independently or not, relations between spouses in Bulgarian Gypsy families can be equally complex in their amalgamation of patriarchal elements and modern attitudes and behaviors. In most cases, both spouses are educated and work, and it is accepted that they should brainstorm together and make joint decisions about important things, such as big purchases, job options, loans, vacations, and child-related concerns. Men's opinions may have more weight in general, especially in situations where they are the bread-winners, but there are women who defend their stance with plenty of spirit – Adriana, in her 40s, for example, let her husband know that he had to choose between obliging his mother and having a family to come home to that day.

At the same time, many important aspects of routine household dynamics and interpersonal interactions tend to make Bulgarian Gypsy men's lives easier and more socially rewarding. Regardless of whether both spouses work or not, on a typical evening or weekend, men sit down, watch TV, or play on the computer, while women cook, serve the table, clean, do the laundry, iron, etc. Acceptable activities for men include driving, shopping, paying utility bills in person, preparing certain meats and homemade alcohol, and fixing things around the house. In their interpersonal relations, Bulgarian Gypsies tend to be open and warm, regardless of gender. For example, they are much more likely than Bulgarians to hug and kiss when they meet others. By themselves, women are friendly and engaging, but in mixed company, some of them retreat and let men dominate the social scene. Most often, male dominance in social

situations takes the form of monopolizing the conversation and making all the jokes.⁶³

“The Gypsies” of Nadezhda

For a series of generations, the encapsulated communities in Nadezhda consistently failed to engage meaningfully with the socio-economic, cultural, and ideological developments that transformed the lives of the people to the north of the train station. One important consequence of their conservatism is that today these communities espouse time-honored family structures, practices, and attitudes that seem obsolete, maladaptive, and uncivilized to most modern Bulgarians. Below I discuss some of the gender dynamics that characterize the Turkish, Musician Gypsy, and Naked Gypsy communities.

Turks

The vast majority of the Turkish households consist of an older couple presiding over one or more of their sons and the sons’ families. The older parents control the property, and coupled with tradition, this gives them significant authority over the other adults. The patriarch reigns over the entire family in principle, but since men do not deal with women’s issues, his wife manages the females in practice, which means that she runs the household. This makes her very invested in who joins the family, and she goes to great lengths to choose her daughters-in-law. Even powerful patriarchs complain that their wives run the marriage game in the Turkish quarter and arrange whatever unions they want amongst themselves, without consulting the boys and sometimes behind their husband’s backs (Egemen). The most common considerations that go into picking a daughter-in-law have to do with expanding the kin network in beneficial ways and

⁶³ Sometimes, however, Bulgarian Gypsy women may find themselves feeling truly uncomfortable in social settings. For example, during get-togethers, women may get tipsy but rarely inebriated, whereas men are given license to drink to the point of becoming embarrassingly emotional, talkative, and boisterous. On one occasion, I observed a dynamic where a drunk Bulgarian Gypsy husband flirted and danced with other women in front of his sober wife, who looked in the other direction with a stoic face.

with procuring a beautiful girl with a reputation for being pure, humble, and docile. There is a rush to snatch the good girls before anybody else does, which is one reason why the average marriage age for women here is in the mid teens. In fact, some would-be mothers-in-law are so eager to claim a girl who fits their criteria that they might ask for her when she is as young as seven. In such cases, the girl moves to her new house, but she lives as one of the children and is not expected to be a “wife” until she reaches a more appropriate age. Girls who are not married by their late teens, on the other hand, run the risk of remaining spinsters for life. After a woman passes 20, she may become the subject of speculation about her character and morality, which makes her undesirable; hence, parents who get approached about their teenage daughters think twice before turning too many offers down, even though they know that this means the end of the girls’ education and childhood.⁶⁴

Over the past decade, some young Turkish men have managed to win victories in demanding the wives they want. One wealthy mother, Adalet, whose second son and daughter-in-law were abroad, shared that she had really had wanted a different girl for him. The girl she had wanted was “white, beautiful, and nice,” but the boy had his heart set on his current wife. Adalet had gone through the same thing with her first son, who married the woman she had chosen for him, but he refused to have anything to do with her, so in the end they had to return the bride to her family. In this case, Adalet conceded – “She is black, but he wanted her. Young

⁶⁴ The European Commission has sponsored some NGOs to administer local campaigns against the practice of (forced) early marriages. One such NGO proudly reports that in 2010, two staff members organized “teams of volunteers” in Nadezhda to run “numerous meetings” with “representatives of all ethnic groups in the populous neighborhood” in order to inform youth how to pursue high school and college education, as well as to discuss “the practice of early marital commitment [...] sexual maturation, pregnancy, giving birth, abortions, contraceptive methods, etc.” (Amaliye 2010). In my observations, however, one person organized two meetings with the help of one volunteer and free sweets and soda. The first meeting attracted around ten Naked Gypsy children and teenagers, Mrs Boneva, and three Musician Gypsy adults, who did most of the talking. The session primarily involved displaying and discussing posters of happy Roma college students. Then there was a cautionary discussion about the high cost of having babies. I learned that “nobody” showed up to the second meeting. Thus, most Nadezhdans have remained isolated from the heated domestic and international discourse regarding early Roma marriages, and they have not experienced a new surge of government interference in this area.

people today are different.” Girls who try to exercise such strong will do not fare so well, however. A young woman, Bedia, fell in love with a neighbor and stubbornly refused to let go of him regardless of her parents’ disapproval. The boy’s mother married him to somebody else, but Bedia and he continued to see each other, and she even had a botched abortion, which made it impossible for her to have children. While men can have extra-marital sex without completely ruining their reputation in the community, the same does not hold true for women. When people started calling her “a whore” on the street, she had to flee and work abroad. There, a Bulgarian man from another part of the country proposed to marry her, presenting Bedia with an opportunity to leave Nadezhda forever. She was just hoping that he never found out about her infertility.

In more typical situations when things go “as they are supposed to,” a girl who gets married gets pulled out of school immediately. Very few Turkish women have a high school education, and many do not even finish middle school. Unlike older women who were educated during socialism, some women below the age of 20 were so uncomfortable talking in Bulgarian that we used translators. It is inappropriate for a married woman to leave the house alone regularly, especially if this puts her among other young men – “it tempts.” Instead, she gets, metaphorically speaking, attached to her mother-in-law’s hip at all times while in public. Merchant families allow young women to sell to the customers, but under supervision, and the exchanges are limited to the minimum required for such transactions. Before I knew any of this, I once approached a young woman who appeared to be alone at a street clothing booth. Within seconds, an older woman emerged from behind, listening to us with a tense expression on her face. I barely paid attention to her, but later on Dora, who witnessed the scene, informed me that

this was the mother-in-law, that she was displeased, and that I may have botched my access to this particular household by approaching the girl directly.

Consequently, I learned to speak to the older women first, and I was surprised to find out just how much autonomy and authority they have. They like to introduce guests to everybody in the house, but not because they have to – they take pride in showing off their successful and attractive families. Daughters-in-law, especially, are displayed like trophies. The introduction ritual unfolds along these lines: A middle-aged, heavy-set woman exuding confidence yells out a name from the living room. A thin young woman enters. The mother-in-law introduces her with a smile and awaits a reaction. The socially graceful response is to remark how pretty the girl is, emphasizing her white skin. If she has light eyes, their rarity is duly noted, together with hopes that the future children will take after her; if she has dark eyes, the cliché compliment is that they are as “black as olives.” The girl blushes and smiles, but does not speak – she acts very shy, and there is a strong probability that her Bulgarian is deficient. In some cases, she can barely wait to leave the room. And if she does not, the mother-in-law can always ask her – or anybody else, including males – to leave, if she wishes to have a more private conversation.

One of the consequences of being married so young is that the girls are pliable and submissive in the hands of their in-laws. It is much easier to mold the perfect daughter-in-law out of a child than an adult. I am sure that it happens, but I while I met Turkish men who left their homes over disagreements with their parents, I never heard of Turkish daughters-in-law who stood up to their in-laws over being at the bottom of the domestic social hierarchy. During the period after their “engagement” and before having children, especially, they are at risk of being “returned” for transgressions. In a way, there are two levels of marriage here – one marked by an “engagement” and one marked by a “wedding.” The more modest engagement

celebrates the decision of two families to bring together their children. The young people are considered “married” and live together, but things are not completely set in stone. Proper Turkish weddings are essentially an extremely expensive and ostentatious public display of solid commitment. In some cases, they happen very soon after the engagement, but it is also common to withhold them until the girl is (very) pregnant and there is no turning back, although some unfortunate women get abandoned or decide to leave after they have children too. One such case involved a young woman whose husband suddenly developed a mental disorder and who did not get enough support from his family. If a wedding does not take place by the time a woman gives birth (generally, the reason for such an omission is that neither one of the families can afford it), it is no longer considered necessary and does not take place. It is rare to formalize either event at the municipality.

It is not deemed necessary for married Turkish young men to drop out of school, but some do so anyways. Nobody expects them to act much differently or to spend a lot of time with their wives, however. They maintain strong relations with peers, and a decent number have (or have had) mistresses. One such mistress – a Bulgarian Gypsy – told me that her boyfriend complained about not being able to connect to his wife because she was just “a child” who never grew up. Some mistresses belong to other ethnic groups and live outside Nadezhda, others are either local Turks or Musician Gypsies who never married or were abandoned. Being a single woman in Nadezhda is very difficult – both in terms of economic survival and in terms of social status – and some decide that having a man to support them financially and emotionally is better than being alone, despite the risks and social consequences.

As couples age, have children, and accumulate their own capital, they frequently get a separate house or build an annex to their parents’ house that provides some autonomy. The

recent trend for young men or newlywed couples to work abroad has sped up this process in many cases. The wives may have to skip a year or two while they stay home to nurse small children, but for the most part, parents of older children do not have a problem leaving them with the grandparents, who are relatively young and capable of taking care of them. Whether it is because they are growing older or because they are in charge, the wives in families that live independently are pronouncedly more self-confident and outgoing.

Musician Gypsies

As a whole, the members of the Musician community in Nadezhda are the most “progressive” and open to the outside world within the context of the segregated ghetto. To begin with, both men and women are most likely to have jobs and personal relations outside the ghetto. Some members of the older generation still work in the factories, and many younger couples do seasonal labor abroad. Second, being in the middle of the local social hierarchy and sharing the label “Gypsy” with the Naked Gypsies seems to compel many Musician Gypsy men and women to go the extra mile to prove that they are “different,” more “modern,” and more like the Bulgarians than anybody else around. For example, the men never wear denim jackets or the yellow-and-black striped hoodies that make a large percentage of Naked Gypsy youths look like bumble bees; the women are more likely to go downtown to buy clothes in the latest fashion; they shun the bleached and dyed bright red hair and the extravagant hairclips of the Turks and the Naked Gypsies; and they are more likely to wear their hair down or to get hairstyles similar to those of Bulgarian women, including short cuts.

Over the past ten years, it has become increasingly normal for Musician Gypsy men to finish high school and to marry in their late teens, even early twenties. For girls, the typical marriage age remains in the mid-teens, and once married, they still leave school – parents still do

not want to see their daughters remain spinsters, and the parents-in-law still do not want their daughters-in-law out of the ghetto and among other boys. Parents are also accepting that it is more prudent to let their sons decide which girls they want, which has increased the incidents of young people flirting and even dating. And if the mothers-in-law disagree, more and more youths elope. In some cases, the parents accept the status quo, and in some cases, they fight it. On one occasion, a 15-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy eloped and were considered “married” for six months; but eventually, the unrelenting mother of the boy managed to get rid of the girl and to force a neighbor on him. The public wedding took place right next to the house of the first “wife,” who watched for a bit and then broke down inside.

Women in young Musician Gypsy families are the most emancipated compared to their peers in other ethnic communities in Nadezhda. Many refuse to be subjected to the authority of their mothers-in-law and demand to live separately. This could only happen because the Musician Gypsy men tend to be relatively close and affectionate with their wives, whom they increasingly marry “for love.” Dora’s husband, Lazar, had not spoken to his mother and grandmother for over a year because they had treated Dora disrespectfully. The couple decided to rebuild their annex to make it a separate house, and in the process they moved to the house of Dora’s parents despite the old-fashioned belief that men were “emasculated” if living with their in-laws. Young wives also have a great deal of authority when it comes to making decisions and executing projects affecting the whole family – they may advise their husbands on their choice of bands and instruments, they may be the treasurers of the bands, they may be entirely in charge of decorating their homes, they may decide what schools to choose for the children and what career paths to suggest to them, and they may even start an independent business as beauticians, as long as it is local and it does not make them inadequate wives and mothers.

Higher confidence and forceful insistence of having a choice also lead to higher rates of divorce and single motherhood among Musician Gypsies. Once a woman is single again, she goes back to her parents, who are responsible for supporting her and her children. She may remarry – often a man from another locale – but she may not bring along the children from her first marriage, especially girls, and this is an important consideration for single mothers who get proposals. Should she choose to abandon her children, the grandparents “adopt” them.

Naked Gypsies

At first glance, it might seem that Naked Gypsy households are almost identical to those of the Turks and the Musician Gypsies. There are many major similarities, indeed, but while many members of the other two communities have challenged some of the more oppressive patriarchal attitudes and practices, the Naked Gypsies have continued to embrace them. This can be observed in the process of arranging marriages, in some of the wedding rituals they have chosen to preserve, in widespread expectations about how relationships among members of the household should be structured, in their heightened preoccupation with men’s prestige, and in child rearing practices.

The norm that the parents should choose (or have veto power over choosing) the spouse of their child goes unchallenged here. Whereas this was a receding trend in other parts of Nadezhda, here I ran across many teenage men and women who reported that they were forced into marrying their current spouse; and while some insisted that they came to like the spouse over time, there were a few who were still bitter about this. While more rebellious youths have found certain ways to go around arranged marriages, the practice continues to constrain them. “Dating” in the Western sense of the word is unacceptable. In the evenings, one may occasionally come across teenage couples kissing in dark corners in other parts of Nadezhda, but

this kind of secret cannot be kept for long, and if a boy and a girl flirt/date without getting married immediately (i.e., within days), the girl's reputation and future are at risk. Some youths with unrelenting parents do elope and marry "for love," which basically entails finding a relative to lend them a bed, so that they can return as "de-facto" married. These are usually relatives on the boy's side and/or somebody with whom the parents have been feuding anyways. At this point, the boy assumes most of the responsibility for deviating from normal procedure. In private, the couple still may bond over the romance of eloping, but for the community, the husband becomes a symbolic "kidnapper." People do not vilify him – young men cannot be blamed for going along with their passion – but framing him as a kidnapper is important because it does not put the good character of his wife into question. A ritual then unfolds, where the father of the bride threatens to kill the boy, looks for them, and makes a public scene. The girl may save face by saying that she did not really want to do "it," but "he did it," and now there is nothing that could be done. If things go right, both sets of parents concede to go along with the status quo, but the boy still has to offer his father-in-law some compensation, however symbolic, to show respect. The bride's parents, however, do not owe him anything, and weddings in such situations are less likely to take place. The parents of the boy are still expected to take the young couple in, but the bride may be put through tougher tests to prove her character.

Applying the term "kidnapping" to any sort of situation that is not approved by the parents diminishes its deviant connotation, and together with the belief that once a girl is "dishonored" she is used goods, it compels certain men to really kidnap girls who refuse to marry them. Very few families report such cases, because it is better for their daughter to have any husband than to have none. The fear of "kidnapping" – in both senses – is often offered as a reason to pull young girls from school. On the one hand, school is a place where girls are free

from family supervision and where they can start dating a boy without parental approval. In a nationally publicized case, for example, a local 10-year-old schoolgirl conceived a child with her 19-year-old boyfriend whom she met near the school (News.bg 2009). On the other hand, girls are not protected when they leave the ghetto, so it is usually on the way to school that they get kidnapped against their will. Such cases may be relatively rare, but they have provided a ready excuse in situations where parents are criticized for pulling their daughters out of school and arranging to marry them as early as 12. Since the girl might get “stolen” anyway, the argument goes, they might as well choose a good husband. This also ensures that the adolescents marry pure, unlike their Bulgarian peers, who may have multiple partners starting in their teens.

As is the case in other ethnic groups in Nadezhda, weddings are among the most important projects Naked Gypsy families undertake, and a wedding often requires incurring debts that take years to repay. They celebrate the two sets of kin coming together, and they are a boost to their standing in the community. Never having a wedding is a source of embarrassment for the couple and for the parents alike, while being able to talk about and to show pictures/videos of a spectacular wedding brings the entire family pride and pleasure; consequently, viewing wedding pictures is a common ritual activity when new people visit a house. In a culture where people incessantly worry about making ends meet, being able to stand out, to display opulence, and to exhibit a debonair disregard for costs – even if only for a day – is valued highly, and even expected, for certain occasions. The typical Naked Gypsy wedding is not as lavish as the typical Turkish wedding (although some do come close). The public festivities may be squeezed into one day only; the hired musicians may be locals, or they may be replaced by a “DJ” altogether; the dinner may take place on the street and consist of cheap beer, bread, spiced sausage, and cabbage salad; the guests may decorate the bride and the groom with

smaller and fewer bills; and even though Naked Gypsy brides imitate the clothes, hair, and make-up of Turkish ones, they cannot compete in terms of price and elaborateness. At the same time, the Naked Gypsy wedding rituals have changed less over the last few decades. For example, many Naked Gypsies still practice the ritual of the so-called “dishonoring” (“obezchestyavane”/“обезчестяване”) during the engagement, which entails locking the youths in a room and waiting outside to find out whether the girl is, indeed, pure. If everything goes right, her new mother-in-law wraps the “evidence” around her shoulders for everybody to witness, and the bride leads her jubilant female relatives in a parade along the streets of the sub-ghetto, as they belly dance and display the stained sheet. Turks do not practice “dishonoring,” and the Musician Gypsies remember doing it in the past, but they now consider it a “barbaric ritual” and “non-sense” (Veska).

“Newlyweds” usually move in with the parents of the groom. Given the higher degrees of poverty and density here, they tend to have even less autonomy and privacy than young couples in other parts of Nadezhda. And compared to their counterparts in Musician Gypsy and more progressive Turkish families, Naked Gypsy brides tend to be more subordinated to their husbands and in-laws. Most of the women who have gotten married over the last two decades have practically no education, have never worked, and have had very limited interactions with the outside world; in essence, they entered their husbands’ home as inexperienced children who were vulnerable and unprepared to stand up for themselves. In some homes, young women do not even speak in the presence of their mothers-in-law, and they never leave the sub-ghetto unsupervised. One day, a middle-aged woman asked me for money, so that she and her teenage daughter-in-law could go to the village where the girl was born. The girl’s baby was sick, but she had no ID and the doctor turned her away, so they had to fetch the necessary papers and issue

her an ID fast. They had enough money for one bus ticket, so I suggested that the girl should go by herself, but the older woman promptly responded, “Oh no, she is stupid, she cannot travel alone, she doesn’t know how to talk to people. She is stupid.” The girl nodded in confirmation. I also found myself in numerous situations where mothers-in-law criticized their daughters-in-law for being lazy and insubordinate right in front of them, while the young women were going on with their chores quietly and diligently. The first few years after a Naked Gypsy girl enters a new family constitute a critical trial period for her because in this part of Nadezhda, families have fewer qualms about banishing a daughter-in-law if they dislike her character. The young females rarely fight back, but they also have their own female relatives nearby, which gives them a support network and a venue to “escape” for some relaxing time of gossiping, venting, and laughing, just as long as they do not do it too often. Women from nearby villages, on the other hand, are isolated and extremely vulnerable, especially given that it is often men with “difficult families” and prior failed marriages who hunt for brides in places where people are unaware of their reputation.

Ultimately, children are the greatest source of tension and joy in most Naked Gypsy families. Within Nadezhda, Naked Gypsy women are most vulnerable to abandonment if they do not have a child within a year of getting married. For example, I was told of one man who “returned” six wives in a row because they did not make him a father. Thus, this first year tends to be nerve-racking for many early teenagers whose bodies may simply not be ready. With each month, the in-laws get more and more license to call her “infertile,” to mistreat her, and to threaten her. But when she does have her child, this immediately boosts the mother’s standing in the family and in the community without generally making her life significantly more difficult. To some degree, raising children takes the whole sub-ghetto, and many relatives on both sides

pitch in with babysitting, displays of affection, moral support and advice in difficult times, food, gifts of cash, hand-me-downs, etc. From the moment a child is born, everybody in the extended family knows when, how, and to what degree he or she will be expected to contribute until it is time to get their ward married. The disciplining and monitoring aspect of parenting does not appear to be much of a burden on the young parents either. Once a child can run around and make his way in the spatial and social maze of the sub-ghetto, he is granted a surprising degree of autonomy. For most of the day, he is somewhere outside playing with friends, and if he needs to be tracked down, there is always somebody who has seen him recently and knows his whereabouts. Few families bother to create and enforce rules regarding homework and chores. I do not remember seeing unmarried girls help their mothers with the housework – they get a crash course when they get married. Youngsters of both genders are asked to make runs to the convenience store, but they usually get bribed with extra cash for sweets.

The dense social networks that see to it that most Naked Gypsy children reach adulthood often fall short when it comes to ensuring that they do so in good health. Coupled with ineptitude and avoidance, diffused responsibility is a drawback in this respect. Men only get involved with health problems in life-and-death situations. This leaves the women in charge, which poses a range of problems. Illiterate teenage mothers are inexperienced when it comes to taking charge and to dealing with external institutions, and calling them “stupid” disincentivizes them further from educating themselves and from keeping up with routine exams and vaccination calendars – they expect to be told what to do on a daily basis. On the higher level of the command chain, the mothers-in-law often fail to come through also: they have multiple youngsters to monitor, they are equally uneducated about widely-accepted practices ensuring healthy lifestyles, and they tend to prefer old home remedies that can be ineffective and

dangerous. Few make the connection between the local diet and the rampant rates of obesity and associated diseases. Most children are raised on white bread, cheap sweets, salty snacks, carbonated drinks, and greasy meats. It is rare to see children eat fresh fruits and vegetables. Living in unhygienic conditions, eating a poor diet, missing vaccines, and mingling in a dense community where epidemics spread like wildfire cause youngsters to succumb to dangerous diseases that were eradicated decades ago elsewhere. This is a problem everywhere in Nadezhda, but it is worst amongst the Naked Gypsies.⁶⁵

The Bulgarian media occasionally sensationalize stories of how “the Gypsies” “sell their daughters” at the cusp of puberty and how, “like beasts,” they do not care about their children’s education, upbringing, or health. Getting to know the Naked Gypsies makes it clear that they may indeed demand too much in steering the entire lives of their progeny, especially given that cultural inertia tends to point in maladaptive directions; that, paradoxically, they may also place too few demands on youngsters on a daily basis, thus leaving them unprepared for life in modern society; and that they lack the experience and knowledge to ensure that their children are healthy. However, this hardly means that they do not care. On the contrary, in their culturally specific ways, many parents here shower their offspring with inordinate care and affection. Against my original expectations, I did not get the sense that Naked Gypsies love their daughters less than they love their sons, but that love assumes different expressions in practice. Families tend to

⁶⁵ In the winter of 2009, an outbreak of measles coupled with viral pneumonia affected the majority of the children in the ghetto. It started amongst the Naked Gypsies, and while many Musician Gypsies and Turks knew to keep their children indoors, which reduced their rates of infection, 80-90 percent of the Naked Gypsy children got sick. Within a month, fifteen children died, aged between 40 days and 15 years. Measles is a mandatory vaccine in Bulgaria, and this outbreak – which soon spread to minority ghettos in other towns – took the public by surprise. Both residents and doctors carried responsibility for its occurrence. The ghetto residents are practically illiterate when it comes to basic health and wellness, including how to observe a vaccination schedule for children. As a backup plan, a law requires that general physicians take proactive steps to ensure that all of their assigned patients are vaccinated, but instead of going door-to-door, many doctors find it easier to simply stamp the medical record of truant children and to close the case (Dobrev; Velina).

allocate more resources to sons and to let them be more aggressive and domineering. For example, boys of all ages often feel entitled to demand cash on a whim – e.g., to purchase gaming time in the local computer halls – and parents appear unable to refuse, even if they are struggling financially. On one occasion, after a 10-year-old boy left without even thanking his mother, she turned to me and said, “See how bad he is! But he wants to play, what can I do?” Little girls, on the other hand, get a lot of personal attention and coddling, which is often geared toward preparing them to become brides. For example, many families proudly display pictures of their pre-teenage daughters dressed like brides or Indian princesses, and they expect visitors to comment on how beautiful she is and will become. As a form of compliment, people may tell the parents of a good-looking baby girl that they will want her as a daughter-in-law when she grows up. At the same time, when young girls misbehave, their relatives might threaten them teasingly, “She is very bad. We are going to marry her off [and get rid of her].” Over time, I experimented by randomly asking a dozen of girls and boys, “What do you want to be when you grow up? Do you want any kind of job?” All girls responded with blank and confused looks at first, although if I pressed further, a couple actually said, “A teacher” or “A singer.” By contrast, almost every boy replied confidently that he wanted to be an athlete or a policeman.

Conclusion

Sliven is not a big city, but it contains two vastly different worlds. North of the railroad is a modern – though not prosperous – Eastern European town emerging from the toll of post-socialist economic restructuring. Even the segregated Bulgarian Gypsy neighborhood features relatively good infrastructure, a welcoming atmosphere, and a high level of social cohesion. South of the train station, however, is a walled-in ghetto that seems out of place in a modern EU

nation. The vast differences in space correspond to very different lifestyles. These differences are evident when comparing the relatively integrated Bulgarian Gypsies in the Town with the Turks, Musician Gypsies, and hyper-marginalized Naked Gypsies in Nadezhda. The Bulgarian Gypsies are struggling economically, but they fare relatively well compared to the ethnic communities in Nadezhda, whose members live under conditions of extreme segregation and deprivation. Further, the Turks, the Musician Gypsies and, especially, the Naked Gypsies continue to embrace patriarchal ideas and practices that the Bulgarian Gypsies have long abandoned.

This descriptive chapter has set the stage for the more analytical chapters that follow. For example, demonstrating the extreme segregation and marginality in Nadezhda helps one understand why entrepreneurial pastors seek to live off religion, which is the subject of Chapter Three. Highlighting the high levels of morbidity and mortality in the ghetto accounts for why so many people turn to the Evangelical churches in search of miraculous healing, which is addressed in Chapter Four. Detailing the patriarchal practices that persist in Nadezhda and the extreme encapsulation of its inhabitants sets the stage to explain why joining Evangelical churches has done so little to advance the status of Nadezhdan women.

CHAPTER THREE

LIVING OFF RELIGION IN NADEZHDA: ENTREPRENEURS AND THE FLOW OF RESOURCES IN ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS

Since the fall of socialism, a localized and homegrown form of Evangelical Protestantism has swept over Nadezhda, transforming the ghetto into an extremely competitive religious marketplace. Very few people in Nadezhda are actually familiar with the term “Protestant”⁶⁶ – local Evangelicals merely call themselves “Christians.” According to my estimates, by 2010, over eighty percent of the residents self-identified as “Christians,” although this term rarely signifies an agreed-upon set of beliefs and practices. If pressed to be more specific, many display nervousness about not knowing whether “God” is synonymous with “Jesus” or – in the case of some Turks – about having to choose between “God” and “Allah.”⁶⁷ Almost every resident has been at least once to one or more of the neighborhood’s many Evangelical churches. At any point in time, up to ten percent of the residents attend church on a fairly regular basis, albeit with high turnover rates. At least thirty Evangelical churches were established between 1990 and 2010 in Nadezhda, with variable success in terms of membership and permanence. By 2010, there were “only” fifteen. Five of the churches were exclusively Turkish; three were headed by Musician Gypsy pastors, but their members represented all ethnic communities in the neighborhood; and seven were exclusively Naked Gypsy. Given the diverse and contradictory

⁶⁶ On one occasion, when I specifically posed the question, a Musician Gypsy pastor declared that the term “[Protestant] comes from protesting. The Christians in the first century protested for the truth, and this is why we are called Protestants” (Veliko).

⁶⁷ For example, a “Christian” Turk in her 50s specified that she is not of the kind that “light candles,” but she celebrates the Orthodox Christian St. George’s Day, and she “fasts” during the Ramadan by paying somebody to do it instead of her because she has diabetes. She does not attend church because she dislikes the Turkish pastors, but if a family member gets sick, she might seek out an imam or her favorite evangelist from the Pentecostal Church downtown, if he happens to visit a Musician Gypsy church. Thus, many Nadezhdans’ spiritual beliefs and practices involve a high degree of syncretism.

accounts of my informants, I eventually gave up tracing the specific process by which each church formed. Instead, I focused on discerning general patterns in the practices and motivations of the individuals who founded and managed the churches.

Four broad categories of religious actors define the relational field in which Nadezhdan Evangelical churches are situated. The first category consists of various kinds of foreign missionaries interested in working with marginalized populations of non-believers or recent converts. The foreign missionaries that have become especially influential in the Nadezhdan religious field do not represent tightly structured organizations characterized by dense bureaucratic infrastructures and centralized channels of authority (such as the Seventh Day Adventists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Mormons); for reasons to be explored later, these kinds of foreign actors have failed to establish a substantial ongoing presence in the ghetto. The foreign religious actors that have been influential here represent loosely structured transnational associations of churches that are essentially autonomous from each other and from central authoritative bodies on the national or transnational levels. When the Bulgarian religious marketplace opened in the 1990s, such churches from the West – and the weakly organized denominations to which they belonged – poured money and personnel into the country. Soon, most of the foreign evangelists and money moved on to new spiritual battlegrounds (such as the Caucasus, the Middle East, and East Asia), but a few missionaries continued to work in the country, often with disadvantaged populations that are most open to converting to Evangelical Christianity and most in need of material aid. In the case of Nadezhda, their level of commitment has varied, ranging from short one-time visits, to supplying funds for founding new churches, to staffing short-term medical centers and running long-term child-sponsorship programs from a distance.

In order to work in the country, foreign religious actors depend on Bulgarian interpreters, consultants, and guides, whom they – or others in their transnational religious networks – often trained and appointed as leaders of neo-Protestant denominations in Bulgaria in the early-to-mid 1990s. Although they visit Sliven only occasionally, such Bulgarian denominational leaders constitute the second category of key religious actors exerting influence in the Nadezhdan religious field. Most were educated abroad, depend on foreign funding to run a variety of foundations, and can easily appeal to affluent patrons using their transnational denominational networks. Their strategy for simultaneously attracting resources and for expanding their denominations has been to serve as indispensable intermediaries between foreigner missionaries and Roma religious entrepreneurs in impoverished communities, such as Nadezhda. To attract foreign missionaries, they proselytize in ethnic ghettos and villages and boast of having tens of thousands of Roma members in need of spiritual salvation and material assistance. To attract Roma religious entrepreneurs, they offer pastors a high degree of local church autonomy and access to foreign sponsors. Most churches in Nadezhda belong to such organizationally weak neo-Protestant denominations, whose leaders do very little to offer guidance or get to know their member pastors and congregations, but also demand little accountability and transparency of them in return.

The third category of relevant religious actors in Nadezhda consists of the main protagonists of this chapter – the local church leaders. In the mid-1990s, as they faced vanishing job opportunities and diminishing government welfare, dozens of ambitious and resourceful Nadezhdan men realized that Evangelical churches constituted a potential venue for procuring and appropriating external resources, as long as these resources flowed through relations that were not monitored by strong umbrella organizations. Their goal has been to found fully

autonomous churches that have been run less like ecclesiastical bureaucratic organizations and more like family enterprises ruling over docile and disorganized congregations, accountable neither to denominational leaders nor to lay church members. The Bulgarian extra-local Protestant denominational leaders have been particularly willing partners in this scheme. They have eagerly ordained barely-qualified “pastors” and registered new “churches” without demanding any subsequent accountability or transparency. In their position as intermediaries, they have also helped with the other major obstacles facing segregated and poorly educated pastors – their lack of foreign contacts and inability to communicate with missionaries.

Conspicuously absent from the Nadezhdan field in 2010 was a fourth category of religious actors: Protestant church leaders from the Town. Given their local knowledge and their crucial role in the early history of the Nadezhdan Evangelical community, their absence may appear surprising at first. I shall argue that it is explained by the interplay between the structural characteristics of the Protestant churches in the Town and the Nadezhdan pastors’ interest in autonomy. Some of the Protestant churches in Sliven boast a solid historical presence here, while others arrived only recently, but all belong to denominations where oversight is practiced along clearly designated channels of authority and where accountability and transparency are expected within and among member churches. The degree of organizational strength and centralization of authority varies across denominations (e.g., the Jehovah’s Witnesses are micro-managed by their headquarters overseas to an extreme degree, whereas the Bulgarian Gypsy Pentecostal churches are relatively autonomous), but compared to the extra-local neo-Protestant intermediaries, the leaders of the Protestant churches in Sliven tend to be much more involved in the affairs of their affiliate churches in the region, to hold subordinate pastors accountable, and to place exacting spiritual, moral, and behavioral demands on the lay members of those churches.

Local Protestant leaders also tend to be suspicious of the practice of channeling material aid to affiliate churches indiscriminately, as they believe that it breeds dependency and corruption. Thus, even though many of the Sliven-based religious actors could in principle link Nadezhdan Christians to strong transnational organizations with ample resources, the pastors in the ghetto have avoided working with them (and after a few unpleasant experiences, the local Protestant leaders in the Town have not been eager to work with Nadezhdans either).

The argument of this chapter is that many Nadezhdan pastors have been driven less by the imperative to save souls, build communities, or reestablish a sense of moral and social order than by the desire to seek benefits for themselves and for their families. To this end, they have bypassed opportunities to establish stable, close relationships with local Protestants in Sliven and instead have sought access to resources embedded in looser international Evangelical networks by establishing relationships with extra-local intermediaries. Manipulating the multiplicity of scales that characterize the Evangelical networks in which they are embedded, the Nadezhdan pastors have carved out a niche that allows them to live off religion, operating outside of the organizational gaze of meddlesome denominations.⁶⁸ The religious dynamics in this niche hardly constitute “organized religion” in the sense that is familiar to people in the developed world. Nominally, the ghetto features over a dozen formally registered churches led by ordained pastors and representing powerful denominations, but local religious practices and organizational structures are characterized by persistent fluidity, ruthless competitiveness, rampant corruption, and lack of bureaucratization and institutionalization.

⁶⁸ Pastors are not singular in such pursuits. NGO staff in resource-poor environments are similarly notorious for using their positions to benefit their kin, although they tend to be more accountable to the organizations whose money they acquire.

Literature Review

Surprisingly little has been written about how the flow of resources through transnational religious networks facilitates corrupt practices by local religious actors in developing societies. The scholarship on Evangelical Christianity in non-Western countries mentions this phenomenon, but it usually does so in passing and without giving it the full analytical attention it deserves.⁶⁹ An exception I came across is a small set of working papers written by experienced missionaries for the World Council of Churches. While these reports are meant to provide moral guidance and practical advice to religious leaders, they also detail scandalous examples of religious corruption from around the world (Stückelberger 2010, 66-83), describe the harm it inflicts on religious communities (especially on the most disadvantaged members, such as women), and propose strategies for fighting it (Thiel et al 2007). Stückelberger, for example, places particular importance on the need for oversight, accountability, and transparency – both within and across churches. According to him, the current forms of religious corruption in the global South can be traced to a series of conferences in the post-colonial period, when the global Christian community decided that churches in developing countries would be autonomous partners to their former mother institutions from the North, but the latter were also expected to continue sharing their material resources. Subsequently, many foreign donors lack the leverage to demand transparency and accountability, which facilitates bad practices (53-55).⁷⁰ Such reports, however, are written from a moralistic perspective and for religious practitioners; hence,

⁶⁹ Practically all my informants – foreign missionaries, denominational heads, pastors, or lay church members – admitted that dishonesty was an endemic problem in the relations between donors and recipients. Yet, many did not voice their concerns in public because they worried that this would jeopardize their funding, mission, contacts, or reputation. The same dynamics are described in the comparative literature on international NGOs, especially scholarship that focuses on strategies of extraversion (Igoe 2003).

⁷⁰ Gifford (1998) confirms that this is a problem that is particularly salient for Evangelical missionaries. Constrained by the language of “partnership,” their only recourse to countering corruption is to leave the country.

they do not subject the extraction of resources from transnational religious networks to sustained analytical scrutiny.

My analysis of Nadezhdan pastors' efforts to live off religion by drawing resources from loosely organized and non-constraining international networks builds on and critically engages three bodies of scholarly literature: (1) the literature on strategies of extraversion, (2) the literature that examines the position of "brokers" or "mediators" within social networks; and (3) the literature on religious economies. The first body of scholarship originates from the works of Jean-Francois Bayart (1993), who argues that since the colonial era, embattled sub-Saharan African elites have deliberately sought dependence on foreign actors as a strategic mode of action. He calls this phenomenon "strategies of extraversion," or "mobilizing resources derived from (possibly unequal) relationships with the external environment" (2000, 218). Consequently, political and economic actors have come to perceive the external environment as a major resource to be coveted and competed over.

Expanding on Bayart's work, a number of researchers have demonstrated that enterprising individuals in developing societies have been creative in adopting and adapting extraversion strategies to take advantage of diverse external resources. Igoe (2006; 2003) and Gugerty and Kremer (2008) demonstrate that well-meaning but ill-informed Western donors who seek to strengthen civil society in Africa often support NGOs that are mismanaged, misdirected, and exploited by local leaders wishing to appropriate their resources. For example, some local leaders who were entrusted to facilitate the Pastoral Land Rights movement in Tanzania expended most of their efforts competing with each other over funding and power, acting as estranged administrative staff (as opposed to involved community organizers), and positioning themselves as gatekeepers between foreign donors and beneficiary communities in order to

manipulate and exploit both (Igoe 2003, 866). Gugerty and Kremer (2008) argue that foreign funding may diminish the degree to which severely disadvantaged populations engage in civic associations, as it changes the nature of civic organizations' leadership and membership. In their study of women's community associations in Kenya, the authors show that the introduction of foreign resources attracts younger, better educated, more competitive, and wealthier men and women, who are skilled in pursuing strategies of extraversion and who displace and alienate the original disadvantaged members. Gugerty and Kremer's observations reflect the dynamics in the so-called "Gypsy NGO industry" that proliferated in Eastern Europe after 1990. Lured by foreign donors, thousands of relatively educated upper- and middle-class Roma founded NGOs that have absorbed foreign funds without actually helping or engaging the most disadvantaged minority communities (Barany 2002).⁷¹ Consequently, very few marginalized Roma in Bulgaria trust NGOs that claim they wish to help.

The literature tends to discuss extraversion as a strategy of elites, who are in a better position to have exposure to the external world. Nadezhda demonstrates that extremely ghettoized, stigmatized, impoverished, and uneducated people can creatively procure external resources as well, provided the opportunity and the proper nexus of social actors. In this case, the opportunity came in the form of missionaries. Some authors argue that while foreign aid and secular NGOs tend to benefit primarily the elites in developing societies, foreign missionaries are more popular and effective among the poor (Clark et al 2006; Peklmans 2009) because they do not create or exacerbate inequality (Pfeiffer 2002) and because they decry corruption (Marshall-

⁷¹ Whereas in the 1990s, the EU, Western governments, and private foundations were the primary funders of Roma NGOs, in more recent years, the sector has been also funded in context of the Decade of Roma Inclusion spanning the years 2005-2015. Labeled as a failure by many, the Decade has been a major funding initiative involving European states, intergovernmental, and non-governmental organizations (<http://romadecade.org/about-the-decade-decade-in-brief>).

Fratani 1998). Indeed, compared to IGOs and most transnational NGOs (which tend to work with Roma elites), transnational Evangelical organizations have been more consistent, convincing, and successful in their efforts to work with marginalized Nadezhdans, albeit with the help of intermediaries. Hundreds of missionaries have visited the ghetto, and hundreds of thousands of dollars have been donated for religious and social projects here. Instead of improving the overall wellbeing of the community, however, well-meaning external religious actors have created incentives for dozens of local men to divert the inflow of resources and to shape local religious dynamics in ways that advance their own interests.

A few scholars have attempted to adapt and extend the concept of extraversion to analyze religious actors in resource-poor environments by arguing that religious forms of extroversion are fundamentally different from the economic forms preoccupying secular actors – to the point where they dramatically alter the original meaning of the term to describe entirely different dynamics from those depicted by Bayart and the scholars following in his footsteps. Englund (2003), for example, employs the term “extraversion” to examine how Malawian Pentecostals struggle for “radical equality in a global community” of believers through their embeddedness in transnational organizational networks (108), or what Gifford (1998) calls “externality”. For Ukah (2003), on the other hand, extraversion is “the use of [missionary organizations] as a conduit for bringing in external ideas, innovations and practices into the [Nigerian churches]” (278). Gifford (1998) similarly describes African churches practicing “extraversion” by encouraging their members to orient themselves culturally to the West. My observations in Nadezhda, however, demonstrate that in some contexts, local religious leaders show little interest in organizational externality or the cultural cosmopolitanism of their followers, since these two

forms of extraversion might distract from and potentially confound their pursuits of external resources.

While these authors do discuss self-interested religious actors scheming to appropriate external resources, they are reluctant to problematize such dynamics. Ukah (2003) claims that Pentecostal churches in Nigeria do not pursue economic forms of extroversion (283). Englund (2001; 2003) sympathizes with frustrated local pastors who blame their failure to find missionaries willing to give them money and autonomy on the stinginess, corruption, and micro-management of foreigners. And even though Gifford (1998) quotes Evangelical Christians complaining about corrupt individuals stealing money and repelling donors (278), he concludes that foreign sponsors benefit African churches as a whole because they provide congregations with independence, including from the government (312-314). My observations in Nadezhda, however, demonstrate that external funds primarily benefit individual pastors and their families, rather than the congregations. In fact, while benefitting the leaders, church autonomy in the Nadezhdan context tends to hurt the congregation, as will be argued in Chapter Four.

A second body of work that informs my analysis focuses on the concept of “brokerage” in network theory. Simply put, brokerage describes a situation where a structural hole (or the lack of a direct tie) exists between two actors and a third actor serves as a bridge between them, often in ways that make both alters dependent on the broker (Burt 1992). When a broker, or a mediator, occupies many such bridging positions, she is said to have a high degree of “betweenness centrality” in her network (Freeman 1977) and can potentially accrue power and various kinds of resources from this structural position (Gould 1989; Marsden 1983; Powell et al 1996; Powell et al 2005). Central positions in social networks, when coupled with having many

weak ties, are positively correlated with having a high degree of social capital (Blyler and Coff 2003).

According to the classification of brokerage mechanisms suggested by Spiro et al (2013), the mediators who work in Nadezhda engage in “transfer brokerage.” In this form of brokerage, the mediator conducts resources from one party to another without allowing direct ties to be made between his alters. In fact, in the Nadezhdan case the mediators are very careful that such ties are never made, even though this would benefit both of their alters. This is an important element of their own strategy of extraversion, as this enables them to control and appropriate the flow of resources in their networks. The mediators in question are the Bulgarian leaders of decentralized international charismatic denominations with extensive weak ties to both Roma pastors and foreign missionaries. Roma pastors and foreign missionaries are divided by a structural gap based on their inability to communicate and the high degree of social encapsulation of Nadezhdans. The mediators help transfer material resources from the missionaries to the pastors (and in the process benefit themselves), and they also help the foreigners acquire personal satisfaction and humanitarian capital from doing missionary work (however ineffective it may be, as the foreign benefactors lack personal knowledge of and connections to their Nadezhdan beneficiaries).

The third body of work that I engage is the literature on religious economies. The basic premise of the religious economies model is that in conditions of religious pluralism, religious fields operate as “marketplaces,” where consumers choose among competing religious suppliers depending on the “goods” (beliefs and ideas) they offer (Finke and Stark 1988; Stark 2006; Stark 2007; Stark and Bainbridge 1985; Warner 2002; Wortham 2004). While this perspective is useful

in understanding how pastors act in their role as small-scale entrepreneurs, the dynamics in the ghetto put into question key assumptions and findings of this literature.

First, the religious economies model tends to focus on religious entrepreneurs' competition for followers, rather than for resources. The issue of resources itself has been explored primarily as it affects competition for members. Thus, Chesnut (2003), Finke and Stark (2005, 11), and Young (1997) argue that state-supported religious organizations lose their incentive to market their spiritual goods and satisfy their followers, whereas churches that depend on members work harder to proselytize and keep their flock. The state is absent from the Nadezhdan religious field, but the impoverished and disillusioned residents are either unable or unwilling to provide sufficient support for the churches or for the ministers. Consequently, Nadezhda exemplifies a very different dimension of religious competition, where many religious entrepreneurs – especially Naked Gypsies and Turks – focus a substantial part of their efforts on pursuing external resources and do little to attract and keep members.

Second, scholars in this tradition tend to argue that in competitive environments, spiritual providers will differentiate their product in order to capture non-overlapping niches of the market by appealing to consumers who desire different goods due to “normal variations in the human conditions, such as social class, age, gender, health, life experiences, and socialization” (Finke and Stark 2005, 9-10, 12; see also Chesnut 2003; Young 1997; Witham 2010, 129-132). However, Bush (2010) has challenged this assumption. In exploring why most Christian denominations have a majority of female members while their products cater to men, she notes that the religious economies model fails to “interrogate the restrictive conditions under which the supply of religion is produced and posits market success to be primarily a function of product appeal, while downplaying variation in the power and resources that allow for production and

distribution” (2010, 305). In Nadezhda, the power relations on the supply side of the local religious economy have had the peculiar effect of *diminishing* product differentiation. Despite being over-populated by dozens of churches embroiled in fierce competition, the Nadezhdan religious marketplace has also been distorted by barriers to entry, nepotism, and cliques that limit and disempower religious consumers. There are no differences among the ghetto’s churches in terms of the beliefs and ideas they teach, or what they expect from their members. Each ethnic group has established its own distinctive churches in terms of the language, music, and worship and preaching style. There are also slight stylistic variations among a few of the Turkish churches and among the three Musician Gypsy churches. The Naked Gypsy churches, however, are practically identical to each other in all aspects, and Naked Gypsy Christians usually choose churches based entirely on their personal relationship with the pastors.

Third, some religious economies scholars have argued that religious organizations that demand high levels of commitment from their members tend to be successful precisely because they require more investment from their followers and thereby chase away free riders, who would otherwise dampen the zeal of the whole group (Finke and Stark 2005; Iannaccone 1994). But churches and denominations that exact a lot of effort, time, and money from members have performed extremely poorly in Nadezhda. I identify three reasons for this failure. First, in their critique of the hypothesis that links church strictness and success, Roozen and Hodaway (1993) suggest that geography and demographic characteristics are better predictors of whether a demanding church will succeed among a specific population. Indeed, Nadezhdans are destitute and poorly educated (and the women, in particular rarely partake of regular activities outside of the house), which makes the ghetto a tough place for churches that demand tithes, intense learning, and time investment. Second, in order to mobilize resources, a church needs to be

organizationally strong to begin with (Marwell 1996). Well-organized churches, however, cannot be easily run like semi-fraudulent family enterprises, which is what many Nadezhdan pastors wish to do. Finally, the local pastors have been unwilling to welcome tightly organized, centralized, and demanding denominations on their turf, because this would threaten their autonomy and bring in unwanted outsiders who might scrutinize their practices.

To summarize, the religious economies literature focuses on competition, and while the Nadezhdan religious field is indeed intensely competitive, the dynamics and consequences of this competition are different from those emphasized in the literature. Here, religious entrepreneurs compete for material resources, as opposed to followers; there is little product differentiation to satisfy diverse consumers; and churches and denominations that exact high levels of commitment from members have proven entirely unsuccessful. As Chapters Four and Five will show, this has significant consequences for the internal social dynamics in the churches and for the effects these churches have had on gender dynamics in the ghetto.

Organization of the Chapter

Chapter Three will proceed by providing a brief background sketch of the roles that the two main traditional religions in Bulgaria – Islam and Orthodox Christianity – played in the religious dynamics of segregated Nadezhda before the 1990s. I will show that despite a nominal association with Islam, the vast majority of the population in Nadezhda embraced syncretic and ambiguous beliefs and practices. I will also discuss why the current monopoly of Evangelical pastors in the Nadezhdan religious marketplace has gone unchallenged. The BOC has never engaged the stigmatized population in the ghetto, and it has no plans to do so. Starting only a decade ago, a small minority of Turks have adopted a “scholarly” Islam that was introduced by

transplanted imams, but the movement does not appear to be picking further momentum and it discriminates against Musician and Naked Gypsies.

Second, I will provide a historical account of the appearance of the first Evangelical Christians in Nadezhda in the mid-to-late 1980s. I will show how small home prayer groups with ties to Protestant actors in downtown Sliven were established by a handful of unusually independent Nadezhdan women.

Third, I will analyze the relations between the Protestant leaders downtown and the male pastors of the numerous churches that have emerged in the ghetto since the early 1990s. I identify a set of characteristics of the Protestant churches in the Town that set them apart from their Nadezhdan counterparts. I then focus on two that have had significant consequences for the relationships between Protestant actors in Sliven and Evangelical leaders in Nadezhda: (1) the degree to which they belong to relatively centralized denominations that demand accountability and transparency, and (2) the degree to which they rely on external funding for their survival and comfort and to attract affiliate churches. I analyze why Nadezhdan pastors severed their ties with the Protestant actors in Sliven in search of autonomy, which the latter were unwilling to provide.

Fourth, I will identify and analyze the kinds of foreign actors that have taken an interest in Nadezhda over the past twenty years and discuss the Nadezhdan pastors' strategies of extraversion. I will show that foreign missionaries have been instrumental in providing local clergy with key material and social resources, such as church buildings, houses, monetary and material support, appeal to potential church members, and cumulative prominence in the larger Protestant field. Depending on their level of education and cultural and professional background, some leaders have an easier time engaging with external actors than others, which

generates unequal access to resources. People-pleasing Musician Gypsy pastors are the most advantaged, while the most socially and culturally marginalized and transparently entrepreneurial Naked Gypsies are the most disadvantaged. I will argue that Nadezhdan pastors have been unwilling to work with Protestant leaders downtown because in addition to refusing to provide churches in the ghetto with sufficient autonomy, the latter are unwilling to serve as mediators between the pastors and foreign sources of material benefits.

Fifth, I will explore why in the mid-to-late 1990s Nadezhdan church leaders started to gravitate toward decentralized and hands-off charismatic denominations with good foreign ties but no local representatives. The extra-local Bulgarian leaders of such denominations often use Roma as part of their own strategies of extraversion in order to appeal to foreign donors interested in working with marginalized populations. While they channel some material benefits to the local pastors, they are also willing to provide them with an extreme degree of autonomy, and they are not interested in enforcing any rules about how Nadezhdans should “do” Christianity. Still, relations between Nadezhdan and distant denominational leaders remain fraught with suspicions over exclusion, prejudice, exploitation, and abuse. From their weak position of power, Nadezhdan ministers employ a variety of strategies to attempt to circumvent their dependence on Bulgarian mediators. As part of this section, I will also discuss the nature of the relationships between Nadezhda churches and missionaries. The majority of the foreigners who visit the ghetto are short-term and one-time “religious tourists” who pursue personal growth and excitement performing their Christian duty while encountering exotic communities. They do not engage with the locals in a meaningful way, aside from potentially donating money for church development that benefits only the pastor. Other missionaries with humanitarian orientations have attempted to make inroads in the ghetto in the past, but fraud, language

barriers, misunderstanding of local culture, poor transparency and accountability arrangements, distrust between Roma and mediators, and an inability to triangulate information from diverse reliable sources have derailed former projects and deterred the initiation of new ones.

Missionaries interested in discipleship or mentorship have a difficult time working in Nadezhda for similar reasons.

Finally, I will briefly describe by way of comparison the dynamics in the religious field encompassing the Pentecostal Bulgarian Gypsy churches in Sliven. Bulgarian Gypsy Pentecostals have much stronger ties with local Protestants, and they belong to churches where transparency is the norm and where it is accepted that the leaders should be accountable both to denominational leaders and to their congregations. They have close, direct, and long-term ties to foreign religious actors, but unlike Nadezhdan pastors, they are much less concerned with extracting material resources from such ties. Instead, they become “disciples” of foreign actors who serve as their spiritual mentors over the course of years.

Islam and Orthodox Christianity

It would be misleading to suggest a defined “religious field” in Nadezhda prior to the early 1990s. In the past, Bulgarians in Sliven lumped all ethnic groups to the south of the railroad in the category of “Turkish Gypsies” and considered them “Muslim.”⁷² But the memories of modern-day residents across all communities suggest that over the span of the last three generations, at least, the actual practices and beliefs of locals were heterodox and syncretic.

⁷² Some contemporary Muslims in Nadezhda insist that “Muslimness” is essential to the ethnic identity of the Turks in the ghetto and still decry the “National Revival” campaign that took place in 1980s (Pastor Adem; Egemen). That campaign involved renaming all Turkish-speaking citizens in Bulgaria, forcing them to speak only Bulgarian, forbidding the practice of circumcision, forbidding them from wearing traditional ethnic clothes, and making them “realize” and “remember” that historically they are of Bulgarian origin. Nadezhdans – especially Turks – were directly affected by the Revival campaign. Nowadays, many Turks still use their Bulgarian and Turkish names interchangeably. This holds especially true for Turks who have converted to Christianity.

The closest mosque was in the nearby village of Chintulovo, and some residents went there occasionally for talismans, spells, or to perform *kurban* (the sacrificial slaughter and consumption of lambs shared with family, neighbors, and strangers). The rest of the time, Nadezhdans embraced a mix of practices derived from Islam, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and folklore during holidays, special occasions, and in times of need. For example, families held *kurban* on the day of the Christian St. George,⁷³ and some people with Christian names (such as Ivan/John, Petar/Peter, or Yordan/Jordan) celebrated the days of their “patron” saints. Residents executed most rituals without calling for ordained clerics of either faith. A local Turk performed the vast majority of circumcisions, and my older informants did not remember using imams even for funerals, although a few recalled that their grandparents had mentioned it as a practice from yore.

Although the syncretic mix of practices contained elements derived from the Orthodox culture, the BOC has been strikingly absent from Nadezhda. This is paradoxical, given that Orthodoxy is the vastly predominant religion in the country. Enjoying the monopoly as the state and national Church for over a century, the BOC has practiced very little proselytism since the 19th century,⁷⁴ especially among populations like the Nandezhdans, who have been deemed undesirable and unredeemably non-Bulgarian (Bogomilova 2003). It never attempted to build a church in the vicinity of the ghetto, and it never sent priests within its walls. For their part, Nadezhdans have long considered it bad luck to come across a priest in a long black frock, to the point where they cross the street to avoid doing so (similarly to the way in which some Westerners avoid crossing paths with black cats). Consequently, in times of special need – such

⁷³ This tradition continues to be practiced nowadays by most Musician and Naked Gypsies, as well as some Turks, including Evangelicals, to the chagrin of some pastors and external Evangelical actors.

⁷⁴ Chesnut (2003) describes similar dynamics in the Latin American context.

as disease, infertility, or family crises – Nadezhdans used to seek the services of fortunetellers, spell-makers, and supernatural healers. These were primarily women, and prior to the fall of socialism, they were the main authoritative players in a localized “religious field” with minimal traces of “organized religion.”

The numerous Evangelical churches that currently operate in Nadezhda have a near monopoly in the local religious marketplace, as they continue to face no challenges from the main religious institutions in Bulgaria – the BOC and the Chief Mufti or other Islamic organizations from abroad that have started to proselytize elsewhere in the country in the past two decades (Ghodsee 2005a; Ghodsee 2009). In the 1990s, one of the local Orthodox priests pushed for the purchase of municipal land on the outskirts of the ghetto to build a chapel, but the Eparchy refused, and then “[the BOC] missed the moment because [...] the Protestants came” (Father Apostol). In his opinion, this lapse was critical, because “the Gypsies are the future of Bulgaria and we are digging our own grave by ignoring them.”⁷⁵ He and another young priest have ventured south of the walls once or twice to visit the only practicing Orthodox Christian there – a Musician Gypsy woman whose “integrated” demeanor, attitudes, and lifestyle (including having two live-in Bulgarian daughters-in-law) differentiate her sharply from her neighbors. But realistically speaking, two priests – who are already inundated with work elsewhere – cannot spread Orthodoxy door-to-door in Nadezhda, especially in view of the above-mentioned superstition about encountering a black-robed priest (Father Apostol). Just as the BOC stays out of Nadezhda, Nadezhdans tend to stay out of its establishments. I met residents who had visited Orthodox churches downtown, either out of curiosity or to light candles for

⁷⁵ One indication of how clueless some representatives of the BOC are about Roma culture is that the same well-meaning priest also stated, “the Roma will love the Byzantine chants, which are closest to their mentality and musicality.”

wishes, but they did not feel encouraged to return. The easier it is to recognize a visitor as a Nadezhdan, the more likely she is to complain about feeling scrutinized and uninvited (Musician Gypsy woman in her mid-30s). Indeed, the abbess of a monastery in the region cited personal experiences as proof that Roma often come to church to steal or beg, and hence they should be watched. Father Apostol acknowledged the problem with a sigh: “Yes, we need to treat church visitors from Nadezhda better.”

As the alleged “traditional” religion of Nadezhda, Islam has a more visible presence in the ghetto and more followers than the BOC. It has also undergone a process of modernization over the past two decades. In the late 1990s, a “scholarly” imam, Hakan, moved to Sliven from another part of the country and introduced “not a new religion, but the right version of the old one” (Emin Imam). He opened a small school and an office in a local house, gathered about twenty Turkish youths, taught them to read the Quran and to live by it, and preached against magic and talisman because “they are from the Devil.”⁷⁶ When I was in Sliven, three imams worked in Nadezhda: Hakan, a young Pomak from southern Bulgaria, and a local Turk. About ten percent of Nadezhdan Turks today are “new” Muslims and about forty percent remain Muslims in the traditional, “pre-Hakan” sense of the term (i.e., syncretic). However, the new form of Islam has not affected the other ethnic groups in the neighborhood. The Turkish Muslims are very exclusionary vis-à-vis Gypsies, and especially Naked Gypsies. Hakan explicitly stressed the link between Islam and cleanliness through rules about frequent washing and bans on nudity in public baths, or sharing the same bed. He then argued that Gypsies did not have the predisposition to meet these demands: “Gypsies urinate and defecate everywhere – have you smelled the tunnel? [...] Only Gypsy kids have come to the mosque, but they steal and smell

⁷⁶ A handful of the youths graduated from a madrasa in Plovdiv and went to serve at other mosques in the country.

of urine, so the Turkish kids dislike them.”⁷⁷ Musician Gypsies and Naked Gypsies reciprocate the contempt, and some were worried about my getting somehow hurt or duped while interacting with the new breed of Muslims.

In 2007, the local Muslim community erected its own mosque at the main entrance to Nadezhda. However, only a dozen men and boys attend evening services, and even fewer do so during the day. During the month of Ramadan, that number doubles, and about twenty women and girls also pray on the second floor. Alarmist Evangelical pastors in the ghetto tend to exaggerate these figures. In the most dramatic instance, Cenk, a young Christian Turk in his 20s, warned that 80 percent of the Turks have turned to radical Islam and that 500-600 people go to the mosque every day. Attendance is in the hundreds only on the last three days of Ramadan, when guests from nearby villages arrive for the communal kurban sponsored by the Chief Mufti. Despite being mostly empty, the new mosque has caused much discomfort across Sliven. Nationalists have framed the building as offensive to the anti-Ottoman historical legacy of the town, and graffiti to that point has tarnished its pristine white walls. Further, many Sliveners assume that the structure is associated with the fundamentalist Wahhabi Islam that was recently imported to Bulgaria from the Mideast (Ghodsee 2009). The local Muslims, however, insist that the mosque was built by the Bulgarian Chief Mufti, who would not “allow us to seek foreign sponsors independently, otherwise we would have problems with the state” (Emin Imam). Emin Imam also emphasized his loyalty to Bulgaria by asserting that he enforced the Bulgarian language at home, that he did not let his family watch Turkish TV, and that the Quran center in Nadezhda teaches children in the Bulgarian language to prepare them for public school, “so that

⁷⁷ Other residents also accept the association between Islam and cleanliness. In complaining about the filth and chaos in Nadezhda, one Christian Musician Gypsy couple joked that they were considering converting to Islam just because Muslims were so clean and united.

others don't mock them in the future." At the same time, the leaders of the Muslim community know numerous imams in Turkey, with whom they exchange visits.

The First "Christians" in Nadezhda

There is some disagreement about when and how "Christians" first appeared in Nadezhda. A handful of informants claimed that the neighborhood contained a few "believers" as far back as the 1960s, when the area was still inhabited by Roma, Turks, and Bulgarians alike. It is possible that there were, indeed, residents who had some kind of relationship with the two Protestant churches in downtown Sliven – the Evangelical Congregational Church (henceforth, the Congregational Church) and the Evangelical Pentecostal Church (henceforth, the Pentecostal Church). Despite being persecuted by the socialist regime, these two churches and the small Protestant community associated with them have occupied a solid niche in Sliven's religious field for over a century now, and in the past, they did welcome Roma to some extent.⁷⁸

However, most Nadezhdans' historical accounts converge on a founding group of three to five women who gained prominence in the early-to-mid-1980s. They prayed secretly in the home of "the last Bulgarian" in the ghetto – the now departed Mara, who lived close to the borderline between the Musician Gypsies and the Naked Gypsies. Some of these women were unusually independent and familiar with the outside world: for example, one of them was a seamstress who sold her products at the train station; another was a traveling vendor. They also

⁷⁸ Protestantism traces its roots in Sliven to the 1880s, with the founding of the Congregational Church. Within half a century, the Pentecostal Church and a Church of the Seventh-day Adventists also joined the local religious marketplace. Combined, these early congregations contained about 150 members. They tended to be disproportionately well-educated professionals, who earned public recognition for their modern "European" dispositions and for working in the realm of temperance, women's advancement, and youth cultivation. The socialist authorities allowed the Congregational and the Pentecostal Churches to function, but under persistent harassment and under the same roof. A handful of committed families sustained a tiny, encapsulated, and increasingly conservative Evangelical community that was practically unknown to the rest of the citizenry (Valeri).

attended the Congregational and the Pentecostal Churches downtown. Within Nadezhda, they were alleged to have “gifts of prophecy and healing” (Kina), and at some point, sick and distressed neighbors started to ask them for help. Given the practical thrust of their activities, it is likely that many locals grouped them with the other female fortunetellers and healers. However, certain aspects of their methods set these women apart from traditional witchdoctors. They did not charge for their services, and they placed some responsibility onto those who sought their assistance, insisting that healing was conditional on faith and prayer. By the early 1990s, up to thirty more members had joined their prayer sessions, and these numbers swelled after the fall of socialism.

“Mara’s church” splintered in the early 1990s, however, as men took an interest in “Christianity” and the potential it presented for accumulating economic and social capital. One offshoot was headed by a Musician Gypsy man called Asen – “the founding pastor” of the Musician Gypsy Christians. The other one was headed by a Naked Gypsy man who was called Asen as well – “the founding pastor” of the Naked Gypsy Christians. A Turkish man from the village of Rechitza started a separate church for the Turks in the southwestern part of the ghetto. None of them were ordained at the time, and the former two have since passed away, whereas local, younger religious entrepreneurs eventually expelled the latter. Since then, local religious entrepreneurs have routinely created, fought over, and “hijacked” churches in the pursuit of status and legitimacy with potential members and sponsors.

Nadezhdan Pastors and Town Protestants

The Town Protestants

The first Nadezhdan Christians and Evangelical churches in the ghetto were closely tied to the Protestant churches in downtown Sliven.⁷⁹ In addition to the Congregational and Pentecostal Churches, which had been established in Sliven for decades, the major new players in the field included the Evangelical Baptist Church (henceforth, the “Baptist Church”), Dove, the Seventh Day Adventists (henceforth, the “Adventists”),⁸⁰ the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (henceforth, the “Mormons”). These churches differ from those in Nadezhda in seven key respects. I enumerate the first four briefly, and then discuss the last three in more detail. The degree to which Nadezhdan churches differ from those downtown in the fifth respect – the extent to which they demand commitment from their members – will be developed in more detail in Chapter Four, which deals exclusively with the dynamics of church life. The sixth and seventh characteristic – the degree to which pastors demand autonomy from their denominations and to which they rely on monetary support from

⁷⁹ Most Sliveners became aware of the Protestants in their midst around 1989, during the “Great Awakening,” when international evangelists arrived to spread “God’s message” in the stronghold of communism and atheism. They organized mass crusades, where they “gave witness” to fantastic miracles, told stories of personal martyrdom, and demonstrated Jesus’ power through healings, causing a fair degree of alarm among the local authorities and befuddlement in the local Evangelicals (Pavlov). Curious about anything foreign and prohibited, thousands flocked to such gatherings initially. Some of those who believed that the miracles were not staged did, in fact, “accept Christ.” Between 1990 and 1992, the combined Congregational and Pentecostal Churches overflowed with visitors from all generations, social classes, and ethnic backgrounds (Luchezar). For several reasons, however, the awakening soon reversed. First, the media and the BOC initiated a campaign against the new “sects,” claiming that they “bought” people and caused “psychological disease and split personality” (Daskalov; Father Apostol; Pavlov). Second, many self-proclaimed “rational” and “ideologically-moderate” Bulgarians were offended by the “fanatical” theological and social conservatism of the Protestant movement. Third, of those who took deeper interest in the movement, many were distracted by the challenges of managing the economic and cultural transformations of the chaotic 1990s. And fourth, some were disenchanted by the ensuing discord and competition within and across churches, as religious leaders turned against each other, congregations fragmented, and new actors appeared. But up to a thousand people – the majority of them members of the middle class and women over the age of fifty – chose to attend the old and new churches at varying rates of frequency, thus laying the foundations of today’s Protestant field in the Town.

⁸⁰ The Adventists had opened a church in Sliven in the 1920s, but the Socialist regime outlawed Adventism as a degenerate sect, so the church was shut down between the 1940s and 1990s, and its members were persecuted.

foreign sponsors – have been especially consequential for the relationship of the Protestant actors in Sliven and the Evangelical leaders in Nadezhda and will be central in the discussion of this chapter.

First, the Protestant churches in Sliven are organizationally stable and bureaucratized. Second, their leaders enjoy high levels of legitimacy among their parishioners. Third, despite occasional gossip and disagreements, the ministers of the different churches are courteous and helpful to each other, and many of the members socialize despite belonging to different congregations. Fourth, competition for members is minimal, since congregants have already picked their congregations based on individual preferences about worship style, scriptural interpretation, lifestyle, and social dynamics.⁸¹

Fifth, the Protestant churches downtown exact high levels of commitment from their members in terms of effort, time, personal transformation, and financial contributions. They tend to embrace a “corporate” – or participatory – worship style during services, which make the

⁸¹ Churches’ sizes and leaders’ dispositions strongly impact the social dynamics within churches. The Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are the smallest assemblies in the Town, and they are led by highly conservative leaders. With fewer than fifty members each, they constitute tight social circles, which provide a sense of solidarity but also make it easier for individuals to police each other and to pressure nonconformists. Many locals find such social arrangements stifling and reminiscent of indoctrinating “cults” and “sects.” The Congregational, Baptist, and Adventist Churches each have about one hundred members, which allows elders to keep track of parishioners and for members to get to know each other, but also provides more room for cliques and personal freedom. Incidentally, Dove too has about 100 members, but the bulk of interpersonal interactions take place in the contexts of small home “cells” of fewer than ten people, who get assigned based on personal choice or demographic similarity. Ministers’ personal dispositions further shape the congregations by appealing to different kinds of believers. The Adventists’ conservative elders, for example, tend to attract struggling – and often widowed – older females, who themselves used to be more religious (Orthodox or Protestant) and socially conservative even prior to 1990. These women tend to form close networks of companionship and support, which fail to accommodate younger people. The younger and more liberal Congregational Church ministers, on the other hand, find it easier to relate to working-class men and women in their 20s and 30s, who have formed a de-facto social club. Finally, with about 300 members, the Pentecostal Church makes it hardest for ministers to engage with everybody personally, so they generally let members decide whether to go to Bible classes, join social groups, or seek out individual shepherding. Some Protestants from other churches in the Town interpret this relative disengagement as snobbishness. The Pentecostal Church is especially attractive to people who dislike being pressured to invest too much ideologically, behaviorally, or socially (such as busy and affluent professionals).

members feel truly engaged in the organizational and social life of the church.⁸² In return, however, the members of the Protestant churches in Sliven are expected to become familiar with scripture and to undergo a profound spiritual and behavioral transformation in accordance with its tenets. As part of this transformation, they establish a close personal relationship with God, as opposed to merely anticipate concrete rewards from Him in return for believing in and praising Him.⁸³ The way in which this attitude contrasts with that of Nadezhdans will become apparent in Chapter Four.

⁸² For a discussion of corporate worship style, see Basden (1999). It should be noted that believers across different churches still differ in the extent to which they embrace corporate worship style. Generally speaking, services at churches that adopt “traditional” (or “reformation-style”) worship entail singing only a few hymns, calm and orderly group prayers, and a sermon that offers didactic analysis of Bible passages and relates them to spiritual, moral, and behavioral transformations. Among the Bulgarian congregations in the Town, the Adventists, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons, and the Baptists are most traditional in terms of worship style. To a lesser extent, this category also includes the Congregationalists and, paradoxically, the Pentecostals. The top Pentecostal Church leaders are descendants of the early Protestants in the Town, and they enforce distinctly non-charismatic services, tame music, and didactic sermons that explore Bible passages line by line. A leader at another local church joked that the Congregational Church is more “Pentecostal” than the Pentecostal Church. According to one account, the traditionalist old leaders of the Congregational and Pentecostal Churches were aghast when the global revivalist Derek Prince visited in the early 1990s and got 80 percent of the members to speak in tongues – he even “brought his own people to show” how it was done. Most “rational” Bulgarians, however, likened the practice to demonic possession and found the mantra “the blood of Christ” troublesome (Valeri). The most distinctive characteristic of the “contemporary” worship style is its “charismatic” and “experiential” nature, which follows in the Pentecostal tradition. It entails a much greater focus on pop-style Christian music, which is performed by a band of singers and instrumentalists. The assembly members pray, sing, clap, and dance in an uninhibited display of jubilation, and some speak in tongues, perform miraculous healings, and prophesize as a demonstration of “receiving the Holy Spirit.” The rowdy atmosphere can generate much “collective effervescence.” The sole Bulgarian Protestant church in Town that embraces a contemporary worship style is Dove, which split off from the Pentecostal Church in 1993 precisely over disagreements about charismatic practices.

⁸³ Granted, the churches downtown vary in how they interpret and apply scripture in practice. The more doctrinally and socially conservative Jehovah’s Witness, Mormons, and Adventists emphasize memorizing and using scripture as literally as possible in order to structure one’s life. In order to become members, believers are expected to undergo training and to provide a credible profession of personal faith, and once they are members, they are asked to maintain unquestioning, steady commitment and stern discipline over their habits, even if the conduct promoted by the church clashes with taken-for-granted social norms and requires members to break pre-existing social relations. For example, devoted female Jehovah’s Witnesses and Adventists give up pants and jewelry, and the Adventist pastor advocates vegetarianism and spousal permission to be alone with a member of the opposite sex. The leaders of the Congregational Church, Dove, and the Pentecostal Church are less demanding of members when it comes to literal understanding of scripture and following restrictive rules. They tend to make sermons more accessible by structuring them around worldly problems and events, and they use Bible texts in an inspirational manner to encourage personal and community growth and to provide a sense of personal direction. In the words of one Congregational Church member, whereas “conservative” churches emphasize obedience to and glorification of an awe-inspiring God, the “liberal” ones are “I-oriented,” and people go there to seek spiritual comfort and social support. He pointed out that this was evident in the lyrics of different churches’ songs. The hymns in the Adventist

Sixth, the Protestant churches in the Town are institutionally, materially, and socially embedded in national and international denominational organizational structures and informal relations. These denominations represent and legitimate member churches to the state, operate theological training facilities, and ordain and supervise ministers. To varying degrees – and depending on their extent of centralization and bureaucratization, charter rules, and infrastructural capacities – these denominational organizations also support and engage with member churches by appointing personnel, by steering routine church dynamics, by demanding financial accountability, by purchasing infrastructure, by sending material aid, by distributing literature and periodicals, and by involving believers in a larger community through youth camps, music festivals, conferences, congresses, etc. The Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Mormons belong to the most highly centralized denominations, whereas the Congregational, Pentecostal, and Baptist Churches belong to relatively decentralized ones.⁸⁴ The latter three

and Baptist Churches, he said, are often framed in terms such as “You are great,” whereas many of the contemporary songs in Congregational Church and charismatic churches often use phrases like “I praise You,” “I come to You,” and so on (Valeri). Another way of framing the difference is that the less conservative churches encourage members to exercise more agency, whereas the more conservative ones promote a more passive relationship with God. Further, the members of the latter three churches are subjected to fewer and less stringent rules: some openly have an occasional glass of wine, wear eye-catching clothing and jewelry, and watch “spiritually controversial” movies, such as *Avatar*.

⁸⁴ The Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses belong to strict hierarchical “episcopal” organizational structures, whereas the Adventists belong to a “presbyterian” denominational structure, where authority is dispersed in a complex multi-level governance system run by elders. For example, the Adventists get an externally-appointed new pastor every five years; the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons, on the other hand, rotate foreign “overseers” who live among the members and perform leadership functions; and the Jehovah’s Witnesses worship using scripts and songs that are sent from the New York headquarters every month. The branches submit part of their tithes to the headquarters, but the latter procure the buildings and may assist materially, if needed and according to set rules. The congregations vary in the extent to which they are responsible for maintaining the facilities and supporting the pastor. The Jehovah’s Witnesses get the least material support, but their members have above-average income. The Adventists receive denominational support for infrastructural maintenance and the pastor’s salary, but its members are among the poorest. The Congregational, Pentecostal, and Baptist Churches belong to denominations characterized by a “horizontal” distribution of authority. The term “congregationalist” is often used to describe a type of governance that allows autonomy to local congregations. Non-denominational churches usually embrace congregationalism in its pure form, but there are none of these in the Town. The Unions of Evangelical Congregational Churches (UECC), Pentecostal Churches (UEPC), and Baptist Churches (UEBC) have central national offices and executive boards, but these governing bodies focus more on building a sense of community among churches and individuals, as opposed to exercising administrative and managerial control over local assemblies. Dove is unusual in that it belongs to DOVE Christian Fellowship International, which lacks an office in

churches, however, have leaders with prominent standing in their respective unions, so they are still well embedded in larger organizational and personal networks.⁸⁵ In fact, their pastors are diocesan “overseers,” who vet other regional churches that ask to join the unions. For example, the “blue-blooded” Pentecostal Church pastor – who traces his ancestry back to generations of Protestants – was nominated to chair the UEPC. The Congregational Church, which boasts high traditional capital in the country, hosted the 2010 UECC National Congress. And the Baptist Church pastor is the nephew of an international Baptist luminary, who has helped him organize numerous social and charitable projects.

Seventh, with some exceptions and variations, the Protestant churches in Sliven generally do not rely on international material aid for their own survival or for attracting affiliate churches.⁸⁶ The church leaders are fairly comfortable monetarily, as they receive salaries either from their congregations or from their denominations, and while they are hardly equal in terms of wealth, physical space, and facilities (such as AC, computer technology, and AV equipment), the churches do not need to worry about making ends meet economically. Those leaders downtown who are willing to support an affiliate church materially – by lobbying for domestic

Sofia; hence the local church is directly involved with the federation leaders in the US. In principle, these unions constitute voluntaristic associations of independent peer churches that embrace similar doctrinal stances and worship style (Pastor Lonev); however, not all churches are equal in terms of the attention, respect, and support they receive from the central governing body and from other members.

⁸⁵ In decentralized denominational structures, “prominence” constitutes especially coveted capital, which can translate into status and valuable resources for the member churches. Prominence describes an actor’s connectedness and visibility within the organizational and informal social networks, and it is often premised on special advantages (kinship ties with other prominent leaders, renowned theological expertise, personal charisma, or having oversight over a church with a rare historical legacy).

⁸⁶ All denominations represented in Sliven are structured in a way that places small churches under the jurisdiction of district overseers. In some cases – such as the UECC, UEPC, UEBC, and the Mormons – these overseers are in Sliven. In the case of Dove, a “church” in Nadezhda would be considered a cell and not even a church in its own right. One possible exception is the SDAC, which embraces a Presbyterian denominational structure characterized by the lack of bishops, or overseers (here all clergy are on the same level of authority). The Adventists, however, often group small churches in a district under the leadership of a senior pastor, which means that if they were to open a church in Nadezhda, they would probably not ordain a Nadezhdan to lead it and a Bulgarian pastor would still oversee it.

or international denominational support or by seeking out funding from foreign missionaries or religious organizations – are concerned with accountability and vet recipients of aid carefully. None of the Nadezhdan churches have proven themselves in such terms in the past twenty years. When it comes to reliance on foreign material aid, the Mormons fall on one end of the spectrum. Even though the church is headed by the president of the administrative district (“stake”), the congregation is too small to afford its own building. Hence, they have been relatively dependent on central denominational authorities abroad, which purchased their building for them. But the Mormons have strict criteria as to whom they want to attract, which excludes marginalized Nadezhdans (for reasons discussed below). On the other end of the continuum is the Pentecostal Church. It constructed its large building mostly with the help of local contributions (Pastor Lonev), and its leader believes that congregations should be primarily responsible for procuring their own buildings and for supporting themselves.⁸⁷ The other churches in the Town fall in the middle of the spectrum. The Congregational Church has owned its building for over a century, and its members support the pastor and the administrative staff on their own, but the congregation receives ample foreign aid from sister churches and organizations abroad in the form of food and clothing, which it has been willing to share with affiliated congregations its leader oversees.⁸⁸ The Baptist church, the Adventists, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses have beautiful and comfortable buildings that were constructed or purchased with the contributions of

⁸⁷ By comparison, his younger peer in nearby Yambol, Pastor Gavrail, is more willing to seek out funding to support small churches that he oversees in the nearby villages. A few members of the Pentecostal Church in Sliven have independently served as bridges to foreign missionaries for Nadezhdan pastors. This includes Mr. Pavlov, whom I discuss briefly below. The Pentecostal Church’s pastor Lonev does not interfere in their activities, however, and in one case he did not even know about them.

⁸⁸ The Congregational Church has “sister churches” abroad that often send in trucks full of food and clothes. The “sisterly” connections were established through former members who emigrated from Sliven to places like Germany and the UK. The aid is distributed among the members and to daughter societies in the nearby villages. The food is rationed out for free, but members pay a nominal sum for clothing items. Whatever is left over is sold to non-members for larger sums of money.

members and/or with the help of their respective denominations.⁸⁹ Dove rents a spacious conference hall in one of the most luxurious hotels in downtown Sliven. And while all of the churches downtown have extensive foreign contacts, with the partial exception of the Baptist Church they have been reluctant to channel missionary aid to minority churches that are not part of their denominational unions.

In general, the Nadezhdan Evangelical pastors and Protestant leaders in Sliven have been reluctant to work together, although both sides have made attempts to do so at varying times and with varying success. Dove, for its part, never even tried to open a cell in Nadezhda,⁹⁰ whereas the Adventists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Mormons have made sporadic efforts to attract members among the residents, but failed completely. The Congregational, Pentecostal, and Baptist Churches were more successful, relatively speaking. Historical legacy provided the Congregational and Pentecostal Churches with a head start because the founding Nadezhdan Christians had attended their amalgamated congregation prior to 1989 and then the Congregational Church (which inherited the old shared building) during "the Great Awakening" in the early 1990s.⁹¹ But these efforts derailed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As of 2010, only the Baptist Church was still trying to establish one Turkish and one Naked Gypsy affiliate church in the ghetto, but its chances with the Naked Gypsies were very slim, as I will explain below.

⁸⁹ The Baptist Church also distributes foreign aid from German and UK donors and runs a free doctor's office that is for members only.

⁹⁰ Some Bulgarian Gypsies claim that Dove's pastors discriminate even against integrated Bulgarian Gypsies, let alone marginalized Nadezhdans. This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

⁹¹ A Turkish pastor told me, however, that when he tried to go to the Congregational and Pentecostal Churches in the late 1980s, the ministers turned him away because the anti-Turkish National Revival campaign was underway and the Bulgaria Protestant leaders did not want to get into trouble with the authorities by getting involved with a minority that was forcefully being "Bulgarized" and "integrated" in the mainstream society by the nationalizing socialist state at the time.

Racial prejudice, lack of experience with Roma culture, and inability to adapt to interacting with undereducated people may have interfered with the proselytizing efforts of all the Protestant churches in the Town. Many Nadezhdan Christians blame racism for the broken relationships between them and their Bulgarian peers in Sliven, and there seems to be much truth in that. Indeed, a Bulgarian Gypsy Jehovah's Witness who had visited the ghetto stated, "They [the Naked Gypsies] really aren't good people – they are very dirty, and how can you be friends with a dirty person who smells?" (Tanya). The elderly sister Kina, one of the founding Christians in the neighborhood, complained that a Congregational Church elder stereotyped all Nadezhdans who attended the churches downtown as users and beggars and accused them of attending only to receive aid, even though many Bulgarians themselves were doing precisely that. In other cases, lack of experience and a failure to adapt to interacting with undereducated people have undermined proselytizers' efforts. For example, for a couple of years, an Adventist elder volunteered to preach at two Naked Gypsy churches weekly, but he was discussing obscure subjects in language that was prohibitively complex (i.e., the Napoleonic wars and "pacifism"). One day, after he covered the story of Creation in minute detail, I asked the woman sitting next to me what he had said, and she responded with a shrug, "Something about the planets?"

However, my observations suggest that two major factors go further in accounting for the failure of the Town's Protestant leaders to work with Nadezhdans: (1) the degree to which authority in their denominational organizations is centralized, which affects how local pastors are ordained and appointed and demands a high degree of accountability and transparency; and (2) the fact that the representatives of the Town churches and Nadezhda ministers depend on foreign religious aid to different degrees. Even though the first Christians in Nadezhda became believers in the Bulgarian churches downtown, the latter's emphasis on centralization, accountability, and

transparency created tensions between the local external religious actors and the male Evangelical leaders. These leaders displaced the women and focused on building churches that were run as family businesses that generated material and social capital for themselves and for their families. The Nadezhdan believers mostly went along because most of them were related to the ministers and because they still wanted to benefit from the miracles the pastors promised, while they did not want to exert much effort themselves. I explore these two factors – autonomy and foreign aid – in detail below, although I give separate attention to the pastors’ strategies of extraversion through exploiting foreign religious aid by addressing it in a separate section.

Town Church Leaders and Nadezhdan Pastors’ Autonomy

In the fluid, lawless, and competitive religious environment of Nadezhda in the 1990s and early 2000s, practically anybody could become a “pastor” provided that one had some ambition and charisma. Because of the process by which religious actors claimed positions in the post-1990 religious marketplace in Nadezhda, they are not “staff” serving stable organizations and congregations. Instead, “pastors” run “their” “churches” like private establishments, often with the help of close male relatives or friends. Consequently, they set the church’s goals, and, with a handful of exceptions, they feel entitled to equate their personal interests with those of the church.

In the 1990s, earning the title of “pastor” had little to do with accumulating education, experience, and “spiritual maturity” before one could be vetted and ordained by a stable church polity and denominational overseers. Instead, pastors in Nadezhda claimed to draw their legitimacy from divine anointment and de-facto leadership positions. For example, one pastor bragged about being drunk, walking into a church, being anointed by the Holy Spirit, and preaching within days. And tens of men who do not even belong to a congregation nowadays

still feel entitled to the title of “pastor” because at some point they presided over a “church” (often a home group), with or without ordination or formal training. Whereas one generally needs proper schooling to progress as a leader at Protestant churches in the Town, many of the early Nadezhdan ministers emerged as leaders informally and then pursued schooling so that they could solidify their legitimacy, get formally ordained, and register (or take over) a church. Further, while Bulgarian and Bulgarian Gypsy pastors have degrees from elite theological colleges in the country or abroad, undereducated Nadezhdan pastors get certified by unaccredited programs that do not require school diplomas for admission and that offer simplified curricula.⁹² Theological training for Roma is offered either as separate courses in ethnically mixed institutes or in segregated educational centers run by domestic Protestant organizations; distance learning through the mail is an option that is also particularly popular (Toncho).⁹³ These educational facilities and the people who run them will be discussed further below.

The lack of education, experience, spiritual maturity, and proof of character of Nadezhdan pastors created a major fissure with Protestant actors in the town when it came to registering affiliate churches. In the case of the extremely centralized and bureaucratized denominational structures – the Adventists, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Mormons – the rift has been impossible to bridge, since the external actors demand to send in and to rotate their own leaders, who have been trained extensively elsewhere and who have proven to be reliable to the central authorities. Such a scenario is unacceptable to the religious entrepreneurs in Nadezhda,

⁹² Leaders of doctrinally conservative denominations with historical roots in the country – such as the UECC, the UEBC, and the UEPC – denigrate such centers because of their low admission and academic standards. A clergy at one of the Bulgarian churches in the Town complained that he had Roma classmates at a more demanding training facility, and those Roma were given simplified exams and allowed to keep them overnight in order to pass.

⁹³ The closest educational center is in Stara Zagora, but most of the earliest pastors went to Samokov and Burgas.

since it would undermine their scheme of accumulating material and social capital by running their “churches” as they see fit.⁹⁴

The relationships between Nadezhdan Christians and the less centralized Protestant denominations in Sliven have been more complex. As I mentioned above, the leaders of the Congregational, Pentecostal, and Baptist churches are regional overseers who are in the position to evaluate local churches and to decide whether they are worthy of acceptance in their respective unions; although there is some variation, they tend not to grant this status easily. In the mid-1990s, the pastor of the Congregational Church, Pastor Veselinov, moved to form a “society” that would have incorporated a couple of early Nadezhdan churches. In the UECC, “societies” constitute “daughter cells” without ordained pastors – something akin to “embryo churches” waiting for approval to move on to full recognition. Their “mother church” oversees them closely until the leaders and the members reach sufficient maturity.⁹⁵ According to Naked Gypsy informants, Pastor Veselinov found a potential foreign church sponsor for a building and

⁹⁴ I encountered a particularly telling example of that general incompatibility in the Turkish (Gypsy) ghetto in the nearby town of Nova Zagora. A church there joined the Union of the Churches of the Seventh Day Adventist because it invests heavily in its churches in terms of material resources. Also, a health and housing development foundation associated with the union – Adra – is famous for transforming a Roma ghetto in the city Kyustendil in southwestern Bulgaria. However, the members of the church did not want to attend weekly Bible classes and (learn to) read. Adventist doctrine also does not allow members to publicly present needs in churches. The Union paid for the church building, but it sent a Bulgarian elder to live in the ghetto and to become the new pastor there. However, the old local pastor led an exodus of members and registered another church with a decentralized charismatic denomination. The Adventists left the neighborhood and never returned.

⁹⁵ In 2010, the Congregational Church had ten societies in the villages around Sliven, including some that were Roma. They had about ten adult members each. Designated preachers visited the cells every Sunday, and they routinely examined their financial accounts and activity reports. Becoming a society would have curtailed the power of the Nadezhda pastors, but the congregations might have benefited in at least three ways: First, of the churches in Town, the Congregational Church receives the most aid, and some of it always goes to the cells it oversees in nearby villages. Second, the UECC has been fairly successful in finding foreign sponsors to purchase or construct churches, although the Union owns the deeds. Third, my observations suggest that after years of visitations, some Congregational Church preachers have established close interpersonal relations with members of their entrusted groups; in the context of one Roma cell I visited occasionally, this has led to the thinning of ethnic boundaries. Every Sunday, in an informal and relaxed setting, three Bulgarians and up to a dozen Roma share their experiences of the past week and trade insights on dealing with diverse kinds of problems (sickness, accidents, unemployment, conflicts with neighbors, handling unruly teenage daughters, singlehood, teenage motherhood, etc.). Also, the visiting team includes a teacher, who takes the children to a backroom for interactive Bible school.

asked a local Turkish Pastor to coordinate the merging of the Nadezhdan churches, since holders of external resources place importance on large constituencies. However, the cunning Turk “showed the Gypsies” to Turkish-speaking missionaries, misrepresented himself as the leader of “all churches in Nadezhda,” and convinced them to build *him* a “church” that included a lavish three-story house (Pastor Kalcho; Vitan). The Naked Gypsy church leaders, on the other hand, became enticed by other denominations that allowed them more autonomy, in addition to more material benefits. The rationale behind their choice will be discussed in further detail below. Congregational Church ministers have not tried to make further inroads in Nadezhda since that failed attempt.⁹⁶

The Baptist Church’s involvement in Nadezhda is fairly recent. Since about 2008, its doctrinally and socially conservative Pastor Manev had been working with one church in the ghetto to prepare it to join the UEBC. Its congregation consists primarily of the families of swaggering young Turkish men who have been fighting for power with the older and more established Turkish pastors. A couple of the members have attended Bible colleges in Sofia and other towns. However, just a few of these young Turks attended Bible classes in the Baptist Church downtown, and when Pastor Manev also procured a grant to organize an accredited literacy course for undereducated members of the congregation, only five of those enrolled graduated with certificates. Because of this and other signs of inconsistency, in 2010 Pastor Manev expected that it would be a while before the church could join the UEBC. In the meantime, he brought over teams of foreign missionaries and presented the minority church as an associate of the Baptist Church. Some of the visitors donated bags of clothes, but there was

⁹⁶ The Congregational Church’s leaders were unwilling to discuss their past experiences in Nadezhda, but they suggested that they were unpleasant. A couple of young Congregational Church members I befriended, however, became curious about Nadezhda’s Christians and asked to accompany me once. They were also part of a team that visits a Roma “society” in a nearby village every week.

no talk of finding money for a building, which the congregation needed the most. In 2010, Pastor Manev also initiated unofficial negotiations with a Naked Gypsy church, but both parties seemed to understand that it was unlikely for them to reach common ground because the Naked Gypsy pastor was not willing to undergo the arduous vetting process.

In the early-to-mid 1990s, many Nadezhdan pastors attached themselves to the Pentecostal Church in Sliven. This was an attractive alternative to the Congregational Church because even though the Pentecostal Church pastor Lonev, disproved of many things that transpired in the Nadezhdan churches, the UEPC was sufficiently decentralized to register numerous autonomous churches within close proximity of each other and to let “the people” decide how spiritually mature, morally upstanding, and experienced their pastors should be. However, the aloof Pastor Lonev also disapproves of channeling aid to (Roma) churches on principle. This segues into the second reason why the Protestant actors in town and the Nadezhdan leaders did not see eye-to-eye over the past two decades: the issue of foreign aid.

Nadezhdan Pastors’ Strategies of Extraversion

Types of Foreign Religious Actors

Over the past two decades, religious actors from abroad have established a strong presence in the Nadezhdan Evangelical field. They have been responsible for the establishment of dozens of churches, and they have influenced the religious dynamics in the ghetto. I refer to them collectively as “missionaries.” In 2010, I repeatedly heard how foreigners used to come in droves in the past, but not anymore. Yet, in any given month (if not week), it seemed that at least one of the churches had visitors from abroad. I personally crossed paths with Americans, Canadians, Koreans, Germans, Turks, Russians, and Norwegians, but I heard of other

nationalities as well.⁹⁷ For analytical purposes, I divide missionaries who visit Sliven into five categories: (1) “crusaders” or “evangelists” (Archer), (2) “Kingdom’s adventurers” (Petrov), (3) “church developers” or “church planters,” (Garrison 1999; Stetzer and Bird 2010) (4) “humanitarians” (or religious actors focused on social and humanitarian work) (5) and “mentors” (Angelov; Samuel).⁹⁸ Many missionaries fall into more than one category and perform different functions in the context of different churches or ethnic communities.

Crusaders are short-term visitors who organize public spectacles to “spread the message of God” and to compel non-believers to “accept Jesus Christ as their Savior.” Another popular name for them is “evangelists,” but this term is also applied to religious actors who employ any approach to conducting proselytism and revivalism. Even though large-scale crusading by eminent international evangelists has subsided since the “Great Awakening” of the early 1990s (Angelov), some missionaries still try to revive “God’s movement” in the country: “After the Berlin wall, I heard that an awakening was underway and God was moving. Unfortunately, things have leveled off, but it will come, seven times stronger! ... God has a mission for Bulgaria” (Samuel). Some crusaders have careers in international evangelizing, whereas others are private individuals with full- or part-time jobs and very limited resources. An American representative of the latter type, Samuel, shared that when he was laid off from his full-time job a

⁹⁷ According to the recollections of diverse informants, professional international evangelists were the first foreign religious actors in Sliven. Upon returning home, they would spread the news about their “victories” on websites, at churches, conferences and seminars, and during crusades in other countries, where they would meet other missionaries. This is one mechanism through which budding communities of Christians appear on the map of the global flow of Evangelical personnel. At about the same time, leaders and members of foreign denominational federations were moving to re-establish ties with Protestants in the country, which had been severed during Socialism (Ramet 1992; Mojzes 1992). A lot of foreign personnel began pouring into the country (educators, temporary division presidents, evangelists), and money was being sent for infrastructure (new churches, schools) and for evangelical work (crusades, training).

⁹⁸ This mode of doing missionary work is not to be confused with the rigid relationships that characterize the “Discipleship Movement” in the US, even though one of its proponents – Derek Prince – did visit Sliven (for more information on the Discipleship Movement, see Henderson 2007).

couple of years ago, he and his wife considered it a blessing because now he could work half-time, and the rest of the time they could “follow God’s message and plan,” travel all over the world, and meet believers from different cultures. Currently, the majority of the crusades in Bulgaria are led by such non-famous professional and non-professional evangelists in encapsulated Roma ghettos. As public spectacles, crusades always generate onlookers here, just as public weddings, birthday parties, and dancing drunken men do. These events assume the format of free concerts, followed by giving witness, preaching, and healing demonstrations. According to one American missionary, Archer, “you must be willing to try new things. If you go out and do what you normally do – pray and talk about the Devil – people won’t come. Crusades now should be a form of entertainment that should [...] make people interested, come out, and see what is going on.” According to a Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical Christian, however, both mediators and pastors are aware that crusades are no longer effective, but they pitch the idea to clueless foreigners to give them a gratifying experience and to make themselves look like they are doing something useful (Luchezar).⁹⁹

Some Bulgarian mediators use the term “Kingdom adventurers” to describe short-term missionaries who tour foreign countries without necessarily organizing or participating in crusades. They usually visit minority churches, watch the services, give witness about the circumstances of their spiritual rebirth, sing, and pray for the sick. In some instances, they hand out small aid packages and “preach through labor” outside of services by doing construction work, painting orphanages, cleaning windows, and picking up litter, but I never witnessed such

⁹⁹ Many domestic Protestant actors have started to wonder whether crusading in Roma ghettos has become a self-serving exercise without a broader useful purpose. A Bulgarian international evangelist from Sofia stated, “The most common American approach is, ‘We preach and 100 people got saved during an event.’ This is shallow. It overlooks discipleship, or the process of re-socialization” (Angelov). A Bulgarian pastor from a city near Sliven seconded: “We need no more crusades. Come on, everybody has been saved at least once already! What we need is to actually work with the people so that we don’t lose them and we help them develop.”

activities first-hand in Nadezhda. Besides providing moral support to local believers, the goal of visiting impoverished minority communities is for the adventurers to have a “wake up call to see how people in other parts of the world live,” which compels them and others to “change your heart so that you are more useful to God.”¹⁰⁰ Many Western Evangelicals feel duty-bound to go into the world as ordinary people whom God uses in extraordinary ways. Some foreign churches even have designated missionary departments that select places in need to be evangelized and put together teams of volunteers to go there (Petrov; Smith). Certain international Protestant organizations also specialize in training and coordinating teams to travel around the world on short-term mission trips (e.g., Youth with a Mission and Mission Possible). Herself a humanitarian missionary, Van Engen (2000, 20-21) criticizes such short-term “tourists” for visiting impoverished minority communities, so that they themselves can “see a foreign country” and have alleged life-changing experiences, as opposed to actually helping, understanding, or even evangelizing people in need.¹⁰¹ This constitutes a different form of opportunism that is still based on self-interest. Team coordinators may end up coming to the same country/region on a yearly basis, but most adventurers only do so once.

Church developers help in the construction, expansion, modernization, or furnishing of church buildings by providing funding, materials, and – occasionally – free labor. They can be members of any other category of missionaries who decide to donate money after visiting a community and receiving a “vision” that their help is needed in “planting” new churches or in

¹⁰⁰ To see how Kingdom adventurers describe their experiences in Bulgaria, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOMpbXmFcGE&list=UUY_3SA_V-4AyeTn9yXrDqWg; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbBc-LyFny8&index=56&list=UUY_3SA_V-4AyeTn9yXrDqWg; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MseG7i8vafQ&index=57&list=UUY_3SA_V-4AyeTn9yXrDqWg

¹⁰¹ This form of voyeuristic, but ultimately disengaged, religious tourism is similar to the slum tourism in the global south (Meschkank 2011; Rolfes 2010) and the “reality tourism” surrounding sex trafficking in Thailand described by Bernstein and Shih (forthcoming).

supporting local congregations materially. Some church developers may never visit the ghetto. For example, upon visiting Nadezhda, evangelizers or Kingdom adventurers may go home and ask their wealthier congregation peers to donate money for church development. Protestants in Bulgaria call them “sponsors,” although that label also describes actors that fund social and humanitarian activities. Church developers have been very influential in the national Protestant field and especially in minority ghettos. They are different from other sponsors because they invest in expanding the global Evangelical community, as opposed to humanitarian work.

Humanitarians invest time and effort to help struggling communities in a variety of ways outside of religious and church life, including supplying material aid and health services, funding daycare centers for people with special needs, offering free professional training, and organizing community development projects. In some cases, these are Protestant organizations that specialize in this line of work. Also, some congregations in the Town have established “sisterly” relations with churches abroad through members that emigrated or through denominational channels. Until recently, clothing and food constituted most of the humanitarian aid flowing into Sliven. After Bulgaria joined the EU, however, it has been harder to solicit donations, and the process of delivering aid has been complicated by regulations, such as the requirement that second-hand clothing gets fumigated (Angelov; William). Local churches continue to receive boxes with useful items through personal or denominational venues (at least for Christmas), but Protestant organizations either withdrew or adapted their activities.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Big organizations, like Compassion International and World Vision, are no longer interested in Bulgaria, even though they have projects in Romania and Albania. In the words of a former charity missionary from the UK, “only Romania gets discussed as a poor country in the context of Europe” (William). In one instance, an offshoot of the now departed British Saltmine International, Krasif Aid, has switched to sending special-needs medical equipment, supporting a local faith-based NGO that helps people with special needs, and experimenting with community sustainability initiatives, such as jewelry and sewing workshops in the Town.

Mentors are missionaries who focus on spiritual and behavioral discipleship of communities of recent believers with whom they establish long-term relationships. They accept that helping people to be saved takes more work and commitment than mere crusading and short one-time visits. In order to nurture and cultivate “spiritual babes” (Angelov), some professional mentors return to selected churches repeatedly to organize multi-day seminars that delve into spiritual subjects and develop practical skills necessary to lead the life of a conscious Christian.¹⁰³

Dependence on External Resources

In the words of Vitan, a Naked Gypsy in his early 30s, “being a pastor is a great way to get rich.” Most marginalized Nadezhdans take it for granted that pastorship is synonymous with access to coveted benefits, particularly ones that originate from beyond the concrete wall that surrounds them. From the moment external Protestant actors engaged with the residents of the resource-poor and segregated ghetto, they were seen either as potential sources of material and social benefits, or as means to finding such sources. Thus, they have shaped the expectations, goals, and practices of many local ministers, with blatant opportunism and cutthroat competition being a frequent outcome. The following story recounts one informant’s perception of an early interaction between missionaries and four local churches:

I remember how it was before the Americans and the Germans came. We all prayed together without conflicts. But the foreigners made religion like business. First came [Bill] from America. He organized a conference. He and his team lived with families for one month. We fed them, went to picnics together. The Americans were basically on vacation. In the end, [Bill] gave

¹⁰³ The personnel of international Protestant organizations with long-term local presence are also in a position to establish mentorship-like ties to selected congregations (William). For example, Krasif Aid’s associates and team coordinators of Youth with a Mission are often in the Town (they even share the cost of renting an apartment on a permanent basis), and they always visit the same two or three churches, to the point where members know them by name. Discipleship may not be the stated goal of their activities, but their prolonged presence de-facto facilitates an ongoing exchange of ideas about how Christians can grow – individually and collectively – especially considering the specific challenges facing the local communities.

envelopes with money to each pastor. This was unexpected. The pastors started to fight over the money, even though the envelopes were individually labeled. [Bill] started a very bad practice. Then [Kadir] from Germany and some Americans came. They built a big church, so that all of us would be in one place. They used the land of pastor [Demir]. When the church was finished, [Kadir] organized a big seminar and told the people to unite. They listened to him because he was from abroad, he was educated, and he knew how to fool people – if he had told them to kill themselves, they would have done it. [Kadir] stayed for less than a month and left. All the pastors expected that he would give them money, like [Bill] did, but all he gave them was advice to be united. It turned out that he was testing them – he was planning to give them salaries if they followed the advice. A week later, the pastors started to fight over the title of being the main pastor. [Demir] said that he owned the church, so he kicked everybody out. He used the money [Kadir] sent for the baptism pool and for a school to build a house on top of the church. Then he tried to get the church members to donate money for another church, so that he could turn this one into a supermarket. Then the Germans came again, bearing clothes, food, and toys. People started fighting over the stuff ... The Germans and Americans taught us to want, to beg. The pastors tasted the honey and got used to it. (Behice)

The above account shows how the first encounters with foreign religious actors taught many entrepreneurial men in this resource-poor environment to approach their involvement with Evangelical Christianity as a lucrative strategy of extraversion. Their attitude has not changed since.

While we were discussing one Naked Gypsy pastor's desperate attempts to involve me in his search for sponsors, Dora once exclaimed in a rhetorical expression of exasperation: "Tell me, Stela, what is the story with all these sponsors? I never understood, why is all this, why do these pastors care so much about that?" She knew, of course, that well-meaning missionaries provided at least four invaluable material and social benefits. To begin with, acquiring a church building in Nadezhda is practically impossible without external church developers. Construction prices here are much lower compared to those in the Town; however, the fragmented and impoverished local Christians cannot possibly build and maintain churches on their own. Two Turkish, one Musician Gypsy, and two Naked Gypsy congregations rented spaces with tithes, but this is not an optimal solution for two reasons: (a) even a short-term drop in membership and/or tithes endangers the survival of the church; and (b) some locals believe that acquiring "a real

church” is a sign of divine anointment for a pastor (Nevena). Consequently, finding a foreign church developer is among the primary objectives of any pastor without a (good) building.

Second, a number of local religious leaders have treated church developers as a means of acquiring free new homes. It is common for a pastor to “selflessly” donate his house plot for a new church, whereas the foreigners cover the construction costs, even though the pastor’s family technically has no legal ownership of the land, since Nadezhda is not zoned as a residential neighborhood.¹⁰⁴ The twist is that in addition to the church itself, the building includes a new multi-story dwelling for the pastor’s family members, the tithes cover their utilities, and they literally (in addition to symbolically) own the church. More entrepreneurial individuals can get quite creative about squeezing extra cash from church developers. For example, a Turkish man in his 50s told me that a Naked Gypsy minister had approached him to buy a plot for a church and had proposed to present thrice the original asking price to the American sponsors, so that the minister and the seller could split the difference.

Third, Nadezhda pastors seek out missionaries in hopes of acquiring cash and other goods. Even if church members in the ghetto could afford to support the pastors’ families, they rarely feel that it is their responsibility to do so; in fact, many believers get indignant and drop out if they think that their collections were “stolen” by the leader for his personal use. And for reasons outlined above, the local pastors eschew centralized denominations that would pay their salaries. This leaves the occasional foreign missionary who might be sufficiently moved by a pastor’s hardship and decide to support his work through salary or donations in the form of clothes, a washing machine, a computer, or tuition fees for his child. Below is an excerpt from a solicitation email from a Turkish pastor to a potential sponsor that I was asked to translate:

¹⁰⁴ All of Nadezhda is designated as an industrial zone, so technically, all housing units there have been built illegally and without permits.

Pastor [Doe], I present a need for my family [...] If it is possible by God, could you assist me with a minimum of US \$300 for the first six months of 2010, so that we get food, at least? And if it can be done for the entire 2010, I will be grateful to God and to you. Normally, a pastor needs \$500 to survive: he can use \$200 for electricity and water, and the remaining \$300 goes for food. Pastor [Doe], also pray for my eldest son [...]. His wife left him, and I am taking care of one of their children. My mother [...] lives with me as well. I have some debts to repay too. None of us work, since there are no jobs. Things are very difficult for us. If you can, help me.¹⁰⁵

In many cases, pastors quietly appropriate donations that were intended for the whole congregation, but were handed to them in private (Pastor Berk; Toncho; Velina).

And fourth, engagement with missionaries helps a pastor by generating more attendance and by boosting his status in the field, which, in turn, may procure further material benefits. In a circular fashion, attendance and status (which often depend on some initial aid) can be used as a validation that a pastor is doing good work while appealing to external actors for even more resources. I agree with Benovska-Sabkova and Altunov (2009) that Roma do not embrace Evangelical Christianity for material considerations only (see Chapter Four). However, it is a fact that when food and clothes are distributed at Nadezhdan churches, attendance spikes.¹⁰⁶ According to Ralitzia, a Bulgarian mediator working for a faith-based foundation in Sofia that channels aid into marginalized Roma communities, “people follow the aid, especially the Gypsies.” Thus, many pastors seek sponsors for daily soup kitchens, in part because offering a steady source of aid motivates believers to attend their churches more often, and it diverts members from other churches.

¹⁰⁵ This language is reminiscent of the ritual narratives of lament used in appeals member of the underclass made to the Bolshevik authorities in early Soviet Russia. These written appeals described extreme hardship and pleaded for inclusion in the proletariat class (Alexopoulos 1979). See also Kligman and Verdery (2011) on similar petitions in the context of socialist Romania.

¹⁰⁶ The extras are not necessarily “pretending” to be Christians – they consider themselves such and they usually have some prior association with the church. Still, ministers and regular members resent such “free-loaders.” One Musician Gypsy pastor even claimed that he has turned aid away, “because the people who came were not true believers, and it did more damage than good” (Pastor Damyan). This is especially a problem when aid arrives rarely and is insufficient, as was the case in 2010.

Even short-term, one-time crusaders and Kingdom adventurers who show up empty-handed trigger a chain of effects that benefit religious leaders. When outsiders put on a public spectacle, they are bound to draw a curious crowd, so the hosting pastors benefit by getting in the spotlight by association. Further, locals have come to believe that foreign Christians are endowed with near-magic healing powers, so they flock to visitors by the hundreds.¹⁰⁷ According to my close Turkish friend, Behice, “People go because of the foreigners. It’s a curiosity. If Americans pray, they are more likely to be healed. They are also curious to see if they will fall [i.e., if the Holy Spirit will knock them down] this time.”

Figure 11. Naked Gypsies Surround a Foreign Missionary Who Prays for Them.



When they witness big crowds of believers, outsiders perceive that “God works mightily” in Nadezhda and that this particular pastor is exceptionally anointed, so they may be more inclined to support his church and to refer others to him. The more visits a pastor gets, the more legitimacy and prominence he accrues inside and outside the ghetto: “Part of the competition

¹⁰⁷ Despite announcing that I was not a Christian, many locals perceived me as a harbinger of miracles as well. For example, a woman whose 15-year-old daughter could not conceive claimed that in her dream, I brought the teenager a baby and that the girl conceived within days.

over foreign connections has to do with that fact that they are a huge source of prestige. It is a way of showing that ‘my ministry is being noticed’” (Archer).

The Need for Mediators

Numerous religious leaders in this impoverished and encapsulated neighborhood have come to covet sponsors, but they face many hurdles in reaching foreigners on their own: no knowledge of Western languages, a dearth of prior external contacts, limited experience with computer technology and the Internet, lack of basic familiarity with other countries, and poor letter-writing and self-introduction skills.¹⁰⁸ Thus, pastors depend on other domestic religious actors with international connections to gain access to missionaries.¹⁰⁹ Earlier I called such bridging actors “brokers,” or “mediators.”

The more marginalized minority ministers are, the more challenges they face in establishing and sustaining relationships with international and domestic religious actors, yet the more crucial such contacts are for procuring resources. In the context of Nadezhda, the background, experiences, and skills of Musician Gypsy church leaders and members have made it easiest for them to connect with outsiders. They are most likely to have middle or high school education, to speak Bulgarian well, to have access to the Internet, and to resemble Westernized

¹⁰⁸ The world outside Bulgaria is a mystery for many Nadezhdans. I regularly got asked if I drove from America to Bulgaria, and some of the locals who were visited by Norwegian Evangelicals, for example, had never heard of Norway.

¹⁰⁹ At the very beginning of my fieldwork in Nadezhda, Toncho warned me that when the pastors found out that I lived in the US, they would “look at [me] with dollar signs in their eyes.” Indeed, local pastors asked me right away for money to repair a roof, to purchase music equipment, to pay an electric bill, to help a pastor’s impoverished family, to get urgent medical treatment, and so on. After it became clear that I was not a source of material benefits, I was inundated with requests to find “sponsors” abroad instead. Some pastors assured me that I would be rewarded by God (Pastor Adem), others said that they expected me to do it because I was “a nice person” and clearly “loved the Gypsies” (Pastor Veliko), and some made it clear that “it was unfair” of me to expect their cooperation if I was not prepared to help them in return (Pastor Damyan).

individuals in terms of habitus (behavioral code, clothing, body language, and bearing).¹¹⁰ An additional advantage for Musician Gypsy pastors is having been (or having relatives and church members who are) professional crowd pleasers. When my relatives and friends visited and asked to see a Roma church, for example, I usually took them to a church whose pastor, Zhivko, was a former guitarist in a wedding band and knew how to put on a show. Foreign visitors, in particular, were charmed by the choreography, which borrowed elements from charismatic Black churches in the US and Gypsy music, which enhanced the thrill of experiencing “something different.” Since it came closest to providing an “authentic experience” (Taylor 2001; Wang 1999) for religious tourists, Pastor Zhivko and his congregation enjoyed substantial benefits in terms of prominence and infrastructure. The church received regular visits from denominational overseers and missionaries, and with the exception of the new mosque, it was the nicest building in the ghetto (featuring a large balcony, a stage, a computer, projector and professional music equipment), which made it a frequent site of regional and national conferences and gatherings.¹¹¹ The large choir and band often accompanied domestic and foreign crusaders across the country. In his decentralized denomination, Pastor Zhivko himself is a regional “overseer” over other churches (including some in Nadezhda), he has joined other superior Bulgarian overseers on

¹¹⁰ Some young members are sophisticated Internet users, who read the Bible electronically, post YouTube videos of services on Facebook, and even belong to Bible forums (Cenk). Older leaders still tend to struggle with communications technology. For example, ministers at the smallest Musician Gypsy church asked me to set up an email account and a website for their church, and I did, thinking that it would be an innocuous favor. Soon thereafter, they received their first email from an “African widow” offering to split millions of dollars with them. I told them that it was a hoax, but they responded, and got a response back, and responded again. Each time I got more concerned and more emphatic in my warnings that they were being scammed. When the other side asked them for a bank account and I got angry about their failure to heed my advice, they finally gave up.

¹¹¹ To see a video of a performance for foreign visitors, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2vg8SuUVMo>. The visitors sit at the front to the right.

foreign trips, and he has become a rather savvy user of social media for the purpose of increasing his prominence at home and abroad.¹¹²

The culturally encapsulated Turks tend to be less sociable and approachable than Musician Gypsies. Lacking music equipment and bands, their churches are also the “tamest”; one pastor actually hires Musician or Naked Gypsy performers when missionaries visit. Since the late 1990s, most Turkish religious leaders have had limited interactions with Bulgarian mediators, with the exception of the aforementioned “young” Turkish church that works with the Baptist Church downtown. Instead, most Turkish pastors have used their Turkishness to find sponsors on their own, such as Turkish-speakers from Germany and Korean proselytizers (from the US and from South Korea) who have experience evangelizing in Turkey.¹¹³ In the past, such actors used to send substantial funds for church development, pastors’ salaries, music equipment, foreign-language lessons for the youth, etc. Having unmediated foreign ties emboldened two leaders to register their churches independently, but the missionaries eventually withdrew, leaving the pastors scrambling to find any new contacts they could get.

Most of the Naked Gypsy pastors are basically illiterate, culturally and behaviorally distinctive from Bulgarians and Westerners, and unabashedly eager in their pursuit of material benefits. Most Bulgarian and foreign religious actors appear uncomfortable in the grubby and over-crowded Naked Gypsy churches, where locals stare at them relentlessly, where the music is

¹¹² Another Musician Gypsy pastor also holds a high office in his respective union, and he also has a large church, enjoys national prominence, and hosts large conferences. However, the union’s foreign founders have failed to respond to his pleas for funding building improvements, food programs, a kindergarten, and an agricultural cooperative.

¹¹³ Some Western evangelists seeking to make inroads in the Islamic world are wondering whether Christian Turks in Bulgaria could be the next “knights of Saint John at the gate between Europe and Asia” (Keith). The prospect of being sponsored to proselytize in Turkey appeals to some unemployed pastors, but these kinds of sponsors are not interested in helping the churches and communities in Bulgaria. In one awkward case, Turkish pastors hoped to get material assistance from a US evangelist and the evangelist hoped that the Turks would donate money to support his mission in Turkey.

painfully loud and occasionally discordant, and where pastors accost them forcefully with solicitations for aid. Naked Gypsy ministers are further disadvantaged because they are surrounded by peers who are better skilled in attracting and retaining the favor of both mediators and foreigners. In some cases, this adds an additional degree of separation from key players in the broader field. I encountered missionaries who have worked with other ethnic groups in Nadezhda for years without setting foot in the Naked Gypsy areas or learning about the ghetto's internal social divisions; I also witnessed exploitative Turks taking missionaries for a stroll among the Naked Gypsies to solicit material aid with images of others' abject poverty, even though they were not going to share that aid later on.¹¹⁴

The Protestant leaders in Sliven have proven to be poor bridges to foreign aid, and Nadezhdan pastors have generally responded by severing their ties with them. This has been particularly problematic with centralized denominations, which would not invest any money in congregations that do not appear to hold promise as member churches. For example, after a bad experience involving purchasing livestock in a nearby Roma village, the US Mormon "elders" (who were in their early 20s) decided against working again with marginalized Roma in the region. In another instance, even though an Adventist elder made the effort to walk all the way from downtown to the Naked Gypsy part of the ghetto every Thursday in order to preach at two

¹¹⁴ One Naked Gypsy pastor has pursued a potential solution to his endemic dependency and structural marginality in the Protestant field. Together with minority ministers from across the country, a handful of Bulgarian mediators, and a Norwegian Protestant organization, he has founded an alliance of Roma pastors. This is not a bureaucratic organization with staff and physical infrastructure, but a way to put forward a "Roma" face for missionaries to approach. The pastor was unusual among Naked Gypsy pastors because he "owned" a direct relationship with a couple of foreigners in an attempt to avoid dependence on mediators. He used online translation programs to communicate with them directly via email, and he occasionally called upon a Bulgarian to facilitate complex exchanges, although he strove to marginalize mediators as much as possible. The pastor and his congregation were receiving the most visitors and aid in the Naked Gypsy part of Nadezhda; however, these infusions were modest and infrequent. A drawback from pursuing national prominence independently is that more connected, experienced, and savvy mediators have come to perceive them as competitors (Kolev; Vasilev). Some national religious leaders have also expressed concerns that Roma alliances further facilitate the fragmentation of the Protestant field along ethnic lines (Vasilev).

churches, he was eventually uninvited on the basis of being of no practical “use,” because “He just comes and talks nonsense, and he doesn’t even bring us anything!” (Toshka). Other Bulgarian Protestant leaders alluded to similar incidents that confirmed their stereotypes about Gypsy pastors being “opportunistic,” “untrustworthy,” and interested in exploiting outsiders under any pretense, including Christianity. Some do not believe in channeling aid in general. Pastor Lonev, for example, explained that Pentecostals interact and help each other on a voluntary basis only, and he expressed general aversion to working with foreign sponsors on the grounds that it distracted and endangered the spiritual integrity of aid recipients. Further, he argued, it breeds dependency – a problem Bulgarians stereotypically associate with all Roma:

It takes a lot of effort to find and to keep [foreign] contacts. And then one has to meet their conditions. I am grateful that we don’t have any sponsors – no conditions, no demands, no tensions, no dependency mentality. Aid deforms the mentality, and Roma are completely hooked on that mentality – to be taken care of, not to pay for electricity ... even the church is obligated to take care of them.

A partial remedy to that drawback has been Mr. Pavlov, a Pentecostal Church member who is also an international evangelizer willing to mediate for pastors in Nadezhda. Over the past two decades, however, he has had limited success in establishing stable links between Nadezhdan Christian communities and missionaries. His efforts produced a handful of church development projects, but these were one-time deals, and the insatiable beneficiaries eventually turned their attention to actors with something new to offer: extra-local Bulgarian mediators associated with highly decentralized Protestant denominations.

Extraversion in Practice: Nadezhdan Pastors, Extra-Local Protestant Mediators, and Foreign Religious Actors

Extra-local Bulgarian Mediators and Decentralized International Denominations

In the mid-to-late-1990s, Bulgarian Protestant actors from outside Sliven started to make inroads in Nadezhda, marking a dramatic shift in the kinds of players with whom the local churches might affiliate. Some are young and cosmopolitan Bulgarians who were appointed as national and regional overseers of decentralized international denominations (Kolev); others head foundations that channel foreign religious aid into the country; some combine both roles. The most powerful of the new denominational unions in the national field are the decentralized and charismatic Bulgarian Church of God (BCG) and the United Church of God (UCG).¹¹⁵ In addition to them, other denominations that were represented in the ghetto were the Christian Church of Zion, and the (Korean) Reformed Presbyterian Church.

There is often an overlap between the positions of denominational overseers and foundations' directors. Many of the Bulgarian denominational overseers have trained abroad and worked with their respective foreign denominational leaders and with missionaries from the outset. Subsequently, they have developed extensive professional and personal connections in the West, which has been particularly useful for establishing "non-profit" religious foundations, which provide a good source of income. For example, one regional overseer studied at a

¹¹⁵ Formally, the Church of God is an association of churches governed by an International Executive Council of eighteen bishops who are elected by a General Assembly of present clergy and lay members every two years (none of my Roma informants knew any of this, however). The International Executive Committee appoints state and regional overseers, who, in turn, appoint bishops to serve on the state councils. The state overseers also appoint district overseers. In the case of the BCG, the district overseer in charge of Nadezhda is in Stara Zagora. Local pastors are appointed by the state overseers in consultation with the district overseers and the local congregations. My impression from Nadezhda is that while the congregations technically vote on pastors' appointments, churches here are hardly such in the traditional sense of the word, so it is relatively easy for any "pastor" to mobilize his relatives to vote for him without them actually even attending his "church."

seminary and attended a mega church in the US. Upon returning to Bulgaria, he established three charitable foundations associated with his denomination. He still visits friends in the US, and numerous Kingdom adventurers from his former church alone have visited Bulgaria through his foundations.¹¹⁶ He also helped create and headed a theological college in a nearby city (including a program for undereducated Roma), whose board of directors included many Americans. His foundations receive their funding primarily from abroad, and he receives a salary to run them. He also gets paid for his interpreting and coordinating services every time he accompanies missions through these foundations. For such Bulgarian actors, too, engaging with external Protestant actors has been a strategy of extraversion; only, unlike Nadezhdan pastors, they are well positioned to gain access to foreigners without having to rely on mediators: they are themselves the mediators to whom Nadezhdan pastors have increasingly turned. In the language of network theory, they occupy that enviable position of brokers in the religious networks that link Nadezhdan pastors and foreign missionaries.

For their part, foreign missionaries depend on such brokers, or mediators, to help them navigate the local religious environment and to handle the basic logistics of conducting activities in the country. Mediators may be personal acquaintances of foreign missionaries or staff of domestic Protestant foundations that work with missionaries on a regular basis.¹¹⁷ Large

¹¹⁶ Many large charismatic churches in the US have missionary departments that are in charge of planning missionary trips for their members. If the head of a faith-based foundation in Bulgaria knows the head of the missionary department of a US mega church personally, for example, this could provide a steady stream of religious tourists over the years. Other mechanisms of establishing contacts with foreign missionaries are discussed in Footnote 117 below.

¹¹⁷ The following account exemplifies one way through which a group of missionaries became acquainted with two mediators in Bulgaria. An American couple befriended a Greek missionary while they were working on a food program in Peru. They visited their new friend in Rhodes, Greece. In a church there, they met Bulgarian émigrés from a town near Sliven. The Bulgarians gave them the email address of Lyudmil, a member of their church, who graduated from a seminary abroad and has long-term experience working with foreign missionaries. A year later, the couple was visiting Istanbul and decided to visit Lyudmil in Bulgaria. He introduced them to a denominational leader. The leader took them to visit a number of churches in the region, including one in Nadezhda. When they returned to Istanbul, they met an American evangelist, and when they told him about their experience in Bulgaria, he

international Christian missionary organizations that fund social projects based on grants (e.g., FourSquare and Mustard Seed) and missionaries with no previous contacts in Bulgaria prefer to work with such foundations, because they are legally registered and easier to find (online or through personal contacts), screen, and interact with, and they are (presumed to be) more accountable (Vincent). Mediators have emerged as powerful players in the national religious field, and managing a foundation has become a coveted career. The elite Bulgarian Evangelical Theological College even offers a major in NGO management, with a focus on grant writing and fundraising.¹¹⁸

Apart from the spiritual and moral imperatives of doing missionary and social work, these new Bulgarian denominational leaders desire member churches in Nadezhda in order to show foreign donors – on whom they themselves depend for a living – that they have as many and as marginalized adherents as possible. Their positions are not tenured, so they need to continually show that they are active in terms of proselytizing and pursuing more members. Thus, they have made themselves “desirable” to Nadezhdan pastors in the two main ways that local Protestant leaders have not: (1) by making it very easy to become a pastor and by granting them organizational autonomy, and (2) by linking them to foreign sponsors. I provide more detail on these two points below.

asked them to take him there. Together, they visited a few more churches and then decided to organize a conference, to which they invited pastors from the entire region (Vincent).

¹¹⁸ According to Igoe (2006; 2003), establishing NGOs has become a common element in the strategies of extraversion of actors in resource-poor environments over the past half a century. The practice is a response to the need for creating legal entities that can process funding from external sources and foreign donors’ interest in encouraging grassroots social movements (Igoe 2006, 414). Similarly, establishing foundations in the Bulgarian Protestant field has become a common approach to institutionalizing relations between domestic and foreign religious organizations. For example, when the Union of Congregational churches in Germany decided to help the UECC to build a day-care center for children with special needs elsewhere in the country, the UECC created a foundation to manage the project.

Dual Extraversion, Collusion, and Local Autonomy

Bulgarian leaders of the new decentralized denominations were in a good position to provide autonomy to affiliated churches because the international denominations they represented were committing large sums to infrastructure development and member recruitment without really demanding much accountability beyond nominal reporting. I have not seen any of these reports in person, but based on personal impressions and third-hand witnesses, my understanding is that they include the number of churches that are registered, the number of members in those churches, pictorial and video evidence of working in minority neighborhoods, and personal declarations of having performed proselytism. In registering a church or ordaining a pastor, the leaders of the new denominations do not follow special criteria or a lengthy vetting process. They embrace a hands-off attitude toward member churches, which provides local ministers with near-complete autonomy.

The autonomy of Nadezhdan churches is further enhanced by the fact that unlike the Protestant actors in Sliven, the overseers of the decentralized denominations are geographically distant and hence unfamiliar with the social and cultural dynamics in the local community (Lyudmil). They visit very infrequently and for short periods of time – usually when they accompany foreign missionaries – and when they do, they are too busy catering to the foreigners to make attempts to interact with the pastors or with the lay members of churches in order to get to know them or to hear their complaints about pastors' misdeeds. In my personal observations, even when congregants have managed to complain, the overseers have not cared or done anything to address issues, such as misappropriation of money or dictatorial styles of leadership. Ultimately, however, engaging with the community is not their goal. They are there to register

churches and members in order to show them to donors, which enables them to make a living. Like local pastors, they live *off* religion, not *for* religion.

The new unions are also willing to legitimate and ordain new ministers quickly and easily. This benefits both the pastors and the unions. The new “pastors” can claim legitimacy on the local level, even though this legitimacy comes with little quality training and few actual “qualifications,” whereas the unions are primarily interested in spawning more member churches. In one telling example, a Naked Gypsy pastor got serendipitously ordained as he happened to be taking a course at one of the decentralized denomination’s schools at the same time when one of its disgruntled leaders quit, opened a new school, and offered immediate ordination to those who supported him. The Roma students did not even need to pass a test. By doing this, the Bulgarian Protestant leader immediately gained the loyalty of a small contingent of minority “pastors” – however unqualified – which is necessary in claiming social capital in the domestic religious field and in finding foreign donors. Thus, instrumental opportunism is clearly not a characteristic that defines local pastors only.

The leaders of the new decentralized denominations are much more savvy in their strategies of extraversion, and they tend to use Roma as “bait” of a sort, while also allowing a certain portion of the resources to trickle down to member churches. Thus, in their search for member churches, these new players in the Bulgarian Protestant field have established a norm of reciprocal usefulness, where Roma pastors expect something in return for joining a denomination, employing their own strategies of extraversion. For example, the Naked Gypsy pastor Kalcho described how years ago, he committed to a union because Overseer A promised him a building. Overseer A, however, was unable to deliver, so when Overseer B, from a different union, found church developers to transform part of the pastor’s home into a church, he

switched. Then Overseer C promised the pastor a new building just when the latter's family needed a dwelling for their newlywed son, and the church was re-registered once again. When I arrived in Sliven, Pastor Kalcho complained that he had not received help from his union for years. At the time I was leaving, he was switching again in hopes of getting yet another building; he claimed that his current church was "not sanitary," but neighbors pointed out that two more of his sons had reached marriageable age. Pastors often engage in such denomination switching as part of their extraversion strategies to maximize material benefits, always going to the highest bidder. Another strategy of extraversion employed by the pastors is to approach two different parties with pleas to fund the same project or items (food, clothing, etc.). Then they send a picture of the completed project or of themselves distributing the goods to each sponsor, as required for the purpose of accountability, while keeping half of the money.¹¹⁹

In this system of dual extraversion, both Roma pastors and Bulgarian mediators need each other in order to pursue their respective interests. The pastors need the mediators in order to procure bridges to foreign resources, whereas the mediators need the pastors (and their impoverished congregations) in order to attract the attention of foreign missionaries. The severe destitution of Nadezhdans enables this symbiotic arrangement in the first place, and it encourages high levels of corruption and instrumentalism, but the exploitation of foreign

¹¹⁹ Having established expectations, outsiders need to continue channeling benefits to retain pastors' loyalty. Over time, however, international decentralized federations have reduced funding for their branches in Bulgaria, and in certain cases, this has led to an exodus of disgruntled member churches. In the words of an American missionary, "people [from the US] came and bought churches for their denomination and then went and bragged at home about having a church in another country... It was unsustainable in the long run" (Archer). In light of these recent developments, certain denominational leaders were saying that Roma got too dependent and even pointed out that in principle, unions were supposed to get a percentage of the tithes collected by the churches, as opposed to the other way around (Kolev). In some cases, the misalignment of expectations has even led to disagreements over how church members should be counted. Foreign leaders have started to insist the lists of members include only those who give tithes, whereas churches want to count as many people as possible, because in the past this translated into more aid. Personal networking skills and good informal ties have become crucial to a successful mediator with a competitive advantage in the increasingly tougher religious marketplace.

resources takes place at various levels, and Roma pastors are hardly singular in employing practices of extraversion.

Even though they depend on each other in a bond of reciprocal usefulness, the relations between Nadezhdan ministers and Bulgarian mediators are characterized by deep-seated tensions stemming from the structural imbalance of power between them, which affects the distribution of resources, and from pervasive stigmatization, which affects how mediators treat the pastors. To begin with, minority religious actors often complain about being disempowered and marginalized in the context of their denominations, which is clearly the case. I know of no high-level Roma or Turkish overseers in the new decentralized organizations, even though the vast majority of their member churches and congregants across the country are Roma and Turks. On the one hand, a Bulgarian overseer claimed that, “Roma pastors still need to mature. Otherwise, they will get in comical situations, and the Bulgarians will not listen to them” (Kolev). On the other hand, Nadezhda Christians express endemic suspicions that the reason for their structural disempowerment is so that mediators can exploit them while pretending to help them. For example, they are convinced that some Bulgarians “show them off” to sponsors in order to solicit sympathy and donations, and then take the money.¹²⁰ Indeed, a number of Bulgarians confirmed that they knew mediators who had taken advantage of minorities as “bees that carry honey” (Kolev). One consequence of such incidents is that if a mediator takes pictures or brings foreigners to a church and then no aid follows, he is automatically suspected of pocketing cash (Pastor Kalcho; Kolev).

¹²⁰ Allegations about abuse abound: An Australian took it upon himself to sponsor twenty-two Roma pastors across the country, but when a Bulgarian mediator stole half of the sum, the disappointed donor withdrew. Another Bulgarian mediator got trucks of clothes for Roma, but opened a second-hand store instead. One Naked Gypsy pastor accidentally saw a document stating that he had been given tens of thousands of dollars, but he never even knew about it.

Further, stigmatized minority ministers grumble about the social distance between themselves and their Bulgarian peers. Argir, a former Musician Gypsy pastor, admitted that, “Roma are not psychologically ready to be with Bulgarians – they get embarrassed because of their low culture.” Most “high-cultured” actors do little to alleviate the problem. I attended ethnically mixed conferences and observed people from different locales forming relationships, but in general, they were of the same ethnic background – Roma sat with Roma (although they were different kinds of Roma), Bulgarians huddled with Bulgarians, and English-speakers sat with English-speakers. For one conference, all minority members were booked in a lodge, whereas the Bulgarian organizers and foreigner sponsors stayed in a luxury hotel down the road.

During their rare visits, mediators are usually too busy engaging with the foreigner missionaries they accompany, and they often shun the locals, especially when the latter try to assume control of the conversation and ask the mediators to translate about their material needs. Some pastors suspect that Bulgarian Protestant actors visit and engage with them infrequently, briefly, superficially, and curtly in order to keep them from establishing closer direct ties with the foreign missionaries, thus maintaining their privileged status as monopoly brokers between them and foreign contacts and appropriating the valuable benefits that flow from those contacts. The pastors believe that the mediators are to blame when visitors spend only a couple of hours in the ghetto, and they accuse the Bulgarians of controlling the interactions between foreigners and residents, as opposed to merely translating. If that were not the case, a common assumption holds, foreigners would be more willing to sponsor the local pastors. One possible explanation for the mediators’ disengagement that partially exonerates them is that conducting sporadic and brief visitations tends to be the *modus operandi* of most

international missionaries who frequent Bulgaria today. Most of the latter are non-professional crusaders and Kingdom adventurers, who only make a single and short transitory stop.

Relations with Foreign Religious Actors

The dynamics between Roma pastors and mediators have framed the interactions between the pastors and the ultimate source of the material benefits they pursue – foreign missionaries. Earlier I introduced four kinds of missionaries with whom Nadezhdans have engaged over the past two decades: crusaders, Kingdom adventurers, church developers, and humanitarians. At this point I will describe in more detail the nature of the relationships between these categories of actors, on the one hand, and the residents of the ghetto, on the other, and the impact these foreign religious actors have had on life in Nadezhda.

Transient crusaders and Kingdom adventurers touch and pray for tens and hundreds of residents, and they take numerous pictures with the locals, but meaningful interactions with Nadezhdans are limited. Nevertheless, even if they had more time to spare from their busy itineraries, it is likely that Nadezhdans are at least partially right and that mediators would still keep verbal exchanges to a minimum and translate selectively in order to prevent pastors from making the visitors uncomfortable with aid solicitations. Disgruntled pastors suspect that Bulgarians do so to control resources, and some Nadezhdan ministers even started to call me over when Westerners arrived, asking me to “translate everything!” for them (Pastor Bozhko). Some mediators explained, however, that pastors hurt their prospects of building ties with outsiders by approaching them so hastily and bluntly (Lyudmil). In my occasional experiences as an interpreter, I myself witnessed awkward exchanges that supported the validity of their claims. One evangelizer admitted that he was suspicious of overly “aggressive” entreaties, citing “horror stories” about having pastors “throw children” at him in South America to elicit pity.

Archer shared, “I don’t like people begging and harassing me [...] I wait to receive my own vision [from God] whom to help.” In most cases, solicitations were for help to materialize pastors’ “visions” about new or bigger churches with attached schools, kitchen facilities, and daycare centers, but widespread corruption and a general decline in missionaries’ interest in Bulgaria have made it difficult to find church developers.

As an extremely poor locale, Nadezhda attracted the attention of some humanitarians in the 1990s. But the volatility of the religious marketplace, local ministers’ shortsightedness, and cutthroat competition have derailed potentially valuable projects and disheartened well-meaning outsiders and residents. Damyan, a Musician Gypsy pastor, provided an illustrative example about a sponsor who used Bulgarian intermediaries from another town to transfer a large sum of money to a bank account under Pastor Damyan’s name in order to construct a big church and a small shoe factory, which would have generated much needed employment in the neighborhood. However, the Bulgarian Protestant actors allegedly withheld a substantial chunk of the church funds, and another Nadezhda pastor tried to take over the factory project by accusing Pastor Damyan of stealing the investment capital. The charge was proven wrong, but the sponsor was so aghast by the cheating and backstabbing that he “quit the country” altogether. Such incidents have had broader, longer-term consequences than losing any particular sponsor – information spreads fast in the Bulgarian Protestant field, and not only individuals or churches, but entire neighborhoods and towns get blacklisted. In my preliminary conversations with national religious leaders, missionaries, and even government officials in Sofia, I received many clues that Nadezhda had a bad reputation even before I set foot there. A couple of well-meaning British humanitarians with experience in the area even expressed concerns about my becoming a victim of dishonest practices and getting caught up in the interpersonal rivalries of Nadezhdan

leaders. The ghetto residents were stigmatized as people who could not be trusted, and working with them was to be avoided.

I only encountered two small and resilient foreign missionary organizations that had spent years promoting child advancement in Nadezhda, and in both cases, their efforts appeared incompetent, misguided, and ineffectual due to lack of local knowledge and the scheming of Bulgarian mediators and Nadezhdan actors.¹²¹ The mediator for the first program was a member of the Pentecostal Church downtown who arranged for a retired Bulgarian teacher to run a pre-school “academy” for up to twenty-five youngsters in the basement of a private Turkish home in the ghetto. Once or twice a year, the humanitarians from the foreign organization came for a day to see the children, to distribute gifts, to organize a lunch or a skit, and to take pictures for their donors. Figuring out the exact workings of this program proved to be a challenge for me, however. The foreign sponsors were eager to send me the yearly reports they received from the mediator, but the mediator himself refused to speak to me. I was also never able to see how the academy worked on my own, except for the one time when I accompanied the foreign sponsors. Together with statements from other sources, the mediator’s reluctance to meet me and my inability to observe classes on regular days made me suspicious that the mediator and the teacher were concerned that I might uncover problems related to proper accountability and transparency, and that I might relay this information to the extra-local humanitarians, who had little local knowledge.¹²²

¹²¹ I found records of similar projects in the past. For example, in 2001-2003, a foundation from a nearby city won a grant from a large international missionary organization to run a daycare center for 55 children aged 6-15. In order to make it easier for the children to adapt to the Bulgarian public school, three specialists taught literacy and civics, worked with parents, and provided food. However, the center ended up being counter-effective, as the children preferred to go there rather than attend school.

¹²² While self-interested partnerships appear to have been the case in some of the other examples I have cited, I have no evidence that the domestic mediator and the foreign actors were complicit in mutual enrichment in this particular case. Still, cases like this speak to broader problems in the field of institutions dealing with international aid more

According to its mission statement, the second program enabled Americans to metaphorically “adopt” children by sending them small monthly sums of money in order to support their educational pursuits. The humanitarian missionaries employed Bulgarian mediators as interpreters and travel coordinators when they visited, but the local program manager who handled the program funds was a Naked Gypsy pastor. He happened to be the richest among his peers, even though his church is among the poorest and does not even have its own building (they rent). Throughout the year, the pastor and the foreign head of the program – Bryan – use an Internet translation program to interact in a very rudimentary and often inefficient way (while I was in Sliven, the pastor often asked me to elucidate email communications). The Naked Gypsy pastor, Bryan, the families of the children, and local neighbors gave me wildly divergent information about the sums that were being sent (ranging from zero to a thousand dollars per month); about the eligibility of the children who were being sponsored (i.e., whether they had to be enrolled in school or not); about the kinds of aid that were being distributed (monthly stipends to 10-40 families, or money to feed 80-100 children once a month); about the activities of the children (whether they attended church and Bible school or not), etc. I could not question the disparities too much without relaying information I acquired from some informants to others, but fraud, language barriers, scant flow of communication among actors, poor transparency and accountability arrangements, the inability of sponsors to distill information from diverse reliable sources, and mutual distrust among Roma and mediators all presented themselves as possible factors behind the failure of Nadezhdan social projects funded and/or carried out by external religious actors. Whatever the answer, outsiders clearly fell short of

generally. As various actors in this field act in their own interests and are driven by their prejudices, the targeted recipients of aid – the masses of poorest Roma – have consistently failed to receive the bulk of the aid that has been channeled into the country.

grasping the challenges of working in this complex environment, which affected their ability to bring about the intended outcomes.

Experienced humanitarians – especially full-time professionals whose method is to embed themselves in marginalized communities – emphasize the need to “do one’s homework” before embarking on any kind of financial aid project in a poor neighborhood, because otherwise, one’s efforts might be futile or do more harm than good. One European missionary was particularly critical of part-time, “Southern Baptist style” missionaries, who “go in, do something, and leave without even getting to know the people” (Michael). In my observations, almost all of the benevolent foreigners who were trying to introduce a positive change in Nadezhda did so based on pre-existing assumptions about the local culture that they adopted either in their home countries or from their Bulgarian mediators. In one farcical example, a small medical team offered very rudimentary “medical exams” over the course of two days and distributed large amounts of over-the-counter pills to hundreds of people, but without investigating whether locals even knew what they were or how to use them. They had experience working in Turkey, so they worked with a Turkish pastor, who was more interested in accruing prestige and potential material benefits by having foreign guests than in the benefits they would actually bring to his community.¹²³ Thus, thousands of vitamins were passed out, although the residents threw them away because they believed that vitamins caused weight gain.

¹²³ The team consisted of members of a Korean American mega-church, and they were all medical professionals who volunteered to conduct health missions overseas. The typical “exam” they offered involved sitting down with a translator and a “patient” in a room that was overflowing with tens of rowdy onlookers, asking about her symptoms, measuring her blood pressure and blood sugar levels, hypothesizing about possible ailments, advising her to go to the doctor, and giving her over-the-counter medications, supplements, and reading glasses. A dentist and a cardiologist were also conducting exams, but they did not have the equipment to do so properly. Their church had purchased the medications and supplements intending to distribute them in Turkey, but they were left with a large surplus, so they needed a place to finalize their mission (Luchezar). Pastor Adem provided them with the venue they needed, even though this was against Bulgarian law. With the exception of Adem, the team members did not interact with Nadezhdans outside of the context of the exams – they even brought their own lunch and ate separately. To a large extent, however, this segregation was the making of Adem, who tended to guard “his” foreigners jealously and rarely allowed other locals to have direct contact with them.

The pastor knew that, but never told the visitors. In the case of the adopt-a-student program, the Americans had been collecting and sending clothes to the families for years, but when Bryan asked me to take photos of people wearing them, it turned out that the clothes had long been used as kindling because they were culturally inappropriate. The pastor had never said anything to Bryan either. When I delivered the news to Bryan and gave him tips about more suitable choices of apparel, he stated irately that, “beggars shouldn’t be choosers.” I never found out if he changed his practices.

In addition to accusing such humanitarians of being incompetent due to their lack of local knowledge, professional foreign religious actors express the opinion that inexperienced missionaries may stifle the socio-economic and cultural development of the communities they are trying to help because they “tend to establish dependency, as opposed to breaking Roma’s victimization mentality [...] Every community has resources and needs to learn how to use them” (Archer). Surprisingly, a fair share of Nadezhdans expressed similar opinions. According to Argir, “[The foreigners] created a consumer society, as opposed to teaching the people to work, to give, and to be useful.” He also argued that pastors should refuse donations of clothes because “it is humiliating for a child of God to wear hand-me-downs.” Bulgarian mediators, however, are not advising foreign missionaries about any of this. It is in their interest to maintain their position as brokers and to ensure that foreigners have few local contacts and little local knowledge, even if the latter continue to channel foreign aid into the community in an ineffective and counter-productive manner. This makes missionaries dependent on mediators, and maintaining such dependency is part of the mediators’ strategy of extraversion, providing them with a valuable access of external resources. Local pastors, for their part, similarly care

little if the missionaries do any good for their respective churches and communities, since their main concern is that the external resources benefit them and their families.

Nadezhda is a particularly challenging destination for missionaries interested in long-term discipleship and mentorship. Compared to crusaders, Kingdom adventurers, and humanitarians, mentors need to build relations based on frequent and prolonged face-to-face interactions that are either direct or that involve personally invested mediators, mutual understanding, sympathy, and trust.¹²⁴ Communication boundaries and cultural differences greatly impede achieving this goal from the outset, but in and of themselves, they have not stopped some from trying. The evident interest of Nadezhdan pastors in extracting resources from foreign sponsors has gone a long way to repel hopeful mentors, who felt that locals were mostly interested in them as a means to achieving material benefits. In the late 1990s, for example, the Turkish-speaking German missionary Kadir spent extended time in Nadezhda, trying to build a mature, dynamic, and united Christian community among the Turks without any mediators. He mentored the leaders about church governance, provided lifestyle advice to residents, built a large church, and even provided financial support to some ministers, so that they could devote themselves fulltime to shepherding believers. However, the local pastors misappropriated money without putting into practice the organizational or behavioral changes to which they had avowedly committed. Kadir severed most of his ties in the neighborhood under the assumption that “They only cared about getting [money] from our missions and nothing beyond that. They want to rule like kings and have people in the churches be like slaves.”

¹²⁴ As I have already discussed in detail, extra-local domestic Protestant actors provide autonomy to local clergy and congregations, letting them decide how to do Christianity. Even if that were not the case, by virtue of being remote, they have very little knowledge of – and influence on – local dynamics. The same goes for the foreign actors for whom they mediate, and since the mediators’ main goal is to draw resources from foreign donors, they have little incentive to exert further effort into demanding change from the ghetto’s residents. In fact, this could jeopardize their relationship with the locals, whom they need as “bait.”

Archer recalled his disappointing experiences while trying to establish permanent relations with a group of pastors that included a Naked Gypsy from Nadezhda. He first sponsored a conference at a ski resort to get to know them, which must have made him look like a “golden cow” because the next year, the pastors sent him an inflated budget for a joint crusading tour across the country. He decided that “they clearly did not want to learn but to have a good time for free.”

Awareness that “abuse is common in international ministry, especially when dealing with poor people” (Samuel) has caused hopeful mentors to pass the job on to Bulgarian mediators, whom they support. While discussing his decision to turn down a Naked Gypsy pastor’s request to fund a church construction, Samuel said,

You can help with initial funds for building, but then what? The community needs development, where people learn to meet their own needs. [...] I would rather organize an event, but I leave Bulgarian leaders in charge, because this [...] teaches the others by example [...] They are sophisticated, well read, and they will be examples to [Roma] pastors, who will then set examples to their members.

In practice, however, it is rare to find domestic religious actors whose organizational arrangements, operational models, personal attitudes, expertise, and goals motivate them to invest time and effort into onerous work with stigmatized minority communities. It seems that they seldom even help the visitors to adjust their approach to the cultural and social particularity of the population. For example, a few foreigners led conferences in Musician Gypsy and Turkish churches (in one case on a yearly basis), but their handlers/translators clearly did not brief them in advance. On one occasion, an American discussed evolution versus creationism, assuming that everybody there was already familiar with the debate and the concepts. At some point, I asked my Musician Gypsy neighbor what was being said, and she shrugged her shoulders, “I don’t know, something about revolution?” This brought to memory a Bulgarian Protestant actor’s claim that, “[Marginalized] Roma call foreigners ‘crazy people with money’ and think that they are just looking for an audience, somebody to listen to them.” At the same

time, numerous religious actors of all ethnic groups in the country insist that foreigners are in the best position to talk to Roma about cultural practices, since Roma listen to them because they have the leverage of resources, because members of stigmatized minorities assume that they are well-disposed toward them, and because they have the aura of being somehow “wiser.”¹²⁵

Bulgarian Gypsy Pentecostal Churches in Sliven

Across the city of Sliven, Bulgarian Gypsies have established their own Protestant field that is starkly different from that of Nadezhdans. While the Bulgarian Gypsies were not the central focus of my research, I will briefly describe their churches in order to demonstrate that their religious leaders do not engage in practices of extraversion to the extent that Nadezhdan leaders do, that they do not depend on mediators in their interactions with foreign religious actors, and that the dynamics in this field come closer to the findings described by the literature on religious economies. The reason for this divergence is that compared to Nadezhdans, Bulgarian Gypsies constitute a more integrated community whose members have higher education, enjoy more resources, and suffer less stigmatization (see Chapters Two and Five). Consequently, their churches are more likely to resemble the other Bulgarian churches in the Town, as well as those we find in Western societies.

In the early 1990s, many Bulgarian Gypsies got swept up alongside their Bulgarian neighbors, co-workers, and friends in the early post-communist wave of fascination with Protestantism. Most members of the community have visited Protestant churches at some point in time, and even though the majority of them have opted not to join, they are more likely than Orthodox Bulgarians to “like what [they] saw and heard there” (Dimitra; Velina). Almost

¹²⁵ By contrast, some Bulgarians and Bulgarian Gypsies complain that their trying to bring real change to marginalized communities would be futile, because any criticism is dubbed “racist” (Ralitza; Zahari).

everybody in this small ethnic community has relatives and friends who are Protestant, which creates a relatively high level of tolerance and exposure. Some visit both Protestant and Orthodox churches, pointing out that they are both “Christian.”¹²⁶

The early Bulgarian Gypsy Protestant converts attended the same Bulgarian churches I introduced above. However, Bulgarians and Bulgarian Gypsies identified three reasons why they eventually went their separate ways: worship dynamics, ethnic tensions, and the Bulgarian Gypsy pastors’ personal ambitions to pursue leadership. That Bulgarian and Roma “temperaments” inevitably clash over worship dynamics is a stereotype used widely to explain or justify segregated churches. In the early 1990s, for example, some Bulgarian Gypsies joined Dove for its contemporary worship style, but left soon after the Bulgarian pastor assigned them to a separate evening service and segregated Bible discussion groups. Allegedly, he wanted to make Roma feel more “at home” by accommodating their taken-for-granted emotional nature and by enabling them to enjoy their preferred music style (Matei). Protestant Bulgarians use Western-style church music: anything from 19th-century US hymns to contemporary Christian rock. Most Bulgarian Gypsies, on the other hand, have taken to the flourishing domestic Gypsy Christian music industry – a blend of Gypsy, Turkish, Bulgarian, and Arabic dance rhythms (Musician Gypsy musician in his late 40s), which Roma worshippers find to be “more evocative and genuine” (Albena).¹²⁷ Disagreements over music style aside, Bulgarian and Bulgarian

¹²⁶ In looking to account for why Bulgarian Gypsies are more likely than Bulgarians to be drawn to Protestantism, my attention was also consistently drawn to differences in how they relate to religion in general. Echoing BOC priests who complain the their compatriots are not deeply religious due to their rationalistic and skeptical “nature,” Pastor Manev asserted, “the Bulgarian loves to philosophize, to test things; Roma are more open.” Proportionally, Bulgarian Gypsies of all ages are less likely than Bulgarians – and especially male Bulgarians – to equate being “religious” with believing in “grandma’s mumbo-jumbo” (Matei).¹²⁶ Consequently, compared to their Bulgarian peers, a higher percentage of Bulgarian Gypsy churchgoers are of working age and male, even though females are still in the majority.

¹²⁷ A Bulgarian Gypsy Pentecostal in her 30s relayed a story that exemplifies this tension. The Pentecostal Church organizes an annual camp, which is attended by youth from all over the country. One year, a Roma band performed

Gypsy Protestants still interacted regularly in the context of church services, Sunday schools, youth group meetings, and other informal social gatherings for a decade. According to some Bulgarian Gypsies, however, the Roma were never fully accepted: “7-10 years ago, all churches had mixed youth groups, and it was really nice, but even within those groups, there were ethnic cliques” (Albena).¹²⁸ And Bulgarian Protestants argue that it was the Bulgarian Gypsies who were cliquish and who followed ambitious leaders seeking to be in charge of their own churches (Veselinov).¹²⁹

Whether it was because they felt excluded or because they excluded themselves, a number of Protestant Bulgarian Gypsies formed their own worship groups during the 1990s. A handful of these eventually became small churches of no more than fifty members. One of them joined the UEPC and became the Second Evangelical Pentecostal Church (PC2). The Congregational Church remained the last major ethnically mixed congregation in Town until 2002, when most of its Bulgarian Gypsy members left to start another Pentecostal church in Nikola Kochev.¹³⁰ They called it Antioch. This move finalized the break between the Bulgarian and Bulgarian Gypsy Protestant subfields in Sliven. Initially the Bulgarian Gypsy subfield was

and Bulgarians started to dance to the rhythm. At this point, Pastor Lonev stopped the music and told everybody that this kind of dance was objectionable and he never wanted to hear it again.

¹²⁸ Further, I heard stories about Bulgarian Gypsies’ enduring racial stigmatization and harassment, which were made believable by my own observations. In one case, a young Bulgarian member of the Pentecostal Church told me that neither the “Gypsy scum” nor “your Mexicans” were “people.” In a second case, an elderly Bulgarian Adventist woman said to me that Roma were a “cursed race” because they were the descendants of Noah’s son Ham.

¹²⁹ On church schisms along ethnic lines driven by social and cultural differences and prejudice by members of the mainstream society, see Mullins (1987) and Niebuhr (1957). On church schisms driven by competition for leadership positions, see Shin and Park (1988).

¹³⁰ On my two visits to the Mormons, I did not meet any Roma among the dozen or so attendees, although I was assured that a couple of Bulgarian Gypsy members came occasionally; I knew of no Roma in the Baptist Church; and the one Bulgarian Gypsy family in the Adventist Church dropped out while I was there. Two affluent and cultivated Bulgarian Gypsy families constituted a decent proportion of the tiny Jehovah’s Witness congregation.

relatively densely populated with churches that competed over members, but given the small size of the community, by 2010, the PC2 and Antioch were the only two remaining players.¹³¹

The long-term survival and success of PC2 and Antioch has much to do with their young and adept leaders. They are accomplished representatives of a new generation of well-educated, multi-lingual, media-savvy, and Westernized religious minority leaders with extensive domestic and foreign contacts based on their educational, professional, and personal backgrounds. Filip, a member of the PC2 in his 30s, worked abroad, and he occasionally coordinates missionary teams of Kingdom adventurers for Youth with a Mission. Zahari, the pastor of Antioch and also in his 30s, attended the prestigious American University of Blagoevgrad and theological institutes in Sofia and in the US. He learned to preach while interpreting for professional American crusaders. Before creating Antioch, he had already established another church in Blagoevgrad. He routinely visits religious organizations and acquaintances in the US and the UK. Despite the qualifications of their leaders, these are not affluent churches. Both rent their spaces, and Antioch's members are slowly collecting money in order to construct their own building,¹³² but the prospective church's blueprints do not include any housing for the pastor's family, like they do in Nadezhda.

The major difference between the two Pentecostal Bulgarian Gypsy churches in Nikola Kochev is their size. On the couple of occasions when I attended services at the PC2, it had about a dozen attendees, whereas Antioch usually had 50-100. There are also some differences in terms of worship, music, leadership, and social interaction styles, which accounts for some

¹³¹ I heard that one pastor emigrated, that another pastor had to tend to his sick wife, and that many members switched to better options that came up (Zora).

¹³² PC2 rents a small convenience store space in a private house. In 2010, Antioch rented a hall in the basement of a non-operational community center, but the amenities were subpar and on a busy day seating ran out. In the course of nearly a decade, the congregation gathered enough funds to buy land and to retain an architect to design a new building. It was just starting to collect money for the actual construction, which might take even longer.

product differentiation in the religious marketplace. Otherwise, the churches are remarkably similar in terms of organizational stability; their leaders' backgrounds, skills, attitudes, and standing in the eyes of the congregation; infrastructural capacities and constraints; the demographic and socio-economic background of their members; the extent to which they demand that members undergo a profound personal transformation based on reading scripture and commitment to church life; belonging to a configuration of networks that demand some accountability and transparency on the part of the churches' leaders; and the ways in which they relate to international religious actors. Below, elaborate on the latter two characteristics.

Leaders' Autonomy

Whereas Nadezhdan pastors are primarily concerned with having the freedom to extract resources from foreign missionaries and do not worry about the consequences to their reputation, the leaders of PC2 and Antioch are kept in check not only by the need to be accountable and transparent to their denomination unions, but also the necessity to maintain their reputation in the network of domestic and international connections they have established with a lot of effort in the course of many years. Allowing rumors of bad practices to circulate would amount to risking losing important personal and professional relations.

Even though they are less than five minutes apart on foot and they are both members of the UEPC, PC2 and Antioch fall under the jurisdictions of different regional overseers. When Pastor Lonev facilitated PC2's application to the UEPC nearly two decades ago, a couple of the original members of the tiny congregation expected that the affluent and well-connected "mother church" would watch over them by passing on a fraction of its ample resources or locating foreign sponsors. As mentioned earlier, however, Pastor Lonev has been unwilling to do so as a matter of principle. Since then, the younger PC2 leaders have embraced the philosophy that

financial independence from the mother church is fundamentally a good thing for the spiritual wellbeing of the congregation. The two institutions continue to maintain relations, however. Some PC2 leaders send their children to Sunday school at the Pentecostal Church, they attend summer camps organized by the mother church, and preachers from the Pentecostal Church occasionally lead services at PC2. The church's leaders also have numerous direct ties to other domestic religious leaders and foreign missionaries, which motivates them to maintain a good reputation, even though they are not formally accountable to them.

When Zahari sought to formally register Antioch as a church in 2002, on the other hand, Pastor Lonev and “all other Bulgarian pastors in the Town” refused to acknowledge his ordination and to recommend that his church be accepted in their respective unions (Albena).¹³³ It was Gavril, the young and sympathetic Pentecostal diocesan overseer in the nearby city of Yambol, who registered the new church in the UEPC. A preacher from Yambol visits Sliven occasionally, and he substitutes for Zahari when needed. The distant Bulgarian church does not provide material assistance, however. Even if aid were available, Gavril said, poorer village churches would take precedence. Domestically, Zahari is mostly networked with young Bulgarian and upper class and well-integrated Roma Protestant leaders outside of Sliven. Such informal ties have also proven useful as bridges to missionaries. For example, Archer came to Bulgaria to evangelize and mentor on the invitation of a teacher at a theological college in Sofia. There, he met Ralitzia and a Roma pastor from Kyustendil. The two were familiar with Zahari, so while they were touring the country with Archer, they stopped by Antioch. Since then, the American has visited the church numerous times.

¹³³ Because of his background, skills, and connections, Zahari was seen as a dangerous competitor, especially given his added appeal of directly representing a disadvantaged and racialized population to foreign constituencies. Indeed, one Bulgarian minister expressed frustration that Antioch “stole” some of his church’s foreign contacts.

Embeddedness in International Religious Networks

Nadezhdan and Bulgarian Gypsy churches are embedded in international religious networks to varying degrees and in different ways. Whereas Nadezhdan churches compete for visits from international donors, Antioch is one of the most internationally prominent churches in Town. Yet, the congregation gets few material benefits from abroad – in fact, by leaving their old churches to join Antioch, some members lost access to free clothing and food elsewhere.¹³⁴ Despite failing to attract donors, Antioch is particularly attractive to missionaries who are willing to invest time and effort in building enduring relations and in affecting believers through long-term discipleship in the form of frequent visits, seminars, and workshops. It helps that English-speakers do not have to pay for interpreters here (William). Additionally, the tight community, the lively exotic Gypsy beats, and the charismatic worship style generate an uplifting and participatory mood, which many visitors enjoy and prefer over the atmosphere in Bulgarian churches. Archer said, “Bulgarians are favored when it comes to certain kinds of teachings on a deeper, more serious level, but the feeling of community is better at [Bulgarian] Gypsy churches ... and Zahari’s church, in particular, is very eager to grow.”¹³⁵

Most importantly, however, Antioch’s leaders and members treat missionaries as friends and sources of knowledge, as opposed to means to procuring material resources. They come to

¹³⁴ To my knowledge, only one American brought bags of small gifts for the participants in her seminar, and some British missionaries have been casually on the lookout for church developers. While the congregation attracts no aid, a couple of Protestants from other churches in the Town and Nadezhda insisted that the pastor himself receives monetary support from abroad, and that he even misappropriates money from the assembly. However, I did not hear such accusations from members or missionaries, and the rumors did not have any impact on the organizational and social dynamics in the church, so I decided to avoid the risks of alienating key actors and bracketed investigating them.

¹³⁵ The following video captures the relaxed dynamics of such visits (the intro shows Main Street downtown; to see the snippet from Antioch church only, forward to 1 min and 35 seconds into the video; the previous snippet is from the Baptist Church; the snippet after Antioch is from a Naked Gypsy church in Yambol; and the last snippet is from the Congregational Church): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_GP5h2q-Xc

seminars and sermons with notebooks, take notes, display interested, ask questions, and follow the lead when it comes to expressive displays during worship. Hopes that a visitor might volunteer to help with church development are expressed subtly: guests get pocket-sized calendars with a drawing of the proposed building, and Zahari discusses the collections' progress during each service, so anybody who is present realizes that this is an ongoing problem. But he also consistently reminds the parishioners that they should be realistic and responsible for their church right before passing around the box dedicated to the construction of the new church:

I am sick of going to British and Americans to beg – “Brother Americans, can you please give us some money” – and to explain to them the project for the building. So, I am not doing it anymore. They won't understand, they are not a part of our life. And they have a big crisis on their hands too, it is hard on them too. We have to do this on our own! People who left to work abroad years ago still ask me, “Are you still meeting in the museum?” It's maddening. What do you mean, “still”? We didn't follow our material interests; we stayed here with God. I could have gone to a Bible college in the US, but decided to stay behind to get this church built. It is time for Nikola Kochev, Oreshyaka, Novo Selo, and Komlouka to have a church of their own!¹³⁶

The fact that they are not treated as the means to enrichment is not lost on the experienced missionaries who visit the Bulgarian Gypsy Pentecostal churches, and they continue coming in order to do what missionaries ultimately want to do – save souls, build deep spiritual relations with other Christians, and do God's work.

Conclusion

The dynamics in the Nadezhdan religious field are analogous to those of individual and institutional instrumentalization observed in the international field of distributing material aid more generally. Those working for and with transnational religious organizations are often aware of the strategies of extraversion of local actors, yet they rarely speak about them, largely

¹³⁶ Filip expresses similar sentiments, “Churches should be independent of foreign sponsors, and in fact, they should be responsible for others.”

because this would discourage donors from contributing to their cause.¹³⁷ Some argue that religious organizations are “better” than NGOs, in part because they are driven by “higher” values, such as the deeply felt calling to do God’s work and to serve His children. A similar point is made by scholars who adapt the concept of extraversion to religious organizations, arguing that religious actors are inherently less interested in acquiring material benefits from their external contacts than in pursuing higher goals, such as embeddedness in a global religious community and exposure to external ideas and practices and Western culture. My observations in Nadezhda, however, demonstrate otherwise. Economic advancement is the primary motive for becoming a pastor in Nadezhda, and the complete lack of oversight and institutionalization has allowed the local pastors to take corruption to an unprecedented level, running their “churches” like business enterprises where nobody holds them accountable.

Chapter Three made reference to two occasions when foreign resources were framed in terms of “honey.” In one case, a local informant accused Nadezhdan pastors of “tasting the honey” and getting addicted to it. In another, a Bulgarian denomination leader admitted that many Bulgarian mediators perceive Nadezhdan pastors as “bees that carry honey.” This speaks to the complex relation among foreign missionaries, Nadezhdan pastors, and Bulgarian religious actors who serve as bridges between the two. Many missionaries seek out Roma in order to feel good about themselves as Christians who engage with marginalized communities; but instead of benefitting the local community of believers, their superficial engagement tends to bring discord and encourages corruption. The church leaders in the ghetto approach missionaries opportunistically, but are unable to gain access to them without the help of mediators. Mediators

¹³⁷ According to one anecdote, in the 1990s, the billionaire philanthropist George Soros was aware that a certain percentage of the money he funneled into his Open Society initiatives went into the pockets of staff, and yet he understood that this was an inevitable part of the process of transformation in Eastern Europe (Kligman, personal communication, August 2014).

also approach missionaries as a source of material benefits, but they need to incorporate the pastors in their own strategies of extraversion in order to attract the attention and money of foreign donors. Thus, the system of “benefits” facilitates instrumentalism on all levels. Further, the dynamics of symbiotic dual extraversion between Roma and mediators are fraught with tensions and distrust, as they are premised on a structural imbalance of power and access to resources. Ultimately, the mediators have the upper hand due to their skills and central position in the networks that span local and foreign actors.

As entrepreneurs, the Nadezhdan pastors primarily compete over material resources, as opposed to followers (and to the extent that they compete for followers, they do so in order to gain more material resources). Since their focus is not competition for followers, and since their churches are often populated by their relatives, Nadezhdan religious entrepreneurs do little to diversify their products in order to meet different customers’ preferences. Their primary goal is to establish churches that meet the basic standards of mediators and sponsors: charismatic songs and worship, healing practices, and the ability to observe many attendees upon visits that themselves generate attendance, albeit situationally. My observations in Nadezhda also show that denominations that demand high levels of commitment from church members are unable to establish a presence here. To some extent, this failure can be explained by the culture and lifestyle of the ghetto residents, who are notoriously difficult to mobilize in any sort of civic associations outside of the domestic sphere. The impoverished and undereducated Nadezhdans are particularly averse to joining churches that require paying tithes, intense learning of scripture, and committing time outside of worship. Another factor behind the absence of strict denominations in the ghetto is that the pastors reject them because running well-organized and accountable churches is not in their interest. On the one hand, they want to reap the benefits of

having a church without putting too much work into it. On the other hand, in the context of Sliven, the denominations that demand the highest levels of member commitment are also the most highly centralized and likely to demand transparency and accountability from the pastors.

The dynamics in the Nadezhdan religious field contrast with those described in the comparative literature and in the Protestant field in the Town. In the latter, Protestant churches have absorbed significant amounts of aid from local contributions and from international faith-based organizations, but in order to build stable and accountable organizations and to assist their underprivileged members. Most Protestant leaders in Sliven are less dependent on foreign religious actors for their and their churches' survival, but when they do interact with such actors, they have the capacity to do so without relying on opportunistic mediators. Also, missionaries are much more likely to engage with the congregations as long-term and involved mentors. The Bulgarian and Bulgarian Gypsy church leaders compete primarily for members, and to the extent that they pursue foreign resources, they do so in order to attract congregants. In their competition for members, they have diversified to serve distinct populations based on ethnicity, age, gender, class, and taste preferences. And denominations that demand high levels of commitment by church members have a healthy presence in the Town. My observation from Bulgarian and Bulgarian Gypsy churches come closer to reflecting the findings in the comparative literature, but these are churches in the more traditional Western sense of the word – stable, accountable, and transparent bureaucratic organizations and not family businesses ran by entrepreneurs.

Evangelical Christianity was first introduced to Nadezhda by a handful of intrepid and devout women, but it was soon hijacked by entrepreneurial men who realized that churches provided an opportunity to make a living by tapping into and exploiting the flow of resources in

the transnational Protestant networks. This has had significant consequences for the internal dynamics in Nadezhdan churches, which is the subject of Chapter Four, and for the effect these churches have had on gender relations in Nadezhda, which is the subject of Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF NANDEZHEDAN CHURCHES

It is about 6 pm on a winter evening, and service is beginning at a Naked Gypsy church in Nadezhda. The congregation meets at the pastor's house, where the entire first floor constitutes a single open hall. At the far end of the hall is a raised stage with a lectern, a table, an electronic piano keyboard, huge speakers, and a sound system. The lectern is adorned with bright artificial flowers and on the wall behind the stage hangs a big cross, but otherwise the room is devoid of decorations. The floor in the hall is dirty old linoleum speckled with holes. The walls feature many muddy and moldy blotches amidst the peeling paint. The hall is divided evenly into two seating areas, with an aisle in the middle. The seating accommodations are a hodgepodge of whatever the congregation was able to procure from diverse sources over the years. On the left, the rows of attached wooden folding seats were salvaged from an old movie theater. At the front, one can choose among a batch of mismatched and rickety chairs. In the back and to the right, people slouch on long wooden benches without backrests. The stuffy air inside is filled with the faint smell of sewage from the street, of mold, of smoke from the wood-burning stove, and of burnt plastic, which is used for kindling. Still, it is much better to be here in the winter than in the summer, when the room turns into a putrid inferno. Most churches in this part of the ghetto meet three evenings per week. During weekdays, the timing accommodates working men. On the weekends, it enables the women to get their regular Sunday house cleaning done in the morning.

This is one of the largest Naked Gypsy churches in Nadezhda, although it is hard to specify its exact membership size. Church attendance fluctuates dramatically here, depending on the season, on epidemics, and on the frequent conflicts between leaders and members, as well as

among members. I have witnessed anywhere between ten and seventy adults attend this particular house of worship. On this winter day, the church is on the full side. Some are attracted by the stove, which brings a temporary respite from the freezing temperatures outside and allows them to save on their own government-distributed wood at home. Most worshippers, however, are here to pray for sick family members, especially children. A lethal epidemic of measles and pneumonia is underway, and it has affected almost every family. The church attendees gathered here tonight are of all ages, but the majority of the adults are between 20 and 40 years of age. Men and women are represented about equally. The women are clustered to the left and to the back, whereas the men occupy the front rows and some of the benches in the middle-right area. There are also over a dozen children in attendance, from babies to tweens, with their parents or alone. There are no attempts to accommodate or to control them – there is no designated area for youngsters, nobody takes them aside for Bible study, and nobody tries to discipline them into sitting still, being quiet, and listening. Instead, they appear to be here for the music, to socialize among themselves, to play, and to people-watch, and this infuses the overall atmosphere in the church with a fair dose of noise and chaos.

The service opens with a series of songs that last for about half an hour. Some are fast, and some are slow; most are in Romany, but there are a couple in Bulgarian too. A common denominator that they all share is their “Gypsy” sound – a mixture of Balkan folk, modern pop, and oriental rhythms that is easy to discern by anybody who is familiar with the region. Another commonality is that they all speak to God – asking him to give strength to the church, expressing love for Him, pleading for His protection, etc. Even though some of the audience members sing along, the songs are performed by a group of four young men on the stage. One of them is on the keyboard, whereas the other three sing into microphones. Being in the “worship group,” as

the bands are called locally, is associated with status, but not necessarily with musical skills. Thus, some of the singers lack precision and melodious voices, and at times their amateurish performance can make a listener cringe. Still, this type of “orchestrated” music performance is deemed a central and necessary aspect of worship in Naked Gypsy churches (so much so that if the sound system of a church malfunctions, the pastor may cancel the service and take the entire congregation for a visit to another church).

The volume is set so high that one can feel one’s chest reverberate even in the back of the room. I have witnessed visitors who are unaccustomed to such high decibels cover their ears (I myself wear ear warmers as a pretext to protect my ears). The locals do not appear to mind, however. For many of the songs, the men in the audience stand up. When the tempo is quick and upbeat, they clap and smile; during slow and sad songs, they may put their hands on their chests, close their eyes, and sing along with emotional expressions on their faces. Some women with children on their laps clap also, but this appears to be more of a technique to entertain and appease the youngsters. The pastor, the deacon, or the assistants occasionally interrupt the performers to pray aloud for a blessed service, for divine inspiration for the preachers, for God’s presence, for the general wellbeing of the neighborhood, of Sliven and of the country, for the epidemic to be over, and so on. In the meantime, adults and children are constantly walking in and out, sustaining the sense of disorder.

After the last song, it is time to present “needs.” This is the most participatory part of the service, so everybody livens up. One by one, members of the audience get up and address their “brothers and sisters.” Nadezhdans believe that if more people pray for a specific need, God is more likely to hear and respond, so everybody presents their case and asks the others to pray for him or her. First, they thank God for all that He has already given them – “strength,” “food,”

“protection,” “life,” “the air,” “the universe,” and so on. Then they describe the specific reason that brought them here. Tonight, the majority of the presenters talk about the epidemic. Many children are in the hospital, some in critical condition. The pleas are delivered in eager, earnest voice, often accompanied by tears. Stories of adversity and desperation are recited like poems, occasionally so fast and frantically that the speakers seem to forget to swallow. They provide minute details, specifying when and how the child got sick, what necessitated a trip to the doctor, the name of the doctor, any specialists involved, the number of phone calls made, the exact diagnosis, and even metrics, such as blood pressure and temperature. The men generally speak in Bulgarian, whereas the women are more comfortable in the Romany language. After the last need is presented, the deacon leads the entire congregation in a long prayer. This is an emotional and raucous collective activity that can last up to five minutes. The men speak aloud, some of them even yell, whereas the women tend to whisper under their breath and to cry.

The pastor finally takes the stage and starts the sermon at 6:45 pm. He speaks in Bulgarian. His poor training in oratory skills makes it difficult to distinguish a clear central theme, but the most recurring concepts are faith and miraculous deliverance. He also continuously reminds the audience how important and powerful “the word of God” is. But instead of picking a section in the Bible and analyzing it in detail, the pastor throws in disjointed verses from here and there. At times the delivery is so disorganized and incoherent, involving so many jumps from one theme to another and from one Bible passage to another, that even I am unable to follow him, despite taking careful notes. To make matters worse for his undereducated audience, he sprinkles his speech with complex words that very few here know. These are often misused, so they appear to be used for the purpose of intimidating and demonstrating his intellectual credentials. Only a handful of men have Bibles and appear to follow the pastor’s

words. Most others, especially the women and the few men in the back, look ahead with blank faces. If they are not busy tending to children, they seem lost in their thoughts. Every time a child cries or somebody enters or leaves the hall, much of the audience turns around to take a long look. They appear more interested in the social dynamics around them than in the words of the pastor. At the same time, however, they do not greet each other, smile at each other, or interact with each other.

Sermons in Naked Gypsy churches are relatively short. This one ends at about quarter after seven. It is time for collective prayers and a few more songs again. A basket for contributions is passed around, and almost everybody drops in a few coins. However meager, this money will be used to pay the utility bills of the church and, if anything is left over, some of the basic expenses of the pastor (since they meet at the pastor's house, they do not have to pay rent, as some other churches in Nadezhda do). The pastor announces a chain fast for the epidemic and asks for volunteers.¹³⁸ People raise their hands – fasting is a primary local form of participation in church-organized activities outside of worship, even though it is done individually and in the privacy of one's house. The last remaining people are leaving. Some men from the spiritual council stay behind to discuss the service and church business, but lay members are generally unwelcome. Later on, they will accompany the pastor to houses of sick children, where they will pray for healing miracles.

Overview and Literature

The scene above captures the typical dynamics of services at Naked Gypsy churches in Nadezhda. I chose to open Chapter Four with it because the goal of this chapter is to sketch the

¹³⁸ During a chain fast, the members of a church coordinate amongst themselves to fast in a sequence – one person fasts during a certain time frame to be followed by another person, and so forth.

basic features of church life in the ghetto. This is a primarily descriptive chapter that sets the stage for the more analytical discussion in Chapter Five. It begins by elaborating on the role of the Nadezhdan pastors from a different analytical point of view from those adopted in previous chapters. Numerous scholars highlight the democratic nature of charismatic churches, which is said to curtail authoritarian tendencies in the leadership style of their ministers. Hobbs (1960) argues that Southern Baptist churches, for example, are inherently democratic and participatory because any member may propose policies, which are then subjected to a vote by the entire congregation (132). Harvey (1970) asserts that Protestant Christianity is premised on the democratic doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers,” where everybody has an equal relationship with God (190). In the context of developing societies, others argue, the democratic spirit stems from the fact that many churches are run by locals (Bays 1993, 175; Robbins 2001) and that authority is distributed across church members (d'Epina 1969, 75; Stoll 1990, 13; Willems 1967, 136).

On the other hand, scholars have acknowledged that pastors enjoy a distinctive position of privilege in their congregations, particularly when it comes to laying claim over charismatic gifts, such as healing (Chesnut 1997, 80-81, 102; Cox 1995, 247; Lalive D'Epiney 1969; Page 1984, 227). Some ministers and theologians focus specifically on the problem of authoritarian pastorship and its consequences for Evangelical churches. They assert that congregation members are often disengaged from the church polity (Wood, 1970) because they do not understand formal rules and procedures (Ingram 1981) or because they are taught to value harmony over discord (Ingram 1980; Pinson 1977; Richardson 1978; Wood 1970, 1067). This, in turn, undermines the spirit of democracy and sets the conditions for the emergence of divinely sanctioned and socially-confirmed authoritarian leaders (Ingram 1981, 121). Enroth (1992)

insists that powerful and controlling pastors go unaccountable and unchallenged all too often, and they appeal to their alleged divine anointment to manipulate and coerce their flock into following their arbitrary decisions, wishes, rules, and definitions of reality through fear, guilt, and intimidation (189).¹³⁹ Reid (1969) claims that authoritarian leadership styles harm congregations because by retaining all decision-making power, the pastor alienates the flock and creates hostility that is manifested in terms of low tithing, morale, and creativity (22). Writing from a “post-modernist” perspective, Oh (2003) similarly disavows authoritarian pastorship in favor of service leadership. Servant leaders use their character and relations (as opposed to position of power) to benefit others, not control them. They also share and delegate power and trust their subordinates (142).

The dynamics in Nadezhda reflect the findings of authors who emphasize the authoritarian tendencies in leadership styles in Evangelical churches. In this context, the role of pastors is framed by the challenges they face in maintaining their position of leadership, which is often disputed on the basis of their pursuits of material resources, inadequate skills, and proclivity for corruption, as shown in Chapter Three. They hold onto power by claiming monopoly over the authority to deal with supernatural powers and by establishing authoritative organizational structures.

Second, I will discuss what motivates Nadezhdans to become Christians and to join churches. The popular perception among Bulgarians is that “opportunistic” Roma convert to Protestantism primarily in the pursuit of material benefits. This line of argument is rarely

¹³⁹ Enroth identified 10 sets of features he found in abusive churches: control-oriented leadership, spiritual elitism, manipulation of members, perceived persecution, lifestyle rigidity, emphasis on experience, suppression of dissent, harsh discipline of members, denunciation of other churches, and the infliction of painful exit processes.

engaged by the academic literature, however, even if only to dispel it.¹⁴⁰ This is surprising, given that much of the literature embraces the so-called “deprivation and disorganization” argument (Robbins 2004), according to which people are most likely to seek escape, consolation, hope, the promise of alternative rewards, social connections, and moral direction in Evangelical churches when they experience economic hardship, sudden displacement, and social changes that leave them in a state of anxiety and anomie (Anderson 1979; d'Epina 1969; Martin 1990, 190-91; Thomas and Hopkins 2009, 130-131; Willems 1967). Some have criticized such arguments for being overly general and for failing to take into account the specific conditions of the contexts in which conversion processes have taken place (Brodwin 2003, 87; Levine 1995, 166; Wacker 2001, 60).

After dispelling the popular perception that Nadezhdans join Evangelical churches in pursuit of material resources, I will show that in the context of the ghetto, poverty has, indeed, shaped the structural conditions of life in a way that explains the magnetism of the new religion. Nadezhdans join churches for a variety of reasons, ranging from pursuing community and entertainment to seeking new ways of coping with extreme poverty. Above all, however, Nadezhdans are driven by the hope for miraculous healings, against the appallingly poor health conditions in the neighborhood.

Third, I will describe the nature of the relationship between Nadezhdan believers and God. In doing so, I adopt a distinction between transactional and relational models of relating to God (Fisher 2009; Murray n.d.; Tucker 2009). In the transactional model, believers commit to

¹⁴⁰ But see Wanner (2003), who asserts that material aid constitutes one factor behind the “magnetism” of Evangelical churches in Ukraine (281). Thomas and Hopkins (2009) similarly claim that in the context of Africa, “In addition to worship gatherings, churches and faith associations provide food, shelter, childcare” (131), which appeal to marginalized populations. However, the point is rarely elaborated in detail, as the authors move on to discuss the non-tangible benefits of joining churches, such as sense of community and self-empowerment.

God – or to doing things for Him, like going to church, reading the Bible, etc. – in exchange for blessing they expect to receive from Him. In the relationship model, believers pursue a deep personal transformation based on developing a loving and meaningful relationship with God and on following their divinely inspired calling.

I will show that Nadezhdans primarily embrace a transactional attitude toward relating to God, in part because routine exchanges in daily life are a familiar aspect of survival in this particular context. And even when they decide to commit to God in exchange for receiving benefits from Him, they often postpone doing so fully (by going to church on a regular basis) because the traditional local culture requires (abstinence from) behaviors that are incompatible with the expectations placed upon Christians.

Fourth, the chapter will address the most common definition of what it means to be a Christian in Nadezhda. According to the literature, becoming an Evangelical Christian is associated with profound symbolic transformations that separate people from their past and from the secular world (Burdick 1993, 224; Brusco 1995; Chesnut 1997, 125; Droogers 2001, 46; Gill 1990, 714; Martin 1990, 163; Meyer 1998; Meyer 1999; Robbins 2004; Tuzin 1997). In addition to the symbolic rituals of baptism and other subsequent “rituals of rupture” (Maxwell 1999, 68; Robbins 2003, 224-27), this break often involves adhering to ascetic behaviors that distinguish believers from others around them, such as abstinence from smoking, drinking alcohol, using drugs, engaging in crime, gambling, cussing, fighting, dancing, extra-marital sex, wearing provocative clothing and jewelry, and so on (Austin-Broos 1997; Brodwin 2003, 88; Lehmann 2001, 65; Levine 1995, 171-72; Loreto Mariz 1994, 8; Marshall 1993, 234; Robbins 2004; Wacker 2001, 122). Converts generally understand the world as a struggle between the divine

and the demonic (Barker 2001,107), although they define the demonic differently based on the context and the local social concerns (Robbins 2004).

Chapter Four demonstrates that the transformation that marks a Nadezhdan's new life as a Christian is defined primarily in this-worldly behavioral terms, which involve adopting an ascetic lifestyle. A "believer" is generally equated with a set of practices: having faith and praying, abstaining from certain unholy behaviors and corporeal pleasures, and embracing positive character traits. To be a Christian, however, does not necessitate a deep understanding of God's nature or plans. Many of the most common rituals of rupture are not necessarily required for one to identify as a Christian either. Failure to adhere to this commonly accepted definition of a "true Christian" often precludes one from joining a church or from being baptized, either because the person feels unworthy or because others exclude him or her. But this hardly means that the definition is set in stone, as residents engage in ongoing symbolic battles over the significance of key practices, such as going to church, reading the Bible, dancing, and drinking alcohol in moderation.

Fifth, I will analyze the extent to which Nadezhdan churches provide opportunities for believers to participate in church life in the context of worship. The charismatic worship style is a distinctive feature of Evangelical churches that has profound consequences for life in those churches. According to a number of authors, it attracts believers because of its eventful and experiential quality, spontaneity, and exuberance (Brouwer et al. 1996,179; Burdick 1993, 87; Corten 1999, 42-43; Lalive d'Epinay 1969, 52-53). Some make the point that worship rituals are a much-needed – and even addictive (Blumhofer 1993, 210-11) – release from the ascetic routines believers follow in their daily lives (Kiernan 1976; McGuire 1982; Robbins 2004; Stringer 1999, 159; Thompson 1966, 368-69). Its ecstatic nature also generates solidarity-

building collective effervescence, which solidifies the sense of community among church members (Bomann 1999, 104-105). An especially important element of the worship ritual is the music. Many authors emphasize the extent to which singing and dancing provides a cathartic emotional release in Evangelical churches (Bomann 1999, 110-113; Cox 1995, 142; Nichol 1966, 64-65). In the context of Brasil, Chesnut (1997) argues, churches that employ folk and pop rhythms see higher attendance rates, and their members – especially females – report that sacred music is among the things that bring them the greatest joy (102-103).

Chapter Four will demonstrate that Nadezhdans are relatively passive in the context of church worship. The bands dominate the music performances, whereas a substantial part of the audience does not participate in the singing. Ecstatic practices – such as dancing and speaking in tongues – are not socially acceptable. People are also disengaged from the sermons, which are often difficult to follow and incoherent. The two aspects of church services that are fairly participatory are the presenting of needs and the collective prayers for those needs, as these are the main reason why most members come to church. They provide an opportunity for troubled members to put forth the problems they are facing and to pray individually and collectively for their resolution.

Sixth, I will analyze the extent to which Nadezhdan churches provide opportunities for believers to participate in church life through extra-worship activities. Much of the comparative literature emphasizes that the vast majority of members of Evangelical churches have the opportunity to occupy various positions (preachers, deacons, and leaders of groups) within the church organizations, which engages them actively in the lives of their congregations (Blacking 1981, 45; Chesnut 1997, 135; Lalive D'Epinay 1969, 49). Churches also demand active involvement by lay members in general in terms of tithing (Chesnut 1997, 119; Corten 1999, 59;

Lalive D'Epinay 1969, 54; Loreto Mariz 1994, 73) and attending church services, meetings, crusades, and Bible and home groups (Chesnut 1997, 141; Gill 1990; Willems 1967, 168). Such practices not only promote the sense of “strong institutional grounding” (Levine 1995, 169; Martin 1998, 117-18; Robbins 2004), commitment, solidarity, and empowerment in the context of the church, but they also teach institution-building skills that can be applied in other contexts, such as community and political mobilization. In fact, in many places where states are unable to provide basic services (Comaroff & Comaroff 2003, 121), Evangelical churches have come to replace other institutions in providing health, job placement, and educational services (Chesnut 1997; Marshall 1993, 225; Willems 1967).

Due to their financial and organizational weakness, the authoritarian leadership style of the pastors, and the high levels of apathy in the ghetto, however, Nadezhdan churches fail to provide adequate opportunities for members to engage with the organization and with other members outside of worship. Only a couple of churches run social programs to help their poorest members, and even those offer infrequent services for a tiny portion of the congregation. While most churches have small groups of young men who meet and discuss the Bible and Christian approaches to dealing with everyday life, there are no such groups for the majority of the members. Most believers also rarely participate in crusades, social gatherings, movie screenings, summer camps, and other kinds of activities that are often organized by the Protestant churches downtown. Coordinated chain fasting for major problems facing the community is common, but this takes place in the privacy of members' homes and does not require any interaction among them.

The Role of the Pastors

Church leadership in Nadezhda is associated with numerous social and material benefits (see Chapter Three).¹⁴¹ These include prestige, claims to superior education through attending Bible schools, free travel, external contacts, priority access to material aid, paid utility bills, cash, and, in some cases, a free house. Pastors' claims to such benefits do not go unchallenged, however, as lay Christians often complain about their non-spiritual motivations, lack of competence, and corrupt practices. According to the Bulgarian pastor Gavril, who is familiar with Nadezhda's religious field, "The problem for local leaders is that people know each other's 'dirty laundry' and any misstep delegitimizes one as a leader." Examples of real and imagined missteps abound: pastors who feed children are accused of appropriating the sponsors' money and of only feeding their own relatives (Mina); people condemn pastors for taking money from politicians during elections (Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s); and residents continuously suspect that pastors steal money from the churches' funds and "keep secrets and do not tell their brothers who pays them" (Turkish man in his 40s). The antagonism between lay believers and pastors has reached a point where a pastor's sick child is perceived as evidence that he has misbehaved and is being punished (Sevda). Even pastors who do not engage in corruption are viewed with suspicion (Toncho).¹⁴² As a result, many believers flee the churches, and those who stay generally scoff at the idea of contributing to pastors' salaries (Vitan). In general, people do contribute monetarily in Nadezhdan churches, as everybody feels obliged to give something at the end of service, but the sums amount to a pittance. Even raising money for a church's daily

¹⁴¹ Men from all walks of life have become pastors since the early 1990s, ranging from unemployed alcoholics to boxers, to petty merchants, to successful musicians.

¹⁴² Pastor Berk complained that high levels of distrust in religious leaders have affected his dressing style: "Pastors should dress nicely, but I dress in jeans so that people will not say that I am stealing."

operations can be a challenge. According to Semih, a Turkish man in his late teens, “Some people try to collect [more] fees for AC and heating, but people run away.”

Young men pose an especially tough predicament for pastors. On the one hand, they tend to comprise the most active members, who staff key church organizational positions, such as musicians, members of the spiritual council, and assistants to the pastor. The absence of youth in a church is generally seen as a sign of decline and lack of divine favor. Pastor Zhivko summed up this idea as follows: “We [the church] have a great future, but it all depends on the youth.” On the other hand, young men are most likely to challenge pastors about their lack of transparency and accountability. They are also most likely to pursue some biblical training, and this occasionally emboldens them to question the pastors’ theological qualifications, which are often minimal. Vitan launched the following complaint about pastors’ inadequacy when it came to being spiritual leaders:

Many pastors do not know the Bible and embarrass themselves [...] People notice that – even Naked Gypsies – and leave, start talking about it. The Bible is spiritual food, and I have heard people say, ‘We ate bad food today.’ [...] But the old generation of pastors does not let go of the power. At least there will be no more new churches, as all the sponsors are gone.

Filip, who was familiar with the religious dynamics in Nadezhda, similarly asserted that the lack of proper training goes a long way in explaining why parishioners frequently challenge the pastors: “Besides being too concerned with getting help from foreigners, Roma clergy are inefficient because they do not develop themselves. The people catch up with them and then the pastor starts controlling them and things get bad.”

Each ethnic group in the ghetto has a contingent of young men who “hop” churches every so often due to conflicts with pastors – I came to call them the “floating congregations” because they rarely stayed at any one church for a long period of time. Some of them have ambitions to start their own churches (Cenk; Ganka; Luchezar), and many have done so in the past.

According to a Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s, “In the old days, all ethnic groups went to the same church. Then the youth learned to read the Bible and opened their own churches.” The following account by Berk, a young Turkish man who became a pastor of a splinter church a few years before I met him, eloquently captures the general conflict between Christian youth and the older generation of church leaders in Nadezhda:

Many people have no respect for religious leaders, but in our young church we try to fix this. People say that we are solid. We realized that if we went along with the old leaders, they would continue in their old ways, so youths gathered from all churches to restore the Christian name. In the other churches, the pastor is God, he controls the money, the council. This is not according to the Bible. He wants to be obeyed. The pastors took the blessings that came to the neighborhood and did not give it to the needy, did not use it to good ends. They could have sent children to Bible schools, but they did not want to. They only chose their own sons, even if those were bad people. And then [one of the pastors] went out with a married woman and destroyed the name of the church. Guilt is infectious. If one of us does something bad, people say, ‘the boys.’ When we [finally] went to Bible school, the pastors started to hate us because they saw us as competition. There, we also saw the bad qualities of the pastors. We learned about the kitchens, the funding, things we did not know before. Years ago [an American sponsor] sent money for the young people, but we never saw it. He visited later, and we chatted with him without [the pastor] being there. The pastor had told him that he had offered us the money, but we refused it. When we approached the pastor, he kicked us out – ‘Am I supposed to report to you?! If [that sponsor] leaves, somebody else would come [...] You grew up too much and now try to tell me what to do!’

In response to attacks on their legitimacy, pastors and their supporters frequently emphasize the difficulty and uniqueness of their work and point out that Nadezhdans fail to understand what church leadership entails and how it should be rewarded:

Hatred and gossip come from Satan [...] The churches neglect apostleship and prophesy. People don’t listen to that. Hopefully leaders are increasingly respected and people start to recognize the service and the calling of the ministers. But some people do not understand the difference between pastors, ministers, and brothers. As more and more people go to Bible school over the last 4-5 years, more do. (Argir)

People do not understand the work [the pastor] puts in, the sacrifices he makes. People still need to understand that pastors need salaries. We should not hate and slander each other but hold our hands in unity. (Pastor Zhivko)

A pastor has a tougher fight because he is stronger in the faith and the Devil is more interested in him. If he slips, he will drag down the entire flock. (Pastor Kalcho)

At the core of the pastors' legitimacy is their claim that they bring a unique value – a specialized knowledge about dealing with the supernatural. Most importantly, pastors claim to have unique authority in supernatural approaches to dealing with disease and hardship. Traditionally, disease was often associated with magic spells and evil spirits, and people preferred to go to the familiar healer/diviner next door, as opposed to a patronizing and intimidating modern doctor in the Town. Over the past two decades, however, Evangelical entrepreneurs have managed to substitute the source of disease with Satan and to reframe the act of healing as “victory” over “the enemy” (Yovko; Naked Gypsy woman in her 50s). In addition to proclaiming that going to soothsayers endangers one's relationship with God (Musician Gypsy woman in her 40s), pastors have instilled a commonly-shared belief that turning to God is the best solution to dealing with health problems. As a result, nowadays it is common to hear prayers that exalt God as the ultimate healer:

[God,] You are specialist in all diseases! I've never underestimated doctors or medications, but Jesus is the doctor in our lives! (Pastor Zhivko)

You are the king of kings, the doctor of doctors, the professor of professors. Help us, heal us, Holy God, Jesus! He is our immunization. (A Naked Gypsy man during prayer at Pastor Bozhko's church)

Pastors claim to be uniquely knowledgeable and qualified to call upon God/Jesus/The Holy Spirit, whether it is to heal, to baptize, or to bless. A Naked Gypsy pastor claimed that God told him,

I gave you a job to seek the sick and the sad, so that you can pray for them [...] We are obliged to pray. No matter who asks us – Roma, Bulgarians, Jews. We've been given this power and if anybody asks us, we are forced to. (Pastor Bozhko)¹⁴³

¹⁴³ When prayer is not enough, pastors may even act as health mediators of a sort, as they accompany sick people to the hospital to pray and to interact with the doctors as authoritative figures. It is not always easy to distinguish whether a pastor goes in the capacity of a spiritual leader or of a relative, but hospital-bound parties seem to draw confidence from having a pastor in their midst.

They usually do so through their ability to summon the Holy Spirit either in the context of church services or in private prayers. Consequently, despite their problematic standing as church leaders, pastors have wrangled a de-facto monopoly over the practice of miraculous healing. Currently, the ghetto has only a couple of women who still practice spells and fortunetelling, but most residents shun them as witches “from the Devil.” It should be noted, however, that many Nadezhdans go to pastors in the same way that they used to go to healers – only in times of need. The rest of the time, they continue to maintain the identity of “believers,” but they use a range of reasons for staying away from the churches – from being unworthy to not trusting the pastors.

Second, pastors claim legitimacy by insisting that they possess a rare expertise in and relationship with the “word of God,” or the Bible, which is assumed to have supernatural powers. As experts, pastors have authority over the use of this “weapon.” Prior to every sermon at Pastor Bozhko’s church, for example, the deacon prays for the pastor’s immanent delivery of holy words: “Bless the mouth of the preacher to encourage the church, to bless the church, it is a wonderful deed in this life.” Yet, there is little personal or institutional effort on behalf of church leaders to get others to establish their own direct relationship with the text by reading the Bible and by gaining intimate knowledge of its content. The churches offer no regular Bible classes, and only some pastors organize sporadic meetings for men to discuss biblical texts and moral teachings. Instead, pastors support the notion that, like a magic spell, the word of God can be heard without even necessarily being understood. Being a Christian is more about having faith and the grace of God, as well as about exhibiting proper behavior, but less about knowing the Bible. According to Pastor Bozko, “Many people say that they read the Bible, but will they enter Heaven? We have grace, Jesus’ love for humanity.”¹⁴⁴ At the same time, in a place where

illiteracy is rampant, their rare training sets pastors apart as exceptionally learned, and they often emphasize that in an attempt to boost their authority. Pastor Kalcho boasted, “I only have fourth grade, but people think that I have a PhD,” and Pastor Zhivko once proclaimed, “I am a translator of the Bible!”

Finally, pastors claim supernatural authority by monopolizing the performance of certain rites, such as wakes and funerals. Upon a death, it is not uncommon for many pastors in the area to congregate in the deceased’s house for the wake, even if the person was not a church member and if nobody called for them. There, they take turns delivering encouraging speeches, leading spiritual songs, and praying for the departed. The bereaved relatives do not challenge such acts of taking initiative by the pastors. Who carries out the funeral service at the cemetery usually depends on who is closest to the family. The performance of the funeral rites imbues the deliverer with an air of authority and solidifies his status as a community leader.

In addition to claiming monopoly over the expertise in dealing with supernatural forces, most pastors maintain power through authoritarian practices. This is especially true in the case of the Naked Gypsy and most Turkish churches. The church essentially belongs to the pastor and his family, and they have the authority to single-handedly expel anybody they dislike, which happens often. Many church members do not even know the denomination to which the congregation officially belongs – instead, churches are identified by the pastors’ names (“Bozhko’s church,” “Adem’s church,” etc.). The ministers’ centrality in the church is symbolically reinforced during each service, as members pray for their leader explicitly: “Above all, bless our pastor, his family.” In order to keep the benefits of pastorship in the family, the

¹⁴⁴ This attitude resembles the traditional local understanding of the Quran as a holy text one can use to achieve supernatural goals, but without necessarily understanding it. Even nowadays, despite the heavy emphasis on living as a conscious Muslim, I met a Turk who admitted to having memorized the Quran by heart without actually knowing what it says.

most important positions in the organization – such as deacons, preachers, treasurers, and musicians – go to close relatives. The spiritual council makes most decisions without consulting the congregation, and in some cases, the council itself is a mere formality. It is assumed that the pastor's son will succeed him. In Bozhko's church, for example, each sermon included a requisite prayer for the son of the pastor to learn the English language, so that he could be "one person in this neighborhood who can translate" and deal with sponsors when he took over the leadership.¹⁴⁵

Motivations for Joining Churches

Nadezhdans become Christians and join churches for a number of reasons. Some are driven by social considerations, some are attracted by the entertainment provided in the churches, but most seek supernatural assistance in dealing with hardship, especially health problems. Their motivations, however, do not conform to the widely held belief among Bulgarians (those who are aware of the mass conversions to Evangelical Christianity in ethnic minority communities) that Roma join churches in pursuit of aid in the form of food, clothing, or money. Prior to embarking on my fieldwork, I myself hypothesized that material aid was a crucial factor behind the mass conversion of desperately impoverished Roma to Evangelical denominations with foreign ties. Indeed, this hypothesis was supported to a limited extent, as I discovered that Nadezhdan churches fill up when foreigners visit or when aid is distributed, as

¹⁴⁵ A foreign sponsor sent money for the boy's private school fees and for English lessons, and while I was in Sliven, the pastor was asking for even more money for a new laptop, as well as for a commitment to have the child sent to the U.S. to study. Since I left Sliven, the pastor has passed away, and his teenage son has, indeed, succeeded him as a church leader, even though he never went to Bible school. The American sponsor appears untroubled by this, since the young man knows a little English and his leadership is convenient. In other cases, missionaries seem to be pleased to see sons follow in their fathers' footsteps, unaware of the broader implications of this nepotistic practice.

both regular and occasional churchgoers are more likely to show up.¹⁴⁶ Also, aid is a factor in some people's decisions regarding which church to choose.¹⁴⁷ For example, Sevda, a Turkish woman in her 40s, said that her family stopped going to their old Turkish church when the pastor allegedly cheated them out of aid and switched to Zhivko's church, where they were the beneficiaries of aid, even though they were not "official" members. And Nadezhdan Christians are not ashamed to admit that they hope for aid. Some even pray for their leaders to find sponsors: "We pray for those sponsors who want to help. Bless our leader and the spiritual council, give them wisdom" (An elderly Naked Gypsy man during service at Bozhko's church).

On the other hand, my fieldwork led me to believe that material aid has surprisingly little to do with why Nadezhdans become "believers." Numerous informants with "insider" knowledge supported this belief, arguing that aid might attract more people to a church at times when boxes were distributed, but overall it does not explain why so many Roma start going to church in the first place, or why they maintain their identity as "Christians." One Naked Gypsy poignantly asserted that many people would feel ashamed if they only went to church when aid was distributed, making it obvious that they were not true Christians but had solely opportunistic motives: "We still have some dignity not to pretend to be Christian for a piece of clothing!" (Vitan). And I came across a number of Nadezhdans from all ethnic groups who felt humiliated by aid and complained that it creates a society of "users." A Musician Gypsy complained that

¹⁴⁶ This is equally true for ethnic Bulgarian churches. Some members complain that destitute Bulgarian pensioners – especially widows – join churches without really embracing Evangelical Christianity, but primarily to gain access to material aid and to seek out human contact. This is despite the fact that ethnic Bulgarian churches have bureaucratic structures that enable them to police who joins the organization and to monitor membership and attendance dynamics, so free riding is not easy – in order to receive aid, one needs to attend church regularly and to be perceived as a genuine Christian and as a member of the group.

¹⁴⁷ Nadezhdans have other sources of aid as well. The municipality occasionally distributes items such as fire wood, flour, oil, pasta, and so on, and most residents are eager to take advantage of such assistance, regardless of their relative economic status.

“people need jobs, not handouts [...] people need to learn to work, to give, to be useful, not to take” (Argir). Some Musician Gypsy churchgoers were even known for passing on their “gift boxes” to poorer people. In other words, a large number of Nadezhdan Christians perceive foreign aid differently compared to their pastors, believing that it brings about more spiritual and social harm than benefit to individuals and to the community.

This is not to say that extreme marginality is not a factor in the proliferation of churches in the Roma ghetto and the high rates of acceptance of Evangelical Christianity by the residents. But it does so by affecting the structural conditions of life in the ghetto, which prompts people to turn to supernatural forces when dealing with the numerous challenges they encounter on a daily basis. More specifically, marginalized Nadezhdans seek out religion in order to get reassurance of future good fortune, to solidify their social ties in their extremely encapsulated communities, to find some entertainment outside of their homes, to “treat” physical ailments, and to deal with the stress of poverty itself.¹⁴⁸

Prior to the arrival of Evangelical Christianity, Nadezhdans were not strongly affiliated with any theological doctrine, be it Christian or Islamic. However, the folk culture in the ghetto has always been characterized by an avid concern with the supernatural, from magic and witchcraft to extraterrestrials.¹⁴⁹ Charismatic Evangelical Christianity, which emphasizes benevolent and evil spirits and mystical entities, has proven to be compatible with traditional

¹⁴⁸ By contrast, many Bulgarians join Protestant churches in search of some deeper understanding of philosophical truths, to combat their disenchantment with the turbulent modern post-socialist society, or to pursue social connections and institutional grounding.

¹⁴⁹ Mina shared the following story: “Last year, somebody started a rumor that the Martians are coming in a flying saucer, so people stopped their children from leaving the house. People were running on the street, screaming, ‘The Martians are coming!’” Nevena confirmed the account, adding that she watched an interview with a Bulgarian, who claimed that the aliens detested the stench in the country and how “stupid” the people were.

Roma culture, adding new tropes to the repertoire of supernatural forces that are believed to inhabit the ghetto and to affect its residents' lives.¹⁵⁰ Mina conveyed the following story:

Every year, there is a fair in Sliven. One year there was a carousel with swans, and some people thought that they were angels. 'God is coming! This is why the children got ill!' Many youth started going to church then and people started to pray. There was [a laser spotlight beam pointing at the sky] and people thought that these were the angels. People came out to see the angels, the streets were crowded, no one could pass, so people climbed on the roofs to see the angels coming. But then others went to check it out and realized what was going on.

One tenet of Evangelical Christianity that has proven to be especially salient with Roma culture is the emphasis on "the blood of Jesus," or the notion that sacrifice brings about health and good fortune (the local definition of "salvation"). For generations, Naked Gypsies, in particular, have slaughtered chickens on the day of Bango Vasil (St. Basil) and lambs on St. George's day, and they have placed high symbolic value on the blood of the animal, which is used to mark children for supernatural protection. The language of the pastors evokes those traditions: "God, I put your blood on your people, children, the state, the nation" (Pastor Bozhko).

Some Nadezhdans join churches in search for a sense of community, but their number is small in size. A handful of young males join because their friends are church members and because they feel compelled to conform; but in even more cases, men in their teens and 20s are worried about losing their status as fun-loving chaps if they become churchgoers, so they eschew organized religion. Some people join because they are related to pastors and feel obligated to do so. In one instance, I witnessed a Musician Gypsy pastor pressuring his nephew: "You are my relative. All my other relatives have become believers, and I want to make you one also." But in a place where almost everybody is related, many manage to resist the social pressure. Residents already live in tightly interwoven networks of relatives and neighbors. These networks provide

¹⁵⁰ Some of the comparative literature indicates that in other contexts, too, Evangelical Christianity incorporates aspects of the local traditional culture, which is partially what makes it so appealing across diverse societies (Cox 1995, 101-2; Hollanweger 1984, 405; MacRobert 1988).

much-needed safety for severely marginalized people, but borrowing from Durkheim's understanding of the relationship between social integration and psychological well-being, one could also argue that many ghetto residents feel "suffocated" from being too socially integrated (Dora; Mina; Nevena). For some, churches compound this feeling. A Musician Gypsy man in his 50s man mused that he had considered going to church, but had not done so because he felt that "everybody [would] be staring and gossiping." Churches are often perceived as the sites of gossip, strife, and injustice. A number of informants who had left church shared that they were repelled by feuds with other church members, or by the intrusive behavioral policing and interference in their private lives (Vela). Some Naked Gypsies even go to Musician Gypsy and Turkish churches (and members of all ethnic groups in the ghetto occasionally go to Bulgarian churches in the Town), because they like worshiping in anonymity, away from snooping neighbors (Ganka).¹⁵¹

A handful of young residents are attracted to the churches because they offer music and the entertainment.¹⁵² Roma Christian music has a wide fan base in Nadezhda, where it is not uncommon to hear even "secular" people play it while partying on the streets. At the same time, the ghetto has no public places where youth can find entertainment, such as movie theaters, concert halls, malls, and cafes or restaurants with ample seating. Thus, besides the private parties and weddings that often take place in the streets, churches constitute the only local public institutions to offer "entertainment" on daily bases. This attracts a number of children and young

¹⁵¹ Vitan lamented that Naked Gypsies who go to other churches "do not make friends there. The Musicians and the Turks make hypocritical friends, they still think they are above us." He also accused a Turkish pastor of using his Naked Gypsy deacon "as a slave, to do all his work without paying him," and he insisted that the pastor only tolerated Roma churchgoers to boost his numbers and to show foreigners that he has members from poorer groups.

¹⁵² Over the past two decades, Roma Christian music (which adopts typical Roma rhythms and is often sung in the Romany language) has matured into a distinct genre that has gained wide popularity among ethnic minorities in Bulgaria. The genre boasts its own nationally renowned stars and a national radio station, and a large number of trendy songs are circulated through CDs and electronically.

adults – especially among the ranks of the Musician Gypsies and the Turks – who seek a place to “hang out.” A handful of informants recalled how they first ventured into a church because they were beckoned by the sounds of the music coming from within (Cenk). Further, knowing how to play an instrument is a valuable skill for men in the ghetto, and some young men join with the hope of learning. Indeed, some of the better musicians in Nadezhda have trained in the churches.

By far, the poor health conditions in the ghetto constitute the most important factor behind Nadezhdans’ becoming Christians and joining Evangelical churches. The crowded ghetto is a hotbed of epidemics, from virulent flu strains to various poxes and hepatitis. The outcome is often grave, as discussed in Footnote 65. In addition to being fraught with contagious diseases, life in Nadezhda entails constant physical dangers. Most of the houses were built by non-professionals and without regard to safety standards; thus, almost every family has a story about somebody – usually a child – getting hurt as s/he fell from the steep, narrow, and rail-less stairs or from the flat rooftops, which are used as playgrounds, summer kitchens, or animal pens. Such incidents are often imbued with supernatural meaning. In one example, a Turkish woman in her 30s complained: “Even the house attacks us – the kid got caught on the bench and fell on her head yesterday” (Belgin). In a different example, Dora tripped and fell and insisted that some invisible force pushed her and that her leg was broken; because she prayed on her way to the doctor, however, God downgraded her injury to an ankle strain. Members of the medical institution, who blatantly despise Roma patients and deny their right to accessible information about their condition, further complicate dealing with disease and injury. Akila, a Turkish woman in her 30s, recalled the following incident:

When my daughter was 6 months old, she fell on her head. The doctor told me that all was well, but then the child fell into a coma and almost died. The doctor said that she will not live until the next day, but he never even gave her a diagnosis, he spoke in Latin!

Consequently, many Nadezhdans view sickness and injury with a helpless and mystified terror and consider it to be the worst thing that could happen to them or to their loved ones.

As a result, when asked why and how they became Christians, the *vast* majority of my respondents replied that they were motivated by the desire to find miraculous solutions for health problems. Health concerns that drive people to flock to the churches and to believe in the healing powers of Jesus Christ range from anything like having a tick (Musician Gypsy woman in her 40s at Pastor Veliko's church), to depression (Vela), to the inability to conceive (Naked Gypsy woman in her 20s at Pastor Zhelyazko's church), to having a cross-eyed daughter and a deaf-mute son (Naked Gypsy man in his 40s), to having one's child nearly die from diabetes (Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s). In addition to their personal accounts of averted disaster, people frequently seek solace in a shared repertoire of stories about spectacular healing miracles from the neighborhood and from across the country. A popular local narrative features a Musician Gypsy man who inexplicably recovered from third-degree burns on most of his body. Even more dramatic is the story, known across the entire national Protestant community, about a three-year old boy who died, was autopsied, and resurrected days thereafter. Such accounts, as well as day-to-day testimonies among members of the community, constitute the most effective form of proselytism in Nadezhda. And if a wish for a miracle is not granted quickly and one needs to go to the doctor anyway, pastors have a ready explanation – that this particular family was chosen to participate in God's larger plan: "God sent a vision to somebody [in my church] that his daughter would be healed, but he needed to take her to doctors in Sofia, so that [the doctors] could witness the miracles" (Pastor Kalcho). Alternatively, the family itself can be blamed for not being worthy of a miracle. In one case, the young Naked Gypsy mother of a child who had recently died was told to stand up in front of her church and to repent. When she

insisted that she had already repented, pastor Zhelyazko said that God had informed him that she had gone to a diviner when the child had fallen ill. This allegedly angered God, who let the child die.

Finally, economic hardship in itself constitutes a reason why people turn to the supernatural and attend churches. According to Pastor Bozhko, “About a thousand people go to church now, more than the usual, because the [economic] crisis hit them. The same happened in the mid 1990s.” Yovko, a 40-year-old “newly converted” Musician Gypsy, confirmed this claim:

I entered the church four months ago. I used to go [...] 15-16 years ago, but my ex-wife was not religious and I left the church. I am with my current wife for twelve years now, and God touched me with the love to go. In the past, I only went for four months. I went because I had financial problems. I was a poor musician, did not even have a house. Nobody talked me into it. God helped me. He gave me a house.

A Musician Gypsy in his 20s shares a similar story: “I used to go [to church] before, when I was a young kid, because my friends went, just for the fun. I had no idea what was going on. Then I stopped going, but life got hard. I’ve been going for three months now.” Some men go to church to pray for a job and even to pass their driver’s license exams, which would make it easier for them to get jobs. A Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s became a believer when she was imprisoned for pickpocketing, and the same thing happened to her daughter. These are all examples of residents who accepted the pastors’ argument that, “if you do not have good children, houses, this is a sign that you don’t have the Holy Spirit” (Pastor Bozhko).

Relationship with God

Because most Nadezhdans engage with the supernatural in search of something concrete in return, their consequent relationship with God can be described as “transactional.” This attitude is apparent in the most commonly accepted interpretation of the concept of “salvation.”

In the context of Nadezhda, salvation generally translates into deliverance from physical hardship: “Salvation is to be saved from all bad things, from cares, to have a better life without bad things” (Vela). A Turkish girl, 16-years-old, equated salvation with being saved from dying.¹⁵³ The widely held belief is that if one gives something to God – namely, repentance – He will reciprocate and reward one in material ways. In its basic form, repentance involves averring that one wants “to be with God,” to praise Him, and to serve Him. A more meaningful sign of commitment is admitting to and giving up sinful behaviors – such as smoking and drinking – and going to church: “We should tell God what mistakes we have made and He will forgive us. [Then] we have to be very holy, pure, and He will say ‘there are my children.’ Adam and Eve made a mistake and were banished from heaven” (Pastor Demir). The final stage of repentance is to undergo water baptism, but many people postpone that because they consider themselves unworthy behaviorally. A few Musician Gypsies also undergo baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is demonstrated through speaking in tongues and/or “falling down” when touched by the pastor. However, most Nadezhdans – particularly Turks and Naked Gypsies – are too socially conscious to participate in such public spectacles of “possession.”

Upon repentance, “whatever you need, God will provide” (Naked Gypsy man in his 40s at Pastor Bozhko’s church). There is a sense that God now “owes” miracles to the believers in order to “deserve” being praised by them. The following excerpts from prayers and witnesses exemplify the transactional nature of the relationship between Nadezhdans and God:

¹⁵³ There are exceptions to such materialistic interpretations. For example, the former pastor Argir complained, “When they hear salvation, many people think of Noah, who was given a plan for physical salvation with precise details. They do not realize that it is a different thing, like liberating a prisoner with a death sentence by paying a price for his freedom, which is the blood of Jesus Christ.” Yovko similarly claimed that it matters to God whether one becomes a Christian “because one was sick or for salvation, because God is coming soon. Everything material is vanity.” But in general, the afterlife is not at the forefront of the concern of local believers.

God, take away the epidemic, so that we can be happy in your presence. (Naked Gypsy man in his 20s at Pastor Kachlo's church)

He doesn't want money, but only our belief and prayers, and he will give us miracles. (Musician Gypsy woman in her 50s)

God has promised us healing! (Naked Gypsy man in his 40s)

Tomorrow, get up at 6 am and pray to God to protect our children [...] Pray to God, say 'Give me!' (Pastor Adem)

The father knows your needs, but seek the Kingdom of God and all else will be provided – house, furniture, money, family, healing. (Pastor Zhivko)

In truth, brothers and sisters, I promise that my mouth will never go quiet. Protect me and my family! The grandson was sick, with no diagnosis. [...] We prayed and suffered, and it turned out to be diabetes. God showed us his glory, the child got better because a brother prayed for him all night. So, I promised to go and give witness. My son and daughter-in-law repented also. (Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s)

God deserves to be praised. My sister's granddaughter was childless for five years, and she prayed for five years, now she is pregnant. (Naked Gypsy woman in her 60s at Pastor Kalcho's church)

Whatever I wish for, He always achieves glory in His victories. (Naked Gypsy man in his 30s at Pastor Kalcho's church)

For six years I had no child and I said, 'God, will you abandon me? I love my wife and do not want to leave her!' Then we had two sons, and my wife is pregnant again. God is loyal – we want and He gives. (Naked Gypsy man in his 30s at Pastor Kalcho's church).

Whatever we want, He is loyal and righteous. He gives us joy and we praise Him. He will not abandon us. (Naked Gypsy man in his 20s at Pastor Kalcho's church).

In a neighborhood where misfortune constantly looms on the horizon, even the absence of adversity is seen as a sign of divine intervention. According to a common perception, the Devil lurks behind every corner to hurt and deceive the residents. Many people are convinced that the ghetto itself is cursed. Thus, if a child falls or an adult trips without getting hurt, many still consider it a good idea to go to church and to give thanks for being spared from a potential misfortune. For example, a Turkish woman in her 30s whose son "cut himself, but not too deeply," thanked God for watching over the child. Testimonies and expressions of gratitude are

used to open prayers and to ask for more favors – for healing, for daily protection (Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s at Pastor Bozhko’s church), for important documents to pass through bureaucratic channels (Bilyan), for good daughters-in-law (Musician Gypsy woman in her 40s at Pastor Veliko’s church), for a job (Naked Gypsy man in his 30s at Pastor Bozhko’s church), for money to throw a wedding (Naked Gypsy man in his late teens at Pastor Veliko’s church), for new window sills and golden earrings (Alev), and so on.

According to Nadezhdan folklore, it is especially important that once a person repents, s/he does not renege on one’s commitment to God, because one will suffer dire consequences: “If people use God and do not commit in return, God will make them pay a hundred times. They get sicker and die” (Naked Gypsy woman man in her 30s); “When people leave the church, material ruin follows” (Naked Gypsy man in his 40s). In a way, it is better to postpone repenting than to take the step and then to stray from the path. Consequently, most residents wait to become committed Christians (i.e., to join a church and to get baptized) until after they have accomplished things that are both required by local cultural traditions and considered unspiritual. The discordance between cultural and religious expectations is especially salient in the realm of Roma weddings and taken-for-granted youth behaviors. Traditional Roma weddings necessitate heavy drinking and dancing, which are decried by the new religious teachings. Thus, many families wait to marry off their children before they start going to church, often to pray for the birth and wellbeing of (grand)children. Dora’s father, Dragan, shared that he finally “believed” when he married her off, or after the festivities concluded and he was “safe.” Prior to that, he had made a deal with God that he would stop dancing and drinking if she got married.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Dragan was making conditional deals with God because Dora, who was the 16-years-old at the time, had been “dating” her would-be husband for a few years without getting married, and this was endangering her reputation in the neighborhood, even though she had remained a virgin. He was also worried that somebody would kidnap her, which were “thoughts sent by God as a punishment” because he was procrastinating on his promise.

Nadezhdans' understanding of human nature expects youths – and especially young males – to be interested in sexuality, drinking alcohol, dancing, and having fun in general. Thus, forcing “unmanageable” young people to join churches amounts to forcing them to repress their natural inclinations and puts them at risk of disappointing God, which might carry dire material consequences for their future. In the Naked Gypsy churches, in particular, it is extremely rare to have unmarried men as committed church members – the brotherhood of believers is usually seen as the domain of family men.

In addition, many Nadezhdans believe that being a Christian entails certain supernatural dangers – being the target of evil spirits, for example – which children are not equipped to fight. Consequently, until recently many families not only failed to encourage unmarried youths to go to church, but they actively prevented them from doing so. Dora recalled that she first went to church when she was nine years old because she was curious, but her grandmother chased her away, saying, “I don’t want you here praying. You are too young.”¹⁵⁵ Her parents even gave her extra pocket cash not to go. She first joined a church “for real” when she was 18, after she was married and had a child. Dora’s husband, Lazar, exemplifies the typical church attendance pattern for young males: occasionally stopping by a church out of curiosity as a child, then quitting during one’s “wild” teenage-hood, and then rejoining upon marriage and fatherhood, when life got challenging. As the son of one of the original four Christian women in Nadezhda, sister Kina, he claims to be among the first children in the ghetto to believe in God. However, he dropped off church in his early teens, when he became a professional musician, and he did not return until his late 20s, after a bad car accident. Nowadays, most Nadezhdans of all ethnic groups allow children to enter the churches if they want to. But with the exception of one

¹⁵⁵ Another Musician Gypsy woman in her 20s similarly remembered going to church as a curious child and having to hide under the table because the older women chased her away (Delka).

Musician Gypsy church, which occasionally organizes Bible classes for children, there is little effort to train preteens and young teens spiritually or theologically.¹⁵⁶

What It Means To Be a Believer

The commonly shared definition of “repentance” in Nadezhda goes hand in hand with an idea of what it means to be a believer that is distinctly this-worldly and involves a clearly defined set of behaviors. Above all, a Christian has to believe in God. God is the sole creator of the universe and a father figure that comforts His children in times of distress, as long as they have faith in Him, pray to Him only, and follow His commandments:

A Christian believes in God, in what God did on the earth and in the sky. To become a Christian, you have to believe God created all. (Dancho)

Faith is love and praying, believing that there is God and that whatever I want, He will give it to me. It is to pray with joy. (Behice)

Further, Christians – and especially churchgoers – are required to adopt certain behaviors that please God and mark the symbolic boundaries between them and non-believers. Most of these markers are framed in prohibitive terms – such as abstinence from drinking alcohol, smoking, dancing, violence, stealing, gambling, cursing, gossiping, being prideful, and going to soothsayers. God sees all transgressions and punishes the offenders:

A Christian is to believe a lot that God is the only one, only to believe in Him. Not to gossip. [...] God has a notebook and on the 40th day, there will be a judgment of our sins, such as adultery. (Musician Gypsy woman in her 20s)

¹⁵⁶ There has been an ongoing attitudinal change regarding the spiritual training of children among some Musician Gypsies and Turks, but it affects a small segment of the population. Pastor Berk, for example, was purposefully brought to church by his grandfather when he was ten, and his father even gave him a picture Bible, which he read but did not understand. As a rare exception to the general pattern in the ghetto, he never stopped going to church during his teens, and in 2003, he even went to a Bible school in Sofia. According to him, “It is better for kids to learn to fear God young, to become good people. But lots of people still stop the youth from going to church and tell them to ‘live life’.”

Christians are more cultured, polite, they do not drink. [...] One goes to hell if one does not obey the commandments. It is very bad to believe in God and to not follow the commandments. (Spasena)

The most common local definition of a committed Christian incorporates a separation between the spiritual realm and the realm of the corporeal. The body is associated with “the enemy” and constitutes a vehicle for sin. Thus, many things pleasant to the flesh are suspect:

It is important to repent for real, to reject yourself. [...] The body is hateful to Jesus. If you are led by the flesh, you will die. (Pastor Veliko)

Being a Christian is to accept Jesus Christ as God in our life and to renounce physical passions, all bad in the world, to follow God Jesus Christ, [...] and to follow the commandments with one’s soul and thought. Faith is to believe in what you do not see, in Jesus Christ, without seeing his face. Whatever you wish for in His name, it happens. (Kadriye).

In addition to abstaining from the practices listed above, one way of rejecting the corporeal is to practice regular fasting, which involves abstaining from food and water for a period of time, usually ranging from a few hours to a day. The ban on consumption is flexible, however, as it is generally considered acceptable to break a fast if one feels ill – the intention is what matters. People fast individually and in coordinated “chains,” for specific personal needs or because the church decides to do so as a group. Further, sexual activities are strictly limited to marriage partners, with the caveat that marriages need to be formalized with the state authorities, or otherwise they constitute adultery.¹⁵⁷ Another way to reign in sexuality is to embrace a modest dressing style: “A Christian is not to dress seductively, not to sin, not to curse, to help others. That’s what the church says” (Behice). Men avoid wearing shorts in public, whereas women don long skirts, cover their shoulders, and do not wear makeup. Until recently, Christian women were also prohibited from wearing jewelry, and they had to cover their heads in church:

¹⁵⁷ This requirement is rarely enforced, however, because many couples are unwilling to legalize their de-facto “marriages” at the risk of losing their state support for single mothers. Some Christians consider themselves unworthy of communion or baptism if they are in an informal marriage, but many overlook the issue altogether.

Clothes are very important for believers. It is only 7-8 years ago that women stopped wearing headscarves. The churches had scarves for those women who didn't bring any, even. But this changed as people went to other churches and saw how it was there, so they stopped wearing scarves. (Dancho)

Besides abstaining from non-spiritual behaviors and corporeal pleasures, a Christian should develop positive character traits, such as spirituality, humility, kindness, and forgiveness:

We need to act spiritually in every way – not to envy but to bow our heads, obey, fulfill the will of our Father. Because He went to the cross and He bleeds still to give us eternal lives. (Pastor Zhivko)

Non-Christians only think about food, we think of higher things. (A missionary from Turkey speaking at Pastor Adem's church)

Sometimes God tries us to make us famous and we start boasting and claiming to be God. Give money and fame to a stupid man, or to a Gypsy, and watch the spectacle. [...] We need to be famous in Christianity, with prayers. (Pastor Damyan)

Given that interpersonal conflict is endemic in Nadezhda, Christians put a particularly high value on the ability to control one's tongue and to maintain polite interactions:¹⁵⁸

[Christians are] spiritual, nice, respectful, have good relations with others. (Turkish woman in her 70s)

What's a Christian? Not to cuss and not to respond to insults. (Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s).

A Christian is different from the others and it shows. He sits differently, behaves differently, talks differently. He doesn't cuss or hate. (Turkish woman in her mid-teens)

A Christian is a good person, honest, who loves others more than himself. He is obligated to love and to help in the hardest of times, even with a good word. (Vela)

Words are endowed with supernatural powers and are believed to have a real effect in the world. Hence, one should watch what one says, keep quiet when angry, and be kind the rest of the time:

This week, let's be careful what comes from our mouths [...] This comes from the Bible, so these are good words. There are secular words that kill, so we need to be careful what we say and where, when to talk and [when] to be quiet. Real Christians are smart Christians. Talking is silver, but silence is golden. [...] One day [your words] will come true. You reap what you sow,

¹⁵⁸ It is very common for non-churchgoing Nadezhdans to curse when angry or excited. Men, in particular, often use negatively charged words when they get drunk and get in altercations with their wives, relatives, or neighbors. In Bulgaria, Roma of both genders are generally stereotyped for having the tendency to curse, as exemplified by the expression, "s/he curses like a Gypsy."

so do not cuss at your children, bless them. Because one day the child will get sick and it will be your fault. Talk to them positively and they will be good, smart, they will read. It will help, so one day it will come true [...] Eternal life is achieved through patience and saying good things – ‘I will work, I will be fine, I can.’ We should not say, ‘Why did I get sick?’ but ‘I will be fine.’ (Turkish preacher in his 30s at Pastor Berat’s church)

Forgiveness is an especially important and well-rewarded Christian virtue, whereas lack of forgiveness is a sin that prevents one from repenting and from being healed:

How many times does a Christian forgive? Seventy times seven, Jesus says. That’s 490! [...] Why are you in church if you do not want to do what God wants you to do, if you do not want to do what the church demands, if you do not do the Christian thing at home? If you repent tonight, God will not torture you, He will take away your disease. (Pastor Zhivko)

At the same time, most Nadezhdans’ understanding of what it means to be a Christian does not entail the pursuit of a deep comprehension of God’s nature or plans. Due to their lack of biblical training, many Nadezhdans express confusion on related issues. While I was spending time with a group of Turkish female Christians in their 20s, Behice speculated that God Himself came in the flesh as Jesus to show that He was alive. “But then,” she mused in a puzzled voice, “some say that God is fire, but you cannot even see it.” Her cousin Gizem explained, “The Holy Spirit is when the pastor puts his hands on you, but the Holy Spirit is not God, it is a mark of God, that He is with you.” She also wondered whether Jesus was God or God’s son. A third woman countered, “There is no difference between Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit – all are one. These are just different words for the same thing.” People often call God “father,” and some even talk about “father Jesus”: “You say whatever comes to your mouth, you pray to all of them” (Behice).

The emphasis on strict behavioral markers for distinguishing a Christian sets up a dynamic where people often find themselves unable to meet the requirements and consider themselves unworthy of a full-scale relationship with God (Argir). More specifically, they consider themselves too impure to join a church, to be baptized, and, in some cases, even to pray:

“It happens that people slip and say something bad, but Christians should feel bad, repent. If I slip, I do not even feel pure enough to pray” (Belgin).¹⁵⁹ In many cases, the policing and subsequent punishment against behavioral transgressions is self-imposed: “I believe, but cannot quit the cigarettes. If I go to church, I would be offending the Holy Ghost. I need to be pure” (Naked Gypsy woman in her 50s). But if one sins and still continues to go to church, other Christians may react and impose external sanctions, as demonstrated by the predicament of a Musician Gypsy man in his 20s:

I went to church as a kid, and I was in the kids’ group. I never stopped going, but I have cooled off, because I am facing sins. I made a mistake and people are reminding me, which is very bad for me.

In another controversial case, sister Kina caused uproar when it became known that she sacrificed a pigeon because her son was ill. Due to her prestigious status as one of the founding Christians in Nadezhda, she was not expelled from the church, but her peers criticized her “hypocrisy” for weeks. If somebody less respected had committed the offense, she might have been reproached publicly by the pastor and by her peers, and perhaps even told to stay away from the church. In cases where the pastors are lenient, “real” Christians may even leave and condemn the leader and the congregation for allowing impurity in their midst:

¹⁵⁹ This is especially problematic for Musician Gypsy men, who often work as entertainers, a job that is not considered compatible with the Christian lifestyle. Yovko used to go to church, but then started performing and quit up until recently:

When I left, I kept believing. I travelled a lot and prayed during travels. I read the Bible, but I was too busy. My ex-wife smoked and misbehaved. [...] Now things are different. My last wedding performance was in December, and this was the last time I drank and smoked, because I decided to go to church. I started to fast and pray. Over the first month I did not take communion. I know the Bible and know I was not ready. It felt awkward, but I had not repented. I knew that I had to be like a clock and perfect in front of God. When I finally participated, it felt great. I came to church at 8-9 pm, then at home I turned off the TV, started to read the Bible between 10 and 12, prayed and felt the presence of God. I did the same when I got up in the morning – the first thing I do is pick up the Word. [...] Now the entire family is in the church, over 10 people. [...] Yesterday I decided to repent fully. [...] Now I will not do bad things even for money. The Word of God is like the salt in a meal, you cannot live without it.

The people who go to Adem's church are usurers, adulterers, magicians. [Mr. X] is a usurer and he goes there. God helped him, so he goes. I would not allow this in my church. I would talk to him – it is like bringing a curse on the church. Adem, however, told him 'It's your business, you can come. (Pastor Berk)

The definition of what it means to be a believer is not transcendent and uncontested. In an ongoing battle for moral superiority, it is common to hear accusations that numerous kinds of "others" do not grasp what it means to be a true Christian – across individuals, across churchgoers and non-churchgoers, across churches, and across ethnic lines. One area of contestation has to do with the requirement of going to church. According to churchgoers, "Somebody who does not go to church is not a believer, even if he prays at home" (Spasena). They consider people who skip church meetings to be "spiritual infants, not on the high path" (Musician Gypsy man in his 20s). Some churchgoers even resent believers who go abroad as migrant laborers and thus only go to church and "pray seasonally."¹⁶⁰ But many residents disagree that going to a "formal church" is a necessary condition for being a Christian. One Naked Gypsy man in his 50s who left his church because of unspecified "problems" insisted that he and his wife still qualified as believers because they prayed at home. In fact, he had just recently prayed for a job and God gave it to him, which was seen as a sign that he was in the right. Still, he admitted, "the truth is in the church," and he planned to join a congregation one day.

Another area of contestation revolves around establishing a personal relationship with the Bible. The vast majority of Nadezhdan Christians are disinclined to read religious texts (Belgin).¹⁶¹ During service at one Naked Gypsy church, I counted that less than a quarter of the

¹⁶⁰ Some migrant laborers do claim that they attend churches in their distant locations, although these are usually small prayer groups or "home churches" of the type that existed in Nadezhda prior to the early 1990s.

¹⁶¹ The reasons why most Nadezhdans join Evangelical churches and the ways in which they relate to God and understand what it means to be a believer are in stark contrast to those of most Protestants in downtown Sliven. As discussed in Chapter Three, the latter believe that a true Christian should undergo a profound personal

men and none of the women had Bibles. According to a Naked Gypsy man in his 40s, “people [here] like to listen without reading. Also people do not want to pay for Bibles and say ‘Why should we pay?’”¹⁶² Some even believe that reading the Bible too much can be dangerous.

Veska shared the story about a young man who read the Bible too much and then died; according to her, God knew that he would sin eventually, so He took him prematurely. Such inclinations and ideas do not sit well with everybody, however, especially with some more devout members of the Musician Gypsy and Turkish communities:

People here are simple, do not read, just take what is said to them unquestioningly and sometimes may even twist it ... my aunt told me that she preferred to go to an Evangelical church because they talk and save her the time having to read. This is laziness. (Musician Gypsy woman in her 40s).

People used to believe that if somebody was educated, it was bad for the faith. Now we emphasize education among the children. [...] We used to read the Bible, but accepted it blindly. Now if there is a misunderstanding, people check more. [...] Now people are starting to look for Bible truths, but this is only as recent as the last one month. [...] Uneducated Christians are not really Christians – they are just dead. (Argir)

Domestic and foreign visitors are similarly critical of Nadezhdans’ lack of engagement with biblical texts:

Being a Christian requires maturity and intellectual development. A person who has never read the Bible cannot have true faith [...] Roma can listen, and the word still works, but they have to listen very carefully to capture the biblical principles. (Pastor Lonev)

This book is spirit, truth, life, but while people believe that, they also believe that just listening to somebody read it is enough, no need to read and understand it themselves. Some Turks are different, and a few of the Musician Gypsies [...] In Germany everybody brings Bibles, we teach them to do so. Here they do not. People just want to sit and to do nothing. In Germany we work with the children. (Kadir)

transformation that is manifested through a deep personal relationship with God. In order to undergo this transformation, a believer must read and re-read scripture and religious literature closely and on a regular basis, which Protestants in the Town do both individually and in Bible study groups. One also needs to commit to church life by attending services, regular social gatherings and events, and by contributing financially through tithes.

¹⁶² Free copies of the Bibles are available at many churches in the Town; I myself acquired nearly a dozen of different editions. Talking to Bulgarian Protestants, I got the sense that books constituted one form of aid they did not mind providing to Roma.

The ban on dancing constitutes yet another area of disputation regarding what counts as appropriate behavior for committed Christians. Sinuous belly dancing, or “kyuchek,” is part and parcel of traditional Gypsy culture. Men and women of all ages enjoy shaking their hips not only on special occasions – such as weddings, holidays, and birthdays – but also on a daily basis in routine get-togethers. Children are taught to belly dance from an early age, and young females, in particular, take special pride in displaying their skills. Thus, the ban on dancing is a source of great controversy and anxiety for Nadezhdan believers, as exemplified by the following discussion I witnessed among a group of Musician Gypsy churchgoing Christians. It started with Dragan remembering how people used to line-dance on national holidays. His wife Petra suggested that the tradition was abandoned when the municipality stopped paying for music bands, while their daughter Veska said that it was because “the [Christian] law” forbade it. It was true that Jesus used to dance, she said, but that was while he was still human; then he died and was resurrected, and new laws came into effect, forbidding people to oblige the flesh. Her cousin Delka, who was in her 20s, countered that the ban on dancing was neighborhood-specific – the first local Christians wore scarves and “shut themselves off” from the world, hence they set the prohibitive tradition, and the others simply followed. Bilyan (in his late teens) suggested that she might be right, but dancing still served an important function as a marker that differentiates Christians from the rest: “Believers should set themselves off from the non-believers. Whatever the secular people do, we should not do.” Delka continued to emphasize her point, however: “Only here we get judged, while Bulgarians dance and drink.” Two other women in their 20s supported her, pointing out that Bulgarian Christian women dance and drink on March 8th, International Women’s Day. One of them, Dora, even declared that she has every intention to dance at her daughter’s wedding one day. At this point, Veska became furious and declared that

dancing “was from the Devil!” Zara (in her 50s), who was respected as one of the early Christians in the neighborhood, irately announced that nothing could ever make her dance, which put an end to the conversation.¹⁶³

The ban on drinking is similarly contested. The majority of believers hold that drinking is incompatible with spiritual purity, whereas some more critical Christians argue that this is an extremist and backward position. The latter are usually people who have been exposed to the outside world and who are more likely to question the prohibitive norms in the ghetto. Argir even lost his position as a pastor because of his liberal position on the issue:

When I went to Spain, I became integrated in Europe, saw a different lifestyle. They have defects too, but they don't judge one for drinking a little. When I came back, I threw a wedding where we served alcohol. People saw me as being spiritually low and immediately excommunicated me.

In the Musician Gypsy and Turkish communities, Christians might occasionally enjoy a drink in private, but Naked Gypsies are especially strict about enforcing the rule against alcohol. This has become one behavioral marker that divides them from “other Christians,” with leaders being held to particularly high scrutiny:

Naked Gypsies are more Christian, fulfill the Word more strictly. They are not as liberal as the Bulgarian gypsies [who drink occasionally]. There is no way that they would drink like Zahari does. Adem threw a wedding, took the flag, got drunk, and led a line dance. This was a bad example, as we are supposed to be the salt [of the earth]. It may be OK to drink at home, it is even healthy, but not in front of people, because then one cannot preach to them later. The community looks differently at pastors, judges them by a higher standard. People who say that they leave [the church] because they smoke or drink are just making excuses. They are not interpreting the Bible correctly. It is fine to drink a bit, but if the pastor says so, people will curse him. There was a conference where people drank and smoked, and the youths got offended, called the pastors the antichrists. (Vitan)

Whereas Bulgarians and a few members of other ethnic communities in the ghetto might emphasize the need for a deeper spiritual “rebirth” based on establishing a close personal relationship with God, Naked Gypsies Christians are most likely to use strict behavioral markers

¹⁶³ Muslims consider dancing a dangerous activity also. While people are allowed to dance, men and women should do so separately. Couples may dance together, but only in private (Hakan Imam).

to signify their transformation and to set themselves apart from the secular world. This goes back to the transactional way on which they relate to God – adhering to ascetic practices amounts to upholding their end of the “deal” they make with Him.

Worship Dynamics

There are four aspects of worship in the context of church services that provide opportunities for Nadezhdan churchgoers to partake of the life of their respective congregations: the music performance, the presenting of needs, the collective prayers, and the sermon. For many members of Naked Gypsy churches, in particular, participation is mostly limited to presenting needs. In a ritual akin to group therapy, men and women of all ages raise their hands and are called upon by the pastors to share what is happening in their lives. Witnesses about God’s miraculous deeds, thanks about wishes granted in the past, and needs for dealing with current misfortune are usually delivered through fairly scripted affective expressions. The more dramatic the circumstances of the presenter, the more likely it is that s/he will engage in “ritual weeping-as-appeal” in order to call upon the mercy of higher powers (Ebersole 2004, 203, 210). Implicit in such acts of impassioned pleading is a moral contract between God and His followers – as long as believers have faith, praise, and behave, God owes them a special consideration. The sense of relief and empowerment comes through sharing one’s tribulations in the presence of God, relatives, and neighbors and through asking for supernatural help and moral support in procuring “victory.”

During music performances, which often last over half of the service time, Naked Gypsy churchgoers participate unevenly, depending on their position in the church, as well as on their gender. The performance is led by a small group of men with ties to the pastor. Their goal is to

evoke the Holy Spirit and to prepare the audience for prayers and for the sermon. Men from the audience often get up, clap, raise their arms, sway about, and sing along, but the sound system is set to deafening volumes, so one can only hear the band. Women, on the other hand, are generally more socially conscious and tend to remain seated and to abstain from dancing, clapping, and singing.¹⁶⁴ By contrast, the largest Musician Gypsy church has a big choir that incorporates up to a dozen female singers and up to five men, who play instruments. During performances, most members of the church, regardless of gender, rise to their feet, clap, reach up their arms, place their hands on their hearts, and sing along. The notable exceptions are some of the original Christian women in Nadezhda, who are still ambivalent about mixing orchestrated song and dance with worship. At times, Pastor Zhivko turns off the sound system and urges everybody to sing a capella, so that people can hear their own voices and those of their neighbors. This engenders both a sense of individual importance and the perception that one is part of a bigger united community. Numerous people claim that they feel the spirit of God during such performances.

Collective prayer provides another opportunity for churchgoers to participate in worship dynamics, although pastors maintain a degree of control in two ways. To begin with, they pick who will lead the prayers, often choosing members of the spiritual council. This person sets the tone and theme of the prayer, and everybody else follows. Further, pastors call on their supernatural expertise to insert themselves in the relationship between believers and God by painting prayer as a prescriptive process to which they know the secret. For example, some Naked Gypsy pastors instruct people exactly when to say “Amen,” and they tell believers to

¹⁶⁴ Occasionally, mothers with children in their laps move about and clap in order to entertain and pacify the bored youngsters.

close their eyes while praying, so that demons do not get inside and possess them. Some church leaders organize entire sermons around instructing people how to pray:

You should ask from God for the right prayer to pray in the right way, so that he can respond. If you are sick, ask for healing; do not be sick and ask for something else. God knows our needs, but we still should know what to ask for [...] With gratitude [everything] happens, with gratitude, praise the Lord! First seek his Kingdom and righteousness, and [everything else] will be added. Think about heavenly things. [...] Stay sober or the Devil will come and steal, kill, and lie [...] Daniel prayed for 21 days but God did not respond right away, waited to test him. (Pastor Kalcho)

The above prescription may appear commonsensical to an observer, but given Nadezhda's long-standing tradition of relying on "experts" when it comes to dealing with supernatural powers, locals take seriously any information coming from an alleged authority.

Sermons offer the fewest opportunities for Nadezhdan churchgoers to participate in church dynamics. This is particularly the case in Naked Gypsy churches, where pastors are most interested in maintaining their position of authority and least trained to engage and entertain their audience. To demonstrate this, I will again provide a contrast with Musician Gypsy churches, where sermons involve a relatively high degree of participation on behalf of members. To begin with, Musician Gypsy pastors often use a call and response technique while preaching, which sustains the attention of the audience and facilitates its involvement. Calls usually include questions and shocking statements that are designed to rouse a reaction. For example, Pastor Zhivko told the following story: "I talked to somebody yesterday and he said, 'Do you know that the Devil is stronger than Jesus?'" His listeners reacted collectively with appalled, "No! No!" On other occasions, he would excitedly call on his listeners, "Do you feel the presence of God?!", to which people responded in the affirmative. Musician Gypsy pastors also frequently use humor to sustain the interest of their audience. The non-traditional Turkish pastor Berat used another technique to involve people in his sermons – quizzing them:

Berat forced his people to bring Bibles and songbooks. He embarrassed them in front of the church if they did not do so. During service, he asked people randomly what he was talking about, and if they did not listen they were embarrassed. If a fly made a noise, you could hear it. The next day, he again asked people what the service was about. If they did not know, he would put them in a circle, make them open their Bibles, and read, even if they could not read. Many people left the church because of that, but some learned how to read this way. [...] In Adem's church, people only go to present needs, even during worship hour. They only go to complain to God. These people cannot survive in our church. (Kadriye)

Naked Gypsy and most Turkish pastors, on the other hand, simply deliver a long speech and make no attempt to elicit reactions or responses from their listeners. Further, humor is generally absent from their delivery.

Musician Gypsy pastors also have better skills and technology to make the delivery of Bible stories and teachings more interesting and accessible to their audiences. Pastor Damyan plays out scenes, where potted plants stand as props for Biblical characters. Pastor Zhivko projects videos from YouTube and religious sites, reads the subtitles aloud, and then quizzes people on their general comprehension. Consequently, a member of his church boasted, "I do not read the Bible but know the stories from church and from the movies" (Turkish woman in her 20s). In Naked Gypsy churches, however, confusion reigns, as the sermons here are often incomprehensible. As opposed to delivering narratives in a linear and coherent fashion, the poorly trained pastors often "structure" their sermons around obscure themes or morals and make casual, disjointed, and seemingly random allusions to various events and characters from the Bible, as if to assume that everybody knows them already.

The most frequent references are to a handful of stories that tend to emphasize faith during difficult times, unquestioning obedience, and miraculous deliverance: the fatal defiance of Adam and Eve (New International Version, Genesis 2), Noah's compliance and subsequent salvation (Genesis 6), Moses' leading the Jews out of the desert (Exodus), the healing of the lame man by the pool of Bethesda (John 5:4), and the recovery of the bleeding woman of faith

(Mark 5:24). Pastor Bozhko prepares for his sermons by receiving short daily verses as text messages from a website called Biblia.com and by praying for inspiration: “In the morning, I pray for the Holy Spirit to open the Word of God for me.” During service, he rarely reads from the Bible, instead just referring to the number of the chapters he is alluding to, despite the fact that only a handful of men have the book on hand. Unable to follow the sermon, people often look bored or buried in their own thoughts. Many leave before the service is over. On a number of occasions, I approached congregation members during or right after service and asked if they understood what this or that story was about, and I often got confused shrugs in response. Differences in sermon styles do not go unnoticed by Nadezhdans, who occasionally compare local pastors to each other, as well as to pastors in the Town. Behice made the following comparison involving a Bulgarian preacher, a foreign preacher, Pastor Zhivko, and the rest of the pastors in Nadezhda:

[The Bulgarian preacher] is a showman. He does not read from the Bible but uses fables, gestures, and examples. In the Pentecostal church, there was an Englishman who spoke in the [Bulgarian preacher’s] style too, but he said different things. It was a new style, clear. He read from the Bible, but he was very coherent. The old pastors here have old style. They read from here and there, and you have to make the connections and it is difficult to understand. Here we had a deacon like the Bulgarian preacher, and we expected him to talk about Christianity, but he told the women to wash the sheets every 2 days. Nadezhda pastors are unclear, put people to sleep. Most women cannot tell you what the theme was after service. Zhivko is an example of the new style. He uses fables, but does not know when to deliver the punch line, and he uses lots of examples of material objects.

In addition to delivering dull and incomprehensible sermons, Naked Gypsy pastors also make it hard for the audience to concentrate on what is being said by enforcing very little discipline. Here, people come in and out of church throughout the entire service, and this dynamic appears to be more interesting to the rest of the members than the words of the preacher. Further, nobody attempts to reign in the numerous children, who move about freely, make a lot of noise, and stare at worshippers. A Naked Gypsy man in his 30s launched the

following complaint: “At [a Naked Gypsy’s pastor’s church] the children are crazy because the families there know no discipline. The assistant cannot even control his own family. Order in the church is one marker of a good pastor. Some people follow what’s going on, but many have no idea.” By contrast, Musician Gypsy and even some Turkish pastors ask parents to keep the children quiet and express open displeasure with late-comers and noise-makers. There, the eyes of the churchgoers are almost always directed toward the front stage, as opposed to following the social dynamics around them.

Church Life Outside of Worship Services

Outside of a place where worship occurs, we tend to think of a church as an organization with some degree of bureaucratic structure that may provide social services and that further engages its members through social activities. This notion of what a church does is widely accepted in the West, and through a process of institutional isomorphism, it has also been adopted by most Protestant churches in the Town.¹⁶⁵ The culturally isolated churches in Nadezhda, however, are not necessarily aware of this normative model of what a church is. Further, since they are financially and organizationally weak, they are poorly equipped to provide adequate services or to organize activities outside of worship. All pastors proclaim that they want to provide some kind of social services to their members, but very few have the capacity to do so. At the time I was visiting, only one Naked Gypsy and one Musician Gypsy church were intermittently feeding poor members of the community. Aided by a steady trickle of funding from abroad, the former served lunches to children once per month, and the latter

¹⁶⁵ For example, the Congregational Church distributes material aid on a monthly basis, the Baptist Church operates a doctor’s office and offers free computer training, the Adventist Church organizes weekly meetings for women to discuss living a healthy lifestyle, the Pentecostal Church holds regular youth meetings, and so on.

provided food for widows and orphans using the meager collections from members. Many other churches had carried out similar programs in the past, but no longer had sponsors. In the context of the ghetto, many pastors and residents further recognize that having funding to distribute aid was a double-edged sword. It could attract some members, but in addition to generating suspicions about pastors' stealing, aid programs could also trigger interpersonal conflict and repel other members. To begin with, there are many complaints that pastors do not feed the right people. Further, people challenge the distribution of boxed aid. When the boxes of clothes and other items arrive, it is often the case that nobody knows what is inside each box. To ensure that everybody gets a fair share of suitable aid for the needs of particular families, some pastors open the boxes and distributes items as appropriate, but this may cause interpersonal quarrels and accusations of corruption: "Aid only creates headaches. If the boxes are opened and people sort things in the church, fights erupt. One person gets two or three nice things and the people start saying 'This one took this and that' and they start fighting. It's better without the aid" (Dancho). To avoid conflict, some churches use raffles and hand out closed boxes randomly. And in cases where there are not enough boxes to give to all families, churches may even decline aid altogether, or they may just keep it laying around until more arrives, so that everybody gets something (Pastor Berk).

Nadezhdan churches similarly lag behind in providing for social activities for their members. In contrast to the churches in the Town, the ghetto churches have no established and routinized home prayer groups, Sunday schools, summer camps, women's groups, children groups, elderly groups, counseling sessions for newlywed couples, or charity initiatives. Admittedly, this is not entirely the pastor's fault, as the local spirit of participation and

volunteerism is weak.¹⁶⁶ Many churches in the ghetto have “brothers’ groups” only, which also double as “youth groups,” since they are attended primarily by young men. Presided over by the pastor, these groups meet to discuss Bible texts and how to apply them to daily life, but they are relatively small, as many men – especially ones that are not singers, that are not members of the spiritual council, and that are above 30 years of age – opt to stay out of them. Yovko admitted, “I have gone to brothers’ groups, but they are only about meditation. Services are more encouraging and you can feel the Holy Spirit. The entire church is there, and you can feel the chills.”

The pastors tend to maintain a central role in brothers’ groups. Pastor Zhivko’s church holds weekly meetings that are attended by fewer than ten men. The pastor describes such events as follows: “During meetings, we gather in a circle and discuss the sermon from the last service. I ask them if there is anything they didn’t understand. They ask questions and add things. The men are very obedient and respect us a lot. Some are envious, but most love us.” I witnessed one such meeting. Pastor Zhivko spoke most of the time and nobody challenged him, there were no questions asked. Instead, the pastor made the participants repeat the lesson and go over his questions in a didactic manner. Even in this relatively nurturing context, where the pastor was teaching lay members to deal with spiritual matters independently, he took the opportunity to remind them that he was a person of authority and expertise, whose task was to reveal basic biblical lessons, whereas their task was to listen and to absorb unquestioningly:

People may know stories, but the uneducated don’t understand. Some people get offended when they don’t know, and they interrupt me, challenge me... You need to start with milk, even though it is considered embarrassing for adult men to drink it. Solid food is for the trained only. I am teaching you the alphabet.

¹⁶⁶ Pastor Zhivko complained that people accused him of doing everything, but people themselves did not engage, even if he asked them to. He claimed that he wanted to delegate, but could not.

In the past, some churches attempted to organize “sisters’ groups,” but almost all of them fell apart because of poor attendance and because the wives of the pastors (who are expected to run them) are poorly educated, lacking authority in the community, and unwilling to put in the time and the effort to run them. Only Pastor Zhivko’s church claims to have a standing sisters’ group led by the wife of the pastor, but in my observations, that was an informal unit that met very irregularly. It had less than five “regular” members, all of whom were personal friends of the wife of the pastor. They did not integrate the Bible – instead, they discussed daily problems and prayed together. According to a non-attending female church member, the wife of the pastor “does not want to [lead the group], she is not used to it” (Sevda). The church also stands unique in Nadezhda by running a weekly Bible class for about 40 children. They are led by the son of the pastor and another young man. The “teachers” use illustrated texts to convey some of the main biblical stories, such as the fall of Adam and Eve. Their method involves having the children repeat each line of the story multiple times in order to memorize it both in Romany and in Bulgarian. This exercise carries some potential benefits – the children are taught in the official language of the country, and they are socialized to sit attentively throughout a length of time. The drawback is that they hardly learn any analytical reasoning, working with metaphors, or textual analysis. The men also train the children how to pray and sing. On one occasion, they asked one of the boys to lead a collective prayer. The child had clearly learned how to imitate the adults – he remembered to ask “God our Lord” to bless the pastor, and he noted that, “one day we will see You, hold You. ... Make us believe.” Then the children sang a song, proclaiming “I believe in the Bible, I believe in Jesus...” while waving their Bibles.

One way through which Nadezhdan churches engage their members in extra-worship activities is through celebrating religious and civic holidays, such as Christmas and the

International Women's Day. The format at such events is similar to that of worship. People donate small sums of money to purchase snacks and sodas, and then they gather to eat and drink while the pastor preaches and the band sings. Many churches also organize crusades and group visits to sister churches in nearby villages and towns. In most cases, a core group of leaders decide who will be included in the traveling parties, which occasionally prompts complaints on behalf of members who are not selected. On one occasion, I witnessed Pastor Bozhko announce a crusade and offer everyone the opportunity to sign up, but also warning them, "Don't blame me later and say, 'The pastor did not take us!'"

Socializing among church members outside of church takes place, but it is difficult to distinguish it from regular socializing among relatives and friends – in other words, it is not carried out through the organization of the church. For example, a deacon's son at Pastor Zhelyazko's church owns an air-conditioned convenience store and other church members – both male and female – often gather there during the day or in the evening to gossip. During such gatherings, they may even decide to pay an impromptu visit to church members who did not come to service because "People are happy when the church goes to them" (Mina).

Social Dynamics of Bulgarian Gypsy Churches

It is 5 pm on a Sunday evening, the only day of the week when the Bulgarian Gypsy church Antioch holds services. There are up to 120 attendees here tonight, representing both sexes and all age groups, although there are about four women for every one man and the children are only a handful. The church rents the basement of the handsome historical building of an insolvent and practically defunct community cultural center ("chitalishte"/"читалище"). Paying monthly rent for this limited space is not ideal for the large congregation, but they are in

the process of slowly gathering the funds to construct their own, much larger building. The cozy hall must have been used for small-scale performances and as a rehearsal studio in the past. The floors and the walls are entirely covered in wood. The only permanent seating consists of a continuous built-in bench along most of the perimeter of the walls, so the members of the assembly spend a considerable amount of time arranging plastic chairs every time they meet. The lack of AC is not a problem in the summer, as the basement stays comfortably cool. In the winter, however, the most fought-over seats are right next to the single gas heater, which barely warms up its direct vicinity; those further away generally stay in their coats.

The service begins with thirty minutes of music. It is not painfully loud, but it is hardly quiet and calming either, as the first few songs are fast and clearly intended to awaken and enliven the audience. Pastor Zahari jumps up and down as he sings, and the rest of the people sing along, dance in place, stretch their arms in the air, and clap. Over time, the songs get slower and calmer in order to place the audience in the right mood for the upcoming long and meditative sermon. After the last song, most young children are summoned to the stage, so that everybody can pray for their good health and success in school. Then, they are whisked away to a separate room, where they will have Bible school without disturbing the adults' service. At this point, things settle down and any latecomers or noisemakers are bound to attract irate stares or even an angry "Hush!"

Before going into the sermon, the congregation takes time to attend to some practical business. The pastor opens the announcements segment by updating everybody on the fund-raising efforts for the new building. The inflow of collections is meager, but there is a ray of hope – some English friends have suggested that they might be able to find sponsors. Still, contributions remain important, so two boxes start to make their rounds – one for the regular

contributions and another (a sealed golden box) just for the new building. Everybody gives something, and mostly paper bills, as opposed to the coins one usually sees in Nadezhda. The pastor also shares that he has spent some money for gas over the past week because he attended crusades in nearby towns and villages. Then he goes through all the activities scheduled for the upcoming weeks. There is something planned for every day – soup kitchen on Monday, Bible group meetings on Tuesday and Friday, a prayer group meeting on Wednesday, a youth group meeting on Thursday, and a fast on Saturday. Members frequently interrupt him to share their own news. Some speak about events that have taken place over the past week (such as being in the hospital), but most talk about dreams and visions redolent with supernatural meaning. When appropriate, their accounts elicit sympathetic interjections or applause and excited chatter. The pastor urges everybody to turn off their phones, and the sermons can begin.

The topic of tonight's sermon is the importance of cultivating humility toward each other. Antioch has a guest – a foreign missionary who visits many times per year – and he is invited to speak first. He is a good speaker who manages to captivate the audience with entertaining personal anecdotes and well-chosen Bible passages. Then the pastor follows up. He is also an excellent orator. At times he sounds stern and paternalistic, but mostly he is thought-provoking, easy-to-follow, and approachable, frequently employing self-deprecating humor. While people listen to him, they may laugh or show distress, depending on the context, nod and exclaim in approval, sign in quiet agreement, and comment on different points among each other. The sermon continues until 8 pm, but time goes quickly.

After the sermon, the pastor asks everybody who has “the spirit of feuding” to come forwards. This is not the kind of personal flaw that many people would admit to, but to my surprise, nearly everybody gets up, with the exception of the younger members of the

congregation, who have seemed more socially conscious and restrained throughout the entire service. The pastor and the foreign guest pray over the assembly, asking the Holy Spirit to impart them with love and humility. Eventually, everybody joins in the prayer, and as the atmosphere becomes increasingly animated and chaotic, many start to speak in tongues and to cry, clearly overcome by emotions. Some talk about the Holy Spirit in their midst: “The Holy Spirit is here! We are in a room together with God!” A man alleges that he senses that somebody has liver pain. A woman confirms that she indeed has that experience and goes to the front, so that everybody can pray for her. The foreign missionary adds that he feels more ailments in the room, and more people rush to the front, so that he and others can place their hands on them. He then asks the sick to perform sit-ups and to wave their arms around in order to demonstrate that they have been healed. As the service nears its end, many of the participants are smiling and glowing. Some of the women hug and kiss each other. They feel anointed. One woman shakes my hands enthusiastically and exclaims, “Wow, there is much fire here tonight, much fire!” People bid each other goodbye, but many will end up meeting soon, before next Sunday, at some group meeting or event organized by the church.

In this final substantive section of Chapter Four, I discuss Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical churches in Sliven, highlighting some key ways in which they differ from the churches in Nadezhda. I will begin by discussing the role of the leaders. While they enjoy a high degree of respect and authority, Bulgarian Gypsy ministers do not feel the need to adopt an authoritarian leadership style, in part because their power is not undermined by the kinds of challenges that I identified in Nadezhda. They often encourage church members to pursue spiritual development independently, they cultivate leadership skills among their flock, and they delegate important tasks. Then I will analyze what motivates Bulgarian Gypsies to become Christians and to join

churches. The hope for miraculous healings is a relevant factor in some cases here; however, their emersion in a modern, secularized, and anonymous post-socialist society goes a long way in explaining why many Bulgarian Gypsies embrace Evangelical Christianity in search of community and in the pursuit of some larger meaning and order to govern their lives. The group-specific motives for joining Evangelical churches leads to adopting a distinctly relational – as opposed to transactional – attitude toward God. Instead of hoping to get some tangible benefits in exchange for repenting, Bulgarian Gypsies seek to establish close personal relationship with the supernatural on a routine basis. This relational attitude largely frames the taken-for granted definition of what it means to be a Christian according to Bulgarian Gypsies. As opposed to equating being a believer with a set of practices, the members of this ethnic group emphasize the need for spiritual growth and development, which is regarded as an ongoing process. While behavioral imperfections are judged leniently, this definition requires intense engagement with the Bible, as well as finding what God’s plan is for each individual and working to fulfill one’s calling. Finally, I will argue that the pastors’ leadership style generates ample opportunities for lay Evangelicals to participate in church life, both in the context of worship and in extra-worship activities. In the context of worship, I will focus on four main parts: the music performances, the announcements of visions and needs, the sermons, and the collective prayers at the end of services. I will also show that unlike Nadezhdan churches, Bulgarian Gypsy churches provide numerous opportunities for members to engage with the organization and with other members outside of worship. Those include spiritually oriented activities, such as Bible study groups, crusades, and concerts, as well as social services offered to non-members.

The Role of the Pastors

Whereas Nadezhdan pastors are authoritarian figures that cling to power by emphasizing their privileged and unique relationship to the supernatural, Bulgarian Gypsy pastors and other key leaders tend to be perceived as “mentors” who guide people in the pursuit of salvation and spiritual and personal growth (Pastor Evstati). Even though the bonds of blood relations between leaders and the flock are weaker in Bulgarian Gypsy churches, the relationship between them exhibits a relatively high level of trust and respect. Accusations of corruption are rare, and they usually come from church outsiders, especially Orthodox Christians and Protestants of other denominations. To a large extent, this bond is the result of the high degree of transparency practiced in the churches. In Antioch, the pastor updates members on the financial status of the church at almost every service meeting. The funds for the prospective church building are kept in a sealed box that not even the pastor can open without tearing the seal and alerting everybody to the fact. Contributing to this fund is solicited with assurances that, “The golden box does not feed the pastor, it is for the church” (Pastor Zahari). The pastor also openly discusses routine expenditures, such as rent, gas money, hosting guests, and so on. According to the church accountant, “Everybody can check the numbers.” Because of this, and because they have better means to do so, people here appear to be more willing to give tithes “with happy hearts, because otherwise their sacrifice is not accepted” (Pastor Zahari). Also, Bulgarian Gypsy churches do not exhibit the kind of instability as the churches in Nadezhda do, where pastors and congregations change frequently due to fighting over resources and authority.

In their interactions with lay believers, Bulgarian Gypsy church leaders balance the need to maintain authority with an apparent desire to promote informality and egalitarianism. Their authority is sustained in a number of ways. First, nobody disputes that Bulgarian Gypsy ministers have sufficient secular education and theological training to qualify as leaders. I did

not encounter any complaints about them being unfit simpletons, not even from Bulgarian Protestants. One source of their prestige is having numerous connections and foreign language skills, which enable them to host frequent church visitors from the country and from abroad. And according to my observations at Antioch, such visitors almost never miss a chance to reassure the congregation that its head is exceptional: “You have one of the most blessed pastors here, most anointed. [...] I know that God chose your pastor for a special purpose. Do not fail him. You have a huge responsibility” (visiting Roma pastor at Antioch). Second, church leaders present themselves as positive examples to instill certain practices and behaviors. During a cold snap that caused some people to miss church, Pastor Zahari informed the congregation that he had made the trip to the church three times on that day alone, concluding that, “I am a good example for those who are afraid of the cold. We are here to motivate each other to come to the house of God.” Third, the leaders maintain strict church discipline. Pastor Zahari, for example, keeps track of church attendance, which prompts some members to call him and to apologize if they have to miss a meeting. He also demands that people turn off their cellphones – because “the Devil will make it so that somebody calls you right now” – and he frequently scolds them for moving, talking, and being distracted while he preaches, because they “discombobulate” him: “When you are not paying attention and looking at me, I get sidetracked. There is no contact, so look me in the eyes, respond, let me get the point across.” On one occasion, when people were starting to fidget at the end of a long sermon, he declared irately, “Some people are sick of being here. Let them go home and look at me, I am speaking the Word of God!” Whereas such an outburst would have had no or negative effects in Nadezhda, Antioch’s members were clearly embarrassed and promptly quieted down.

At the same time, anybody who visits the two Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical churches in the Town is likely to emerge with the impression that the interactions in them are relatively democratic and egalitarian. To begin with, while demanding the audiences' full attention, the pastors also emphasize informal relations: "We are not here to be formal. Yes, we have to be dressed nicely, but we are here to be with God" (Pastor Zahari). And in many cases, the relationship between the church leaders and their family members, on the one hand, and churchgoers, on the other, develop into true friendships. This is the natural outcome of their spending much time together in and outside church, both as a matter of routine and on special occasions. For example, Pastor Zahari's sister invited a substantial part of the congregation to her birthday party, her closest friends are church members, and most youths feel welcome to phone her or to drop by her house at any time, day or night, if they have a problem and need her advice.

Second, speakers in Bulgarian Gypsy churches, whether local or visiting, are more likely, compared to Nadezhdan preachers, to deemphasize their own importance as leaders and to promote a sense of personal empowerment in church members. In some cases, they demonstrate humility about their own understanding of the scripture, which implies that leaders, just like followers, face the same need to work continuously in order to grow as Christians: "I have been to three Bible schools, but I still know nothing, and I am still learning" (foreign missionary at Antioch). The same egalitarian sentiment is echoed in Pastor Zahari's statement that, "We all are spiritual babies." On one occasion, he openly shared with the congregation his sense of personal angst regarding his adequacy as a leader who can meet the needs of his church, even though he immediately followed up with a statement that seemingly exonerated him: "At times I get tired looking for a building for eight years, whereas some churches get their own building

within a couple of years. And I ask myself, ‘God, am I a bad pastor? What did I do wrong?’ But God told me that it is not that important to have a church. What is more important is to have something from God.” More importantly, he emphasized that people should ultimately rely on themselves and individually pursue their own biblical learning and spiritual growth, because one should never take it for granted that leaders are infallible:

You have to read the Bible. You cannot depend on the pastor – what if he goes the wrong way? Then you have a blind man leading the blind. God is here, what do you care about the pastor? The Catholic Church is nice, but one person leads all, and he is just a man. It all depends on him. [...] Leadership is misunderstood. We have inherited from communism the idea that leaders cannot make mistakes. But we need to learn from the bad traits of leaders. Do all that God tells us to do. (Pastor Zahari)

Worried about their leadership status, Nadezhdan pastors, on the other hand, are highly unlikely to further undermine their shaky authority by discussing their insecurities or by inciting people to take charge of their own spirituality.

Third, church members feel entitled to have their opinions taken into consideration when it comes to service dynamics and to the activities of the church. In Antioch, it is not uncommon to hear complaints if something about the services displeases the flock, and the pastor tends to acknowledge and accommodate its wishes. For instance, people have no qualms about demanding more clarity when it comes to his preaching. Once the pastor forgot to spell out his topic before launching into the sermon, so a man interrupted him with the question, “What is the theme?” Pastor Zahari does not seem to mind such interferences. In fact, he often interrupts the sermon himself to check in with the members and to ensure that they are following him. Aware that he is dealing with a fairly opinionated and engaged audience, he finds it necessary to explain his actions. On one occasion, he imploringly justified his decision to include a new version of a popular song in the music repertoire of the church:

We will play new music today. It is not traditional church music, but I do not know what church music is anyways, it is whatever brings joy to you. We have different kinds of Christians – the

youths like fast music that makes them dance; others like slower music. And after we sing the fast version, young people, do you mind if you sing it ‘the correct way’ for the others?

Further, in many instances, actions that affect the entire church are put to a vote. This includes trivial and important decisions. In a more trivial case, Zahari once asked the congregation whether to cancel Bible school due to the cold. An example when the church collectively voted on something important was when it decided to open the soup kitchen for disadvantaged children. Such acts of consulting with the congregation are generally rare in Nadezhdan churches. In other words, the attitude believers have toward their pastors is also relational, as opposed to transactional, and Bulgarian Gypsies are consistently engaged and willing to be agents of themselves and of their community.

Finally, unlike Nadezhdan ministers, Bulgarian Gypsy leaders do not insist on having a monopoly on dealings with the supernatural. Instead, they ask lay believers to help and to support them in this domain. Thus, the pastors delegate numerous rites and tasks to church members, which leads to a sense of shared authority between them and the laity. A seminar at Antioch was specially dedicated to cultivating a sense of spiritual empowerment in Christians. During that seminar, the American missionary Archer explained that one can individually gain the authority to perform supernatural feats, “in God’s name” and “in His place,” by speaking His word. Therefore, Christians who only pray to God as powerless subjects do not understand their authority: “You should pray to start practicing your authority” (Archer). This attitude explains why it is common for Pastor Zahari to ask church members to read passages from the Bible during service and to place their hands on those who need healing in order to channel the Holy Spirit. Such practices produce a sense of enablement and higher degree of participation and engagement – people are at least partially in charge during the sermons, the collective prayer, and the healing rites.

Motivations for Joining Evangelical Churches

Bulgarian Gypsies are much less likely than Nadezhdans to attend Evangelical churches in consideration of material aid. As discussed in Chapter Three, Bulgarian Gypsy churches practically never channel material aid from abroad, and this is something that their members know and occasionally boast about, as they consider it to be a marker of their being purer Christians. In fact, these congregations are most likely to reverse the typical flow of material aid, so that instead of receiving assistance, they provide it to disadvantaged non-church members. Antioch, for example, runs weekly soup kitchens for underprivileged children from the “Jungle.” Members of PC2, on the other hand, raise money to support a dozen poor Roma families in nearby villages during the harshest winter months; they also visit those families and help them with household chores. These are all examples of the poor exercising agency to care for each other when the state has retreated, thus filling that need against heightened marginalization and racism.

Like Nadezhdans, many Bulgarian Gypsies are drawn to the Evangelical churches in times of sickness and hardship. For example, a Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 30s, shared that the entire family became Pentecostal when his father fell ill with cancer. But this motivation is not as predominant as it is in the ghetto. Also, to the extent that people cite disease as a driving factor for seeking out God, they are more likely to mention psychological ailments and emotional distress, or, as Pastor Veselinov put it, “modern diseases.” A Bulgarian Gypsy woman in her mid 40s recounted, “I became religious seven years ago because I had depression, stress, a bad marriage, and my son was getting in trouble. So, I surrendered everything into God’s hands, although it took me a while to understand what this meant.” Another woman in her 30s similarly turned to Christianity as a means of fighting depression: “I lost my joy for a few years, but now

things will change, there will be a renewal.” And Ognyan, in his 40s, turned to God because he “felt anxiety, fear, emptiness. [...] Then I fell to my knees to pray and felt the emptiness and the bad spirits lift. I was filled with hope, peace and the Holy Spirit.” It took him a while to formally join a church, however, because Bulgarian Gypsy (and Bulgarian) men generally feel embarrassed about being associated with organized religion, which is seen as the domain of gullible women.

While spiritual salvation and renewal do not constitute a central trope in the conversion narratives of Nadezhdan Christians, it is often evoked by Bulgarian Gypsies: “The most important thing is spiritual life. What use is there to come to church, to sing, to be joyous if the most important thing does not happen – resurrection from the dead? It is time to wake up, the salvation is close. We see the signs of the final days” (Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 50s at Antioch). The churches attract some men who were involved, or were considering getting involved, in organized crime and who sought a psychological break with their past. Filip shared that he was about to join an arms trafficking cartel when

I started to experience some powerful feelings of guilt and sin, and I started to reconsider my life. In 1993-94, I really started to ponder Jesus and the Christian life, I started to read the Bible. Things had to be explained to me for me to be convinced. I read and realized that there was eternity and that everybody had a path, a plan. I became a critical thinker.

Ognyan started believing while undergoing the “spiritual battle” of deciding whether to become a hit man for the mob:

In the past I was a bad man, I was nervous and fearful of life changes. During communism, there was no God, all was achieved through labor. At one moment during the transition years, liars and criminal emerged and started to destroy the state. No matter what I tried to do, I was unsuccessful because I was honest. A spiritual battle began, where the Devil was attacking me with a vision about these changes. The dishonest ones were succeeding. I had to decide how to live and I decided to stop living the honest way.

Other examples of specific circumstances that prompted people to consider their spiritual salvation include momentous events, such as being held at a gunpoint during the Kosovo war, receiving supernatural signs, and having prophetic dreams (Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 40s).

Further, unlike Nadezhdans, Bulgarian Gypsies live in a society that is characterized by relative anonymity and where the low degree of social integration occasionally poses challenges to establishing close personal relations. Thus, they are more likely than Nadezhdans to cite social motivations for joining Protestant congregations. A woman in her 20s recalled how over a decade ago, a friend of hers first took her to a church in one of the nearby village and how she went along merely to be around people. Then her mother became friends with a member of the Congregational Church downtown and started to attend that church, occasionally bringing her daughter along. The then teenager was initially dissatisfied because she did not have any friends in the congregation – “Everybody just got up and took off after service. I prayed for God to introduce me to people.” But eventually she got to know other young people and they formed a community, which prompted her to continue going and to become a true Christian. Another young woman in her 20s was similarly introduced to the church by a friend. She was the daughter of a notorious mafia boss, and her family and former friends were all Orthodox Christians who ridiculed her decision to become a Protestant; so, she essentially substituted her entire social circle with friends from the Evangelical community. A third young woman, still a teenager, admitted that when she first went to church, she cried because she did not know how to process all the “love and attention by the other people.” She had never had close friends, and becoming a Christian changed her life.

In the context of the impersonal modern society, Antioch members find a rare sense of community in their church. They form deep social bonds of care and friendship, as they follow

the drama in each other's lives, inquire about each other's problems and sick relatives, travel together for crusades and to visit other churches, celebrate holidays together, and so on. Individuals feel valued, as they rejoice and clap for each other's happy announcements and cry and pray for each other's problems. Each week, the congregation elects a troubled person and organizes chain fasts and prayers to help that chosen individual deal with whatever problems he or she is facing. During service, as the congregation prays for healing or for the alleviation of hardship, it is not uncommon to witness members hugging each other and even caressing each other, which generates a sense of bonding and belonging. Bulgarian Gypsy evangelicals also organize banquets for holidays, such as the International Women's Day, Christmas, and New Year's Eve. According to Pastor Zahari, "Christmas is a family holiday, but we can also get together at somebody's house, or in the church. God does not mind, He wants us to be together because that is how the first churches were." At the same time, the church leaders expend inordinate effort toward maintaining good brotherly and sisterly relations among believers. Pastor Zahari once delivered the following speech on the importance of developing humility toward one another:

In a church, there are many grudges, mocking, rejection among people, jealousy, anger. This happens in the world more, but it also happens here occasionally. Especially among Roma. We are very emotional and show anger in an extreme fashion, we critique a lot, we spy on one another, and the Devil comes. [...] If I hear you say something negative about your brother, you become a member of hell. Jealousy kills your brother. Many of us have jealousy. 'Why does God use brother [X and not me]? Who is he? He is young, a new Christian, I have been here for decades, but God picked him?' [...] God told me last night, 'Let my people come together!' We need to remove those negative Gypsy thoughts and be happy about others' successes and talents, pray for them, bless them, do not kill them [with words].

Members of the audience quietly nodded in confirmation, whispering to each other, "This is a serious topic!"

Relationship with God

Bulgarian Gypsies approach God less “transactionally” and more “relationally” than Nadezhdans. As opposed to perceiving God as a stern father figure that is the source of benefits and to whom they owe faith, prayers, and reformed behaviors in return, they relate to God as a person with whom they need to establish deep communion on a daily basis:

God is not a theory but a real person with whom we need to have a relationship. It is similar to the way in which I relate to my wife, like a communion. It is so wonderful! (Pastor Zahari)

Feel the presence of God, experience it, receive it daily. If you are not in the presence, you will never experience his grace. [...] When we are in the presence of God, we need to have a dialogue. God needs to hear our voice, our praise, our songs – he feels pleasure when His children talk to Him. (Bulgarian Gypsy preacher at Antioch)

As opposed to harboring deep anxieties about not satisfying their end of the transaction with God, Bulgarian Gypsies actively seek to experience emotional satisfaction and joy through their relationship with Him. Like Nadezhdans, they also cry when they speak to God, but this is rarely done as a means of soliciting his mercy; instead, it is a happy emotional outburst, a sign of being overwhelmed in the presence of the supernatural. In their songs, in their sermons, and in the way they routinely talk about the divine, Bulgarian Gypsies also tend to put heavy emphasis on His love. In one case, Kalina, in her 30s, compared the intimate relationship she felt that she had with Jesus Christ to the closeness one experiences to a romantic partner, asserting that, “God is my lover. I need no romantic partner, as I feel loved.” Albena, Zahari’s wife, declared, “We can survive all trials and stay firm only if we have a direct relationship with Jesus – like marriage.”

This is not to say that Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals do not hope that some tangible benefits will follow from their communion with God. Miraculous healings are part and parcel of every service, because “without them, the Gospel loses its authority. [...] The healing of the sick is strategic, because people can see it, it is a part of God’s kingdom. They can see Jesus and God and have proof that the Kingdom is near them. Jesus told his disciples to heal the sick as proof”

(Archer). But the concern with physical or material “needs” assumes secondary importance. To begin with, Bulgarian Gypsy Christians go through great lengths to separate their spiritual development from their material needs, emphasizing that the act of desiring or worrying about anything worldly too much distracts them from pursuing a true relationship with God:

We are surrounded by things with which the Devil tries to seduce us – refrigerators, plasma TVs, employment. All of these are only images. I would like a house and a car, so I place an image in my mind and follow it. The devil is the father of lies – he gives birth to images. But God is the original. He will free us from the false images. [...] Some people are burdened by problems and concerns. The human mind wants to be insured for every possible situation. This is not the way to God’s kingdom. Jesus says to unburden yourself, not to think about tomorrow, it will think of itself. We need to feel free and calm. Some people are too burdened to be good Christians. (Pastor Zahari)

What to do with anxieties? [...] We discover that God takes care of His own people and that He knows us by name. He knows your problems, all you need is to look at Him and trust Him. [...] You need to surrender all your problems to him and become an obedient child. [...] It is a sin to be worried and anxious, as it indicates how little we believe and trust. (Bulgarian preacher at PC2)

Leaders at Bulgarian Gypsy churches often encourage their flock not to “nag” God about needs:

“God is not like the genie in the lamp. Stop looking to him for ‘our’ stuff, people!” (Pastor

Zahari). Once during church service at Antioch, after a woman tearfully expressed gratitude about inheriting a house, the surprised pastor assured her that she was blessed and that God had plans for her, but then he also commended her for never “whining” about the house in the first place. The leaders have successfully imparted their attitude about abstaining from negotiating with God onto at least some of their followers. According to a female Antioch member in her 30s, “We should not seek God for material things, this is how we lose God. There is no need to look for God somewhere else – look for Him inside ourselves. [...] Do not seek God only when you have problems, do it when everything is fine. I pray that we do not waste God’s grace, do not only search for Him in times of need.” Nadya, in her 30s, expressed a similar sentiment:

“God is much more than a healer. He cares much more about what happens to you in heaven, not so much here. God looks at the heart. God is grace.” And whereas in extremely impoverished

Nadezhda, where people have many unmet needs, people thank God for providing them with fulfilled wishes, the more materially comfortable Bulgarian Gypsies are more likely to express gratitude “about the wonderful week spent with Him,” instead (Bulgarian Gypsy woman in her 20s).

Further, Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals believe that God has plans for them, and that these plans will not always match their own perceived needs and desires:

In Exodus, the Jews prayed for their needs – family, illness – but God had His own plan. (Pastor Zahari)

We are worried about humans, but God decides – if we are worried then we do not love God, we care more about the human, whereas all emotions and thoughts should be directed toward God. (Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 30s at Antioch)

Consequently, whereas Nadezhdans put forward needs and hold that God has to “deserve” their repentance by fulfilling those needs, Bulgarian Gypsies tend to acknowledge that the trials they encounter might be for a higher purpose that remains unknown to them. This attitude comes across in the tentative and qualified imploring of the following plea for healing: “Help those who are struggling physically. They can be a hope and a light for the rest, to help them realize that their lives are in God’s hands. Even Jesus asked to be spared the cup. We wish that our friends do not have to go this way. *If possible*, we pray to let us have them for a bit longer” (Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 40s at Antioch).

Whereas Nadezhdans view trials as a form of divine punishment, Bulgarian Gypsies leaders preach that, “Trials produce strength. People do not like trials, but we should thank God for them because they train us” (Pastor Zahari).¹⁶⁷ There is also a higher tendency to imbue tribulations with a deeper meaning. Linus, an evangelist from Greece who visits Antioch

¹⁶⁷ Archer once instructed Antioch’s congregation that, “In some cases disease is the direct result of your actions, so you need to change and repent to heal, but not everybody who is sick is sinful, this is just one possible reason. Disease is the outcome of Adam’s actions, or it could be demonic possession.”

frequently, once exemplified this attitude by recounting how his son's death helped convert a nurse and her entire family, leading him to exclaim, "God gave his only son, and so did I. Death brings life!" And a recent widower in his 30s stoically told the congregation, "I thank God for all trials and tribulations – nothing is in vain." Thus, trials are to be faced with fortitude: "It is human to be scared, we need to rely on God to not be afraid" (Bulgarian Gypsy woman in her 20s at Antioch). Even the death and destruction associated with the immanent end of the world are not to be feared: "Thank God for the end of the world. I do not feel like living here anymore. Let him come and take me, if I am not needed by anybody else" (Pastor Zahari).

Finally, Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals believe that upon developing the right kind of relationship with God, healing will naturally follow as a sign of personal empowerment. The caveat is that one does not achieve healing through hoping and praying, but through faith and spiritual growth. The American evangelists and mentor Archer delivered the following sermon at Antioch:

Crying and begging do not please God, only faith. [...] As long as we have our bodies and minds, God doesn't want to put our soul in a body that breaks down. Salvation is precious, so God won't put it in junk. It is like saving you and shooting you at the same time. Jesus also takes away the sickness and the disease. And salvation turns you into an armored car for your soul. If you are born again, saying 'God, heal me!' is the wrong prayer – you are automatically healed already. [...] What you give attention to, you will eventually believe. So, if you focus on the sickness, you will believe it and you give the Devil the upper hand. If you focus on the Bible, you'll believe it. [...] Change the way you speak – not 'my' sickness, diabetes, problem, it is not 'yours.' [...] One needs to thank God about being healed and to believe that one has been healed even before one feels it, and it will happen – this is faith. We enter through the gates with joy and gratitude. You know that you are healed already. The truth of healing gradually replaces the fact of the pain. Take authority over your body.

Thus, while Nadezhdans beg for "mercy" that God bestows upon humans in an act of pity, Bulgarian Gypsies seek "grace," or divine influence upon the heart, which is eventually reflected in tangible ways in one's life. Whereas Nadezhdans pray for healing, a typical Bulgarian Gypsy prays for Jesus to "touch the soul." According to the latter, Jesus heals, but his primary concern is the invaluable soul he died for.

What It Means To Be a Christian

Nadezhdans perceive the act of repentance as a momentous event that dramatically delineates “before” and “after” the time one becomes a believer. Once a person becomes a believer, her identity and behaviors are relatively fixed and boil down to not reneging on the pledge given to God in the act of repentance. Bulgarian Gypsies, on the other hand, regard becoming and being a Christian as a continual process of ongoing growth and development. This distinction comes across in the theme of a sermon, “To run,” delivered in Antioch in December 2009. On this occasion, the pastor used the metaphor of preparing for a marathon to describe how people should “run for God” with a target in mind. That target is to come to true realizations and to grow according to God’s unique plans for each individual, which places great emphasis on introspection and elevates the importance of the self:

Run for real, not in one spot, like the Jews did for 40 years in the desert. At the end of the year, I want to look back and to see some achievement in my Christian life. Everybody has different gifts and callings. God judges us based on that criterion. I do not care how others run, only how I run. Do not care how the pastor runs. Focus your gaze. (Pastor Zahari)

Given that everybody is assigned a unique task by God, being a Christian is associated with a great responsibility and requires working on His behalf and according to his plans:

If a Christian comes to church but does not do anything for Him, according to His plan, he is just a visitor, not a Christian. There are no passive people in God’s kingdom. In His kingdom, people work. So, evangelize, go to villages. [...] Every branch that does not give fruit is cut off. We need to give fruit, to develop. We should not just keep going with the same prayers about blessing the hospitals and the prisons – forget those hospitals, these are silly. I want life and activity, movement, not going in circles, mere tourism. (Pastor Zahari)

On a different occasion, a visiting Roma preacher similarly emphasized the personal calling and responsibility when he instructed Antioch’s congregation that, “God gave you all a calling to be anointed in this calling and service. I cannot be a singer because I have not been anointed as one.

What's your service? That's where your anointment will find you, and you should stay there. Nobody has the right to go into another calling."

Earlier in this chapter I argued that Nadezhdans tend to define a "Christian" as somebody who has repented and permanently adopted behavioral markers that set one apart from non-Christians. To some degree, this holds true for Bulgarian Gypsies as well. For instance, a Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 30s mused about the practices that set Evangelicals apart from the rest of the community: "People tell me 'you are not normal people anymore, you are not of us anymore.' People make fun of us about giving up cigarettes, alcohol, about giving money to the church." In another instance, a famous former Chalga performer who converted to Protestantism pointed to his changed music style as a symbol of his spiritual rebirth: "I used to play kyuchek, but this is my first song for Christ. Now I am a new creature, a brave man indeed." But there is another important dimension to Bulgarian Gypsies' understanding of what it takes to be a Christian. Above all, they frame a believer as somebody who is continuously undergoing a process of spiritual development and, as discussed above, maintaining a close relationship with God in all of His manifestations. To the extent that behavioral change is desired, it is understood to be a work in progress. In other words, one can engage in certain questionable practices and still go to church without being ostracized by his peers; but hopefully as one matures spiritually, this will eventually manifest itself in a behavioral transformation (Bulgarian Gypsy woman in her 30s). The following statements by Bulgarian Gypsy church members and by a foreign missionary speaking at Antioch illustrate this attitude:

A Christian is somebody in whom the Holy Spirit lives. A change in a Christian's life follows by the principles of the Bible. A smoker can be a Christian, but he has not allowed God to finish changing the old person inside. Others will accept him, but they will also try to help him to stop destroying his body, which is God's temple. We only suggest abstinence from alcohol because some people will try a little and get drunk. Timothy actually says that some alcohol is good for the stomach, but now we have medications for that. One becomes a Christian by accepting Jesus, and the rest follows. (Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 60s)

A Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ, one who believes in the Gospel and that God came in the flesh here on Earth, died, and rose. He should believe in his heart that Christ is the Lord savior. He should read the Bible, go to church and live in a community. He should conduct his life in line with his faith, practice ethical behavior. This is not a cultural thing. It means to be committed, not perfect, but making an effort. It is an everyday thing, not just something you do on Sundays. Christianity is a process and an event. Some Roma have a more pragmatic definition. To them, miracles are most important. Yes, miracles are important, you have to believe that God does things for you, but God has nothing to do with disease, material things. Science will take care of this. (Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 30s)

Some people say that you need to abandon sin, wine, to stop beating your wife, and then go to church. This is not true. You go to church, call for Jesus, and your life will change then. (Linus)

Ultimately, one's goal is to emulate Jesus Christ: "A Christian is somebody who says 'Jesus is all,' who depends on Jesus. All have to learn from the Teacher for the right recipe" (Nadya).

A third element that distinguishes Bulgarian Gypsies' understanding of what it means to be a Christian has to do with the joy religion introduces into one's life. One's relationship with God should be a source of great happiness, which dispels all anxieties and cares and redefines the person and all of his or her activities:

Do I serve God with joy or because of habit? Do not do it because of habit, or because your brothers and sisters will be disappointed, or because you will be scolded by the pastor, or to alleviate guilty conscience. Do it with joy. It is very dangerous to see people who are in the church only physically, but their minds are somewhere else. The real meaning of going to church is to enter burdened and tired with problems you cannot solve and to leave free and happy, transformed. (Bulgarian preacher at PC2)

All Gypsies in the neighborhood should say, 'There is light in these people!' because of the glory of God in your life. (Linus)

A true believer does not worry about his present and future: "There is no need to take pills, your souls are peaceful and free of stress. There is a story of a shamefully rich man who took 52 different pills" (Linus).

Fourth, a true Christian reads the Bible and develops a deep understanding of biblical texts: "we are moved by the Word of God, we want to live it, to apply it, we want its strength now, we are hungry for it" (A Bulgarian Gypsy woman in her 50s at Antioch). Practically

everybody has a Bible, and the church leaders frequently remind the flock not to let the holy book sit on the shelf and collect dust: “You have to read the Bible. When was the last time you read?” (Pastor Zahari). Manol, a Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 40s, admitted that he pasted Bible verses around his bed, so that he could memorize them upon waking up. In addition to reading the Bible at home or during Bible meetings, one is also required to bring it to church. I witnessed multiple occasions when Antioch’s pastor asked the members to raise their Bibles in order to show that they had the scripture at hand. He once explained that, “We have the Bible on the laptop and we can project it, but the personal Bible is a personal relationship with God, and if you do not have it, this is not a Christian life, you are not a believer. The Bible is a way of life.” The members have seemingly internalized this attitude. A man once suggested that the congregation charged 50 stotinki for forgetting one’s Bible, and some “offenders” actually paid the fee without grumbling. But simply reading the Bible is insufficient – one is required to study it, so that one can gain an intimate and lasting understanding of the complexities of divine revelation. Thus, besides bringing their Bibles, many people also carry notebooks and pens to take notes during services. One Bulgarian Gypsy woman in her 30s explained that this was done in order to make sure that they learn scripture better: “if you leave the church without learning something from the Bible, why did you even come, there is no point.” Manol told me that, “We’ve heard great sermons, but once we leave, the Devil comes and we forget them. So, we write everything down during lessons. If I did not write down notes, I would be dead.”

Fifth, Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals place heavy emphasis on being baptized in the Holy Spirit. A large percentage of Antioch’s members have spoken in tongues at least once. This often happens during the healing sessions at the end of each service, when the pastor and everybody prays feverishly – often in tongues – over specific members who have certain

ailments. The sick individuals are lined in front of the congregations, so that others can stretch their arms toward them or even place their hands upon them in order to channel the Holy Spirit into them. Whereas Nadezhdans usually stand passively while the pastor prays over them, Bulgarian Gypsies believe that if the sick person reacts and starts to speak in tongues, this is a sign that God is indeed present and healing her. Antioch even has special services and seminars, whose main goal is to incite “unbaptized” individuals to speak in tongues. I witnessed several such events, and I was left with the impression that being placed in front of the congregation, touched, prayed upon feverishly, and yelled at – “Speak, speak!” – constitutes a tremendous amount of peer pressure. Most of the participants start to speak in tongues at some point, prompting cheers from the entire congregation.

Finally, to be a Christian means to assume a great responsibility toward oneself and toward others. Taking care of oneself takes place both in the physical and in the spiritual realm. Whereas Nadezhdans treat the flesh as an enemy, Bulgarian Gypsies regard the body as a temple and consider it their responsibility to take good care of it: “we have a responsibility to God to take care of our bodies, to do blood tests, and to make sure that all is well with us. We should live long and healthily to serve God with our bodies. These are not our bodies, they are tools God has given us to serve Him” (Bulgarian preacher visiting Antioch). Another way of being responsible to oneself is to plan one’s life methodically in order to register progress according to God’s plans:

A good Christian has a daily relationship with God and the Bible, he has a clear plan of how he will live his life, what he will do each day. (Filip)

To be a Christian is to look for the will of God, to be led by God. Most churches just talk about the Bible, not about doing His will. Otherwise, this is a dead thing, lots of work but without quality; you cannot feel the movement of God, just being stuck in the same place. (Pastor Zahari)

In order to maintain a sense of control over their spiritual development on a day-to-day basis, some Bulgarian Gypsy Christians even keep a diary: “I write down about my life, revelations. God does the same thing, he takes notes on your life everyday. Keep a diary. I cannot be perfect, but I try to. It is important to keep track of your life” (Manol).

Then, there is responsibility to others. The notion that Christians should take care of those around them is frequently imparted upon the Bulgarian Gypsy congregations by local and visiting religious actors alike. According to a Bulgarian preacher visiting Antioch, “We are ambassadors from God’s kingdom here. We are not of this world, but we can interfere, like the US embassy does, even if it is wrong. Christians have to interfere in the world to some degree, like salt.” Acts of kindness are carried out individually and collectively. On the level of the individual, Caleb, a visiting foreign missionary in his 20s, once advised Antioch’s youth to “spend 15 minutes each day doing something for somebody. God notices.” Pastor Zahari summed up this moral philosophy as follows: “We are created to be with people, we cannot be like monks; we need to serve with people and to serve for the sake of people.”

As collectives, the churches aim to provide certain social services for their communities, because, in Linus’ words, “we care for the people in the mahala, and we should reach our hand and go to them, this is the job of the church.” In the case of Antioch, most notable is the above-mentioned soup kitchen for disadvantaged children. Themselves disadvantaged, not all members of the congregation are convinced that this is a worthy endeavor, but a core group of believers, led by the pastor and foreign missionaries, insist that helping the children is not only the right thing to do socially, but that it also amounts to serving God: “People have complained to me – ‘Why do we feed them? They steal, break windows.’ But we need to show them something good

in this society, to show them that somebody cares. [...] They deserve something positive, this is what God does” (Pastor Zahari). On another occasion, he said, “As a church, we are responsible to do this, we need to engage in social activities. [...] Brother Linus has a vision about this service, but now it is in our hands. I believe that it will last and that it will become big.” PC2, on the other hand, feeds sixteen impoverished Roma families in a nearby village (Pastor Evstati). As the global economic “crisis” grew worse over 2010, some members found themselves unable to contribute the 20 leva required to provide the service, but Filip maintained that, “Still, the principle is important, not how much you give. Now we help the people with the housework. And there are still brothers who work in Spain and who send money.”

Worship Dynamics

As suggested by the previous discussion of church leadership and understandings of what it takes to become and to be a Christian, the level of engagement and participation is higher in Bulgarian Gypsy than in Nadezhdan churches. This is the case both during and outside of church services and it applies to all parts of group worship – the opening music performance; the announcements; the sermon; and the concluding collective prayers and channeling of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁸ Like Nadezhdans, Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals derive great joy and take pride in Roma Christian music.¹⁶⁹ Unsurprisingly, then, the musical performance at the beginning of each service constitutes one of the liveliest parts of worship (the other one is the channeling of the Holy Spirit at the end of the service). Antioch’s band is small, consisting of, I was told, the

¹⁶⁸ In the words of a Bulgarian Protestant informant who is familiar with Roma churches, all these parts serve different functions, and their combination leads to a balanced mixture of “targeted preaching,” which requires intellectual engagement and seeks to impart knowledge, on the one hand, and “experiential worship,” where “there is no need to think, just feel the presence of the Holy Spirit,” on the other hand.

¹⁶⁹ According to a Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 30s, “Bible music is oriental music. God loves oriental rhythms. We want to let the people in the world see that we are not backward, but professionals.”

most musically talented people in the congregation: the pastor, his wife Albena, a Musician Gypsy couple from Nadezhda (who bring their own electronic keyboard), and Zora. Zora is a Musician Gypsy woman in her 20s who used to be a lead singer at Zhivko's church but then married a Bulgarian Gypsy and currently lives in Nikola Kochev. The band's function is to lead the audience, not to perform for it; practically everybody in the church stands, claps, and sings along, regardless of gender or age. If any individuals hold back, the leaders may urge them to overcome their shyness or apathy. A Bulgarian preacher at PC2 declared that, "it is sad to see Christians in the church not singing and looking grumpy. This is a sad and ugly picture because one cannot open and relax the soul, one just pretends to be a Christian." But what I saw and heard, especially at Antioch, were mostly shining and smiling faces, shimmying bodies, and happy voices, which led me to believe that the vast majority of the attendees truly enjoy participating in the music performance.

The second part of the worship services at Antioch is dedicated to miscellaneous announcements. In addition to allowing the pastor to coordinate upcoming events and activities of the church, it is designed to enable lay members to share any relevant experiences, thoughts, revelations, visions, and dreams that they may have had over the preceding week. People often read Bible passages that they came across and that struck them as important, and occasionally they even ask everybody to join them in reciting hymns together. In some instances, members ask the pastor and their peers to help them interpret divine messages that they may have received in revelations and dreams. For example, a man in his 40s once shared that he had dreamed the "most handsome man, white, with blue eyes," which prompted everybody to speculate that he had seen Jesus Christ. Other people may talk about something important that happened in their lives, or ask the congregation to pray for the resolution of a problem. The relatives of seasonal

workers abroad may relay greetings from the absentees, serving an important function in maintaining some form of social ties in a community where many members are routinely away. Following the example of their leaders, it is not uncommon for people to also share doubts and insecurities about their spiritual state, which turns this part of the service into something akin to therapy sessions and distinguishes it from the way in which Nadezhdans present their needs (without any reference to personal flaws and struggles). The congregation responds warmly and empathetically to the announcements, volunteering to support the pastor in various capacities, expressing curious excitement about visions and dreams, exclaiming and cheering for happy news, and displaying concerned distress over bad ones.

Even though the preacher is in charge during the sermon, the level of engagement by the members remains higher than in Nadezhdan churches. To a large extent, this can be attributed to the skills of the preachers. Pastor Zahari, for example, is a talented public speaker with extensive training in generating and sustaining the attention of the audience. To begin with, he structures his sermons to be interesting, accessible, and easy to follow. He starts by spelling out a theme, then makes an argument, and puts forward clear (often numbered) points to substantiate that argument. Passages from the Bible are used appropriately, and he often explains their historical and cultural context, making it easier for the listeners to grasp their meaning. He frequently asks audience members to volunteer to read the passages, which creates a sense of broad involvement in the topic, at times turning the sermon into a collective enterprise.

Throughout the entire sermon, the preachers and their audiences sustain some level of interaction. The people often reassure the speaker that they are following the presentation by interrupting him or her with “Amen!” and other interjections. At times, they may even applaud. And if there is a prolonged period during which he or she receives no such affirmations, the

speaker may pause and start asking questions through a call and response technique that reestablishes the connection. Another way of engaging the audience is through the frequent use of humor. On one occasion, the foreign missionary Linus repeatedly provoked mirth by imitating Jesus, snoring sounds, and the whistling of a stormy wind. Encouraged by the leaders, it is not uncommon for members of the flock to step in and to respond in kind. For example, when Pastor Zahari once asked, “How are you?” he received a response, “Frozen!” He chuckled and followed up with, “How cold is it?” and the answer – “A Russian would wear a bathing suit” – generated roaring laughter from everybody. This is the kind of back-and-forth dynamic that is rarely seen in Nadezhda, with the occasional exception of the two largest Musician Gypsy churches. By sustaining their focus and attention for prolonged periods of time, Bulgarian Gypsy evangelicals stand in contrast to Nadezhdan believers, who often act distracted or apathetic in the churches, even though the sermons in the ghetto are considerably shorter. In addition to the abilities and efforts of the speakers, this dynamic is tied to the congregation’s ability to maintain order and discipline. In most cases, it is not even necessary for the pastor to step in – the members themselves police each other and reprimand unruly individuals. If a phone rings at Antioch, for example, those nearby immediately demand that it gets turned off. Most children are taken away before the beginning of the sermon, but in the few cases when they stay, they are expected to remain still and quiet, and the mothers of raucous children are asked to subdue the little ones or to leave.

The closing part of services at Antioch involves collective prayers and channeling of the Holy Spirit. At this point, a considerable part of the congregation flocks to the front of the church to be anointed by the pastor and by their peers. It is believed that the presence of the Holy Spirit unleashes the members’ supernatural gifts, including speaking in tongues,

prophesying, and diagnosing and healing diseases. A few members allegedly have the gift of sensing pain in others; they declare that they are experiencing certain sensations in various body areas, and people who share those sensations come forward to be healed. Even though the pastor (or the visiting preacher) leads the prayers, the majority of the congregation participates by speaking in tongues, by placing their hands on the sick, or by stretching their arms toward them, if they are standing at a distance. Participation is constant across gender, but not across age. Despite the urging of their elders, those in their teens and early twenties appear socially anxious and reluctant to participate fully, especially when it comes to speaking in tongues. This is an exciting, emotional, and chaotic part of the service that generates a high degree of collective effervescence and the sense of being in the presence of something bigger. People animatedly reassure each other that they can indeed feel God's presence and anointment. According to a Bulgarian Gypsy man in his 40s who occasionally visits Pastor Zhovko's church in Nadezhda and who is in a position to compare it to Antioch, the ritual of collectively generating a sense of being in the presence of the divine constitutes a major difference between the two churches: "At Zhivko's church, you go to a concert. At Zahari's church, we are touched by the Holy Spirit."

Church Life Outside of Worship Services

The level of participation in Bulgarian Gypsy churches remains high outside of worship services, as they provide numerous opportunities for believers to gather in groups and to engage in activities. To begin with, both Bulgarian Gypsy churches I visited in the Town have active Bible study groups that meet multiple times per week. In Antioch, this group consists of about thirty people of both genders, and according to its members, this is "where the most interesting things happen" (Bulgarian Gypsy woman in her 40s). The group rotates its meetings among the homes of members who volunteer as hosts. Antioch also has a youth group that includes mostly

teens. Its purpose is to supply young people with mentors who can guide them through the most common issues adolescents face in the context of modernity – social alienation, interactions with peers, family conflicts, temptations to engage in crime, the drug culture, premarital sex, and so on.¹⁷⁰ PC2 similarly has groups that meet outside of regular services. These include four home Bible groups and a separate sisters' group, which meets weekly to discuss Christian approaches to dealing with the kinds of problems females face in modern Bulgarian society. The sisters' group leader is Filip's wife, who was trained at women's seminars in the country and abroad. Both Antioch and PC2 also work with children. At Antioch, a designated adult takes the children away during church services in order to teach them Bible stories, songs, and poems, which are occasionally performed for the congregation. PC2 holds special services for children, where the participants read from children's Bibles and sing songs. The leader of these services attended a special school for Sunday teachers.¹⁷¹

In addition to supporting regular groups, Antioch and PC2 frequently organize workshops and seminars. Most often, the goal of these initiatives is to promote the spiritual development of the members, as in helping them unlock supernatural gifts. However, some of the seminars have a strong practical orientation. Filip, for example, has organized a series of workshops aimed at teaching self-leadership, time management, professionalism, trust, how to put together budgets for their personal needs and as a church, etc. He was trained at a Bible school in Kiev and claimed that his intention was to teach the members to build a better church structure, with clear aims and direction.

¹⁷⁰ Pastor Zahari occasionally complains about the commitment level of the members of the youth group, as they miss meetings and occasionally prefer to play cards as opposed to discuss the Bible.

¹⁷¹ Some members also send their children to Sunday school at the Bulgarian Pentecostal Church downtown "because it is well structured according to lessons and a program" (Bulgarian Gypsy woman in her 30s).

Further, unlike Nadezhdan believers, lay Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals take center stage when it comes to organizing and participating in mass evangelization campaigns. At Antioch, the pastor asks specific members to assume the responsibility of arranging for such events by putting a team together, by contacting the appropriate people at the destination, and by planning for transportation. When the members accept, he asks the congregation to pray for them and instructs everybody to “Please respect the brothers this week, follow their orders.” Unlike Nadezhdan pastors, who select a small number of key members to attend crusades, Bulgarian Gypsy leaders allow anybody who is willing to go, and many members indeed do so. I attended evangelizations that required arranging for numerous cars that were loaded to the brim with men, women, and children. One special form of a crusade is the annual Christmas concert Antioch organizes each December. It is attended by hundreds of Roma and Bulgarians from all over Sliven. The church members assume a central role in setting up the concert. The youths blanket the Town and Nadezhda with fliers, and the adult members act as ushers, hand out brochures to the audience, and engage with people who “repent” during the event in order to ensure that the latter follow up and indeed start attending (any) church. Even the children participate, as they perform songs and skits. All forms of crusades provide an invaluable opportunity for members to participate in the organization of the church, to engage in activities that give them the personal satisfaction of knowing that they are “working for God,” and to establish contacts with outsiders.

Finally, summer camps provide yet another opportunity to become socially involved and to establish contacts with believers of all ethnic groups from other parts of the country. Both Antioch and PC2 are affiliated with large ethnic Bulgarian Pentecostal churches – such as Antioch’s “mother church” in Yambol and the main Pentecostal Church in Sliven – that organize

summer camps and that invite Roma to partake.¹⁷² Signing up for the camps is relatively cheap – approximately 15 leva per person, and the organizers may even provide free transportation and tents.¹⁷³ By contrast, Nadezhdans practically never participate in summer camps. Filip shared that once he invited the young people at a Musician Gypsy church to a national youth camp. They agreed at first, but when they found out that they had to pay 2 leva in tax and to provide for their own food, they backed away. Based on this experience, he concluded that Nadezhdans “do not want to be responsible for missioning and for serving others.”

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to describe the social dynamics of Nadezhdan churches by focusing on six component of church dynamics: (1) the role of the pastors, (2) the reasons why people join churches, (3) the way in which members relate to God, (4) how members define a believer, (5) the degree to which members participate in the context of worship, and (6) the degree to which they participate in church life outside of services. It also compares the dynamics in Nadezhdan churches to those in Bulgarian Gypsy churches in the Town in order to highlight the most important particularities of the former.

Facing ongoing external and internal challenges to their power, the leaders of Nadezhdan churches generally pursue an authoritarian leadership style, as they practically “own” the churches and deliberately present themselves as the most important and knowledgeable members

¹⁷² Antioch members routinely form groups and travel to Yambol to attend services at their mother church, and they have established good social ties with some of the leaders and members of that church.

¹⁷³ At these camps, members can attend more workshops that focus on a variety of topics. I attended one such workshop, which imparted valuable practical knowledge on preaching techniques and addressed such issues as picking themes, structuring sermons, delivery style, sermon length, balancing sermon and singing, using Bible texts, engaging the audience with questions, dealing with distractions and interruptions, imitating others, using slang, dealing with being burnt out, dress code, taking questions, dealing with admirers from the opposite sex, etc.

of the congregation both spiritually and organizationally. All decision-making is centralized in their hands. The less impoverished Bulgarian Gypsy religious leaders, on the other hand, enjoy more respect and have the freedom to balance between maintaining some necessary degree of authority and promoting relatively egalitarian dynamics.

Second, Valeri, a Bulgarian member of the Congregational Church in his 30s, once said to me that when it comes to going to Protestant churches, Bulgarians “shop” for doctrinal compatibility, for pastors’ erudition, and for social networks; that Bulgarian Gypsies are attracted to the right kind of music, to the right kind of church “spirit” and community, and to the pastor’s preaching style; and that Nadezhdans are concerned with healing and miracles, with the hope that they end up with the least corrupt pastor. Indeed, plagued by hardship and disease, marginalized Nadezhdans flock to the churches in hopes of finding tangible relief, and mostly in times of need. Their more integrated Bulgarian Gypsy brethren are more likely to pursue a sense of belonging and close community in the midst of an anonymous society that marginalizes them, and they are also more interested in finding answers to the kinds of existential problems people face in the context of post-industrialism, secular modernity, and the traumatic transition to liberalism and a cut-throat free-market economy.

Third, always pressed by extreme needs and struggling to survive on a daily basis, Nadezhdans view their interactions with God in transactional terms – to them, He is a stern fatherly figure who needs to be honored and pleased in exchange for tangible benefits. Bulgarian Gypsies, on the other hand, view God as a loving and approachable “partner,” with whom they seek to establish the kind of intimate relationship that provides deeply satisfying comfort and joy.

Fourth, building on their transactional relationship to God, Nadezhdans hold that deciding to become a Christian is a momentous event that entails adopting a set of behavioral practices that are meant to please and compel Him to provide for them. According to Bulgarian Gypsies, however, being a Christian is a continual process of personal and spiritual growth; consequently, they place less emphasis on behavioral prohibitions and instead focus on reading the Bible and developing a close personal relationship with God. Any behavioral changes are expected to follow from that.

Fifth, Nadezhdans approach their churches as a place to visit in times of need, but they do not exhibit a high level of commitment or investment in church life itself. Their authoritarian leaders discourage such investment, and their own understanding of what it takes to be a Christian does not call for it. Even during worship, the apathetic residents of the ghetto assume a passive role. They allow the band to do the singing, and they rarely engage with the sermons. The only aspect of worship in which members are actively involved is the presenting of needs, but then they let the leaders perform the rites that would hopefully deliver relief and salvation. Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals, on the other hand, exhibit a high degree of involvement. Encouraged by their leaders and in trying to rise to their standard of what it means to be a good Christian, they participate in all parts of worship services.

Finally, the churches in Nadezhda do little to engage the flock through services and activities outside of worship. Very few have charity initiatives or offer opportunities for members to grow and socialize, such as Bible study groups, women's groups, youth groups, Sunday schools, or summer camps. Most members do not participate in crusades or other evangelizing efforts. The Bulgarian Gypsy churches, by contrast, engage their members in numerous extra-worship activities.

By describing the social dynamics of Nadezhdan churches, Chapter Four provides the background for the final substantive chapter, which analyzes the role of churches in shaping gender dynamics.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVANGELICAL CHURCHES AND WOMEN

Despite a popular perception in the West that Evangelical Christianity is a conservative force, numerous scholars have argued – as I noted in Chapter One – that participation in Evangelical churches has helped marginal populations in developing countries. Chapter Five explores whether similar dynamics have taken place in Nadezhda since the 1990s. The chapter is concerned primarily with women for two reasons. First, in marginalized and developing communities, such as Nadezhda, women are often additionally disadvantaged by patriarchal social organization, beliefs, and practices. As a result, Evangelical churches affect the lives of women and men in different ways. Indeed, much of the comparative literature focuses on the distinctive, and generally positive, effects Evangelical Christianity has had on disempowered women. This chapter will show that participation in Evangelical churches has affected women in Nadezhda in distinctive ways also, although a confluence of structural and cultural factors in the ghetto has limited the beneficial effect for women.

Second, as Chapter Two has shown, the systematic and extreme subordination of women in Nadezhda has been a key factor behind the socio-economic plight of the entire community. For example, the fixation with controlling female sexuality makes marriages between adolescents a prevailing norm in this patriarchal society, and this leads to extremely high rates of school dropout, unemployment, and poverty, feeding into the vicious cycle of their ghettoization, segregation, and stigmatization. Hence, in order to understand how any social institutions, including churches, introduce social change into the ghetto, it is essential to identify how they affect patriarchal structures, beliefs, and practices.

Although the chapter focuses on women, many of the processes it examines relate to men as well. In some cases, churches benefit women by transforming men first, as will be shown in section three. In other cases, Nadezhdan churches fail to improve certain aspects of women's lives not because the religious leaders perpetuate patriarchal beliefs and practices, but because they are not interested in facilitating this kind of change for any of their followers, male and female alike. This kind of gender-blind apathy will be discussed in parts of section four, which addresses Nadezhdan religious leaders' poor record of helping believers to pursue integration in the larger society. Finally, if the churches were to offset oppressive patriarchal understandings and institutions in Nadezhda, they would also benefit men by enabling them to finish school, pursue careers and better socio-economic and cultural integration in the broader society, marry for love at a more mature age, share the financial burden of supporting a family with their wives, and so on.

If one were doing fieldwork in the Nadezhdan churches during the 1990s, one may have easily supported Martin's (1996) characterization of Evangelical Christianity in developing societies as a "women's movement." Chapter Three recounted the history of the emergence of Evangelical churches in Nadezhda starting in the mid-1980s. One central aspect of these early dynamics was that women were the main founders and participants in the first home-based worship groups, which often brought together Turks, Musician Gypsies, and Naked Gypsies. The early home churches were generally associated with the feminine private domain, even though men were rarely happy to see their wives leave the jurisdiction of their particular household in order to participate in autonomous activities outside of their kin networks. However, as Bulgarian and foreign religious actors developed an interest in the residents of the ghetto and Evangelical churches became the source of numerous economic and social benefits,

men took an avid interest in organized religion and displaced women as church leaders and core members. Increasingly stigmatized and emasculated in the eyes of mainstream society, Nadezhdan men discovered that the religious field provided an opportunity to reestablish their sense of masculinity by dominating women (as in all other domains) and by competing with each other for status and authority. In sum, institutionalized religious life became a men's affair, especially in the Naked Gypsy part of the ghetto.

The comparative literature suggests that participation in Evangelical churches benefits women in developing patriarchal societies in four areas: (1) on the level of the church community, women gain status as leaders and members through participating in charismatic worship and in a supportive congregation; (2) on the personal level, Evangelical women acquire a sense of self-worth, as they internalize teachings about their inherent value in God's eyes, as they "demonstrate" spiritual gifts, and as they reframe their lives through testimonies; (3) on the level of the family, churches have challenged patriarchal practices, such as arranged early marriages, and they have also helped women by "domesticating" men; and (4) on the level of society, churches have provided women with an opportunity to pursue economic integration by imparting useful attitudes and skills, cultural integration through exposure to broader religious networks, and engagement with the civic and political arena by facilitating collective action. In Nadezhda, however, the assertion of male control over organized religion has limited women's opportunities to derive these four key benefits from participating in the local Evangelical movement.

Organization of the Chapter

The first section of Chapter Five will show that participation in religious communities fails to bring women prestige, power, status, respect, or communal support. On the one hand, they rarely claim material or status advantages as congregation members and as leaders. On the other hand, they are less likely to join or to form strong communities of mutual support because they remain passive during solidarity-building church services, they do not found formal church groups, and they fail to establish informal social networks outside of their circle of close kin.

The second section will demonstrate that Nadezhdan Evangelical women are less likely than men to develop a sense of strong personal worth and empowerment after conversion. Women do encounter and internalize the self-affirming notion that they are God's precious children, and they are comforted by the ability to turn to a protective supernatural force in times of distress. However, patriarchal gender roles make it less acceptable for women – especially Naked Gypsy and younger women – to claim that they have spiritual gifts, to use testimonies as a means of celebrating their personal transformations and of constructing gender-specific narratives that allow them to reinterpret their experiences, and to embrace notions of personal responsibility over one's destiny.

The third section will argue that Nadezhdan churches have had a mixed record when it comes to improving the lives of women in the context of the family. Most church leaders, who are male, are invested in the deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs and practices in the ghetto, and even in the rare cases where they have come to oppose some of these practices, they have not done so vehemently for fear of antagonizing their flock. Thus, they do not challenge practices that limit young women's choices and opportunities in life, such as early, arranged, and informal marriages. The Nadezhdan churches have forced many men to abandon some behaviors that hurt

their wives and children, but they have also taught women to be even more docile and subservient, and the reformed men have not necessarily become more loving or engaged husbands and fathers.

The fourth section will show that Nadezhdan churches have not helped their segregated and isolated members, men and women alike, to become better economically, socially, culturally, and politically integrated in the larger society by providing them with new practical skills, new attitudes toward education and employment, social capital, and opportunities to organize in collective action. Local pastors have not embraced the idea that part of their mission is to help their flock outside of facilitating miracles and spiritual salvation.

Chapter Five concludes by comparing of the dynamics in the churches in Nadezhda and those in the Bulgarian Gypsy churches in Nikola Kochev. It will show that while the ghettoized, segregated and stigmatized Nadezhdans – and particularly Nadezhdan women – rarely benefit from the positive developments described in the comparative literature, the geographically, socially, and culturally better integrated Bulgarian Gypsies – and specifically Bulgarian Gypsy women – are more likely to do so.

Nadezhdan Women's Participation in Church Life

The comparative literature suggests that the introduction of Evangelical Christianity to patriarchal communities advances women in three ways. First, churches open opportunities for marginalized women to assume leadership positions in the congregations, which elevates their status and self-esteem. Second, women's engagement in participatory worship and interactive sermons during services helps them to create bonds of communal solidarity in the context of their congregations, as opposed to their extended families. Third, women may join church

activities outside of services – such as Bible discussion meetings, prayer groups, or social clubs – which provide further opportunities to become embedded into supportive communities. After demonstrating that none of these three mechanisms have offered Nadezhdan women higher status or camaraderie in the context of their church communities, this section will describe the actual social dynamics among Christian women in the ghetto. As social institutions, Nadezhdan churches have evolved to become the domain of “brothers,” providing valuable public spaces for men to build new and deeper social relations. Most women, on the other hand, still maintain close relations primarily within the confines of their natal and husbands’ families. Even in the context of small congregations, non-related women tend to interact with each other superficially, and their exchanges are often plagued by distrust and conflict. But Nadezhda does not lack Evangelical communities of women altogether. Repelled by the pastors, some older and middle-aged women have left the churches and reverted to gathering and praying at home with a handful of close friends. Another example is a small Turkish church that was originally founded by a Turkish pastor and his female followers from the Town. Here, women have been relatively successful in acquiring access to leadership opportunities and new social networks through the three mechanisms described in the comparative literature.

Nadezhdan Women and Church Leadership

The introduction of Evangelical Christianity to some patriarchal societies in Latin America and Africa has benefited women by providing them with prestige and opportunities to exert influence over others by assuming leadership roles in the congregations and by managing church activities (Espinoza 2002; Flora 1975, 417-418; Hackett 1993; Soothill 2007, Chapter 5). Given that most Christian denominations continue to hold that men are a better fit for ecclesiastical service than women (based on their alleged moral and spiritual superiority), it is

extremely rare to find cases in patriarchal societies where female Evangelicals have attained full equality with their male counterparts. Still, Evangelical churches tend to be highly participatory, regardless of gender, allowing hard-working, gifted, and enthusiastic women to earn some respect and positions of formal responsibility (Marshall 1993). In part, women benefit from their traditional association with the spiritual realm (Cucchiari 1990), which enables them to claim power through spiritual gifts, such as healing, prophesy, visions, speaking in tongues, etc. (Chestnut 1997). Women can also earn esteem as heads of sisters' groups and by overseeing activities that are perceived as feminine, such as fundraising, charity programs, cleaning the church building, hosting and cooking for church events, etc. (Flora 1975, 424; Martin 2001, 52).

Similar dynamics appear to have been underway in Nadezhda in the early years of the Evangelical movement, before prestige-seeking men's maneuvering fragmented the original Evangelical community into dozens of churches catering to specific ethnic and even kin groups. Nowadays, however, all formal church leaders in Nadezhda are men. The common attitude in the ghetto is that women must not preach and that they should be quiet in the church, although a few residents insist that, "Jesus allowed the Samaritan to give witness and to preach. All are equal in the eyes of God. [If we do not allow women to preach,] why do we let them thank God and present needs, then?" (Vitan). Some Nadezhdans also find it hypocritical that the ban on female preaching and leadership only applies to local women, whereas "they still accept foreign women, even run to them to ask them to pray for them" (Vitan).

Indeed, higher-status women from outside the ghetto appear to be treated with a fair share of respect. Visiting Bulgarian and foreign females – especially those who are perceived as a potential source of material benefits – are promptly handed microphones and asked to deliver sermons (I was once ushered to the pulpit, despite my vehement protests that I was just a student

and not even a Christian). In the mid-2000s, an ethnic Bulgarian woman from the Town even led a men's Bible group and preached regularly at a Naked Gypsy church. The tolerance of "gadjo" (non-Roma) women has its limits, however. For example, people eventually got used to the aforementioned Bulgarian woman, and her "bossy" womanhood caused discontent among the men (Vitan).¹⁷⁴ In a different incident, the female American sponsors of a conference at a Turkish church alienated many of the pastors when they engaged in ostentatious charismatic worship and forced some indignant men and embarrassed women to leave their seats, to hold hands, and to dance in a circle. Many of the local leaders did not return the next day, until the foreign missionaries started handing out cash to "bless" the pastors in attendance. Soon thereafter, a couple of the absentees rushed in and apologized for being late. The women gave them cash and a chiding: "Sir, do you remember yesterday, when I touched your arm and asked you to stand up and dance and you recoiled and left? I will now bless you, but you must humble yourself. You never know whom God will use to bless you."¹⁷⁵

Local women do not hold formal positions of leadership in the churches, but certain categories of resident females are in a position to exert some influence over their congregations. Their power rarely goes uncontested, however. The first category includes the early Nadezhdan Christians. In the Musician Gypsy churches, these now elderly pioneers are generally respected, and they occasionally attempt to claim authority on the basis of having gifts, such as dreams,

¹⁷⁴ I tried not to repeat her mistake and sought to avoid causing rumors and disgruntlement by associating primarily with the women. This is why I was a little nervous when, with the exception of female members of the Turkish Evangelical community, women were prominently absent from the English language classes I offered at various churches in the ghetto. I repeatedly voiced my hopes for female participants and pleaded with some of my closer female friends to come, but to no avail.

¹⁷⁵ The American female missionaries were themselves offended by the local chauvinistic attitudes. They had been providing a salary for a local Turkish pastor for years, and they felt that they deserved gratitude and respect. Thus, they were aghast when he seemed to plead with the conference participants to disregard their womanhood. He declared that according to the Bible, if men were unwilling to step up to the task of doing missionary work, then women could fill in. The women felt that this framed their husbands as lazy or indifferent, and it also framed them as a fallback option.

visions, and prophesy. In Pastor Damyan's church, it was two sisters' visions that compelled the pastor to appoint a woman as a cashier. In Pastor Zhivko's church, the opinionated sister Kina has repeatedly challenged the pastor based on her spiritual insight. Many men, however, ridicule older women's gifts as delusions and lies (Semih). Among the original female founders, those at Naked Gypsy churches feel especially disempowered today. Spasena, a Naked Gypsy pioneer in her 50s, changed three churches over the year I spent in Sliven. She was upset that the male ministers did not acknowledge her as a worthy member of the congregation, even though she had graduated from high school, she had visited the USSR in her youth,¹⁷⁶ and she had been trained and certified to evangelize at a foreign-sponsored conference in Yambol in the early 2000s. When I met her, she was not even allowed to sing.

Another category of influential women in the Nadezhdan religious field includes the pastors' wives. Most of them are relatively reclusive housewives who do not interfere openly in the workings of the congregation. But a couple of them do, in fact, assume prominence. However, these women often become magnets for malicious gossip and conflict. One notable example is Pastor Kalcho's wife, who insists on sitting at the front with the men during worship, joining meetings of the spiritual council, traveling with her husband to crusades and conferences, etc. She is consistently ridiculed for being power-hungry, materialistic, opportunistic, and "dumb." Some other women even play practical jokes on her and then bond by laughing behind her back. In the Musician Gypsy Evangelical community, practically all pastors' wives have been the targets of spiteful gossip. Nevena accused the wives of two Musician Gypsy pastors of causing a rift between their husbands (who are biological brothers) and of splitting the church in order to gain power. The wife of one of the Musician Gypsy pastors has been the target of the

¹⁷⁶ Her most vivid memory from the experience was crying in fear and embarrassment when a male schoolmate smiled at her and tried to strike a casual conversation with her.

most extreme controversy. Veska blamed her for breaking up her marriage by finding a second wife for her now ex-husband. She is also rumored to have had an affair with a younger, married band member who eventually committed suicide. The scandal almost destroyed the church, and years later, she remains a persona non grata for many ghetto residents.

In addition to being denied positions as ministers and to having their claims to informal authority consistently challenged, Nadezhdan women have few opportunities to seek prestige through managing church activities. Crusades, or public evangelization campaigns, constitute the most common type of activity for local churches, but men are in charge of them. To the extent that women have regular responsibilities in the church, their tasks are limited to cleaning the premises and to preparing food for important visitors (while I was in the ghetto, two churches also ran very irregular soup kitchens for poor children and widows). The wife of the pastor and a handful of devoted sisters usually carry out these tasks. I got a sense that the women derived some satisfaction from such duties, because these allowed them to boast that they were serving God and elevated their sense of self-importance as responsible individuals who were contributing to the church. In fact, one Musician Gypsy woman in her 50s left her church in protest when the pastor gave her key to another “cleaning lady” (that church was also in negotiations with a foreign sponsor to start a soup kitchen, as she saw the gesture as a sign that she would not be included on the team of paid cooks). However, these kinds of tasks merely replicate women’s domestic activities, and they hardly earn status and influence in the congregation.

Nadezhdan Women’s Engagement in Participatory Worship and Interactive Sermons

The comparative literature on Evangelical churches around the world frequently notes their ability to maintain high levels of membership commitment within closely-knit religious communities. One possible explanation for this is the participatory, interactive, and exuberant

worship rituals of some Evangelical denominations, which tend to generate enthusiasm, collective effervescence, or something akin to “*communitas*” (Corten 1999, 42–43; Lalile d'Epinay 1969, 52–53; Turner 1969, 94-97, 125-130). The literature that focuses on the positive effect of charismatic collective worship generally does not analyze men and women separately. But many Evangelical churches tend to promote egalitarian participatory worship, with women partaking alongside men. In fact, women’s association with spirituality may embolden some of them to be even more engaged than men – for example, Chestnut (1997), argues that they are twice as likely to speak in tongues (99). This suggests that women are not less likely than men to generate a sense of solidarity by participating in Evangelical worship.

Churches in Nadezhda vary in the extent to which they employ participatory charismatic worship at the beginning and end of services. Some Musician Gypsy churches are most likely to engage and to excite their members, whereas the congregations of the older Turkish churches tend to be more passive (Chapter Four). Participation also varies by gender, with men being more engaged than women. The seating arrangements in the churches make this difference easy to discern and may account for some of it. In all churches but Pastor Zhivko’s, men and women sit in separate areas.¹⁷⁷ The main rationale behind this segregation is that it prevents inappropriate interactions. According to Pastor Berk, Pastor Zhivko’s church is plagued by “rumors about divorce and such stuff. [...] We have no such problems. Men and women sit separately here.” Yovko insisted that, “seventy percent of the men are jealous about their wives’ going to church. Some men only go to church to watch and grope women. They use the church hypocritically. I can tell by their faces, I have a sixth sense about it.” Coupled with the

¹⁷⁷ The spatial separation of the two genders is not unique to Nadezhdan churches. Some Eastern Christian Orthodox churches in this part of the world still segregate men from women, as do mosques.

patriarchal understanding that women should not act exuberantly and attract attention to themselves in public, this segregation divides most congregations into spatially distinct camps characterized by different levels and modes of participation.

In Naked Gypsy churches, especially, men are more likely to sing loudly, to stand up, to raise their arms, to clap, to lead collective prayers, to talk, and to move around in a dance-like fashion. Women, on the other hand, may clap and sing quietly and ask the congregation to pray for specific “needs” they have, but otherwise they tend to sit still and listen, and many of them are distracted from doing even that because they are attending to toddlers. While the men as a group are swept up in the excitement, the women appear more self-conscious and more concerned with their social environment, as they often look around to monitor each other’s behavior. To the extent that there is excitement unfolding in their area, it is caused by unruly children, not by collective effervescence. I took the pictures below (Figure 12 and Figure 13) during an upbeat song at the beginning of service at Kalcho’s church in the hope of capturing how much more expressive and engaged men are during worship compared to women. While the men at the front of the church are standing and singing, seemingly lost in emotion, in the back corner of the church, only some of the women are on their feet and clapping. The rest remain seated, and many appear to be more interested in my taking their picture than in the song.

Figure 12. Men Worshipping in a Naked Gypsy Church.



Figure 13. Women Worshipping in a Naked Gypsy Church.



Some of my female informants blamed the evolving role of music for their declining involvement in collective worship. According to Akila, the change came about with the introduction of instruments, sound systems, and bands. Whereas in the past the congregations

sang as communities of equals (mostly women), now small groups of prestige-seeking men performed *for* the congregation, causing internal discord and power struggles:

Eight years ago, it was only the women who sang, and it was a great community, as people sang together. But with the keyboard, there is no more grace to be felt, one no longer feels the power. [...] The church fell apart when the sound systems came. Those who wanted to show off took the microphone, not those who could sing. They only wanted songs that allowed people to clap and jump, to show off the keyboard. The people started fighting [over who would sing in the band]. When people complained about the songs, the pastor did not take them seriously.

Behice complained that “[the members of the pastor’s band] only come to church to show off their voices and talents and to make decisions, which makes them feel like they are something special.” In the Naked Gypsy community, the emphasis on rehearsed performance has left many feeling that “the most important things in the church are the keyboard and the equipment” (Mina) and that “women do not sing – they cannot. The men have the practice” (Spasena). Prominent exceptions to this rule are the Musician Gypsy churches, which employ female singers in their bands, and some old-fashioned Turkish churches, where the entire congregation still sings a capella.

The exclusion of Nadezhdan women from participation during church services extends beyond collective charismatic worship rituals. They are also much less likely than men to engage with the sermons. During the typically convoluted and unstructured sermons in Naked Gypsy churches (Chapter Four), many men listen attentively. Most women, however, appear uninterested and lost in thought, and on a number of occasions, they have been unable to recall what the preacher said within minutes of his last sentence. Since they often experience Christian doctrine as distant and esoteric, Naked Gypsy females do not feel like they are in the position of knowledge and power to engage critically with the words. By contrast, women in some Musician Gypsy and Turkish churches occasionally participate in verbal exchanges with the pastor and other members during sermons, and they feel entitled to analyze and even criticize

their style or content. For example, Dora and Veska vehemently protested a video shown at their church because it referred to “Jehovah,” as opposed to “God” or “Jesus”: “Why was the prayer about Jehovah? Jesus is the boss!” While this remark showed a lack of knowledge about God’s name, it revealed that the women perceived themselves as congregants who had the right to initiate a critical dialogue about religious teachings.

Evangelical men and women in Nadezhda differ in the degree and mode of their participation during church services, and this immediately translates into differences in their propensity to engage in community-building behaviors outside of church. At the end of a service, Naked Gypsy men appear elated and they often gather to socialize and to discuss the sermon. The more glum women, on the other hand, frequently leave church earlier to tend to domestic duties, and they rarely interact with one another after service. By discouraging women from participating actively in religious rituals, Evangelical churches actually impose on them more conservative restrictions than traditional Nadezhdan public rituals do. According to old custom, women, regardless of age or marital status, take center stage in the euphoric public festivities held for weddings and birthdays, even though most church leaders tell their followers that they are no longer allowed to do this either.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ I have provided links to three YouTube videos exemplify the dynamics of secular weddings in Nadezhda. The first two clips illustrate Turkish wedding celebrations in the street, and the third one shows a Musician Gypsy wedding celebration indoors (for both ethnic groups, weddings usually last a few days and have indoor and outdoor components). I was unable to find videos of Naked Gypsy weddings. The poorer Naked Gypsies are less likely to hire cameramen, and even if they do, they rarely have the technology or the expertise to upload the recording to the Internet. Their weddings share many elements with those of Musician Gypsies and Turks, although they alone still practice “dishonoring” as part of the ritual.

(1) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x1Z1Wc0Afw>;
(2) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlSAatG1IOhI>;
(3) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMHwSt3Ferw>.

Nadezhdan Women's Participation in Church Groups and Activities

According to the comparative literature, in addition to generating solidarity during charismatic worship, Evangelical churches embed women into networks of mutual support by bringing them together in the context of shared activities outside of services (Chestnut 1997, 104; Gill 1990, 712; Green 1993; Martin 1999). Given their emphasis on reading Scripture and on personal involvement, most Evangelical churches strongly encourage their members to participate in activities such as Sunday school, Bible discussions, and social gatherings. In some cases, such activities bring together men and women, and in other cases, members are segregated by gender. Regardless, in the context of impoverished and rapidly changing societies, active involvement in church life has provided a valuable opportunity for women to come together and to support each other morally, emotionally, and materially as old communities have been uprooted, as traditional values and family structures have been disintegrating, as men became victims of mass violence (in some cases), and as many women have been forced to support their families while dealing with absent, alcoholic, and abusive husbands (Brusco 1996; Green 1993; Flora 1995, 419; Garrard-Burnett 1998, 122-124).

Nadezhdan women tend to remain on the periphery of organized church activities outside of service. Generally, only the core team of committed male members, or “brothers,” carry out such activities. In many cases, these men belong to the pastor’s family. Women cannot join the “brotherhood” because men believe that this would be distracting and tempting. Even ministers would generate gossip if they regularly spent time with (young) women who were not in their immediate family. There are rumors about past and current pastors who allegedly made inappropriate advances on female members or who engaged in illicit sexual relationships. Thus,

local women are excluded from the brothers' Bible discussion groups and, with some exceptions, from organizational planning meetings of the spiritual council.

Having been excluded from the male-led groups, female Evangelical Christians in Nadezhda find it difficult to form their own, separate church-based groups. On the one hand, they are barraged by domestic obligations that limit their availability for sustained activities outside of the household (Pastor Kalcho). On the other hand, many men and mothers-in-law are suspicious when women seek an alternative social space where they are no longer under the family's watch. Gratuitous jealousy and a general distrust of young women are common in patriarchal societies, where people go to great lengths to control female sexuality and to ensure that wives carry on the bloodline of their husbands' family. Whereas women in Nadezhda usually go to church service in order to present needs and to pray for the family, wanting to chitchat with other women in the context of regular group meetings outside the house is harder to justify.¹⁷⁹ It also does not help that in the mid-2000s, some of the young sisters who met in one of the Musician Gypsy churches ended up socializing with young brothers and getting embroiled in notorious scandals, which was perceived as further evidence that women cannot be trusted and left unsupervised even within the walls of a church.

One Musician Gypsy and one Turkish church claimed to have sisters' groups in 2010, but these meet very intermittently, to the point where they were nominal. Ironically, churches were more likely to have children's rather than sisters' groups (Naked Gypsy churches had neither).

Male ministers can lead the former, whereas only women – especially the pastors' wives – can

¹⁷⁹ Even going to church service requires permission. According to Pastor Berk, "Men decide whether women go to church or not, they can stop the women if they want to. There are issues of jealousy and also sometimes the men do not like the pastor." A Musician Gypsy in her 40s corroborated his account from a woman's perspective: "I used to go to church when I was with my first husband. I took my headscarf, but my husband was still jealous and he stopped me. [...] Then five years passed and I met my current husband. I just started going back to church because my entire family is Christian now." Young Naked Gypsy women, in particular, tend to go to churches where they can be under the supervision of family members.

lead the latter, but very few of them have the education, the confidence, and the time to do it (Vitan). This left one 11-year-old Musician Gypsy girl in a predicament. Upon becoming a “woman,” she was banned from her children’s group because she was too old, but she could not go to the youths’ group, because it consisted exclusively of brothers. In addition to being practically defunct, the sisters’ group was seen as the domain of married women. As a female, she had to withdraw from church groups upon reaching “adulthood.”

Social Networks of Nadezhdan Evangelical Women

Brusco (1996), Green (1993), and Garrard-Burnett (1998) suggest that women seek to form church-based social networks in times when major social upheaval fractures old ties and institutions. I have already shown that the churches in Nadezhda do little to generate a sense of community among women by encouraging them to participate actively in charismatic worship or in other church-related activities. But in the face of such marginalization, do female congregants find alternative venues for socializing with each other, such as the home, the street, the store, or the local café? After all, they are perfectly aware which of their neighbors are “like” them – Christians and fellow-congregants. For Nadezhdan women, however, identifying with a group does not necessarily translate into solidarity and a sense of community. A further obstacle to the formation of networks of support among female Evangelicals is the traditional patriarchal expectation that women should circumscribe their close relations within the extended family circle. When female members of the same church socialize with one another, it is usually because they already have kinship ties, not because they belong to the same congregation. This is especially the case among Naked Gypsy women, who are more likely to socialize with kin who do not go to church or who go to different churches than with unrelated members of their

own church. And to the extent to which female congregants relate to each other, they often do so with suspicion and even animosity.

Dynamics of internal division, exclusion, and conflict constitute an important obstacle to community building for Evangelical women that is rarely discussed in the literature. These dynamics are highly consequential in Nadezhda churches. To begin with, women divide themselves by the degree to which they have access to church resources, often through their affiliation, or lack thereof, with male members of the inner circle of power holders. Naturally, those without access to resources are often resentful of those with it. A Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s grumbled that she volunteered to cook at her old church for years, but when she asked to borrow some of the church benches for a family celebration, the pastor turned her down for no apparent reason, even though he had granted the same favor to his friends. A Turkish woman in her 40s complained at length about the corrupt practices of her pastor's family, especially the pastor's wife, and expressed pessimism about ever being able to experience solidarity with them: "I am not here for the pastor or for his wife. I am here for God."

Second, Evangelical women in Nadezhda find it hard to form a unified community because of generational rifts. Many of the older females feel alienated by the ways in which their younger peers worship, behave, and dress. Vitan described his mother's disenchantment in the following terms:

Christians used to be more disciplined, humble, respectable looking, exemplary, not negative. International guests changed things. When the new generation entered, they introduced more powerful worship, but women no longer cover their heads, they dress in sporty clothes, and they wear flip-flops. People jump, clap, and yell in church. I dislike it. So, real Christians stopped going. My mother is deeply religious, but does not go to church because of the young women who wear tight jeans.

The issue of whether women should wear head covers to church has been the subject of especially heated disagreements. The members of the first generation of Christian women wear

the accessory unfailingly. On the one hand, they believe that scripture commands it. On the other hand, when they started going to church, the scarf was seen as a means of appeasing jealous husbands. But over time, the prevailing opinion became that the need for head covers was an overly literal and counter-efficient interpretation of the Bible: “You cannot force an eighteen-year-old to be an old lady. In the end, it is fine for her not to wear it” (Vitan).¹⁸⁰ The generational split over charismatic worship pits older females against youth of both genders. According to Pastor Zhivko, “fifteen years ago we would have been called sinners for clapping and dancing, but it attracted the youth, who started coming around 2007.” Some older female churchgoers even deny their young sisters the privilege of claiming that they have received gifts from the Holy Spirit – such as speaking in tongues, having visions, or the ability to heal – as I will show in the section dedicated to spiritual gifts. Older women’s claim to authority vis-à-vis younger women in the context of the churches generally parallels the authority most Nadezhdan females expect to acquire as they age and “earn” the right to dominate younger generations of women in the context of the patriarchal households.

Third, the strict behavioral standards for defining a Christian (Chapter Four) cause many women to find themselves judged or even excluded by their congregations based on various

¹⁸⁰ These differences between the behavioral patterns of older and younger generations of Nadezhdan women constitute a reversal of the behavioral patterns exhibited among Pomak women in the Rhodope Mountain in southern Bulgaria. Pomaks are Muslims of Bulgarian ethnic descent who live in isolated and impoverished rural communities. Over the past two decades, many Pomaks, particularly members of the younger generations, have been converting from a moderate local version of Islam to a much more radical Islam introduced by proselytizers from Saudi Arabia. Kristen Ghodsee (2009) argues that unemployed younger men, who associated the loss of their jobs in the defunct mining industry with a humiliating loss of masculinity, spearheaded this wave of conversions because in addition to financial resources, radical Islam provided them with an opportunity to gain a sense of male superiority by advocating conservative patriarchal beliefs and practices. Consequently, younger Pomak women are more likely than older ones to cover their heads. Ibrahimpasich (2013) also shows that younger Bosnian Muslim women are more likely than their older peers to embrace a conservative form of Islam and to wear a head cover. Unlike Ghodsee, however, she argues that young Bosnian women are especially attracted to a devout Muslim lifestyle because they perceive it to be a form of empowerment for them as Bosnians, as women, and as individuals. For them, living as conscious Muslims is a way of embracing their national/religious identity, a way of fighting the memories of the atrocities committed against Muslim women in the 1990s, and a way of denouncing the alienating lifestyle that characterizes modern secular society.

kinds of transgressions. For example, a Turkish woman in her 20s left her first husband in order to remarry a Muslim and was banned from all churches as an adulteress:

The churches do not accept me. [...] Yesterday [a group of young Turkish Christians] yelled after me, ‘Look, there she is, look at her!’ and they shook their heads disapprovingly. And they told [X] that I am not welcome in the church. [X’s] daughter has had five husbands, and yet she judges me and slanders me behind my back! During service, I heard the songs and really wanted to go in, but they would have chased me away. I needed God, but could not get to Him. So, [my friend] took me to the Pentecostal church downtown and I cried a lot and prayed. It is good that nobody knows each other there – you can cry and nobody looks at you. [...] There are no true believers among the Christians here, they put on a mask in the church, but they are bad believers inside. [...] A true believer does not only put on a face for the people, it is not only about the laws, but about having pure thoughts and hearts. But they are still mean to others.

Vela, a Musician Gypsy in her 40s, similarly criticized the degree to which Christians judge one another. She recounted how another woman publicly accused her of “playing with fire” because she was dancing at weddings and going to church at the same time. Vela responded, “What school grade did you complete? Sixth? I graduated from the eighth grade. You are nobody to judge me; you are not smarter than me. I cannot refuse my husband [a wedding performer] when he asks me to dance. I will destroy my family.” At the same time, she herself had no qualms about judging her church-mates on the basis of her own criteria – cleanliness: “People abroad go to church well dressed, they wear perfume, listen to quiet music. I told [my peers] to wash up before going into the temple, that it was offensive, but people are stubborn.” In the end, she concluded that, “The church creates a community, but it is hypocritical [...] I go for personal consolation, not for the people.” Another Musician Gypsy churchgoer in her 30s expressed her feelings about her peers in much stronger terms that lacked any loving Christian sentiment: “I hate these people! I want them all to die, not to exist! Or I want to die myself!”

Pockets of Community among Evangelical Women in Nadezhda

Despite the bleak picture painted above, Evangelical women have formed some small pockets of community in Nadezhda. These pockets represent exceptions that highlight the

general pattern of female disempowerment, exclusion, alienation, and passivity in the churches in the ghetto. To begin with, Nadezhda still has tiny groups of women (usually older) who continue to gather informally in old-style home prayer groups. A Turkish woman in her 50s reported that because she spends many months of the year working in Turkey, she felt alienated from her former congregation (in a more casual conversation on a later occasion, she also let slip that she was repelled by the alleged corruption of the pastor). Thus, she and three of her friends, who have a similar lifestyle, get together to pray at home, which gives them much needed comfort. A few elderly and middle-aged Musician Gypsy women also gather in small home prayer and Bible reading groups, even though most of them attend church. One of these groups still includes some of the surviving women who first introduced Evangelical Christianity to Nadezhda. While such informal groups claim little prestige in the ghetto, they allow women to practice Christianity on their own terms in intimate, supportive, and egalitarian communities.

A more institutionalized example consists of about ten Turkish females who live in the Town and originally had a church there. Led by Pastor Berat, in his 40s, they moved their church to the ghetto in order to take advantage of the cheaper rents. Here, they attracted about ten more local women and three men, mostly young. The pastor is fairly authoritarian, but he spends much of the year working abroad. In his absence, his wife, Kadriye, shares power with a local young deacon, and the other women pitch in. A sign of their relatively high leadership status is that they feel entitled to host foreign guests and visit sister churches in other cities without being accompanied by men (although the local women do not join them). Their style of worship is not charismatic per se, but it is participatory. There is no band, so men and women sing together. Between songs, everybody volunteers to read from the Bible (Pastor Berat demands that members bring their Bibles to services), to pray, and to deliver speeches. The

leaders continuously encourage the members to love each other and to “be humble” with each other as a mark of “true discipleship.” Most Turkish Evangelical men in the ghetto complain that the church is managed by female outsiders who look down upon the residents, but the original founders have, in fact, established friendships with the local congregants, whose homes they visit regularly. While not related, these women socialize on a daily basis, sustain each other emotionally in times of distress, and even lend each other money in times of need. They do criticize each other about objectionable behaviors and practices (and some of them even confess to their peers about mistakes they have made), but their closeness makes it less likely that they will judge each other rashly. Instead of being confrontational and accusatory, they couch criticisms in the form of concerned and friendly advice. Since this church is characterized by such distinctive gender dynamics, I will occasionally refer to it as the “progressive” Turkish church.

Conclusion

Participation in Evangelical churches has not improved most Nadezhdan women’s standing in the religious community. To begin with, they have been denied access to leadership positions and to the social prestige associated with such positions. Second, women have been marginalized in the context of church services, which has made it harder for them to experience the solidarity-building effects of the collective effervescence generated during participatory charismatic worship. Third, they have been excluded from church groups and activities outside of services, which constitute important venues for socializing and network building. Left to their own devices, most Nadezhdan Evangelical women do not seek to build new relations with their peers, as they are deeply embedded in their pre-existing extended kinship networks. In fact, women – even church-mates – outside of those networks are often viewed with suspicion,

propensity for faultfinding, and hostility. Exceptions to this pattern can be found in the tiny home prayer groups composed of Christian women who choose to eschew churches and in a small Turkish church that was founded by a frequently absent pastor and a group of self-confident and assertive women from the Town.

Nadezhdan Evangelical Women's Concept of Self

The comparative literature on Evangelical Christianity in developing societies argues that the movement often helps women by allowing them to re-evaluate their own concept of self in ways that boost their self-esteem and encourages them to become more proactive and assertive. Four mechanisms are commonly identified: (1) the universalist Christian doctrine, which holds that all human beings are spiritually equal in their relationship with God; (2) spiritual “gifts,” which represent a sign of salvation and endows the receiver with spiritual authority; (3) testimonies, which enable the person to ponder and celebrate her transformation and to interpret meaningfully traumatic events; and (4) the emphasis on personal responsibility in the pursuit of growth and salvation, which empowers the individual to take control of her life. This chapter section shows that the four mechanisms commonly discussed in the literature are not in effect in most Nadezhdan churches, however.

First, while women in the ghetto do derive comfort from the idea that they are beloved children of God, most local residents continue to believe that women are spiritually inferior to men and less worthy and capable of spiritual cultivation and encouragement. Second, after assuming control over organized religion in the neighborhood, embattled male religious leaders have sought monopoly over spiritual gifts as a valuable symbol of divine favor. Some of the original female Christians still challenge the pastors by claiming to have spiritual gifts of their

own, but younger women generally lack the confidence to believe that they are chosen. Third, women's testimonies tend to be shorter and less elaborate than men's, they are delivered in a less ritualized fashion, and they usually recount God's miraculous deeds, as opposed to their own personal transformations. And fourth, Nadezhdan Evangelical women tend to assume that if they go to church, a gratified God will watch over them supernaturally, so they place little emphasis on the need to assume control over their lives in the pursuit of personal growth and divine calling.

Adopting a Belief in Spiritual Equality

A key aspect of Evangelical Christian doctrine is the universalistic emphasis on the equal spiritual worth of all of God's children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, or class (Anderson 1979, 69; Burdick 1998, p. 123; Freston 1998, 81; Robbins 1998; Synan 1997, 99; Wacker 2001, 103). This credo has brought moral empowerment to many women in patriarchal societies where females were deemed inherently inferior to males (Loreto Mariz 1995, 98; Green 1993, 174). This has not yet been the case in Nadezhda.

Nadezhdan women in general have a poor grasp on the more complex aspects of Christian doctrine, but they do accept its most basic premise – that they are God's children and that He loves, values, and watches over them. Being able to turn to a supernatural protector with a prayer is an invaluable source of comfort to many women who encounter hardship and uncertainty on a daily basis. According to a Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s, "A Christian is when you feel bad and pray and you will feel light and comfort." A few women talked about God as a confidant who alleviates their sense of loneliness: "I had a need to talk to somebody but there was nobody, so I decided to talk to God" (Behice). Vela shared that turning to God helped her deal with debilitating depression and anxiety disorder. In this sense, Evangelical women do

acquire a higher sense of self-worth, as they perceive having a privileged access to divine love and intervention. However, it is difficult to say to what extent this translates into a sense of equality in relation to men. During my stay in the ghetto, I never heard anybody explicitly argue that women were equal to men because they were all children of God. Earlier, I quoted Vitan who argued for allowing women to preach because the Bible contained examples of women who were instrumental in spreading the Word of God, but that was a different kind of argument and an isolated incident. In fact, during one sermon, Pastor Veliko explicitly discouraged the women to use “the-child-of-God” card as a means of asserting themselves: “Many sisters beat their chests – ‘I am God’s child, I serve God!’ – but they need to be humble, do His will, lower themselves. Recently people have been cocky, blasphemous and disobedient.”

The issue of what it means to be a Christian and a woman is rarely discussed in the ghetto. I heard about German women who had organized a conference for local Turkish women in the past, and it is possible that they discussed the spiritual worth of women and the peculiar challenges Christian women face. However, when I asked some of the attendees to recall what topics were covered, they just remembered that the visitors had guitars and sang songs. I attended another women’s “seminar” organized by American female missionaries at a Naked Gypsy church. In the course of one hour, the guests handed out jewelry and make-up samples, performed, and delivered personal testimonies, while the local women watched – many with their arms crossed – without saying a word.¹⁸¹ There is one practice that many missionaries employ that may boost the self-esteem of individual women: when they visit churches or organize crusades, they almost always single out people from the crowd and announce that God

¹⁸¹ The following YouTube video shows the dynamics of a women’s seminar that appears to be led by Bulgarian women at a Nadezhdan Turkish church: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13m-fc7pgOw>. Of the dozen local women in attendance, many are close relatives of the pastor, and I know from experience that some of them have a hard time understanding the Bulgarian language.

told them that the person was somehow special or chosen to carry out God's mission. They often choose girls or young women. In one case, Dora was picked. She was thrilled and spent the next few days contemplating what kind of "mission" God had in mind for her. However, her family and friends did not seem to share her enthusiasm, and she soon forgot about it.

The universalistic and egalitarian teachings of Christian doctrine do transform the meaning of old social categories in positive ways for Nadezhdans, but this applies less to gender and more to ethnicity and socio-economic class. The idea that the poor and the stigmatized shall inherit the Kingdom resonates deeply among many residents. A Naked Gypsy pastor once told his flock, "Maybe we, the Roma, are the poorest in humanity, but we thank God for his blood, the Golgotha." On a different occasion, Lazar shared, "We watched a movie and were very encouraged about how to go to heaven. The rich people are not going to heaven. It is very encouraging." Such statements rarely come from women, however. Perhaps because they have less exposure to the outside world, they are less concerned with class and ethnicity. Pastors and missionaries are most likely to engage in this kind of rhetoric, and it usually comes up when there are visitors in order to emphasize that locals and visitors are all spiritual brothers (and sisters). If those visitors are Roma themselves, then the message is that the mistreated Roma are God's people and his favorite children. If they are Bulgarian or foreign, the message is that we are all equal in the eyes of God.

Claiming Authority Through Spiritual Gifts

Much of the literature on Evangelical Christianity and women demonstrates that spiritual gifts constitute an especially important vehicle of authority for women. Having gifts is a sign of divine favor, which boosts one's self esteem as a chosen person. In addition, if recognized as legitimate, the gifts of prophesy and visions, in particular, can give a person the power to exert

much influence on others. Study after study shows that women tend to receive gifts at higher rates than men. Also, gifts are associated with the Holy Spirit, and Cucchiari (1990) argues that Pentecostalism in general associates Spirit with the feminine (whereas Word is associated with the masculine).

The original church founders in Nadezhda all claimed to have the gifts of healing, visions, dreams, the ability to see demons, and/or prophesy. Nowadays, older women and pastors are the only ones who regularly claim these kinds of gifts in order to gain public prominence and to influence the community. For example, Pastor Bozhko frequently shared his visions that Christians will make Nadezhda a model community – the source of enlightenment for the entire country. Coming from a disadvantaged and less cheerful position, sister Kina expressed her displeasure with the “moral degradation” of her church by announcing that she saw a band of black demons playing soccer in the church right behind the pastor; the church itself, she continued, was full of dead tree trunks, indicating that spiritual stagnation had settled in. Another time, to the befuddlement of the pastor, she “saw” that he was spiritually drained and under attack by dark forces, urging everybody to pray for him. Many other women (and men) also claim to have dreams that contain religious symbolism and were sent from God, but they tend to have personal significance, and they are only shared with family and close friends (and not with the congregation or the community). A Naked Gypsy woman in her 30s once told me that God came to her in a dream wearing white clothes, carrying a big staff, and surrounded by “some light.” A Musician Gypsy girl shared that she dreamt of Jesus – she recognized him because he had blue eyes and smiled at her kindly. Dora frequently told me about her dreams and visions. One nightmare involved a black dog, which represented the Devil. Another time, she whispered fearfully that she had just seen a large dragon-like creature flying over the ghetto,

which was a sign that Nadezhda was cursed. Her relatives and friends rarely gave weight to her dreams and visions, however.

When the foreign missionaries arrived, they also introduced the gift of tongues. A few years back, some Musician Gypsy churches adopted the position that one had to speak in tongues in order to obtain salvation. For a period of time, many Musician Gypsies spoke in tongues (or prayed to start doing so), but then the practice was abandoned. According to Dora, some people stopped because the original Christians scared them. She bitterly recalled that the first time when she received the gift, an older lady told her that, “it was from the Devil.” The young woman never did it again, claiming that her older peer “took it away from [her].” Many women – especially younger ones – now believe that they do not have the spiritual maturity to recognize whether “gifts” come from God or from the Devil. Their insecurity even affects their faith in their authority to pray for the sick. On one occasion Dora and I were visiting her Turkish neighbors, and we found out that the husband was ill. The wife asked Dora to join her in a prayer for him. Dora panicked and refused, because she was worried that the man was afflicted by evil spirits, that they would attack her, and that she was not strong enough to fight them off. Only spiritually powerful pastors and people with the gift of healing were considered safe to enter that room. Nowadays, it is also only pastors (of all ethnic groups) who speak in tongues, usually when they pray for the sick. Lay church members of both genders in Pastor Zhivko’s church still occasionally receive baptism by the Holy Spirit, but they do so by falling down when touched by the pastor.

Gifts empower a very small proportion of Christian women in Nadezhda. As just mentioned, the pastors monopolize some gifts, like speaking in tongues. Others are the prerogative of a small group of older women, and even then, some men challenge their

authenticity. “Regular” Nadezhdan women sometimes interpret their dreams in ways that make them feel connected to a divine power, which gives them reassurance and a sense of self-importance, but these dreams generally remain a personal affair and they do not endow the dreamers with authority in the community. Overall, Nadezhdan women feel surprisingly insecure about their spiritual powers, which renders gifts an unlikely source for an elevated sense of self-worth.

Giving Testimonies

The comparative literature on Evangelical Christianity argues that testimonies (or the practice of giving witness) benefit the convert’s sense of self in two ways: (1) by allowing individuals to celebrate their status as God’s beloved children and their personal transformations as Christians, and (2) by providing them with a new language that imbues their lives and experiences with higher meaning. Giving witness is a highly performative and ritualistic act that can have a profound effect on the way the believer actively reframes her self and her life. It often involves recounting how the person used to be lost in sin and despair until she found Jesus. Under divine guidance, the convert then changed her heart and lifestyle, finding peace and happiness. In other cases, testimonies may provide accounts of supernatural interferences, such as inexplicable healings, narrowly averted disasters, divine messages, etc. The very act of narrating one’s story generates a sense of subjectivity. Uttering the words solidifies her belief that she is a beloved child of God, as demonstrated by her personal transformation and by God’s interferences in her life. Such stories of salvation and miracles are often used in proselytizing, as a means of appealing to disoriented and dejected people; they are also frequently shared among Christians in the context of services or outside of church. Thus, they create a discursive field that generates its own repertoire of memes and narration techniques that can then be used to

reframe one's life and experiences in a new, more meaningful light. Hardships become trials, and one is comforted to believe that everything – even misfortune – happens for a reason.

Nadezhdan Christians give both kinds of witness. Both men and women frequently share stories of divine intervention during church services, and if asked to, they are happy to recount how they became believers. And they seemingly derive a sense of personal satisfaction and reaffirmation from the act of proclaiming that God has shown them favor and that they are now Christ's followers. However, men's and women's testimonies differ both in their content and in their format. In terms of content, men's testimonies are more likely to celebrate personal transformation because of how locals understand what it takes to be transformed. As described in Chapter Four, in addition to the positive practices of going to church, believing in God, and praying to Him, Nadezhdans define a reformed "Christian" primarily in terms of negatively-framed behavioral markers, such as abstinence from drinking, taking drugs, smoking, crime, abortions, gambling, violence, adultery, and dancing. There is little emphasis on fundamentally restructuring one's outlook and life in order to fulfill a unique calling, for example. With the exception of dancing, smoking, and abortions, these "unholy" behaviors are traditionally associated with men.

Consequently, it is men who undergo the most dramatic personal transformations upon conversion, and this is clearly reflected in their testimonies of conversion. Pastor Zhivko described the change that "people in the ghetto" underwent in the following terms: "We were gamblers, alcoholics, drug addicts, all kinds of things when we did not know about Jesus. But we stopped now, we live for Jesus." Especially in the Naked Gypsy part of the ghetto, men's testimonies are more likely than those of women to involve a complex plot that colorfully depicts their degenerate state prior to conversion; to include prophetic dreams and divine revelations;

and to emphasize a profound behavioral transformation. I noticed that on a number of occasions when their wives started going to church first, husbands framed their decision to follow suit as a personal choice divorced from the women's prior actions; they also credited themselves with making "the family" join the church (Naked Gypsy man in his 30s). In terms of format, men's testimonies tend to be longer than those of women and when men told me their stories, it was not uncommon for kin and neighbors to gather and listen respectfully, which imbued the occasion with an air of ritualism and poignancy. This is precisely what happened on the two separate occasions when the following two testimonies were solemnly narrated:

I used to be an alcoholic. We were very poor and I was a bad man. Nobody respected me in the neighborhood. My wife started going to church fifteen years ago, and I became very jealous, so I would beat her. One day she went to church and I became so angry, I grabbed an axe and went after her to get her back. I was very drunk at the time. When I got in front of the church, I could hear the people singing, and God told me to enter. The moment I entered the church, I became completely sober. It was a miracle! I was terribly embarrassed. From that moment, I stopped drinking and started going to church. Two months later, I started preaching and soon thereafter I became pastor. [His attitude and behavior toward his wife also improved.] (Pastor Kalcho)

I used to be an alcoholic. I spent all my money on alcohol and did not think about the children. But once I entered the church, I did not want to leave any more. I entered in 1993 and achieved a lot. I have six children and have thrown huge weddings for four of them. If I did not believe in God, there would have been no weddings, houses, second floors. Since I believed, I am here. I have been without work. It is the big [financial] crisis now, there was a crisis back then too, but I was saved by my faith. Before I believed, I had a dream that God came to me in a canoe, with a dragon. I recognized Jesus from the pictures and got scared. A pastor told me that the dream meant that Jesus invited me to go to the church. (Naked Gypsy male churchgoer in his 50s)

Since men occupy a central position in the community, most Nadezhdans share an understanding that their spiritual salvation and transformation constitute an important and fascinating affair. Consequently, their testimonies merit dramatic storylines, semi-ritualized performances, and consideration from family and friends.

Women's claim to spiritual superiority remains limited to going to church and abstaining from dancing, smoking, and abortions. Most Nadezhdan women's testimonies of personal transformation center on believing in God and going to church, and they usually include some

kind of miraculous tangible reward demonstrating that their transformation was pleasing to God. Women tend to describe overcoming hardships (as opposed to leaving behind a degenerate state), and they often admit that they started going to church under pressure from family members. In terms of format, women's testimonies are usually less elaborate and shorter than men's (consisting of just a few sentences). The act of giving witness usually took place under more prosaic conditions, and it rarely merited attention from kin and neighbors – in fact, the informants were often interrupted by the need to attend to household chores. Some of these elements are exemplified by the following two testimonies of Naked Gypsy women:

I got married at sixteen but did not have children for six years. Then I heard that God gives children. It was hard to go to church because I did not want to tie myself down, not to be able to dance, but my husband wanted us to go to the church for the kids. I went to church and got pregnant seven months later. It was a boy and we called him [God's gift]. Then we had three more children.

I am 20 now. I was kidnapped [to be raped and forcefully married] when I was 12, but God protected me. I was so scared that I got breast cysts. I turned to God and the cysts disappeared. The same happened with the cysts in the ovaries. Now I am married to a great man and have a great child.

Naked Gypsy women's testimonies rarely describe them as agents who actively take charge of their lives upon accepting Jesus. Instead, they tell stories of reacting to misfortune or following rules. I do not deny that they build subjectivity and derive a sense of self-worth from the act of proclaiming their faith or supernatural experiences, but they have fewer markers by which to measure and boast their personal growth and achievements. To the extent that they do measure personal achievement, women's testimonies generally do so by describing how they fulfill their cultural roles as wives and mothers, as facilitated through God.

Further, something remains conspicuously absent from women's testimonies of the kind of choices they have made in order to be "true Christians," suggesting a deeply seated sense of inadequacy and internal struggle. Most of the changes required of Christian men are beneficial

(or at worst, inconsequential) to their families and communities; thus, they receive support and encouragement in abandoning harmful behaviors. This is not the case for one proscription applicable to women only – abortion. I do not mean to imply that giving up addictive behaviors – such as drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, or gambling – is easy or unimportant. However, deciding whether to have (yet another) child is an extremely difficult choice, and material hardship often forces women to make choices that relieve their families but conflict with their idea of what it means to be a Christian. This choice is often made under pressure from husbands or in-laws; yet, it is the women who are left to carry the psychological burden of being “murderers.” The testimony of Ganka, a Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s, proudly detailed her choice not to abort her sixth child eighteen years ago because both she and her husband had a dream that she should give birth, that they should call the child Maria, and that “God has a plan for everything.” However, she was an exception. Abortion constitutes a common method of birth control in the ghetto, even among churchgoing Christians. At the office of the health mediators, I encountered churchgoing women who came to inquire about abortions for themselves, for their daughter, or for their daughters-in-law. On one occasion, a Christian Musician Gypsy woman in her 20s shared her trepidations because she had heard that some volcano had erupted and it would cause the end of the world, and she was really scared because she had had four abortions. On another occasion, the preacher’s declaration that “Abortion is a deadly sin, a murder” drew numerous audible sighs of distress from the women’s aisle in a Turkish church. The spoken testimonies of women who have had abortions omit their “wrongdoing,” but they remain torn by guilt, which diminishes their experience of giving witness and stands in the way of constructing a sense of elevated self-worth.

Testimonies may provide limited benefits to women when it comes to celebrating personal transformations, but they do help them deal with traumatic experiences in meaningful ways. For example, after she told me the painful story about miscarrying her first child due to hard physical labor in Spain, Delka concluded, “later I realized that God had a plan and that I lost my child because I could not support it at the time.” A Naked Gypsy woman in her 40s made sense of her misfortune by chalking it up to her own failure to keep her commitment to God: “I strayed from God’s path and God tested me with my child, who got very sick. But I came back [to church] and the deacon healed him without medications.” In a more mundane example, when Akila complained that her welfare card was “stolen” by an ATM, Nevena offered a clear causal explanation for the incident – she had not prayed before she left the house to collect the money. In a twist, the distraught Akila refused to take responsibility while still imbuing her misfortune with a different kind of meaning: “Sometimes, it does not matter if you pray or not; whatever God wills will happen.” Even mental health problems can be framed in terms that alleviate the perception of personal inadequacy by being understood in terms of demon possession, generating hope and sympathy from the community.

Developing a Sense of Personal Responsibility

Some comparative literature on the spread of Evangelical Christianity in developing societies argues that the movement empowers women by generating a sense of agency and personal responsibility, where women are encouraged to take control over their lives in the pursuit of spiritual growth and perfection (Drogus 1997; Loreto Mariz 1995). The above discussion on the content of testimonies already suggested that most Nadezhdan Christian women fail to develop that sense of personal responsibility. In order to provide firmer support for this argument, I will revisit the parts of Chapter Four that described the dynamics of

conversion in the ghetto, the nature of Nadezhdans' relationship to God, and the most common local definition of what makes a believer. The vast majority of Nadezhdans join churches in order to seek supernatural help in dealing with hardship, especially disease. This leads them to establish a "transactional" relationship with God, where people commit to believing and to behaving in certain ways in return for tangible supernatural rewards, such as healing, economic gain, or protection. In this context, God is a distant paternal figure, as opposed to an intimate and relatable "friend" with whom one seeks to establish a close personal relationship. There is less emphasis on reading the Bible, on understanding religious doctrine, or on pursuing profound personal growth in order to advance God's plans on earth or to fulfill one's unique mission. Individuals are not necessarily empowered by a sense of personal calling. As opposed to agents who actively assume responsibility for their lives, they embrace the passive role of God's "children," recipients of divine favors, and followers of a small set of clearly defined rules.

This relatively passive attitude characterizes Nadezhdan men and women alike, especially in comparison to the Bulgarian Gypsies in Nikola Kochev. However, women in the ghetto are even less likely than men to develop a sense of agency and personal responsibility that boosts their perception of self-worth and encourages them to take charge of their lives. Some men do choose to go to church because they wish to leave behind an undesirable lifestyle, to transform their self-image, or to pursue better social standing. Women, however, almost always start going to church in order to pray for healing or for conception. This is the natural outgrowth of their traditional status in the community: they are the caretakers for the sick and they also get blamed when young couples fail to produce offspring. Families often believe that if one of their members goes to church and prays, then God protects the entire lot. The honor of representing the family in the eyes of the Holy Trinity often falls upon women, as they find it easier to meet

the behavioral requirements for churchgoers (tradition already prohibits females from many of the unholy activities discussed above). Thus, they are most likely to assume the prototypical role of pleaders for divine favors and rule-followers.

Here, it would be helpful to contrast how Naked Gypsies and Protestant ethnic Bulgarians in the Town approach a New Testament story – the tale of a woman who bled for twelve years, but was healed through her faith after taking the initiative and touching Jesus’ robe without permission (Mark 5:21). This is a very popular story in sermons at Naked Gypsy churches. It is meant to give hope, especially to women with reproductive disorders. On one occasion, the story gave way to an emphatic collective prayer: “We pray for the childless women, touch their wombs. And if their comrades [husbands] are guilty, touch them too. Help childless sisters, open their wombs so that they praise you and glorify you.” I heard the same story at the Pentecostal Church downtown, but this time, the moral was about emulating “female Bible heroes.” After providing a detailed historical background and delving into the Talmud to explain the bleeding woman’s stigmatization and consequent bravery, the preacher encouraged the congregation to embrace “risky faith” – to stand out in their own personal convictions and not just follow what others do. This disparity in approaches demonstrates that Nadezhdan women are more likely to turn to religion as a source of benefits, as opposed to a means of pursuing personal empowerment.

Flora (1975) argues that the sense of personal empowerment and responsibility that comes with embracing a relationship with God generates a sense of freedom and the belief that one can change her life. For many women in Nadezhda, however, even something as basic as the decision to join a church is the subject of somebody else’s directive, approval, amendment, or veto, which hardly promotes a sense of being in control of one’s life – spiritual or secular. Few

Nadezhdan women have read the Bible, which is in Bulgarian, and practically none have participated in discussions about establishing a deep, personal relationship with God or about discovering one's calling. Consequently, the concept that every person has a unique mission to grow and to actively fulfill God's plans is distant to them, which curtails the development of individual agency and responsibility. The general attitude of many Nadezhdan Christian women can be succinctly summed up by a phrase Akila used frequently while describing her life of hardship and bitter disappointments: "If something is meant to be, it will be." While she insisted that many of the things that had happened to her (and to other women she knew) were "unfair," she seemed to find some comfort in resigning to a fatalistic stance.

Conclusion

While participation in Evangelical churches has empowered women in many patriarchal societies by boosting their self-esteem, this has not been the case in Nadezhda. To begin with, the Christian credo that women are spiritually and morally equal to men has not taken root in the minds of most local residents. Second, as a means of securing their contested authority, male religious leaders in the ghetto have mostly succeeded in convincing young women that they are not worthy of spiritual gifts. Third, as opposed to celebrating their personal growth and transformation, Nadezhdan women tend to use their testimonies of conversion to briefly and unceremoniously recount miraculous occurrences that have happened *to* them. Finally, the local churches promote a transactional relationship with God that does not encourage women to feel responsible and in control of their life.

Nadezhdan Evangelical Women in the Domestic Sphere

According to the comparative literature, the introduction of Evangelical Christianity to developing societies improves the domestic lives of marginalized women by changing attitudes towards forced or arranged marriages and by altering men's behaviors in ways that benefit women and improve family dynamics. In relation to marriage practices, some of the more relevant studies are from Africa, where, as in Nadezhda, many parents still force young girls into arranged and early marriages that limit their options in life. Missionary schools and global religious networks seem to have introduced some Protestant women and their families to theological and secular ideas emphasizing universalism, individualism, freedom of choice, and personal development. Consequent attitudinal shifts have made it possible for some girls to avoid arranged child marriages in favor of finishing school, pursuing careers, and eventually starting and planning a family with husbands of their own choosing (Caldwell 1982; Goode 1963; Hallum 2003, 183; Osajie 2013; Takyi and Addai 2002).¹⁸² Campos Machado (1996) argues that Evangelical women in Latin American are also more likely to postpone being sexually active, to marry later, and to practice family planning, although they face different kinds of challenges in the process.

Scholars who study South American and African developing societies also argue that Evangelical Christianity improves women's life in the domestic sphere by reforming men's behavior. According to this line of argument, traditional notions of masculinity are transvaluated and men abandon selfish and reckless practices that hurt their wives and children, deplete their family's budget, and even lead to abandonment and separation (Brusco 1998; Chestnut 1997,

¹⁸² Takyi (2003), however, also argues that some Pentecostal churches encourage early marriages in order to discourage sexual promiscuity and the spread of AIDS.

106; Lehmann 1996, 194; Smilde 1994, 139-159; Stoll 1993, 2-3). Evangelical men re-enter the domestic realm as authoritative but involved and responsible partners. At the same time, Evangelical women are empowered by their sense of spiritual equality and by the support of their community of “sisters” to demand respect at home and to challenge their husbands, if needed (Burdick 1993; Drogus 1997; Flora 1975, 423; Loreto Mariz and Campos Machado 1997).

This section investigates whether Evangelical Christianity has produced any of these effects in the domestic lives of Nadezhdan women. In relation to marriage practices, it explores three questions: (1) Have the churches changed *why* Nadezhdans marry – no longer compelled by parents’ arrangements but by romantic love? (2) Have the churches changed *how* Nadezhdans marry, by forcing them to formalize their unions and to assume the consequent legal obligations? And (3) have the churches changed *when* Nadezhdans marry, by denouncing marriages between children and the ways in which such marriages limit youths’ futures? The answers to these questions vary across ethnic groups, but in the case of Naked Gypsies, they are uniformly “No.”

Regarding men’s behavior, the section shows that participation in Evangelical churches has indeed transformed the behavior of Nadezhdan men in certain ways that benefit women. It explores three areas where such change has happened, showing that in certain cases the benefits are clearer, whereas in others, they are mixed with drawbacks. The local churches have made it harder for many Christian men to leave their families on a whim or in situations where gratuitous jealousy and social pressure compel them to protect their masculine honor against malicious gossip. Changes in spending habits and in the propensity toward domestic abuse are more ambiguous. In relation to the former, even though Evangelical men give up many irresponsible practices that drain their family’s budget – such as drinking, smoking, gambling, selfish purchases, and supporting mistresses – some of them also start making new kinds of

conspicuous, faith-related purchases, which reintroduces financial strain. In relation to the latter, Evangelical men in Nadezhda are less likely to inflict severe and chronic physical and emotional abuse on their spouses, and while this is in part because they restrain themselves, it is also because the churches in the ghetto encourage women to be docile and to avoid “provoking” men by standing up for themselves. Consequently, participation in the local churches especially hurts women with non-churchgoing abusive husbands. While they still face high rates of abuse and receive little support from their peers, such women are advised to endure patiently by relying on faith and prayer. Finally, changes in a churchgoing man’s behavior signal that he is a proper Christian. Yet, the local churches have done little to build bonds of love, dedication, and solidarity between spouses or to elevate the status of young women in the family by transforming gendered and generational power dynamics in the extended patriarchal households. In some cases, however, they benefit women by alleviating conflicts within large family units.

The Effect of Evangelical Churches on Marriage Practices in Nadezhda

Love Versus Arranged Marriages

The comparative literature from Africa cites missionary schools, Western cultural influences, and attitudinal transformations triggered by religious beliefs as major factors that weaken the institution of arranged marriages. In Nadezhda, only the two largest Musician Gypsy churches have been credited with (or blamed for) enabling some youth to select their future spouses, or changing why they marry. But instead of deliberately changing attitudes, these churches have done so by exposing teenagers to a new pool of potential spouses. Services in these two churches provide unprecedented opportunities for unmarried youth to meet in a reputable setting over an extended period of time and to develop feelings for each other. In Pastor Zhivko’s church, adolescents and children have the balcony almost entirely to themselves,

and surreptitious flirting happens a lot (boys show off and horse around, whereas the girls throw coy glances back). Pastor Damyan's church does not provide a separate area for the youth, but boys and girls still "check out" each other, and the pastor is known for supporting couples that have married for love in the past. In some cases, finding love in church has turned women's lives around. After being kidnapped and narrowly escaping rape and a forced marriage to a much older man at the age of fourteen (her parents rescued her on time), a Musician Gypsy woman, who was in her 20s in 2010, was too traumatized to leave the house in order to go to school or to agree to an arranged marriage. But she did meet a nice boy at church, and after being friends with him for a while, she fell in love and married him. A few of these romantic marriages are inter-ethnic – usually between Turkish men and Musician Gypsy women – which has contributed to blurring the boundary between the two communities.¹⁸³

Youths' parents at Pastor Zhivko's church may be ambivalent about surrendering their prerogative to arrange marriages for their children, but some of them have also benefitted from having a larger pool of options from which to choose a potential daughter- or son-in-law. As young Christian women (and men) are acquiring a reputation for being well behaved, wholesome, modest, and respectful, more and more mothers go to the churches to seek prospective spouses for their children. Thus, I witnessed an exceptionally rare arranged marriage between Bilyan, a poor Naked Gypsy boy, and Karamfila, a rich Musician Gypsy girl. The union was proposed by the girl's relatives and facilitated by Pastor Damyan. The 18-year-old boy was handsome, educated, likely to find employment, and well respected. The 16-year-old girl was also pretty, but she had previously eloped with another Musician Gypsy boy, whose

¹⁸³ In a couple of rare cases, locals have even married foreigners. One Turk wedded a Turkish German woman he met during youth summer camp in the seaside city of Varna, and a Musician Gypsy married an American woman he met in Bible school.

mother had forced him to abandon her in disgrace. Her scandalous past made up for his humble background, but her relatives were only able to see him as a redeeming option because they knew him from church. Some families have even started to ask church leaders to use their contacts outside of Nadezhda to find spouses for adults looking to remarry.

Many other Nadezhdans, however, think that in the interest of preserving morality and tradition, churches and unmarried youths should not mix. They warn against a situation where unruly teenagers *only* go to church to scout potential mates and to be naughty, and they employ anecdotal evidence to support their concerns. To the dismay of his mother, Semih proudly declared that he and his friends went to church just to “find girlfriends.” A Musician Gypsy woman in her 40s was horrified when she found out that her son had impregnated a fellow churchgoer, whom she despised but had to accept as a daughter-in-law. Aware and supportive of the widespread apprehensions among the older generations, the vast majority of Nadezhdan pastors make sure that their churches do not interfere with old marriage customs. Thus, Pastor Veliko expelled all unmarried youth a few years ago because “if they eloped, I would have problems with their families.”

According to Vitan, for a brief period in the past, some Naked Gypsy churches enabled youths to replicate the dynamics in the two large Musician Gypsy churches, but the pastors and the families quickly put a stop to it: “There were youth who used to go to look for spouses. A few years ago, many young girls went to church. Three couples met at Kalcho’s church, but this is mostly over now.” Families now prevent their unmarried adolescent daughters from going to church, because they are worried that it will provide a venue for meeting unapproved males. Naked Gypsy teenage boys, on the other hand, drop out of church when they reach puberty in

order to engage in cool posturing – which involves “sinful” behaviors – until they get married in their mid-to-late teens.

Formal Versus Informal Marriages

Churches have had a mixed effect on how Nadezhdans marry by demanding that believers should legalize their marriages. The origins of this requirement are external, as many Bulgarian and foreign missionaries repeatedly insist that informal unions constitute “adultery” and a “sin.” The vast majority of marriages in the ghetto remain unofficial for four main reasons: First, Roma generally detest dealing with government bureaucracy, so they would rather not fill out the forms and go to the courthouse, where they would encounter hostile and condescending clerks. Second, it is financially beneficial for women to claim single-mother status, as they receive more state support. Third, legal marriage comes with legal obligations, making it more difficult and costly for men to leave their wives and children.¹⁸⁴ And fourth, most Roma marry at an early age, before it is even legal to do so. Civil marriages can benefit and harm women at the same time. On the one hand, they provide legal and financial protection in the case of abandonment, as well as the moral satisfaction of legitimacy; on the other hand, they decrease women’s eligibility for an important source of income (in many cases, their only source of “independent” income). The issue of early marriage is too complex and consequential to be conflated with that of civil marriages here, so I will discuss it separately later on.

¹⁸⁴ One Naked Gypsy woman in her 30s argued that she would not want to be legally married because if her husband left, he might take away her children. This is hardly likely, however. It is not customary for men to take the children upon separation (many men barely ever interact with their children again). In fact, if the mother remarries, she does not keep the children either – they are raised by her parents, since it is considered inappropriate for the second husband to have to raise somebody else’s children, especially girls. Upon reaching adolescence, girls may present a “temptation” for males to whom they are not related by blood. Further, girls in patriarchal societies are expensive to marry off, so stepfathers would not want to assume the costs for someone else’s daughter. Churchgoing Christians and even pastors uphold this practice.

Most pastors have assumed an equivocal attitude toward informal domestic unions. On the one hand, they denounce them. Pastors are required to be formally married in order to be ordained (otherwise seminaries do not accredit them and denominations do not register their churches); they often pressure spiritual council members to follow suit, and some even threaten to prevent “adulterers” from taking communion. Preachers occasionally bring up the issue during services, and pastor Kalcho actually organized wedding “campaigns,” where he rented a van to take couples to the courthouse. On the other hand, pastors do not push too hard. Rules about who can join the spiritual council get broken, and communion is given without questions. Pastors do not pester the numerous people who use the term “comrade” (“drugar”/“другар” for male, or “drugarka”/“другарка” for female) in church, even though everybody knows that in the Nadezhdan context it signifies one’s “illegitimate” domestic partner.¹⁸⁵

In February 2010, a famous Roma evangelist from Sofia organized a conference in the ghetto that was attended by members of all ethnic groups. To everybody’s shock, he used the occasion to condemn the rampant “illegal” and early marriages in Nadezhda. He claimed that this brought a curse of squalor and poverty on the neighborhood and refused to pray for “adulterers.” That same evening, I visited Kalcho’s church to see how people felt about the allegations. The angry pastor essentially told the stunned congregation that the visitor was a snob from Sofia who had no right to judge them. Even though in principle he had voiced support for the same ideas in the course of years, the pastor never strong-armed believers about putting those ideas into practice. In Nadezhda’s competitive religious field, trying to change entrenched

¹⁸⁵ To most Bulgarians, the terms “другар”/“другарка” are obsolete – and often detested – forms of address from the socialist era. They were used to signify “friend,” “companion,” or “fellow” prior to socialism, but they are no longer employed in this sense in modern colloquial Bulgarian. Nadezhdans are rare in their continued use of the terms on a daily basis and in the meaning that they assign to them. By employing these terms, they avoid offending God by misusing the words “husband” (“suprug”/“съпруг”), wife (“supruga”/“съпруга”), or “man” (“muzh”/“мъж”) and “woman” (“zhena”/“жена”), which can also signify a “proper” husband or wife in colloquial Bulgarian.

practices that really matter to people could cost a pastor his followers, who would simply move to a more “indulgent” church.

Most Christians in Nadezhda promise that they will legalize their marriages at some unspecified point in the future (perhaps after the children grow up), but only a handful have decided to accept the inconveniences, consequences, and risks of doing so. Those who do sanctify their unions often have so-called “spiritual weddings,” even after years of being together.¹⁸⁶ These celebrations, if the couple chooses to celebrate, constitute an odd mixture of traditional weddings and church services. Family and friends gather to celebrate in the streets with music, food, and drinks, and they bring gifts. However, the festivities only last for a few hours (not for days), everybody dresses much more humbly, the party arrangements are much less ostentatious, no alcohol or dancing are allowed, the church band performs only religious music, and much of the time the pastor delivers sermon-like speeches. Still, nobody feels cheated or nostalgic about the conventional Roma weddings, since these tend to be “older” couples – at minimum in their 20s – that have already met community expectations and had their “real” wedding years ago. And this brings us back to the issue of early marriages.

The Problem of Early Marriages

The legal age for marriage in Bulgaria is eighteen. Many Bulgarians marry in their mid-to-late 20s, although the past twenty years have witnessed a trend for both genders to delay marriage into their 30s or to live together without ever marrying. Roma, however, have undergone the opposite trend. While my Nadezhdan informants claimed that the socialist authorities had made some attempts to stop Roma from marrying off their children in their early

¹⁸⁶ The following YouTube video shows a spiritual wedding ceremony involving two couples at the largest Musician Gypsy church: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4BfF6Ta50Y>

and mid teens, the post-socialist regimes have made little effort to enforce the law in neglected ethnic ghettos. As discussed in Chapter Two, this has enabled patriarchal Roma communities to fully embrace the practice of early marriages once again, even though its prevention is part of the Framework Program for Roma Integration, which was formally adopted by EU member countries in 2010 (Iotova 2010).

According to some Bulgarian and foreign religious actors, early marriages constitute a major impediment to the spiritual salvation and socio-economic advancement of Nadezhdans. A missionary from Turkey preaching at Pastor Adem's church argued that spiritually, the practice constitutes "adultery" because it condones (and even forces) unholy sex between children. The Turkish German missionary Kadir found it infuriating because it steers young people into un-Christian-like existence that is devoid of any drive and meaning: "The early marriages are adultery! I tell them all the time, but nothing happens. [...] These people literally sit around and do nothing all day. The girls especially – they just deal with clothes, makeup, and hair removal. I would go crazy if I had to do that!" Finally, Bulgarian Pastor Gavril from Yambol expressed particular frustration with the associated practice of kidnapping and raping young women as a means of forcing them to marry because "it interferes with the churches. [...] Girls get kidnapped just when they start to dedicate themselves to God."

Socially, early marriages prevent girls from pursuing education, integrating in Bulgarian society, and participating in church life. A Korean missionary who frequents a Turkish church often pleads with the congregation that "it is just indecent to marry too young, like they did in Noah's times." A Bulgarian pastor from Sliven complained, "The early marriages in Nadezhda are a big problem for us. It makes it very hard to work with the women there because it keeps them from getting educated. They remain illiterate and backward. They are just baby-making

machines.” Indeed, the principal of the mixed Elementary and Middle School #8, which enrolled around 200 Nadezhdan children in 2010, explained that due to early marriages, she expected that only one Turkish, two Naked Gypsy, and two Musician Gypsy girls would finish eighth grade in 2010. This is despite the fact that School #8 is more difficult to get into and usually attracts more ambitious families who seek a better education for their children. The principal of the segregated Elementary and Middle School #6, which enrolls over 1,300 Nadezhdan children, did not provide data on graduation rates for girls, but the number is likely low because the school has an abysmal reputation and dropout rates. Whereas the school has nine classes full of second graders (classes usually contain between twenty and thirty children each), that number drops to eight for third graders, then six for fourth graders, then five for fifth graders, then four for sixth graders, and then three for seventh and eighth graders (Dodoiv 2011). A generous estimate would be that five girls per class, or fifteen girls altogether, graduate from School #6 per year. Additionally, some Nadezhdan students are bussed to schools across Sliven. The NGO workers who run the program usually try to dissuade these children from dropping out, so the graduation rates might be higher, at least for the boys; parents are generally less willing to allow their daughters to leave the ghetto after they reach puberty, however. Still, a generous assumption would be that the program graduates five girls as well.

I lack data on the number of boys and girls from each ethnic group in each age cohort, but my very rough estimates suggest that there are between 50 and 100 girls per cohort in each ethnic group in the ghetto, with Naked Gypsy girls being the most numerous. This would suggest that only 8-17 percent of the girls in Nadezhda finish *middle school*. After that, the pool of girls who are still single and “eligible” to attend high school gets tiny, and few of those do so anyway. Anxieties about kidnappings, the general suspicion and stigma associated with young

women who leave the ghetto on a regular basis, and fear of mistreatment by Bulgarian schoolmates discourage many parents from allowing their adolescent daughters to attend the high schools in the Town. Thus, even though DOW required high school diplomas to hire local health mediators, the NGO had to make exceptions in Nadezhda. Of the one Turkish and two Musician Gypsy women it hired, only the Turk had graduated from the 12th grade, which came at the cost of much malicious gossip and consequent family drama.¹⁸⁷

When it comes to the issue of early marriages, most Nadezhdan Christians agree with outsiders in principle, but still struggle to comply in practice. I asked numerous families of all ethnic groups when they intended to marry off their children, and the vast majority insisted that they would wait until the children were “at least” 16 or 17 and had some schooling under their belts. Some even approved of laws that would “confiscate” children whose parents let them marry before they turned eighteen. Yet, almost all families end up breaking their resolve when their daughters reach puberty. In some cases, the girls themselves leave their parents with little choice. Given that Nadezhdans do not date, a girl who falls for a boy has no option but to give her parents an ultimatum: let her marry him or she elopes with him. The thirteen-year-old daughter of a Naked Gypsy pastor used this method to force her father to “give her” to a fifteen-year-old boy. In some instances, the trading of children in marriage between families is a means of accumulating economic and social capital. In one example, a Turkish pastor “sent for” the son of another pastor in a strange reversal of protocol; the boy was twenty-years-old and the girl was only thirteen, but they wanted him as a son-in-law because he was a pastor’s son and he was rich. In most other cases, when people start “asking for” their young daughters, parents give in

¹⁸⁷ Women who were born after the mid-1980s tend to have lower educational attainment compared to their elders. Some of the women in their thirties-to-fifties remembered being forced to go to school by the socialist authorities that came to their house if they did not show up at class. While most young women in Nadezhda now rarely surpass 6th grade, it is not uncommon to meet older women who have finished middle school. This may partially explain why older Evangelical women in Nadezhda are more likely to read the Bible than younger ones.

because they fear that if they miss too many opportunities, the girls might remain spinsters. Change may sound good in principle, but nobody dares to take the risk of being the first to initiate it.

According to Egemen, a Turkish man in his 50s, older women are the main reason why early marriages persist in the ghetto:

Religion does not have any effect on school attendance and early marriages [because] women have more power [in this area]. They decide how to marry the kids, and the men have no say. My granddaughter is in the sixth grade, and even though I am determined to stop it, she will probably be married within two years. I disagree, and so does her father, but my wife, daughter-in-law, and three other 'hens' [a derogatory term for meddling women] will twist and manipulate things to marry her off. Religion cannot change this, only the state can.

In his view, older women are especially invested in early and arranged marriages because they want chaste, pliable, and attractive daughters-in-law and because they have a stake in personally selecting who would live under their roof and take care of them in their old age. Indeed, matriarchs often treat their young daughters-in-law as valuable acquisitions, more so than their own daughters. For example, the wife of a Naked Gypsy deacon proudly showed me her sixteen-year-old daughter-in-law who had just had a baby, while her still unmarried teenage daughter sat quietly in the background. In patriarchal Roma societies, it is expected that upon marriage, daughters will be alienated from their natal families, so parents tend to avoid investing too much material and emotional resources, including pride, in their girls (Kligman 1988). Daughters-in-law, however, constitute valuable investments that contribute to the families into which they marry for many years as house workers, income providers (through employment or government welfare), wives, and mothers. Pretty, well-behaved, and childbearing daughters-in-law are especially worth bragging about.

Egemen's words also came to mind while I was listening to the confession of Kadriye from the progressive Turkish church. While her husband, Pastor Berat, was abroad, she arranged

to marry her seventeen-year-old son to a fifteen-year-old girl. Both Berat and the missionary Kadir criticized her publicly, and she conceded, but she had already “taken” the girl and could not “return” her. At times, however, I wondered whether she had found herself torn between feeling compelled to observe entrenched traditions and possibly wanting to enjoy having a subordinate daughter-in-law, on the one hand, and feeling pressured by novel expectations from external religious actors, on the other hand. Did she just decide that it was better to ask for forgiveness than permission and plan her penance prior to arranging that marriage? I cannot answer this question with certainty, but the strategy of resolving conflicting secular and religious demands through the compromise of “sinning” and then repenting is fairly common in Nadezhda. Also, despite expressing regret about bringing in a child bride, she just nodded when another female church member told a twelve-year-old girl who was helping us prepare lunch, “It is good that you are helping because you will be doing housework for your in-laws any day now.” Clearly, even the women that attend the progressive Turkish church and live among Bulgarians outside the ghetto remain attached to the patriarchal understanding that the “natural” progression of a woman’s life is from a subservient and pliant teenage daughter-in-law to an authoritarian mother-in-law in control of her own submissive daughter(s)-in-law.

The numerous examples above show that despite external pressures, few Nadezhdan Christians, including religious leaders, attempt to tackle the issue of early marriages. The pastors justify their silence with the credo that “nobody can interfere in others’ family affairs” (Turkish man in his 40s), and the lack of sustained public discourse enables parishioners and clergy alike to arrange early marriages without raising any eyebrows (Egemen). Most residents seem to approach the practice pragmatically, as a “calculated sin.” They accept that it is “wrong,” but they also have every intention to eventually repent and legalize the marriage. Whereas one

cannot rewind a girl's age and reset her reputation, God's forgiveness is always within reach, as long as one has faith and asks for it.

A Naked Gypsy pastor was a rare example of a Christian leader who refused to allow his children to enter early marriages:

I pray regularly for Naked Gypsies to stop marrying young. It is a sin to have sex at the age of thirteen, it just is not good in the eyes of God. I have an eighteen-year-old daughter who is not married. People have wanted her, a lot, but we have been waiting until she is eighteen [...] If we want to get young people to marry late, we have to integrate them among Bulgarians. This is key – they have to grow up among smart people.

Importantly, however, the second part of the quote above related to the pastor's son, who was enrolled in an expensive private school in Sliven precisely in order to become "well integrated."

In regards to his daughter, the pastor was only concerned with the sanctity of her sexual relations. She had quit school years ago, but he did not care about that. Since she had reached the legal age for marriage, he had, in fact, already arranged a husband for her with a clear conscience. He was one of the wealthiest Naked Gypsies, and his daughter, who was kept under close watch at home, had a good reputation; thus, he had little trouble breaking with tradition and marrying her off "late."

A former Turkish pastor also made the unconventional choice to let his youngest daughter marry at a legal age; unlike his Naked Gypsy peer, he even encouraged her to finish high school. In the end, however, his conformist decision to force her into an arranged marriage still derailed his effort to help her have a better future. She began to tell me the story as follows:

I got married at eighteen. My parents did not insist on marrying me early because they made a mistake with my brother, and he had a failed early marriage. And then my sister married at sixteen and got abandoned. So, my dad decided that I had to study. [...] But while I was in high school, I constantly got slandered about going out with Bulgarians, Bulgarian Gypsies, married men. It's all because I dressed differently and went downtown with my Bulgarian friends from school.

Eventually, her parents succumbed to social pressure and forced her to marry a man she disliked in order to restore her reputation. Even though she was a Christian, on her wedding night, she got extremely drunk in order to endure him. But her husband spent most of the time working abroad and her marriage ended a few years later, with her eloping with another man. Her reputation was destroyed regardless.

The Effects of Nadezhda Evangelical Churches on Men's Behavior

A common argument in the comparative literature is that Evangelical men undergo behavioral transformations that benefit women in the family realm. As men no longer drink, smoke, gamble, spend selfishly, womanize, have violent outbursts, and so on, they turn into more responsible and engaged husbands and fathers. A frequent outcome is that the family is better off economically. I encountered widespread evidence about the decline in drinking, smoking, gambling, fighting, dancing, and cursing among Christian men in Nadezhda. In fact, this constitutes the most noticeable effect that the local churches have had on life in the community.

I provide a small selection of accounts below:

My husband used to play poker and we were very poor. We were working, but he spent all the money. Now we do not spend on alcohol and God blesses us with all we want. When people go to church, pastors tell them to behave. Before we were Christians, my husband would take the money and it would all be gone the same day. We had no clothes – he would spend it all. (Ganka)

It is true, spouses in Christian families have better relations. Non-Christians spend more, and they have more problems with gambling, conflicts, and poverty. Christians are humbler, less jealous, and they trust each other more. They have more money, but still do not send their kids to school, to seek jobs. (Vitan)

People used to be scared of our deacon because he drank and cursed at people. But now he cooks and leads the band. (Pastor Bozhko)

I do not intend to explore every single transformed behavior and its consequence in detail.

Instead, in the remainder of this section, I will examine selectively how Evangelical churches in the ghetto have changed men's behaviors and attitudes in ways that have affected four aspects of family life: (1) the likelihood that men will abandon their families; (2) men's economic behavior;

(3) incidents of domestic abuse; (4) the nature of family relations. I will argue that while in some areas the benefits to women are straightforward, in other areas, the positive effects of the churches come along with unexpected negative side effects.

Wife Abandonment

Even though Nadezhdan churchgoing men are not more likely than non-churchgoers to form close bonds with their wives in the context of stronger conjugal families, the vast majority of my informants agreed that they are less likely to abandon their wives, to take multiple wives, or to take wives for a short period of time. Of course, there are exceptions. According to Behice, “Some men still do these things. Certain pastors may talk to them, but the men would just leave their church and go to another one, where the pastor won’t broach the subject.” In general, however, religious doctrine vilifies such practices and most clergy and churchgoers stigmatize men who engage in them.

One reason why many men in Nadezhda have abandoned their wives is that the latter’s reputation got soiled by gossip about infidelity, no matter how malicious and phony. In the Naked Gypsy community, in particular, women’s lives can be caught up in and ruined by men’s feuds, where an effective way of harming one’s adversary is to start spreading nasty rumors about his wife. Churchgoing Christians complain that they are especially targeted by spiteful gossip meant to wreck their families and good names. This may sound like playing the victim, but there may be some truth to it, given the war of moral one-upmanship raging between churchgoers and non-churchgoers in the ghetto. The problem is that once rumors about his wife start circulating, a husband feels pressured to abuse and leave her in order to save his honor, even if he knows that they are false. My Naked Gypsy friends Mina and Dancho had an exceptionally warm and loving relationship. They had eloped “for love” against their parents’ wishes, and they

and their four children lived almost as a nuclear family on the top floor of the house they shared with Dancho's family. This is why I was shocked when Dancho confided that he almost left Mina once:

One day I was at work when my mother called me crying. People were saying that Mina was cheating on me because she went to work for the municipality for five days. People gossiped for about a year. We almost got divorced, even though I believed that she was innocent. A gay man started the rumor because he hated me, but God punished him by giving him hepatitis. The neighbors were always very jealous of us. I was depressed and shocked for three, four months. Some people supported me and gave me advice. But many people took pleasure in bad-mouthing us. They also started gossiping about me, that I was having an affair with a Bulgarian woman at work. I had a great job, but I quit because I wanted to stop the rumors. For two years now I am unemployed. The pastor said that I should leave Mina, because 'people said so.' He was embarrassed because I was his brother and he did not want our family to be shamed. But I loved her and could not do it. Eventually the church prayed for the suspicions to go away, and we got victory [a common phrase used by Christians to indicate that God helped them overcome a difficult situation]. At least half of the Christian families here go through something like this.

At first, I found it hypocritical that instead of defending the meek and the mistreated, Pastor Zhelyazko selfishly demanded the abandonment of an innocent woman simply to salvage the honor of the husband's family, to which he happened to belong. At the same time, it was clear that the pastor's stance reflected the common patriarchal belief that a woman is in her husband's family, but not of his family, and her reputation either upholds or threatens his family's honor (Lamphere 1974).

While I was in Sliven, Pastor Zhelyazko and his congregation had an opportunity to redeem themselves with another couple facing the same kind of debacle. Maybe because the leaders did not have a personal stake in this case, they were much more supportive. In July of 2010, Mina summoned me urgently. I rushed to her house, where I met Kerana, a 33-year-old Naked Gypsy woman. Kerana was desperate. She and her husband, Lambi, had been happily married for eighteen years. But on the previous Saturday, Lambi had "gone crazy." He had had a fight with a neighbor, who had told Lambi that Kerana was cheating on him every night. Lambi had been a "timid and peaceful man," so everybody was surprised when he became

extremely jealous, started drinking (for the first time in his life), stopped going to work, and claimed that he was hearing voices and that he was under a magic spell. He broke all the dishes in the house, threw away the food, started beating Kerana and their four sons, did not let her eat or sleep, and even put a knife to her throat, threatening to kill her. Neighbors were taking turns staying in the house to protect her. After days of torture, Kerana was exhausted and sick. Her eighteen-year-old son ended her efforts to find him a wife because he was worried that Lambi would hurt the girl. Kerana believed that God was punishing them because they had stopped going to church. They had attended a Naked Gypsy church for ten years, but quit after Lambi bought a keyboard piano and the pastor said that somebody else should play it (Lambi broke the keyboard, instead of giving it away). Then they went to two Musician Gypsy churches, but Lambi was disgusted by the infighting among the brothers. Eventually he stopped praying and reading the Bible.

I was called in to help because I was judged to be “the most educated person around.” I summoned Lambi, who arrived immediately. I asked him numerous questions about their sleeping arrangements, the quality of his sleep, and the location of their bed, the outside door, and the keys in order to make him realize that Kerana could not have been sneaking out repeatedly without waking him up. We also came to the logical conclusion that he should trust the woman who loved him, as opposed to a man who wished him harm. Still, he could not find peace: “I believe her, but I don’t. His words still bother me. Stupid thoughts come to my mind. I think that I will fall asleep and she will sneak out and sleep with him [...] I know that all men like to destroy families. When they see a pretty woman, their eyes just go wild. If a man hits on a woman, she must beat him on the spot.” He kept insisting that if somebody asserted something, there must be an element of truth to it. When I asked him if he would believe me if I

told him that I had just seen a Martian, he said, “Yes, I would. Because you say so.” It seemed that he felt obliged to be indignant and to act accordingly, similarly to the way Dancho felt he had to act years ago.

After I exhausted all lines of argument I could think of, Mina and Dancho took Kerana to Pastor Zhelyazko. He convinced Lambi to come to church, even though the latter claimed that he was scared of people. The entire church prayed for the couple. The pastor preached about how spouses needed to support each other and how the Devil confused people and took over their thoughts. Dancho also convinced Lambi to join the brothers’ social group, because they “would help him.” Lambi calmed down dramatically. Whereas in the case of Mina and Dancho the church leadership sought to derail their marriage, in the case of Kerana and Lambi a few years later, the same church provided an alternative solution to dealing with displaced jealousy and conflict. Local tradition demanded that Lambi become enraged and that he torture and abandon (or even kill) his wife. Instead, he was given the option to reframe the experience in terms of “possession” and “attacks by evil forces.” Joining a church saved both his marriage and his honor, but it especially helped Kerana, who was spared the crushing fate of becoming an abandoned wife facing public stigma and the prospect of fighting poverty on her own.

Men’s Behavior and Its Economic Consequences

The comparative literature suggests that in many cases, Evangelical Christianity has improved the lives of struggling families by changing men’s behavior in ways that benefit the family economically. To begin with, this involves abstaining from spending the family’s limited budget on harmful and selfish things, such as alcohol, cigarettes, gambling, other women, etc. Further, the literature describes a deeper personal transformation – such as the cultivation of frugality, self-discipline, “future orientation,” and skills – that enable men to become more

efficient and competitive members of the labor market, and which also makes them better family providers (Annis 1987; Brusco 1995).

Nadezhdan churches do not elicit the second kind of deep, economically relevant behavioral transformation in men. Some pastors have, indeed, made their families much wealthier, and a few have even become small-scale entrepreneurs. But this is usually the result of chicanery and the extra “capital” that the pastors siphon from the churches, not because of any new skills and personal traits that make them better at navigating the modern economic landscape. The focus on immediate behavioral transformations – as opposed to long-term, deep personal growth – makes it less likely for members to develop discipline and the propensity to plan for the future, develop skills, save money in order to invest, etc. To the extent that Christian families save or borrow money, they usually do so for the lavish weddings of their children and to expand their houses. When larger sums of money become available (though seasonal agricultural work abroad, for example) they often take time off to relax and do not go back to work until they run out. Consequently, the vast majority of Nadezhdan families with churchgoing husbands are not substantially more financially comfortable compared to families where the husband does not attend church.

Converting rarely inspires men (or women) to pursue better education and stable, well-paying jobs for themselves or for their children. In fact, like their non-churchgoing peers, most Christian Nadezhdans are chronically unemployed and still rely on welfare to make ends meet. To a large extent, this lack of transformation is the product of structural constraints, such as the government’s failure to engage Roma in society by motivating them to attend school and by providing them with adequate education. There is also a large element of truth in the belief, shared by many Nadezhdans, that developing skills is not guaranteed to help them find well-

paying, stable jobs, since such jobs are hard to find in Sliven and most Bulgarians would not hire a Nadezhdan, regardless of his qualifications. At the same time, the lack of transformation in terms of economically relevant behavior can be also traced to a cultural constraint in the form of longstanding apathy toward education and a defeatist attitude. Since the two types of constraints are mutually reinforcing, neither one can be resolved without tackling the other. Yet, relevant external actors have failed to dismantle the structural constraints, whereas local actors, including religious leaders, continue to live in denial about the destructive consequences of the cultural constraints.

Very few Evangelicals in Nadezhda have explored the notion that the ghetto's residents need to adopt more adaptive economic attitudes and behaviors in order to do better in the post-socialist environment. The missionary Kadir, who frequented Turkish churches, complained about his frustrated efforts to teach Nadezhdans a different attitude toward work and employment:

It really bothers me that the son of Pastor [Berat] said that he 'does nothing' in terms of work so casually. Too many people here just want to sit around and do nothing. This is not how it is in Germany or in Turkey. This is because as the Ottoman Empire retreated, pockets of people were left behind, and they retained the old culture and did not modernize [...] I have been telling people here constantly to seek jobs. I told them to go to [a large supermarket in Sliven]. They said that they won't get hired because they are Turks, but I told them that they should at least try. Then I followed up with them and found out that they had not even tried. [...] People here do not want to work. They just want to work for a few hours, get some money, and then be lazy. Even [Berat] is in England now to accumulate some money so that he can come home and kick back. In Turkey, children start working at the age of seven.¹⁸⁸ The pastors here do not talk about any of

¹⁸⁸ In fact, many children work in Nadezhda, in clear violation of international law. The stereotype among Bulgarians is that Roma force their children to work as beggars, which does happen a lot in other cities, like Sofia. But this is very rare for Nadezhdan families, who tend to be extremely protective and cautious about letting their children leave the ghetto alone. I have only seen a couple of Nadezhdan children beg in front of the Orthodox Church in downtown Sliven. During the fall harvest, however, many Naked Gypsy families pull their children out of school in order to help them shell walnuts. The dealers pay by the kilogram, so this practice makes economic sense. The dealers rent empty buildings at the perimeter of the ghetto and turn them into temporary sweatshops. I spent one day working in one of these places. Lacking any chairs, everybody sits on the filthy and overcrowded floors. There is dim light and no ventilation, so the air is full of dust particles from the shells and smells of sweat. The work involves using hammers and small sharp knives, which made me go extremely slowly and cautiously, unlike anybody else around me. I also lacked their economic incentive, as my shelled walnuts were going in Mina's

this because they do not care. They only care about getting money from our missions and nothing beyond that. It is also possible that they are scared [of alienating their parishioners].

Nadezhdan pastors often bring up the rampant poverty in the ghetto, but instead of considering solutions, they tend to encourage residents to derive pride from their indigence and to be grateful for whatever they have, especially for their spiritual superiority. They even vilify some of the most lucrative occupations currently available to the residents. Professional musicians are condemned as sinners, and in fact, many career performers are believers who postpone joining a church until they retire, since they cannot afford to lose their source of income. Seasonal migrant workers are also occasionally accused of privileging the material over the spiritual because their absences force them to be irregular churchgoers.

Many Nadezhdans claim that they do not send their children to school, leave the ghetto, or seek jobs because Bulgarians mock their clothes. So, Pastor Zhivko reframed stylish appearance as a sign of depravity: “When people see a bum, they think less of him. Yet, well-dressed people may be stupid and not believe in God.” Pastor Damyan argued that Christians were above economic hardship altogether: “We don’t feel the world economic crisis because we win over death and hell.” Finally, a Naked Gypsy deacon assured his audience that even though the ghetto was poor and encapsulated, its Christians were “the light of [the] city” morally and spiritually. Whereas in some other contexts material success and its expressions, such as “power dressing,” have been equated with divine favor and healthy spirituality (Frahm-Arp 2010, 77), Nadezhdan pastors have framed this-worldly achievement in opposition to God’s true blessings and spiritual success. Their approach may do little to motivate churchgoers to fight their circumstances, but it offers the satisfying promise of a readily accessible kind of redemption. The

pile. Still, I was embarrassed to find out that by the end of the day, her eight-year-old daughter had managed to clean three times more walnuts than I did.

ability to swap spiritual for material success as a marker of worthiness may even alleviate some men's burden to prove themselves as providers.

Men's participation in Evangelical churches has not been entirely economically inconsequential, however. As some of the personal accounts above showed, not spending irresponsibly on things like alcohol, tobacco, and gambling does help some Christian families by extending the welfare checks a little further. And yet, I encountered certain situations where churchgoing men still spend the family's budget and even go into debt in order to boost their personal status, but this time in the context of the religious community. Since being a music performer in the church is associated with prominence and prestige, some men seek to join the band by buying expensive electronic keyboard pianos and speakers. In the Musician Gypsy quarter, such purchases can be justified as a professional expense, but this is not the case in the Naked Gypsy area. Mina and Dancho had spent years paying off a keyboard and a sound system in monthly installments that nearly equaled their unemployment benefits. He had bought it to perform at the church, but the instrument was putting so much strain on their budget that he asked the pastor to have the congregation cover some of the cost. When denied, Mina and Dancho left the church in protest, and to my knowledge they never returned. I heard similar stories from two other Naked Gypsy families, including Lambi and Kerana, whom I quoted above.

Some Evangelical men (including Dancho) also feel compelled to purchase second-hand computers so that they can play Christian videos and music files while socializing with their church brothers, often extremely loudly. They do so to compete with "secular" men, who regularly organize mini-parties for themselves (featuring ample amounts of alcohol, inebriated swaggering, and booming Chalga) in front of their houses at all times of the day, night, week, or

year.¹⁸⁹ Churchgoing men do not blast obscene lyrics or put on a spectacle, but they still embrace a traditional manly attention-getting behavior that requires money. One could argue that the computers benefit the family by facilitating children's education, but this is not the case. To the extent that children use the computers, they do so to watch old Bollywood movies and to play video games, which actually keeps them from doing homework. Very few of the machines have Internet access, and I did not encounter any that had Microsoft Office.

Domestic Abuse

The introduction of Evangelical Christianity to many developing societies around the world has benefitted women by making churchgoing men less violent, which has reduced the rates of domestic abuse. There is evidence that similar dynamics have taken place in Nadezhda as well. In their testimonies of conversion, a number of men admitted that they used to mistreat their families before they became believers, but stopped thereafter. Dragan and Petra were Dora's parents, so I knew them well on a personal level. They were soft-spoken, kind, and generous people in their early 50s who never said a bad word and seemingly never had a mean thought. They were also very close to each other. Thus, I was surprised when Dragan told me the following conversion story right before I left Bulgaria:

I hated my wife and [two daughters] for three years before I converted. The Devil attacked me. I loved my wife, so the Devil tried to hurt me where I was most vulnerable. I was very jealous. I used to drink a lot too. It started with Veska's wedding, and it accelerated after Dora's wedding. I had really bad thoughts. My wife joined a church because of the way I treated her. A month later, I woke up with a hangover and heard a voice: 'Watch your act!' So, I went to her church. I told the congregation everything. It felt like therapy, although I shocked everybody, especially my mother-in-law. The pastor told me to go to Veliko's church. An older brother scolded me and told me to fast. While I was fasting, [...] I had a vision that my wife knew no other men. We were both wearing white robes, and we were holding a stick together. [...] She raised her arms and declared in front of God that she knew no other men. The problem went away within a year. I won over the Devil.

¹⁸⁹ For a brief example of a secular street party, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqcg54FCEsc>.

Dragan's story suggests that religion and churches have the potential to reduce domestic abuse in three ways. First, religious doctrine frames abusive behavior as sin and imbues perpetrators with the sense of guilt. Second, the church leaders and members monitor men's behavior and shame and guide them to force them to change. Third, religion offers a repertoire of narratives, imageries, and symbols that enable an abusive man to assign supernatural meaning to his transgressions and transformation; consequently, he experiences less shame about his past, the process of behavioral change is perceived as a divine mission, and the outcome provides a rewarding sense of spiritual victory. He proudly emerges as a new, better man. A similar dynamic was also at place in the case of Kerana and Lambi, as discussed earlier.

This is not to say that churchgoing husbands in Nadezhda, even the most devoted ones, never lift a hand against their wives. Evangelical Christians are not *that* progressive, and they allow for it to happen like something that is only natural, but it can only be for the "right" purpose, not too hard, and not too often. According to Dancho, who loves and respects Mina deeply, "Christian men rarely beat their wives, and when they do, it is only for a good reason. Every man has hit his wife once in a while. It is not a beating, just a slap. This is normal, isn't it?" As he was saying this, Mina was smiling and nodding in approbation. His statement may sound outrageous to many Westerners, but to put it in context, Dancho was among the most open-minded and empathetic men I encountered in the ghetto when it came to the issue of gender relations. He was one of those who took turns to protect Kerana from her "possessed" husband; he was visibly disturbed while a tearful Mina was telling us that she had witnessed a Bulgarian man beating his wife on the street right outside the ghetto; and he sympathized with a Musician Gypsy woman for knifing and killing her abusive husband in self defense.

Nadezhdan churches have had the positive effect of making many men less abusive, but in some cases, the decline in domestic conflict appears to be caused by behavioral changes in churchgoing women as well, and this is not necessarily a positive development. Having taken female subordination for granted for generations, Nadezhdan Evangelical Christians have tended to interpret the new religious teachings in ways that foster female docility, obedience, and patience even further. This makes some Evangelical women less likely to “provoke” their husbands’ wrath by speaking out, attracting attention, or standing up for themselves. Belgin cited her newly-found diffidence as proof that she was a better Christian: “I used to have problems with my nerves [a common expression applied to women who are temperamental and “difficult”], but since I became a Christian, I am very patient and do not react as much. I used to fight with my husband all the time, but no more. I do not notice things that annoy me anymore.” Yovko liked his wife better since she started going to church: “Two weeks ago, God sent my wife to the church, to ask for forgiveness. Sometimes she got angry and explosive when I asked her to do things. She is weak-minded. God wants forgiveness in the family. Now she will no longer get angry.” There is much to be said about reducing conflict as a means of enhancing people’s quality of life, especially in a place where life is so stressful. However, one should be cautious when conflict reduction comes at the cost of pacifying and silencing women, who are already disempowered and passive in this context.

Making women more docile may have a small part in it, but above all, Nadezhdan churches reduce domestic abuse by mollifying husbands. Thus, the benefits are most ostensible in households where the husbands go the church. However, a large number of Evangelical women in Nadezhda are married to men who do not attend church. The rates of abuse in such families tend to be higher, with some women getting mistreated precisely because they go to

church. It took me months to realize that when women presented needs for “problems at home” during service, they were using a code phrase signifying either domestic conflict or debt, which were both embarrassing topics. This situation diverges from the dynamics in Brazilian churches (Burdick 1993), where women exchange detailed stories of their domestic woes and in the process construct “shared narratives of suffering” that help them cope in a supportive community of peers. “Problems at home” is a female secret – the Naked Gypsy sisters who let me in on it insisted that men were oblivious about it.

The phrase creates tensions between the women and some pastors, who insisted that all needs had to be explicit or they would not come true. Pastor Damyan even told a dubious story about a woman who had presented a vaguely worded need for months, and it turned out that she had been asking the congregation to pray for her husband’s death. However, the women do not benefit from sharing details about their “problems at home.” The non-participatory churches fail to encourage women to establish communities through which they can support each other emotionally and in deed. Thus, revealing secrets would just generate embarrassing gossip without procuring actual help. With their hands-off attitude, the church leaders constitute unlikely sources of relief either. A pastor can only interfere if the husband is a member of his church. If the husband does not attend church, pastors and lay Christian men are hesitant to intervene, “because people might say that they are personally involved with the woman” (Dancho). Women cannot challenge another woman’s husband either, because it is not their place to talk to men who are not related to them.

Drogus (1997), Flora (1975), and Loreto Mariz and Campos Machado (1997) claim that Christian women in patriarchal societies are empowered when dealing with abusive husbands because of their heightened sense of individual self-worth. Since they perceive themselves to be

in a position of spiritual authority, they have the courage to challenge and even “help” their erring partners. In Nadezhda, however, the prescribed course of action for an abused woman is to remain passive, penitent, and patient: “If a man misbehaves, the wife has to sacrifice herself and to pray and fast, like I did” (Petra). Leaving one’s husband is rarely an option. If she has faith and prays, the abuse should eventually stop. If it does not, she has not exhibited sufficient faith and has not prayed enough. Any small transgression on her part could also be framed as the cause for her “trials,” which amounts to blaming the victim. In extreme cases, leaving might be tolerated, but she cannot remarry, as this would constitute “adultery” (however, if a woman is abandoned, she can remarry and continue to be respected).

Not all Christian women accept these guidelines. When I first met Alev, a vivacious Turkish woman in her mid-20s, she loved to tell me how much she missed her husband, who was working abroad at the time. Then he came home and her perspective changed. He started drinking, “whoring,” and abusing her physically, verbally, and emotionally. She did not just take the abuse – she challenged him, cursed back at him, and by the time I was leaving Nadezhda, she was planning to separate from him. Nobody in her church knew what was happening. The church did not have a tight community of sisters who supported each other, and she suspected that if the male leaders knew, they would accuse her of being an unchristian (i.e., combative and impatient) wife. Whereas Evangelical women in other contexts have been empowered to challenge their abusive husbands with dignity, the churches in Nadezhda do not provide their female members with the elevated self-confidence and emotional support they need to do so. Further, the entrenched local interpretations of what constitutes female virtue have made it harder for Nadezhdan Evangelical women, especially those whose husbands do not attend church, to demand better treatment at home without being denounced by their church-mates.

The Nature of Family Relations

The positive transformation in churchgoing men's behaviors in Nadezhda does not necessarily mean that they will establish closer relationships with their wives and children, or that the status of young women in the context of the family will improve. The prevailing family structure in Nadezhda remains the extended household, where multiple generations live under the same roof. In a context where productive options are extremely limited, this enables family members to form much-needed safety networks and to pool their efforts into procuring enough vital resources to support everybody. Most Nadezhdan parents also take it for granted that their sons and daughters-in-law will care for them in their old age. All pastors in Nadezhda share this attitude, and many have appropriated church resources to add more floors and rooms to their houses in order to accommodate the families of their sons.¹⁹⁰

In the context of most Nadezhdan households, young churchgoing women still spend most of their time with female relatives and with children, as opposed to their husbands. In many cases, mothers-in-law control and even exploit young brides, whereas men, including church leaders, generally stay out of women's domestic affairs. This reflects a common trend in patriarchal homes for women to become increasingly authoritarian as they get older, to the point where they may eventually even supersede the patriarch. Churchgoing men, on the other hand, often form bonds with other male church-mates and spend much of their time outside of the home, socializing with them over church business. At a religious conference in a nearby village,

¹⁹⁰ Goode (1963), Meekers (1992, 70), and Soothill (2008) argue that some African churches have successfully promoted the formation of closely-knit nuclear families, where men's loyalty is redirected from the extended kinship and the community of other males to their wives and children. Combined with the doctrinal prohibition of domestic abuse and the growing self-confidence of Evangelical women (both discussed above), such a development could potentially elevate women – especially young women – to being men's respected partners who are entitled to a fair share of authority in the context of the domestic sphere. This has not been the case in Nadezhda, however.

a non-Nadezhdan Roma pastor criticized this tendency of men to seek brotherhood in the church at the expense of their families at home as follows:

Our God is the God of order and discipline when your life is in chaos. Order your priorities properly, never put anything in front of God [...] These priorities are as follows: first, God; second, your family; third, work; fourth, rest and taking care of yourself. Some people put the church second [ahead of family], thinking that this makes them holy, but God is displeased.

The churches make no effort to encourage married couples to spend time together and to form stronger bonds of affection and solidarity. Spouses do not even sit together during services, there are no church groups for couples, and few among the Nadezhdan clergy provide family counseling.

Still, given complex extended family networks in Nadezhda, the churches serve an important function in repairing damaged family ties, which benefits women by exposing them to less tension and conflict. Nadezhdans are proud and passionate people who often speak their mind. Consequently, family feuds happen frequently and some of them last for years (or forever). It is not uncommon for siblings, parents and children, and – especially – parents-in-law and children-in-law to refuse to visit each other's homes, to attend each other's celebrations, and even to greet each other on the street. Each offended party generally waits for the other side to make the first move. The churches provide a valuable opportunity to break such standoffs. In May of each year, congregations hold "a day of forgiveness," when members are ordered "in the name of Jesus" to absolve and to seek absolution. Refusal to do so is a sin. On this day, the bigger person is not the one who holds on to one's pride longer, but the one who lets go sooner. In May 2010, numerous feuding relatives flocked to Pastor Zhdravko's church, where they approached each other, hugged, and cried in relief. Among them were Lazar and his estranged mother, sister Kina. Even though Lazar had sided with his wife in the prolonged feud between Dora and Kina, the impasse clearly bothered him. He was thrilled to mend bridges with his

mother. After church, he told Dora (who attended a different church) what had happened, assuring her that it was God's will. She agreed to end the feud and to visit Kina too. Ultimately, this also brought Dora and Lazar closer together. He gained more respect for her as a forgiving Christian, and he was grateful to her because he no longer experienced the cognitive dissonance of having to choose between his wife and his mother.

Conclusion

Unlike Evangelical churches in other contexts, Nadezhdan churches have failed to substantially improve the domestic lives of their female members. First, the churches have failed to alter prevailing marriage practices that harm young women by limiting their choices and futures and that leave them fully dependent on husbands that are not legally committed to them. Nadezhdan Evangelicals have not replicated the tendency of Protestants elsewhere to give up arranged and early marriages. Only two Musician Gypsy churches have enabled some youths to choose their spouses, but not through changing notions about individual freedom of choice and personal responsibility. Rather, they have exposed youth to a new pool of potential marriage partners, which has been utilized by parents for the purpose of arranging marriages as well. In order to prevent youth from having such exposure, however, many other churches and parents have discouraged unmarried teenage girls from attending church. The only marriage practice Nadezhdan churches have deliberately attempted to change is the tendency of most residents to keep their marriages informal. But most pastors' efforts have been inconsistent and half-hearted, and most believers have found it easy to ignore them, respectfully.

Second, the Nadezhdan churches have undoubtedly benefitted women by tempering traditional men's behaviors that harm women and children. But some of these benefits come at a price. In some cases, men have replaced certain "sinful" behaviors that create hardship for their

families with new behaviors that boost men's status in the religious community but still constitute a financial drain on the family budget. The domestication of men has also been accompanied by the further pacification and subordination of women, which has not been conducive to their empowerment. This has been especially problematic for women whose husbands do not attend church, and particularly in cases where non-churchgoing men feel no restraint from abusing their wives, whereas their churchgoing wives are restrained by their religion from standing up for themselves. And while churchgoing men are less likely to abandon, abuse, and impoverish their families, they are not necessarily more loving, respectful, and involved husbands and fathers. The new churches have become the domain of "brothers," providing men with a new public venue for socializing and bonding. Women, on the other hand, remain constrained to the patriarchal extended household, which often distances husbands from wives and subjugates young women to men and older women.

Evangelical Churches and Nadezhdan Women's Integration in the Larger Society

A number of scholars have suggested that Evangelical churches advance women in marginalized and patriarchal communities by enabling them to become socially, economically, and politically integrated in the larger society (Keddie 1999, 11). This section investigates four mechanisms through which churches produce such beneficial effects. First, through engaging in church activities, women acquire practical skills and experiences that they can use to advance in the secular world (Brusco 1996; Drogus 1997; Flora 1975, 418; Loreto Mariz 1995, 99; Zents 2005, 219). Second, numerous scholars argue that universalist Protestantism emphasizes this-worldly success and a work ethic that is compatible with modern capitalism, and thus encourages

women in developing societies to “resist poverty” and to pursue economic advancement (Frahm-Arp 2010, 87; Gifford 1998, 39; Hallum 2003, 168; Walkinsaw 2008, 14-16). Third, Evangelical churches are often embedded in supra-local organizational and social networks that expose members to the larger society beyond their marginalized communities, which introduces female members to new people, ideas, and practices (Cole 1961; Fleischmann 2010; Mies 1981; Nunn 2012; Spees n.d.; Zents 2005, 218-219). And fourth, some Evangelical churches have provided institutional infrastructure for community activism, which has enabled marginalized women to become more engaged participants in civil society and in the broader political arena (Burdick 1998; Loreto Mariz 1995, 110-111).

Once again, the dynamics in Nadezhda do not reflect the positive developments in other contexts. First, in relation to the capacity of Evangelical churches to cultivate useful skills that their members can apply in the secular world, I focus specifically on literacy and musical proficiency. In my observations, these are the only two skills that some of the women in the ghetto have actually developed as a result of going to church. However, compared to men, women are less likely to acquire skills and to benefit from them. Second, Nadezhdan churches generate little attitudinal change about allowing and encouraging women to pursue material success and the means to achieve it, (such as education and professional development). Third, segregated Nadezhdans interact with foreign and Bulgarian religious actors infrequently and briefly. Nadezhdan women, in particular, rarely leave the ghetto, while visitors to local churches usually lack the communication skills, the patience, the cultural understanding, or the will to establish meaningful relations with residents, and especially women. And fourth, Nadezhdan churches rarely organize the community for secular purposes. Even in the few cases when pastors mobilize their congregations, they usually do the bidding of external actors – such as

NGOs – without awakening any sort of civic awareness among the apathetic men and women alike.

Acquiring Practical Skills and Experiences in Nadezhdan Evangelical Churches

Literacy

A body of historical literature argues that Protestantism stimulated popular literacy, including women's literacy, in Western Europe and America between the 16th and 19th centuries because it placed a heavy emphasis on reading the Bible (Becker and Woessmann 2008; Eisenstein 1979; Haile 1976; Smout 1982; Stone 1969). According to Cleary (1999), modern Evangelical Christianity still assigns importance to reading, which engenders the self-discipline required to improve one's economic lot (136). Zents (2005) describes the positive effect reading the Bible has on women in developing societies, in particular, as it promotes self-confidence and critical thinking skills (217-218). However, Nadezhdan Evangelicals rarely internalize the belief that reading the Bible is central to their spiritual development and salvation.

The level of literacy in Nadezhda is low, particularly among women. Numerous Naked Gypsies have barely completed any "education" in what is only nominally a school, so they cannot read or write. Books are extremely rare in the neighborhood, but external religious actors occasionally bring free Bibles. Consequently, many households have a Bible stashed away somewhere, even if nobody reads it. This lack of engagement with scripture appalls most Bulgarian, Bulgarian Gypsy, and foreign Evangelicals, who tend to put great emphasis on cultivating an intimate understanding of the holy text. Those Nadezhdans who do read, alone or in groups, are mostly men. According to a foreign missionary couple that proselytized in the ghetto on behalf of the Jehovah's Witnesses, "men in Nadezhda are more likely to understand

that to study the Bible is a huge responsibility. [...] They often ask deeper questions and are more likely to take and read the literature we hand out.”

A number of Naked Gypsy men claimed that they had learned to read because of the Bible, sometimes with the help of relatives and friends from brothers’ church groups. Naked Gypsy women, however, do not participate in Bible discussion groups and nobody makes the effort to teach them how to read. A member of an American missionary team that visits a Naked Gypsy church yearly recognized this as a problem and discussed an idea to provide women with small MP3 players pre-loaded with audio Bibles. To my knowledge, this was never done, but even if it were, dominant men would most likely claim the equipment. Besides, having the option to listen might discourage reading even more. I did encounter Musician Gypsy and Turkish women who read the Bible regularly or on occasion, and some of them also learned how to read because of scripture (Kina; Nevena). These women included primarily older Musician Gypsies, who were among the first wave of converts, and members of the progressive Turkish church, who read the Bible in Turkish. In general, however, most Nadezhdans agree that “women are too busy to read the Bible” (Turkish woman in her late teens) or to do so consistently and analytically.¹⁹¹ Further, the few Nadezhdan women who read the Bible do not use their enhanced literacy to advance professionally or personally. They do not read other

¹⁹¹ People in the ghetto were often fascinated with my practice of constantly taking notes – during services, some women seemed much more interested in my writing than in the words of the preacher, and some young girls even said that they also wanted to take notes when they grew up (without specifying what exactly they wanted to write). One day Dora commented how much she liked my American-made pen, so I gave it to her. She said that she would use it to take notes on the Bible and indeed, even though she had not been a regular reader before, over the next few weeks, she started reading daily and showing me her notes. Then her older sister, Veska, made it clear that she also wanted a pen, so I gave her one. For a while, the sisters became involved competitive note taking. They said that there were many passages in the Bible that they did not understand, and that they hoped that taking notes might clarify things. They started asking me about the meaning of words and phrases. The reading, writing, and analyzing frenzy waned in the course of about two weeks, however. I asked Dora about it, and she said that they were too busy with household chores to keep it up. This experience suggests that female role models would have a positive impact on Nadezhdan women’s lives, but without women in leadership positions, they have none.

books or newspapers, and those who work outside of their homes are employed in low-skill manual labor (as street cleaners and factory and agricultural workers).

Music Skills

A distinctive feature of Evangelical congregations is that they employ music in their worship. Many members are given the opportunity to sing or to play instruments, and some of them develop a proficiency that could be profitable in other venues. Romanowski (1992), for example, demonstrates that over the 20th century, some of the most successful African American performers in a wide range of genres originally acquired their training in church (82). Church performers may also succeed on the Christian music market, using art to express their spirituality in more or less overt fashion (Hendershot 2004, Chapter 2). In the context of Brazil, Burdick (2009) discusses how Black Evangelical men and women have monopolized the increasingly popular “Black gospel” genre, which enables marginalized musicians to intertwine music, race, and religiosity.

Traditionally, music skills have been passed from older to younger males within Musician Gypsy and some Turkish families, but in more recent history some good young performers have learned to play instruments and to sing in the context of church bands and choirs, under the guidance of “retired” professionals. Self-taught and insulated from the music world outside, Naked Gypsy church musicians are the most amateurish. Since Nadezhdan churches have denounced the lifestyle of secular musicians, church performers with career ambitions are left with limited options. One is to pursue “legitimate” success in the “ethnic” Christian Music recording industry, which features envied Roma superstars, a national radio station, and numerous video clips circulating among believers on CDs and online. Nadezhda has

yet to produce its first real star, but there are plenty of people who are trying.¹⁹² A less lucrative option is performing at the occasional crusades and conferences organized by foreigners who sometimes pay the musicians (Spasena).¹⁹³

The vast majority of Nadezhdan church musicians who dare to dream about pursuing music careers are men. Most churches do not even allow women on the stage. Women in the ghetto still do not play instruments, and while singing in public is a source of prestige for men, it endangers a woman's reputation. I met only a handful of female Naked Gypsy "performers," and none of them were on permanent duty. Over my entire stay in Nadezhda, I witnessed one of them (a deacon's wife) sing twice in church; another (a pastor's unmarried daughter) sang at a crusade; and three young women sang at a casual Christmas party at a church. In the former two cases, the women's male relatives were right next to them on the stage. These were rare occurrences, as most Naked Gypsy and Turkish men would not let their wives "show off" in public.¹⁹⁴ As of 2010, only Musician Gypsy churches allowed women to sing in their choirs.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Cenk had heard that dreams come true in Hollywood, so he gave me a CD of recordings he and his friends made and asked me to play it in Los Angeles in hopes that this would somehow jump-start their careers, even though I explained to him that being a graduate student at UCLA hardly meant that I was rubbing shoulders with entertainment executives.

¹⁹³ The following website links to a brief YouTube video from 2012, when the band and choir of the largest Musician Gypsy church performed for a conference organized by an American missionary, Pastor Melissa, in the Pentecostal Church downtown: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5Lr-QxivfQ>. She did not happen to visit Nadezhda when I was there, but I heard about her from numerous informants, especially band members. She had organized a number of conferences in Sliven over the years, and she had been generous to the musicians. A curious aspect of this video is that the band is performing at the Bulgarian Pentecostal Church, whose pastor is known for disliking Roma music. From this and another video I found, it is clear that only Roma and Americans attended the conference. It is not clear whether this was a Roma conference or whether Bulgarians were invited but did not attend. The theme of the conference was Unity, Restoration, and (Building) Relationships.

¹⁹⁴ This might have changed since 2010, however. Just recently, I discovered that even though they left their church over music equipment and other disputes right about the time my fieldwork in Nadezhda ended, my friends Mina and Dancho have turned their corridor and two rooms into a church for part of their old congregation, led by Pastor Zhelyazko. I also found two videos online showing Dancho playing the keyboard once again and, surprisingly, Mina and two other women singing (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYmwk0qcR1o> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXaqT9XnwXI>). Mina wanted to sing in the past and Dancho was open-minded enough to support her, but he was not in a position to demand her inclusion in the old church's band. Becoming church hosts may have given them the leverage to fulfill her dream. I also noticed that husbands and

Also at that time, a handful of young Musician Gypsies and Turks formed a new Christian band called Logos. Some of them had been dismissed from their prior church band after clashing with the pastor; others were seasonal migrant workers who could not join a permanent church band. Logos included a Musician Gypsy woman in her 20s who performed duets with her husband, and since then another young woman has joined as well. As they were independent, churches and other religious actors without bands in the region started hiring them for conferences, spiritual weddings, and crusades.¹⁹⁶ However, the female members of Logos are an exception. Most Nadezhdan female church singers do not consider pursuing a real music career, not even in the “legitimate” Christian music industry, subscribing to the patriarchal notion that respectable women’s options are limited to wifedom and motherhood in the confines of the home.

Promoting the Value of Women’s Education and Employment

I already touched upon the issue of Nadezhdan churches’ failure to promote the value of girls’ education and professional advancement in my previous discussion of early marriages. I also addressed their failure to help men develop new attitudes, habits, and skills that would enable them to navigate the post-socialist economic reality in my discussion about men’s behaviors in the context of family life. However, the relationship between Protestantism, female

wives were sitting next to each other, and some were even snuggling, which I had never seen in Nadezhda churches before. The informal setting may have encouraged them, although the service also did not have as many women in attendance as it used to in the past, when the number of men and that of women were about equal.

¹⁹⁵ Nadezhdan women’s lack of tradition of singing in public sets them apart from Bulgarian women and women from other Roma communities across the country, including Bulgarian Gypsies. The Musician Gypsy church choirs are changing this, however. The choir at Zhivko’s church is featured on multiple YouTube videos, and the women have been invited to perform outside the ghetto on occasion. While this hardly constitutes a career, it might be slowly changing attitudes.

¹⁹⁶ The following YouTube video shows Logos performing at a conference in Sliven in 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FdruQkFIRA>. And the following link shows them performing at a crusade in Yambol that was organized by the board of the denomination “Philadelphia,” which appears to be seeking to expand in the region: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1uEE58zZ78>.

educational attainment, and female professional success in developing societies merits its own in-depth examination here. Regarding educational attainment, Blakemore (1975, 247), Nunn (2012, 10), and Takyi and Addai (2002) show that Protestant women in Africa have consistently attained the highest levels of education compared to members of other religions, in part because they have access to missionary schools and in part because Protestantism emphasizes the value of learning and education for men and women alike. Annis (1987) shows a similar pattern when comparing Pentecostal and Catholic Indians in a small Guatemalan town, suggesting that the Pentecostals value education more because they are more future-oriented. Regarding shifting attitudes toward female employment, Zents (2005) argues that Pentecostal churches in Burkina Faso encourage a woman to “undertake some form of economic activity, to enable her to provide for herself and the needs of her family and to establish some measure of independence” and the ability to contribute to the community (221-222). Gifford (1998, 39) and Frohm-Arp (2010, 88) discuss the extent to which the increasingly popular gospel, or theology, of prosperity teaches African women to denounce poverty and to embrace material advancement in the capitalist marketplace by establishing a link between divine purpose and this-worldly success.

Nadezhdan churches have done very little to teach the value of education or more adaptive economic practices to their members, regardless of gender. However, this is not to say that religious leaders and lay church members place equal value on men’s and women’s education and employment. The vast majority of Nadezhdans take it for granted that girls do not need to be as educated as boys and that men should be the breadwinners, whereas women’s proper place is at home. Given that most pastors have been apathetic regarding the problems of low educational attainment and unemployment in the ghetto, the gender bias has been difficult to capture. It makes itself apparent intermittently, in the rare incidents where religious actors

actually venture to discuss those issues. Further, even though the leaders' general apathy obscures the subordinate status of girls and women, it still shows that mechanisms that have benefitted females in other contexts are not in operation in Nadezhda.

Nadezhdans' tendency to undervalue education is a key factor behind the rampant destitution in the ghetto. Coupled with the collapse of the local industry and the extreme stigmatization of Nadezhdans by outsiders, lack of education leaves many residents with little hope of finding stable, well-paying jobs, if any jobs at all. This is particularly problematic for women, who tend to drop out of school earlier than boys. But while most pastors seek external donations allegedly to help the poor, few address education as part of a more permanent solution to the problem of poverty, perhaps because they have very little education themselves. A Naked Gypsy pastor regularly asked his congregation to pray that the neighborhood would one day have educated individuals who would lead the people out of ignorance and poverty, but everybody understood that these prayers were about his son, who attended a private school in Sliven so that he could one day become a pastor, communicate directly with foreign sponsors, and go to America. At the same time, the pastor's first-born daughter stopped attending public school years prior and was in the process of being set up in an arranged marriage. Nobody ever entertained the idea that she could be one of the educated individuals who would lead her neighbors, fraternize with foreigners, and travel overseas. The pastor also never encouraged the other parishioners to follow suit and to educate their children. Even though he managed a foreign-sponsored program that was explicitly designed to support school children, many of the sponsored children – primarily girls who had reached puberty – had dropped out of school. He did not push the families to comply with the program's requirements; nor did he tell the sponsors that some of the children were no longer in school; nor did he give the children – even those still

in school – the monthly allotments the sponsors believed they were getting; nor did he lead Sunday school for the neighborhood children, like the foreign sponsors believed he did.¹⁹⁷

The other Nadezhdan pastors did not even pretend to care about female education, as demonstrated by their attitudes toward educational opportunities made available to their church members. At first, most of them seemed excited about my offer to teach English to their congregations for free. Pastor Damyan even predicted that I would be a “valuable asset” for his church. It soon became clear that this was an initiative that was meant to benefit men only, and in the eyes of the pastors, the main benefit was that they would have trustworthy people who could communicate directly with sponsors, making Bulgarian mediators obsolete. I emphatically pleaded with the pastors and other men to advertise the classes to women, but only the Turkish churches put together mixed groups (Turkish women are also most likely to travel abroad as migrant workers, so they need foreign language skills the most). Not even my best Naked Gypsy and Musician Gypsy female friends felt comfortable coming to class or sending their daughters, even though I tried to manipulate them emotionally by telling them that I did not want to be alone with “all those men.”¹⁹⁸ Regardless, the pastors’ initial excitement was soon replaced by apathy. A few of them started to forget to unlock the churches after the second or third week of

¹⁹⁷ The following promotional video shows the pastor describing his “vision” of his future educational activities in the ghettos, provided that he received adequate funding: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpVHVOHXwpQ>.

¹⁹⁸ The idea to gather women in a house for language lessons was tempting, but based on my experience negotiating the church study groups, I foresaw overwhelming challenges. To begin with, I already knew that Turks, Musician Gypsies, and Naked Gypsies would have wanted separate groups. Further, many of the women who might have been interested would have insisted on having the lessons in their houses, both for convenience and for the prestige of being able to tell their neighbors that “the American” is teaching there. The moment I selected somebody’s house, I would have offended the rest, who would probably have refused to come at that point. Besides, some of the women I knew were feuding with each other, so it would have been impossible to get them in the same group. The only solution would have been to offer classes in numerous houses, which would have taken valuable time away from my fieldwork. Finally, I could not really guarantee that men – especially those who lived in the house – would not invade the classes, which would have discouraged many women from attending.

classes. And when the men started to lose interest due to the missed classes and the growing complexity of the material, the leaders did not encourage them to persevere.¹⁹⁹

Many pastors also opposed the program that bussed Nadezhdan children to Bulgarian schools in Sliven merely because they feuded with its director, Mrs. Boneva. She claimed that Evangelical pastors were brainwashing Nadezhdans; they considered her a “she-Devil” who exploited Nadezhdans for money. In their jealous obsession with who gets money by claiming to represent the interests of the ghetto, few pastors bothered to inquire whether the bussing program actually did any good by remedying the inadequacies of the segregated School #6, let alone offer to help. A major hurdle the program faced was that Nadezhdan parents would not allow their daughters to leave the ghetto as they approached puberty, which caused a high attrition rate. The pastors were the only community leaders in Nadezhda who could have talked to the parents, yet this was not something that they would consider.

Religious leaders in Nadezhda similarly show little interest in encouraging their female followers to achieve socio-economic integration in the larger society by joining the labor force. A Musician Gypsy pastor had tried – futilely – to stimulate local employment by opening a shoemaking workshop in the ghetto with a foreign investor. Were he successful, however, the workshop would have hired primarily men. The other ministers’ approach to “helping” alleviate unemployment is to pray for desperate men who present needs for jobs; women, on the other hand, are understood to be in charge of presenting needs for healing and other domestic problems. Even Kadriye, who was the de-facto leader of the progressive Turkish church while her husband was absent, maintained the patriarchal attitude that young women belong at home. Under the influence of the missionary Kadir, she finally decided that her nineteen-year-old son

¹⁹⁹ I found out that a Bulgarian denominational leader from Stara Zagora started another ESL program at the largest Musician Gypsy church after I left. I do not know how successful that program was or whether it is still ongoing.

needed to stop laying around all day and start looking for a job. But when she urged him to do something productive, he threatened to beat her up, so she had to wait for her husband to come home and deal with the boy. Having her sixteen-year-old daughter and fifteen-year-old daughter-in-law look for work was never an option, however, even after her daughter finished high school. Custom dictated that she should support both girls, as long as she had the means.

Exposure to New Places, People, Ideas, and Practices

In the era of global travel and communications, Evangelical churches are often embedded in larger organizational and social networks. The flows of people and information within those networks have affected many women's lives by enabling them to build new relationships and to encounter new ideas and practices (Zents 2005, 219). On the one hand, some Evangelical women have been able to leave their encapsulated communities and to expand their social and cultural horizons through church-related travel. Early historical examples of such religious explorers include Western female missionaries, many of whom re-conceptualized their own gender, religious, and national identities through exposure to different cultures (Bowie, Kirkwood and Ardener 1993; Griffith 1997; Hill 1985; Singh 2000; Spees n.d.). Evangelical women in modern developing communities have also gained empowering new perspectives by getting to understand "others" while attending religious seminars, conferences, crusades, or just visiting communities of fellow Christians at home or abroad (Flora 1995, 418; Zents 2005, 218-219). On the other hand, religious networks bring outsiders into marginalized communities, potentially along with novel ideas and practices that have the power to change lives. Thus, Mies (1981) demonstrates that in the mid-19th century, Scottish missionaries' wives in Narsapur, India, taught local women lace-making, initiating an industry that continues to thrive today (488). Fleischmann (2010) argues that missionaries' educational efforts in Lebanon from 1860 to 1950

gave rise to generations of women who were likely to “build character” and to pursue higher education and professional careers (419-420). Key to such transformative encounters is that women establish long-term, personal contacts with outsiders who are committed to help the marginalized communities.

Most Nadezhdan women, particularly younger Naked Gypsy women, spend their lives in extreme encapsulation within the walls of the ghetto, where they interact very little with the outside world. Tanya, a Jehovah’s Witness in her 30s, blamed this “imprisonment” for the inability of her church to attract adherents in the ghetto: “They have terrible traditions. It is very difficult for a woman to go to a church outside of the neighborhood. Mothers-in-law and neighbors will interfere and chastise her for leaving.” Members of Nadezhdan churches occasionally partake in crusades in nearby towns and villages, attend religious conferences or congresses, or visit “sister” churches in the region. People of all groups and of both genders have left the ghetto for such purposes, but women – especially Naked Gypsy and most Turkish women – are less likely to do so. According to Vitan, “some people leave the ghetto for the first time on a visit to a sister church. But some Naked Gypsy pastors do not let women go, and women feel hurt by it. Musician Gypsies are more likely to take the women.” A couple of Naked Gypsy pastors occasionally take their wives when they go to conferences, visit sister congregations, or dine with visitors in restaurants in Sliven. In most other cases, however, pastors prefer the company of males. Pastor Kalcho once asked me to drive him and three brothers to a nearby village to meet another church leader. The men and the pastor’s wife, Toshka, had a conversation in front of the church, but it was in Romany, so I did not know what they were saying. Then she walked into the house and the brothers indicated that they were ready to go. On the road, they told me laughingly that Toshka had wanted to come too, but they

tricked her into entering the house to fetch something for the trip, while we all got into the car and drove away. They were especially amused because she had been running after the car, yelling for us to stop. I never noticed her and felt awful about unwittingly playing a part in her exclusion.

Some categories of women who have ventured outside the ghetto for religious purposes include the first converts, who used to attend Bulgarian churches in Sliven in the past; a handful of embattled females who prefer to pray in peace and anonymity in the big churches downtown; and the choir singers in Pastor Zhivko's church, who occasionally perform at crusades and conferences. In the summer of 2010, women at Pastor Damyan's church were excited about rumors that a foreign missionary was planning a conference in the mountain to the north of Sliven and that they would be invited to sing. They were hoping that this might open the door for even bigger adventures: "If he likes us, he might take us abroad, and he might even pay for the passport fees!" (Veska). Their dreams did not materialize, though their ambition took me by surprise. Bulgaria has long been famous for its female singers, who often tour abroad, but the option of exploring the world through music has begun to tantalize a small number of young women in the segregated ghetto only recently. In the case of some Musician Gypsy women, there is also the growing desire to see with their own eyes what their male relatives – traveling musicians – have told them about the world "out there." For the most part, they are still "stuck" behind the walls of Nadezhda, unable to compete in the music industry and to overcome patriarchal traditions that confine them to the home. But the first step has been taken – hoping and dreaming.

I accompanied Nadezhdan women who left the ghetto on church-related trips seven times. I went with Mina and Dancho to a Christian congress in a nearby village and to a spiritual

wedding in Yambol. I drove, as they could not afford another means of transportation. Dora was curious about Antioch and the Jehovah's Witnesses, so she requested to join me for one service at each church. The women from the progressive Turkish church asked me to drive them to a church in Yambol to hear Kadir preach. Finally, Behice and Vela asked to come with me to the Pentecostal Church downtown because Behice needed to pray but felt alienated by the Nadezhdan churches. In all these cases, my companions were women who felt comfortable with me as a close friend and who requested that I take them to places that they either could not reach easily, that they felt uneasy visiting by themselves, or that their families would not allow them to visit unless they were "chaperoned" by me. If my car and I were not available at the time, most of them would not have attended those events.

In the rare instances when Nadezhdan women visit religious events and organizations outside of the ghetto, they usually do not engage in meaningful interactions with outsiders. I spent two days at a conference in Stara Zagora with a Naked Gypsy pastor and his wife, and on another occasion, I also dined with the same couple and with foreigners and visiting Roma at a restaurant in Sliven. In both cases, the pastor's wife acted awkwardly withdrawn. She spoke only when asked to, and she did so quietly, in short sentences, and with her eyes cast down. At times she would whisper to her husband and he would tell us what she said. She huddled with another Naked Gypsy pastor's wife from a nearby village, forging no relationships with "others." She could have been an isolated example of an extreme introvert, but Spasena reported that she and other women from the ghetto had been paid to attend a conference organized by foreigners and Bulgarians in Yambol in the past, and almost all of the sisters left early because they did not feel comfortable being there – they did not understand what the speakers were saying, they were bored sitting in the same chair for hours, and they simply felt like they did not belong.

Nadezhdan women tend to keep to themselves while visiting sister churches as well. Most Roma Evangelical churches in Bulgaria host visitors from afar for an hour or two after services. The brothers treat the guests to sweets and soda over discussions about scripture and gossip about church and denominational affairs. But in the case of mixed delegations from Nadezhda, women generally do not participate in the social activities. Despite being female, I was always invited to join in and treated with respect due to my “foreign” status. But I experienced this exclusion the time when I drove five women from the progressive Turkish church to Yambol. Kadir was preaching at their “daughter” Turkish church there, and since Pastor Berat was abroad, Kadriye gathered four other women in order to attend in his place (I also suspect that she wanted to make sure that the Yambol leaders did not “steal” the sponsor in the absence of her husband). Having arrived in a group that consisted entirely of women, which was highly unusual and borderline improper, I finally got to experience the dynamics of visiting a sister church as most Nadezhdan women do. After the service, the missionary and the Yambol brothers sat to eat, drink, and socialize. Nobody bothered to invite the visiting women, including Kadir’s wife. We sat quietly at the other end of the church and watched them for two hours, as our empty stomachs grumbled. A few local women stayed with us, but they did not speak to us or even offer us water.

Nadezhdan women are not much more likely to build new relationships when outsiders visit the ghetto either. It is considered inappropriate for women to engage with male strangers, and they are often uncomfortable and inexperienced interacting with female outsiders too. Thus, men welcome and host church visitors, whereas the women merely serve the table and retreat. The teenage daughter of Pastor Berat, who had hosted Kadir’s family numerous times over many years at his church and in his house, admitted that she had never spoken to the missionary or to

his wife because she was too embarrassed. Musician Gypsy and Turkish women may at least smile at foreign visitors; Naked Gypsy women, on the other hand, tend to stare at outsiders, but if eye contact occurs, they avert their gaze without smiling or nodding.²⁰⁰ While it is merely a sign of curiosity, shyness, and inexperience, some Westerners instinctively perceive this behavior as hostile and keep their distance. It takes conscious effort and persistence for an outsider to form relationships with the encapsulated local women. One cannot just visit for a few hours and leave, which is what external religious actors currently do when they come to Nadezhda, even those who show up “regularly,” or a few times per year. Frequent and prolonged interactions are required to learn how to work within and around local gendered behavioral norms, to avoid misinterpreting expressions of shyness and curiosity, and to demonstrate commitment to befriending the residents.

The lack of meaningful relationships between Bulgarian and foreign religious actors and Nadezhdan women has unfortunate social ramifications. According to Ralitzia, the most marginalized members of encapsulated ethnic communities have the hardest time engaging with the larger society on their own. They need sustained and persistent support from the outside the most: “I see young Roma who want to change, but they need help – the community pulls them back. [...] A girl, especially, can never change without a support network of outsiders.” She told me about a summer camp her foundation organized for marginalized Roma youths (not from Nadezhda). In the course of a week, they taught the children to follow a schedule, to interact with Bulgarian adults, to read the Bible, to participate in group discussions, to maintain their rooms and belongings, and to develop other useful skills. However, five months after the youths

²⁰⁰ The following YouTube link show women at Pastor Zhivko’s church engaging freely with foreigners who are praying for them, even though they do not understand each other: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3T-J4-RollU>. By contrast, women are noticeably absent from the following video, showing a foreign team visiting a Naked Gypsy church (I was there when they visited): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOMpbXmFeGE>.

returned home, they had forgotten everything that they had learned. Ralitzia insisted that foreigners were in a unique position to facilitate integration. In part because of their economic leverage and in part because they are not embroiled in a long history of interethnic hostility,

Roma accept difference in foreigners. If a new idea or practice comes from a foreigner, they are much more likely to consider it than if it came from other Roma or Bulgarians. Familiarity breeds contempt, and the more familiar one is, the more Roma impose their own expectations about behaviors on him. For example, Zahari speaks to other Roma in their language, but when he teaches them to abandon the Roma mentality, they reject him.

Yet most foreign missionaries adopt the stance that their divine mission in the ghetto is to spread the Word of God in the pursuit of otherworldly salvation, not to facilitate social change. According to Ralitzia, Westerners' affinity for "cultural relativism" prevents them from introducing positive ideas and behaviors to disadvantaged communities: "American and English missionaries are too conscious of cultural traditions. Some even ask the translators to wear long skirts and head covers, so they don't show them new models." Archer admitted that he instructed his female companions to dress conservatively and to act subordinates, but his primary goal was to save souls, not to change social mores. Besides, he argued, one had to follow local rules in order to be accepted by the community, and any attempts to bring about social change depended on such acceptance: "If we go to a church where women wear head covers, we tell our girls to wear them also. If we get to know the people well and have the opportunity to teach them, we explain to them that this is bondage. But one needs to carry out the change slowly." He was not interested in getting accepted by Nadezhdans, however, because he distrusted the money-grabbing pastors. A Jehovah's Witnesses missionary couple that worked with two Turkish families similarly hesitated to target local practices and beliefs that bothered them, such as early marriages or the idea that men were intellectually and spiritually superior to women. They did not feel that they were in the position to criticize the locals' lifestyle because they were still in the early stages of proselytism. To the extent that they sought to introduce

different patterns of behavior, they did so through personal example. Once they invited a Turkish family to lunch in their apartment, and the Italian husband washed the dishes in order to demonstrate to the stunned houseguests that self-respecting men can do housework.

Very few outsiders have made targeted attempts to change entrenched patterns of beliefs and behaviors in Nadezhda. They inevitably failed, because a handful of individuals with limited time, resources, language skills, and understanding of the local culture cannot possibly transform thousands of people who are deeply invested in their traditional lifestyle. For example, Kadir once criticized Turkish women's habit of staying home and watching TV, as opposed to pursuing more meaningful activities leading to personal and spiritual growth: "Television is a passion, a sweet addiction, a small screen that sucks your brain, attracts you. Why do you put all your time in it? [...] Watching television is a sin. I do not have a TV set at home, because it brainwashes you. Even the static electricity is bad for you." After he said all this during service, we had lunch at Pastor Berat's home. Yet the minute the foreigners left and the dishes were put away, the women turned on the TV to watch Turkish soap operas for the rest of the day. Regardless of his good intentions, the missionary's efforts were in vain because sporadic speeches and self-righteous scolding during occasional visits are not enough to induce deep and permanent cultural change.

Engendering Collective Action

The comparative literature is ambivalent on the relationship between Evangelical Christianity and women's advancement through grassroots community organizing or political activism. Numerous scholars argue that Protestant doctrine, practices, and organizations promote the kinds of personal attitudes and communal dynamics that generate an associational, participatory, caring, egalitarian, and democratic spirit (Burdick 1998; Gaitskell 2000; Green

1993; Gill 1990; Hastings 1993, 122; Marshall 1993, 224; Martin 1990, 203; Martin 1996, 38; Muzorewa 1975). Consequently, participation in churches “can provide the skills and nurture the dispositions and values conducive to active citizenship” (Ireland 1999, 112), including “the self-confidence and organizational skills to be effective in the secular sphere” (Flora 1995, 423). Hallum (2003) argues that, “When women regularly give testimony and lead healings and prayer in front of large groups, and when they plan church functions and charity programs, they are acquiring confidence as well as learning valuable skills of public speaking, budgeting, organizing, and mobilizing others” (184). Thus, churches have at least the potential to empower subordinated women by giving them the social capital and the tools to organize in grassroots activism and political movements. This potential has been realized in a number of historical contexts. In their struggle for social justice, female African American Evangelicals were “emboldened by their faith” to create “an organizational network that has been indispensable to the fight against racism, sexism, and poverty” (Collier-Thomas 2010, xvi). Rios (2005) similarly documents the efforts of Latin Pentecostal women in New York to fight “structural sin” through social work and mobilizing for social justice.

Yet numerous studies from developing societies counter-argue that Evangelical churches there have largely failed to embolden women to pursue social and political advancement through collective action. In many contexts, church leaders advocate general disengagement from the secular world, advising believers to go on a “social strike from society” (Gebara 1996; Lalive D’Epiney 1969; Loreto Mariz 1994, 112-113; Maxwell 2006, 75, 84, 107). And when leaders have favored social and political involvement, this has not necessarily benefitted women. Maxwell (2006, 247) shows that the pragmatic alliance between the Zimbabwean Assemblies of God Africa’s male religious leaders and President Mugabe in the 1990s was largely based on

their mutual disdain for the feminist movement and on their belief that women should be confined to wifehood in the private sphere. VonDoepp (2002) traces the civic and political passivity of churchwomen to the interaction between entrenched power relations and the organizational structure of Protestant denominations. According to him, Protestant women in Malawi in the mid-20th century were less likely than men to organize and demand advancements because “the decentralized and democratic form of the Presbyterian churches actually *enabled* the reproduction of local power relations and social tensions within the organizations” (294), including local customs that dictated the public subordination and quietism of women. Finally, church leaders may, in fact, work to mobilize women, but in the selfish pursuit of their own agendas (Flora 1995, 422), such as developing patronage alliances with politicians (Loreto Mariz 1994, 110-111). The dynamics in Nadezhdan churches reflect this second, pessimistic strand of the comparative literature.

Nadezhdans – and especially Nadezhdan women – are extremely alienated from the civil and political society on the local and national levels. Many lack the basic education to follow mainstream public discourse. For example, I was with a group of Naked Gypsy women when their favorite TV soap opera was followed by a report on political corruption in the country. I started watching, but soon noticed that the women were exchanging perplexed looks. They did not understand the news jargon, including the word “corruption.” Further, the vast majority of Nadezhdans cannot conceive what political or civic activism might mean or entail, which has made it easy for politicians and government officials to ignore them.²⁰¹ The churches in Nadezhda have done little to remedy the profound political and civic alienation of their members

²⁰¹ Politicians visit only during election campaigns, when they make promises that they almost never keep. Most Nadezhdans’ reaction is to withdraw even more and to grow increasingly distrustful, disenchanted, and weary. They even suspect NGO workers, who claim that they are trying to help improve life in the ghetto, of exploiting minorities and taking project money.

or to promote the kind of attitudes, skills, and experiences that would facilitate collective action. As discussed in Chapter Four, pastors do not assume a teaching role during sermons when it comes to new terms and concepts in general. Also, women, in particular, remain marginalized from participatory worship, church leadership, and church activities. Thus, they do not develop the personal self-confidence, the associational dispositions, and the organizational skills required for communal mobilization. I met three local Christian women who helped organize mass health education campaigns, but they were all trained and employed by DOW. One of the women was a pastor's wife, who was fairly influential in her church, but the other two felt so alienated and slighted in their respective congregations that they never attended services.

Still, Nadezhdan churches currently stand as the only local "institutions" that bring together residents on a regular basis. Thus, the church leaders have emerged as "community leaders," and outsiders who need to reach large numbers of Nadezhdans turn to them in order to request introductions, endorsements, and access to public spaces. When the benefits of cooperation are obvious and it requires little effort and risk-taking from the pastor, their request is usually granted.²⁰² Thus, during the lethal measles epidemic in the winter of 2009-2010, many of the pastors unlocked their churches for vaccination campaigns. Some pastors also allow

²⁰² Most Nadezhdan pastors rarely talk about politics, not because of quietist philosophical convictions but because similarly to their followers, they never developed political awareness and they never considered it their responsibility to cultivate it in others. Yet things change during elections. Across Bulgaria, it is a well-known and decried fact that politicians pay for Roma votes and that Roma swing elections. Sliven is not an exception. A benefit of being a pastor in the ghetto is that one can exploit his status as a community leader and negotiate trade-offs with politicians: money for votes and for the opportunity to speak at the churches. I was told that the going price was 20-30 leva per church member. Pastors often over-sell the size of their congregation or their ability to force members to vote a certain way. In fact, some rebellious churchgoers deliberately refuse to vote (or to vote as instructed by their leaders). But the politicians do not know that. Many pastors denied selling votes or refused to talk about it. I believe that some of them refuse to get involved in the practice. But a few leaders also admitted that they have done so in the past and that they did not consider it immoral, claiming that the money went to the church. A Musician Gypsy pastor even said that he asked his congregation which politician they wanted to support as a group. Whether the pastors take the money or give it to the church, the manner in which they influence voting behavior does not amount to cultivating meaningful political engagement that could bring about long-term tangible benefits for the community.

health mediators to deliver informative presentations during services. Women and children were, indeed, the primary beneficiaries of these NGO efforts, since men do not deal with children's healthcare and vaccinations, and they generally are not concerned with learning things pertaining to the domestic realm, such as "safer hygiene practices." But if one asks the pastors to lead, exert effort, and take risks for the welfare of the community, they tend to be less obliging. In Chapter Two, Footnote 64, I discussed a pitiful campaign against early marriages that was sponsored by the EU and administered half-heartedly by a local Bulgarian Gypsy representative of a distant NGO. The campaign had design flaws, but the pastors shared in the responsibility for its failure. The organizer originally asked a few pastors to help her by assembling youths and by attending and supporting the endeavor. All pastors refused to host her, and they did not advise their followers to participate either. The reason they provided was that the woman, whom they had never met, was not to be trusted. Only one Musician Gypsy pastor attended the first meeting, but he did not bring any youths. The organizer had to rely on a Naked Gypsy male homosexual prostitute to promote the event by going from house to house to gather teenagers, which likely tarnished her image and obliterated her chances of getting many people to attend and listen.

Conclusion

Unlike Evangelical churches elsewhere, Nadezhdan churches have done little to make it easier for their encapsulated female members to become integrated in the mainstream Bulgarian society. The churches do not cultivate a meaningful sense of self-worth and independence in women's home environment that can translate into similar attitudes and behaviors in public. Further, Christian women in Nadezhda do not gain any useful skills and experiences that they can use to advance professionally or otherwise. Church leaders have shown no interest in

promoting the value of education and a work ethic that is more compatible with the modern economic environment. Churchgoing women have not been able to accumulate social capital by tapping into the organizational and social networks in which the churches are embedded. And finally, Nadezhdan churches have not provided the skills, the sense of community, the organizational infrastructure, and the leadership necessary for women to mobilize in collective action for civic and political purposes.

Conclusion: Gender Dynamics and Evangelical Churches in Nadezhda and Nikola Kochev

Evangelical Christianity is commonly framed as a cultural system that possesses certain fundamental traits that shape social behaviors across a wide range of contexts. They include its universalistic doctrinal teachings, which elevate one's self-worth; its focus on individual development and personal responsibility; its family orientation; and its participatory congregational dynamics, which promote the development of egalitarian and engaged communities. To be sure, numerous scholars have shown that globalizing Evangelical Christianity does not produce homogenous social effects as it becomes appropriated in diverse contexts. Instead, indigenous cultures and conditions often serve as a prism through which locals interpret and enact new religious teachings and practices. The propensity of Evangelical Christianity to exhibit different modalities across space and time is especially well documented in regards to the content of religious teachings, worship dynamics, leadership styles, organizational structures, and propensity for civic and political activism (for an excellent review of the literature, see Robbins 2004). With respect to determining the effect of Evangelical churches on the status and wellbeing of women in developing societies, however, the brunt of the

comparative literature argues that Evangelical Christianity advances the lives of disadvantaged women, primarily due to the social impacts of its participatory organizational model, engaging worship style, doctrinal emphasis on every individual's inherent dignity derived from her spiritual worth and divine purpose, agenda to transform men into better husbands and fathers, and community-building congregational dynamics. Many of the case studies focus on contexts where women face rapid social changes – such as migration, urbanization, industrialization, market liberalization, modernization, and mass violence – that challenge traditional gender roles, familial arrangements, and community structures. In such settings, many uprooted and alienated women have turned to Evangelical churches to find a new source of dignity, agency, adaptive strategies, and supportive association.

Given the general scholarly consensus on the positive role Evangelical churches have played in the lives of disadvantaged women in developing societies, I originally expected to observe similar encouraging transformations in the marginalized ghetto of Nadezhda, where women are the victims of extreme gender inequality and where the vast majority of the residents have recently converted to Evangelical Christianity. My immersive fieldwork uncovered something very different, however. Even though Nadezhdans have faced rapid socio-economic changes over the past twenty years, and even though these changes have coincided with the proliferation of Evangelical Christianity, the new churches have had a limited positive effect on the lives of women. Instead of adapting to the social and economic reality of post-socialist and post-industrial Sliven, the encapsulated, racialized, uneducated, and unskilled Nadezhdans of both genders have sought refuge in old communal structures, kinship arrangements, and cultural traditions, including patriarchal practices and attitudes. In this context, religion has been less a catalyst for positive change than a coopted vehicle for reproducing old and maladaptive patterns,

especially when it comes to gender relations. In this concluding section, I will summarize my findings in Nadezhda and briefly contrast them to the dynamics in the Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical community, whose members live and worship in the town of Sliven.

As described in Chapter Two, the traditionally Eastern Orthodox Bulgarian Gypsies in Sliven have lived and worked alongside the ethnic Bulgarians for centuries, and even though they still suffer from various forms of discrimination and marginalization, they are much more geographically, socially, culturally, educationally, professionally, and economically integrated in mainstream society compared to the traditionally Muslim Nadezhdans. Whether they reside in the Nikola Kochev neighborhood in the northwestern part of Sliven or amongst Bulgarians in other neighborhoods, Bulgarian Gypsies tend to have significant exposure to the mainstream society. Unlike most Nadezhdan children, who are segregated into a substandard school next to the ghetto, Bulgarian Gypsy children attend mixed schools across the town. Historically, Bulgarian Gypsies and Nadezhdans have had little in common and little to do with each other.²⁰³ The past few decades, however, have witnessed intermarriages between Musicians and Bulgarian Gypsies, Bulgarian Gypsies working in Nadezhda in various capacities, and some interactions between Bulgarian Gypsy and Nadezhdan Evangelicals.

I attended services at Antioch at least a couple of times per month (I attended PC2 only a couple of times), and I became close to numerous people in the community, but I did not conduct systematic observations among this group, since my main research focus was Nadezhda. However, my data were sufficient to make it clear that female members of Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical churches are much more likely than their Nadezhdan peers to enjoy many of the

²⁰³ As described in Chapter Two, they arrived in Sliven centuries apart, associated with different dominant ethnic groups, inhabited opposite sides of the town, embraced different religions, spoke different languages, and practiced different trades.

positive developments that are commonly described in the comparative literature. Contrasting Nadezhdan and Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals in the town of Sliven helps to identify some of the factors that make a marginalized community more or less likely to appropriate Evangelical Christianity as a catalyst for change in the realm of gender relations by enabling subordinated women to pursue social status and social capital as religious leaders and engaged congregation members, by encouraging disempowered women to develop a sense of self-respect and a higher purpose, by transforming men into more devoted husbands and fathers, and by incorporating marginalized women in the larger society.

Evangelical Women in the Religious Community

In contrast to dynamics observed in numerous case studies from the developing world, Evangelical Nadezhdan women have remained marginalized in their congregations both as leaders and as lay members. Even though Evangelical Christianity was first introduced to Nadezhda by a handful of defiant women, entrepreneurial men soon recognized that the new churches allowed a rare access to material resources and social prestige within the community. Enabled by the patriarchal belief that women should renounce public prominence and social relations outside of the household, men have monopolized the leadership roles and the social dynamics within the local religious field. Apart from going to services in order to pray and to present needs, Nadezhdan women are discouraged from engaging in church life as leaders, as lay parishioners, or as participants in social networks.

The Bulgarian Gypsy churches across the Town, on the other hand, reflect the more positive findings in the comparative literature. Numerous women assume various leadership roles in Antioch and PC2. Pastor Zahari's sister, Kalina, and his wife, Albena, are perhaps the most prominent examples of women who are highly visible, influential, and esteemed in their

church. In addition to their relation to the pastor, their status has much to do with their reputation as Antioch's founding members, with being successful and likeable individuals who have earned ample admiration and affection in their own right, and with the valuable services they perform for their congregation on a daily basis. Unlike Nadezhdan women, Bulgarian Gypsy women have a long history of working outside the domestic sphere, away from the constant supervision of jealous husbands and suspicious in-laws. Consequently, they are not impeded by the idea that women should eschew public engagements and prominence. Also unlike Nadezhdans, most Bulgarian Gypsies have embraced the modern belief that both men and women should pursue education, practical skills, and familiarity with the world. Consequently, many women in Antioch and in PC2 have the training, the skills, the contacts, and the experiences to effectively serve their churches and to claim recognition in return. For example, Kalina has a degree from a prestigious university, numerous friends across the world, fluency in English, many travel experiences, and theological and practical training that has helped her become a superb minister, especially to women, youths, and children. Albena's resume is less impressive, but she is still sufficiently educated, skilled, experienced, and confident to sing in the band, to assist her husband during services, and to run the church in his absence. Many other women in Antioch occupy prominent positions as members of the spiritual council, as band singers, hosts of daily Bible discussion and prayer groups, evangelists (or "good-will ambassadors") visiting other Roma communities in the region, crusade organizers and participants, planners of various social events, and managers of (and volunteers for) charity initiatives. The level of female leadership and participation in Antioch dramatically exceeds that in Nadezhdan churches, including the relatively inclusive Musician Gypsy churches.

Women hold prominent leadership positions in PC2 as well. I never met pastor Evstati's wife. The family lived in an impoverished village near Sliven and he, a Turk, appeared to be much more similar to Nadezhdan men than to Bulgarian Gypsies in terms of habitus, including demeanor, cultural predispositions, educational background, life experiences, and personal ambitions. Given that Pastor Evstati was rarely around, one could argue that the true leader of PC2 was the highly competent Filip, whom I already introduced in Chapter Three. His wife, a Turk from an integrated community outside of Sliven, was similarly well educated and specially trained to minister to women. She and another equally qualified young lady, Nadya, lead a cohesive group of females who met every Tuesday to discuss the Bible, as well as more mundane experiences and problems. Formally, men still make the big decisions at PC2, although they do consult their wives. Moreover, women outnumber men, and are united. Not surprisingly, then, female members wield significant influence in this church. This contrasts with the dynamics in Nadezhda churches, with the possible exception of the progressive Turkish church discussed elsewhere.

Some of the scholarly literature on Evangelical Christianity suggests that the very nature of its participatory worship – especially the charismatic denominations' emphasis on singing, dancing, speaking in tongues, sharing testimonies, and engaging with the preacher – benefit alienated and disenchanted individuals by providing them with a sense of increased social cohesion. I have argued that in Nadezhda, only men may “let go” emotionally and behaviorally and experience the collective effervescence generated by ecstatic worship. Women, on the other hand, are expected to “keep face” and remain inconspicuous and self-controlled, especially in public. But in the Bulgarian Gypsy community, gendered behavioral expectations are reversed, supporting the popular stereotype that associates women with spiritual powers (Cucchiari 1990).

Here, it is the men who are more self-conscious about always acting rational, dignified, and “manly.” For example, Ognyan admitted that for many months after he first accepted Jesus, he used to be embarrassed about attending church, which was regarded as the domain of gullible and emotional women; so, he sat in the corner and observed passively. Once, he closed his eyes and felt the Holy Spirit touch his neck, but he still “rationalized” the sensation as a trick. Indeed, even though Antioch’s members are not segregated by gender and the manifestations of emotional fervor are more evenly distributed than in Nadezhdan churches, men in general are more likely to sit toward the back of the church and to be more restrained, whereas women tend to stand up, to sing, to dance, to laugh, to speak in tongues and to share testimonies, dreams, and visions. They also engage with the sermons on an intellectual level, as they ask questions, opine, joke, and take ample notes. At the end of services, most women shake hands and hug, assuring each other that they are sisters united in the presence of the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁴

Numerous scholars have extolled the churches’ propensity to benefit women by embedding them in communities of mutual support, where “sisters” can be there for each other emotionally, spiritually, socially, and even economically (Martin 2001; Soothill 2008). Most of these case studies, however, describe contexts where women experience dramatic social dislocation and alienation after the disintegration of their traditional familial and communal

²⁰⁴ Here, I should make an important qualification that women’s participation in worship and church activities varies by age. Teenage girls tended to be much more restrained than adult women. Boys and girls usually sat together as a group alongside the wall behind the columns, where they were somewhat hidden and could interact amongst each other quietly. They often observed while the adults participated in charismatic worship, even though their parents occasionally implored them to join. The boys were equally disengaged, although their general demeanor was more self-assured. Thus, when a UK delegation from Youth with a Mission organized games in the yard, the boys were eager to play, whereas the girls watched the entire time. Older church members attributed the teenagers’ tendency to act measuredly in public to preoccupation with one’s self-image that was typical for adolescents, especially in the presence of members of the opposite sex. Bulgarian Gypsy parents’ frustration with their children’s perceived reserve in church contrasted sharply with Nadezhdan parents’ trepidations about their children’s perceived laxity. In my observations, however, Bulgarian Gypsy and Nadezhdan youth did not act dramatically different in the context of church services. The different attitudes of the parents demonstrated the differences in their perspectives about trusting and controlling adolescents.

structures (Garrard-Burnett 1998). Further, they rarely examine situations where church leaders have little interest in building communities of committed members who are bound together by solidarity, where old divisions and endemic interpersonal conflict prevent new social networks from forming, and where women are systematically marginalized and isolated in the context of the churches. Wariness of pastors' corruption causes many Christians in Nadezhda to change churches frequently, which makes it hard to establish close emotional bonds with fellow church-mates. Complicating things even further, young wives here are expected to keep their most meaningful social relations within the confines of their household and closest relatives. These women are not alienated or uprooted; on the contrary, they are trapped in a tight net of extremely demanding relations, which makes it difficult and unnecessary to pursue new ties. Finally, I already showed that most Nadezhdan women are excluded from church life and leadership, as well as major aspects of participatory worship, which limits their opportunities to interact and generate social cohesion with peers. In sum, few Nadezhdan women go to church in order to seek new friends and supportive peer communities; in fact, many quit church because they describe their peers as judgmental, aloof, mean-spirited, and cliquish on the basis of pre-existing ties.

By contrast, Bulgarian Gypsies have fewer churches to choose from, and they are less likely to despise their pastors, which helps them to commit to a congregation and to invest in building durable relations. Further, Bulgarian Gypsies' lifestyle is much closer to that of ethnic Bulgarians – members of both groups navigate a mass society where individuals are relatively anonymous and detached, and where many relationships are superficial. Most Bulgarian Gypsies live in small nuclear families, and they are expected to socialize outside of the circle of their closest kin in order to find compatible friends (in terms of gender, age, education, class, taste,

beliefs, interests, etc.) in the context of work, school, civic associations, etc. In a post-socialist city where many people lost their industrial jobs and where civic associations are still a novelty, Evangelical churches provide an exceptionally rare and efficient venue for finding new social relations. In fact, a few members of Protestant churches in Sliven have complained that their peers only join in search of companionship. Women at Antioch, for example, interact regularly in the context of weekly services, group meetings, and activities, such as crusades, charity work, seminars, parties, and summer camps. Consequently, many of them form close relationships of friendship and support. They call each other on a daily basis, visit each other's houses, socialize in cafes and restaurants, invite each other for family celebrations and funerals, pool money for banquets, and so on. In a more dramatic example, when a young woman fell ill, other sisters took turns visiting her; and after her death, they continued to provide her bereaved husband and children with moral support and practical assistance.

Finally, even though Bulgarian Gypsy churches were not spared internal strife, it did not reach the high levels that I observed in many Nadezhdan churches. The dangers of envy, badmouthing, and feuding were discussed a couple of times during sermons at Antioch, and I did encounter some gossip. For example, a woman had a mental breakdown in the middle of service, prompting Archer to speculate that she was possessed, and a friend of mine informed me that she had been a prostitute abroad while her handicapped husband was alone at home, and she was probably being punished for it. However, nobody complained about infighting, injustice, favoritism, or ostracism during my interviews or casual interactions with congregants. Compared to Nadezhdans, Bulgarian Gypsy believers were fairly accepting of others and placed less emphasis on behavioral markers as indicators of true Christianity. Thus, whereas in Nadezhda getting drunk and belly dancing at a wedding might lead to one's excommunication

from most churches, Antioch members turned a blind eye to it, as long as it was not habitual. The congregation also included a few single mothers who had never been married (including Kalina), but I never heard anybody judge them. While these women would have been labeled as “adulterers” and banned from many churches in Nadezhda, Antioch’s members gave them respect, support, affection, and friendship.

Evangelical Women’s Self-Conception

According to the comparative literature, one of the most dramatic transformations subordinate women in developing societies experience after converting to Evangelical Christianity is that the doctrinal emphasis on the inherent value and divine purpose of every human soul imbues the individual (regardless of sex, class, or ethnicity) with a sense of elevated self-worth, confidence, and empowerment in the spiritual realm that can transcend into increased self-worth, confidence, personal responsibility, and empowerment in the secular realm as well. The positive effect of this doctrine is compounded by the common association of women with spiritual gifts, which increases their sense of self-worth, as well as the practice of giving testimonies, which allows women to reframe their experiences in ways that imbue them with higher meaning.

Nadezhda defies this pattern. Lacking education and being marginalized in the context of church life, women in the ghetto rarely read the Bible or participate in Bible discussion groups. Further, the poorly trained pastors rarely manage to captivate their apathetic female parishioners with sermons that are accessible, coherent, and instructive, and unlike the church brothers, sisters cannot approach the pastors for clarification because women do not interact regularly with non-related men. And given the patriarchal expectation that Nadezhdan women should be unassuming and discreet, it is only a few selected men – primarily pastors – who have

monopolized the claim to social status by virtue of having spiritual powers. The vast majority of women, on the other hand, are in the disempowered position of relying on those men to mediate between them and God (by performing miracles, conveying messages, interpreting dreams, etc.). Consequently, most women in the ghetto have at best a superficial grasp of Christian doctrine, including the idea that every individual has an inherent spiritual worth as a beloved child of God, with Whom she should develop a close personal relationship in the pursuit of fulfilling her unique calling. Instead, Nadezhdan women adopt a more pragmatic understanding of what it means to be a Christian: according to them, a believer commits to renouncing certain “sinful” behaviors and to going to church in exchange for some tangible benefits (such as healing). As a result, women’s testimonies in Nadezhda are not highly effective in developing a sense of elevated self-worth through cultivating a deeper subjectivity and celebrating one’s personal growth as a born-again follower of Christ. Women’s testimonies of conversion, in particular, lack the ceremonial delivery style and the emphasis on visions and profound behavioral transformations that are characteristic of many male testimonies in Nadezhda; instead, they are short, informal, less self-involved, and more focused on the miracles that the women and their families received from God after they joined a church.

While most Nadezhdan women are nearly illiterate, encapsulated in an extremely male-centric community, forced to assume the position of marginalized and apathetic congregation members, rendered insecure about their spiritual power, and discouraged from giving the kinds of testimonies that boost one’s self esteem, many Bulgarian Gypsy churchgoing women in Sliven are avid readers of religious literature, influential and invested in the life of their churches, boastful about their spiritual powers, and eager to celebrate their value as chosen people through personal testimonies. Consequently, they are more likely to achieve the kind of personal

empowerment described in other studies. Besides the Bible, many Bulgarian Gypsy female Evangelicals read other religious literature, often by popular Western authors. Many of these works are reminiscent of the self-help literature, as they promote the cultivation of confident, content, and proud believers. Some are addressed specifically to “God’s daughters,” seeking to teach them how to respect themselves as such and to establish a close personal relationship with the Father. Further, some of the preachers in the Bulgarian Gypsy churches, especially certain foreigners, occasionally discuss the inherent equality of women. For example, Linus once preached against the patriarchal Balkan attitude of prioritizing sons over daughters, while an American female missionary organizes annual women’s conferences that teach participants to recognize their unique worth and to deal with the particular challenges of being a Christian woman in the modern world.

As a result of being exposed to modern theological views on the inherent value and calling of every individual, regardless of sex, many Bulgarian Gypsies Evangelicals believe that a true Christian should develop a close relationship with God and continually grow as a spiritual and secular person. Notably absent in this definition is the emphasis on behavioral markers that is so prevalent in Nadezhda. In fact, one Bulgarian Gypsy woman in her 20s openly criticized the practice of identifying Christians based on deeds alone, stressing the importance of “feeling” God and working for him, instead: “You know God when you feel a benevolent force inside you. The sinful are those who proclaim, ‘I am very good!’ and pound themselves on the chest with pride [...] Faith is the hope that somebody is watching over you, guiding you as you fulfill your personal calling.” Other Bulgarian Gypsy women often refer to Jesus as their “friend,” “partner,” “guide,” and even “lover.” Consequently, many Bulgarian Gypsy female Christians have acquired a strong sense of comfort and empowerment from knowing that they are loved and

cherished in the eyes of a benevolent Supreme Being who has a plan for them. Comparing Nadezhdans' preoccupation with behavior to Bulgarian Gypsies' concern with personal growth brings up a paradox that was first discussed by Max Weber (1996): the fixation on immediate deeds is antithetical to a deeper personal transformation that produces a long-term effect on people's actions in the world.

Many Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical women also develop an elevated sense of self-worth by claiming to have spiritual gifts and by giving testimonies. In this ethnic community, women have long been associated with the spiritual realm (whereas men are related to thinking and text), so during services, women at Antioch are more likely than men to share supernatural visions and dreams. Unlike Nadezhdans, all Antioch members are encouraged (and in some cases, even pressured) to receive baptism in the Holy Spirit by speaking in tongues, often by being summoned to the front of the church, so that the congregation could pray for their "anointment." Bulgarian Gypsy females feel less pressure to worry about their image in social situations compared to males, and thus they are more likely to allow themselves to "receive the gift" under the eager gazes of their peers. And while many Nadezhdan women do not feel worthy to claim the gift of healing (or even pray over the sick), many Antioch women feel spiritually confident and competent to place their hands on the afflicted in order to "channel" the Holy Spirit.

Further, most Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals accept that spiritual development trumps material welfare and that they should establish a relationship with God without necessarily expecting anything in return. Consequently, their testimonies typically express gratitude about the rewards of having a relationship with Jesus and about experiencing God's presence. Many women talked about shedding depression, rejection, loneliness, and anomie to find peace, rejuvenation, and happiness as a result of opening their hearts to Jesus. In this context,

testimonies of conversion are less likely to list reformed behaviors and divine favors than to detail the new attitudes and worldviews of happier, more fulfilled individuals. In the process of reframing their experiences, Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical women no longer saw themselves as helpless victims of circumstance and the turbulent changes sweeping their town; instead, they claimed responsibility and embraced a mission under the benevolent guidance of a divine power. Encouraged by their peers' warm support, witness givers engaged in a performative ritual that allowed them to assert their spiritual value and to imbue their experiences with supernatural significance.

Evangelical Women in the Domestic Sphere

The comparative literature suggests that participation in Evangelical churches dramatically improves the family status of women in poor and marginalized populations. First, Evangelical parents are more likely to educate their daughters than members of other religious denominations, and female educational achievement is associated with later age of marriage, having the freedom to make reproductive choices, more professional successes and financial rewards, and enjoying more equal status vis-à-vis one's husband. Second, with its emphasis on family orientation and personal asceticism, Evangelical doctrine has helped countless frustrated women by transforming absent, alcoholic, cheating, gambling, and violent men into responsible and engaged husbands and fathers.

My own observations suggest that Nadezhdan Evangelical churches have had limited and mixed success when it comes to improving the domestic lives of local women. Women here are systematically subordinated to men and older kin due to patriarchal practices such as arranging to marry girls as soon as they reach puberty; pulling girls from school upon marriage (or earlier) in order to prevent them from interacting with males without supervision; kidnapping and raping

girls as an acceptable means of “marrying” them without consent; expecting young couples to live with the grooms’ families, where the brides are under the tight (and occasionally abusive) control of older female kin; keeping marriage unofficial, which makes it easy for husbands to abandon their wives and children on a whim; and expecting teenage girls to produce children immediately upon marriage, while preventing them from pursuing professional development that would afford them economic independence and respectable standing in their families. Since the local religious leaders are invested in these practices and since few wish to alienate parishioners in the competitive and volatile religious marketplace of the ghetto, they do little to combat such practices. Only two Musician Gypsy churches have modernized certain aspects of the marriage practices among a portion of Turkish and Musician Gypsy Christians over the past decade. For example, they have made it easier to marry for love by providing a respectable meeting place for teenagers to gather and get to know each other. Couples that marry for love are generally more likely to enjoy harmonious relations and to live independently from their parents, which reduces the interference of older generations. Naked Gypsies, however, have perceived the growing tendency of young Christians to “elope” as a dangerous trend that threatens to undermine patriarchal family structures. In response, pastors have banned young unmarried people from seeking mates in churches in order to preserve the traditional right of parents to arrange marriage for their children.

Whereas Nadezhdans marry off their daughters in their early-to-mid teens (and sometimes earlier), many Bulgarian Gypsy families encourage their daughters to pursue education and careers; thus, it is rare for a woman here to marry before finishing high school, and many marry later, while some may choose to stay single. Teenagers are expected to date in order to pick out their future spouses, even though churchgoing Evangelical Christians are

extremely concerned with premarital chastity. Thus, local and external spiritual leaders work daily to reign in teenage boys, who face pressure from secular society to demonstrate their masculinity through sexual exploits, while boosting the resolve of teenage girls, who wish to please their boyfriends without compromising their own honor (Caleb and Sarah). Once a person is mature enough to marry, choosing a life-long partner is of tremendous importance to deeply spiritual Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals. Albena recalled that before walking down the aisle, she and Zahari spent a week fasting and praying for signs that they were meant for each other.

Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelicals also tend to assign higher significance to the institution of marriage itself. Thus, unlike a growing number of their Eastern Orthodox peers, almost all Bulgarian Gypsies who go to Evangelical churches consecrate their marriages by legalizing them; and while divorce and single parenthood rates are on the rise in Sliven, many Antioch and PC2 members pride themselves on their commitment and willingness to work through any problems. Still, despite their emphasis on family values, Antioch members are well aware of the difficult social reality modern young women face, and they are surprisingly willing to overlook past transgressions. The congregation included a number of single women who had dated men without marrying them, who were abandoned, and who were raising children alone. Most Nadezhdan Christians would treat such women as pariahs, but I never witnessed them being judged or mistreated in Antioch; here, it is generally understood that people can make mistakes, but they can still earn salvation and respect, as long as they change moving forward.

Evangelical churches in Nadezhda had some success in altering problematic male behavior, and in this way they have made a tangible positive difference in the lives of Nadezhda women, albeit not to the degree suggested by the comparative literature. More precisely,

abstinence from alcohol and cigarettes may not turn a Naked Gypsy man into a steady provider, raise his family from poverty, or compel him to keep his children in school, but it often makes it easier to put some food on the table, improves his health, and makes him less likely to beat his wife. The churches' ban on leaving one's spouse has benefitted some women and children as well, although this is not the case when abused wives are told that leaving their husbands means committing a sin. Also, there is little evidence to suggest that these behavioral transformations have improved the nature of relations among family members or the status of women in the household (Brusco 1995). Churchgoing men may not drink or dance, but this does not necessarily mean that they interact more with their wives or their children. Instead, for many men, being a church member is yet another opportunity to socialize with other men. Even unemployed brothers spend most of their days out and about, building bonds with other brothers, often while discussing church affairs.

Like Nadezhdans, Evangelical Bulgarian Gypsy women and men often admitted that conversion transformed males in ways that made them better husbands. In this community, embracing Jesus is understood less in terms of abstaining from certain sins than in terms of profound personal transformation, measured primarily in terms of developing new relationships. Clearly, one's relationship with God comes first, but one's relationships with one's family members are very important as well. Thus, Bulgarian Gypsies rarely brought up the issues of alcohol consumption, gambling, egoistic spending, and domestic violence; instead, they claimed that Evangelical men were more likely to be faithful and to be attentive and kind to their wives and children. Going to services, praying, reading the Bible, and participating in various kinds of church activities as a family brings the spouses together. For the New Year's Eve performance at Antioch, for example, married couples spent months rehearsing scenes from the Bible.

Additionally, church leaders may provide explicit advice on how to be a devoted husband and father. Thus, Filip instructed some brothers how to schedule their workload so that they could spend more quality time at home: “I am now noticing that people discuss prioritizing and planning in advance to save some energy for their children and wives at home in the evening. [...] I helped one young couple, where the husband worked all night, and the wife was only fifteen and wanted attention. I counseled them for two hours every week.” This degree of intervention by a church leader in a couple’s private affairs is unheard of in Nadezhda, especially if he is not their relative.

Converting to Evangelical Christianity also transforms some Bulgarian Gypsy men in ways that reflect the distinctive social conditions of this community. A number of interviews with churchgoing Bulgarian Gypsy men revealed that upon accepting Jesus, they withdrew from involvement in networks of criminal activity, which is associated with prolonged absences, the ethos of machismo, and personal endangerment. Given the high local unemployment rates, a considerable number of Bulgarian Gypsy men have become involved in international cartels that traffic sex workers, drugs, and arms. Prior to converting, some of the male members of Antioch and PC2 were also involved in such activities and even spent time in jail. As I already mentioned before, Ognyan left Sliven in the mid-1990s to make quick money for his family by becoming a mafia hit man (even though he knew that people in this line of work died young). However, a sudden, mysterious sickness and the unexpected kindness of strangers brought about an internal spiritual struggle, and he initiated a dialogue with God. God showed him alternative versions of his future, with implications for his family, and He gave him a choice – be a rich killer but die young, or go back to his wife and son, have faith that things will fall into place, and follow God’s path. Ognyan used to be an arrogant boxer who would never set foot in the

kitchen, but he started doing housework and helping his son with homework on a daily basis.

Whereas a Nadezhdan man would never risk being ridiculed for taking on women's chores, he serenely regarded doing housework as an expression of spiritual growth and "humility" that was pleasing to God. He and his wife became humble property managers, but while telling me their story, they were holding hands, glowing; they were clearly happy.

Finally, some of Antioch's leaders and visitors have sought to transform women's domestic lives by arguing that young people should become independent from the older generations. Many newlyweds in the Bulgarian Gypsy community still follow the patriarchal tradition of living with the husband's parents for financial reasons and because it simplifies childcare. The drawback is that such cohabitation often results in intergenerational conflicts and the subordination of younger women. But I noticed signs that Antioch's women of various ages were re-evaluating the custom. Two middle-aged women complained about feuding with their respective daughters-in-law and praised the Western practice of separating the generations because they believed that it led to more harmony among relatives. A few months later, Archer publicly scolded a mother for meddling in her adult son's life and for not letting him "grow up": "In Bulgaria, you have the spirit of cursed generations, where the old generations are too involved in the lives of the young ones," he said. Locals were abuzz after the sermon, and many were commending the wisdom of his words. Soon thereafter, Kalina made the bold decision to move out of her parents' house with her young daughter. Even though renting an apartment was very costly and she no longer could rely on eager baby-sitters around the clock, she derived a tremendous sense of personal satisfaction from feeling independent and self-sufficient.

Evangelical Women's Engagement in the Larger Society

A large literature suggests that Evangelical Christianity advances the status of poor and marginalized women by helping them to integrate socially, economically, and politically in the world outside of their religious community. First, Evangelical churches may help women by teaching them useful skills, such as literacy, musical performance, critical and communication skills, budgeting and event organizing, etc. Second, a number of studies suggest that Evangelical churches promote the value of educating and employing women. Third, most churches are embedded in larger networks of religious organizations and actors, which exposes encapsulated women to new people and ideas. Finally, participatory and egalitarian Evangelical churches can (potentially) provide organizational infrastructure and communal environment for disempowered women to learn how to mobilize and organize in order to fight for political and social justice. On the other hand, some studies describe cases where Protestant churches stifle women's political and civic activism for a range of case-specific reasons I will omit here.

Social, economic, cultural, civic, and political integration is yet one more domain in which Evangelical churches in Nadezhda have failed to advance women. To begin with, the churches make no concerted effort to teach women anything that they can use to grow professionally, and given that women are not encouraged to read the Bible or to participate in church activities outside of attending services (except for cleaning and cooking), they have few opportunities to pick up any handy new skills on their own. Potential exceptions to this rule are the Musician Gypsy female church choir singers, but pursuing a music career is still considered inappropriate for women in this ethnic community. Second, the poorly educated and culturally encapsulated religious leaders in Nadezhda have no interest in challenging patriarchal attitudes toward the education and employment of women. In fact, most embrace and enact those

attitudes. Not many external religious actors have been present enough, and astute enough, to notice and to understand the implications of these cultural constraints on the integration of the community, but the few who have cared to do something ultimately fail because they are not sufficiently tied to the community. Third, female members of Nadezhdan churches shy away from outsiders who visit their congregation, and they rarely join the men to visit sister churches, conferences, concerts, crusades, etc. Thus, being a church member provides encapsulated women with limited exposure to the world outside the ghetto walls, including new people, ideas, and lifestyles. Finally, while pastors are considered to be among the few identifiable “community leaders” in the organizational vacuum of the ghetto, they do little to promote meaningful political and civic action. Part of the problem is that political illiteracy and apathy are rampant, and nothing resembling a “civil society” really ever existed here. But even if that were not the case, many residents would not follow religious leaders because pastors are rumored to be corrupt and opportunistic.

While it is easy to demonstrate that Nadezhdan Evangelical churches have done little to expand women’s horizons, it is much more difficult to claim that the Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical churches in Sliven have helped women to engage with the larger mainstream society, because most of the women at Antioch and PC2 are already relatively integrated. The Antioch congregation always marks holidays celebrating education and culture and blesses male and female students on the first day of school and on their graduation day. Like men, women here usually have a high school diploma, at minimum, and thus they have at least the basic skills required in the manufacturing, retail, food, and service sectors. Due to discrimination, unemployment rates are higher among Bulgarian Gypsy women than among Bulgarian women; but compared to Nadezhdan women, Bulgarian Gypsy women are much more likely to hold

permanent or seasonal jobs (in fact, in a reversal of Nadezhdan migration patterns, it is not uncommon for Bulgarian Gypsy women to pursue employment as nannies, farm workers, and hotel workers abroad alone, leaving their husbands behind to take care of the children and the household). In my limited observations at Antioch and PC2, I found limited clear-cut evidence of activities by the churches that could directly benefit women by providing them with useful professional skills. Most obviously, Kalina offered free weekly English language classes. One couple attended in the hope that it would help their business at the Black Sea during the tourist season.²⁰⁵ Also, I was told that in the past, various preachers from around the country and abroad had dispensed practical advice on saving money, finding jobs, dressing for success, and investing wisely. Filip's workshops that taught members how to organize budgets, time schedules, and events also had potential practical applications in the secular sphere.

Further, even though I do not have longitudinal data and I did not systematically compare Evangelical and Orthodox Christian Bulgarian Gypsies, I still propose that the long-term dynamics in Antioch have broadened members' horizons and helped them engage more smoothly with the larger world. Years of managing various church activities, engaging in participatory charismatic worship, analyzing sermons, and re-evaluating their own self-worth could have benefitted some women professionally by boosting their confidence and determination and by honing such skills as public speaking, budgeting, analytical skills, event organizing, communication skills, and coordinating team members.

Many Bulgarian Gypsies have travelled extensively in the country and abroad (even though the experiences of temporary migrant workers in the EU, in particular, tend to be strenuous and stressful, leaving few good memories). Thus, the well-connected Evangelical

²⁰⁵ Ghodsee (2005b) highlights the importance and gendering of foreign language skills in the Bulgarian tourist sector before and immediately after 1989.

leaders in Nikola Kochev are only a few among countless nodes that link the local residents to the social world outside the ghetto. The churches, however, do add a new facet to the locals' experience of other places, people, ideas, cultures, and lifestyles by enabling engaged interactions with diverse religious actors who are genuinely interested in establishing meaningful connections. Whereas Nadezhdan Christian women rarely even smile at strangers, many Antioch female members are eager to make friends, treating most church visitors as potential sources of valuable knowledge and perspectives. With visiting Bulgarians or Roma, it usually takes no time for Antioch's women to open their homes. With foreigners, most local women can only smile, offer a handshake, and rely on interpreters. Only the few Bulgarian Gypsy women who know English fluently have formed close personal relations with foreign missionaries, especially those who visit regularly. In sum, Bulgarian Gypsies are more likely than Nadezhdans to rely on churches to generate social capital not only in the context of the congregation but beyond it. A number of Antioch and PC2 members – including women – further use Facebook and Skype to keep in touch with their distant contacts. Some of them join diverse religious online networks that include Bulgarians, members of various Roma groups, and numerous nationalities from around the world. In addition to basic communications and Bible verses, such networks expose their members to a wide array of cultural ideas, tastes, and ideological views, including more or less subtle perspectives on gender relations.

Three major limitations with my data make it hard to make definitive statements about the effect of participation in Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical churches on gender relations. First, I spent less time among the Bulgarian Gypsies than among Nadezhdans, and I got to know only a few Eastern Orthodox and agnostic members of the community. Without longitudinal data and well-distributed data across religious affiliations, I cannot speculate confidently that the

Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical churches have had profound transformative effects on their congregations. It is possible that selectivity bias was at work, where certain types of individuals chose to attend Evangelical churches, making the congregation different from the rest of the Bulgarian Gypsy community from the start. Second, while I talked to almost all of the women in the tiny PC2, my selection of informants was less than systematic in the bigger Antioch – many of the women there were very friendly and eager to approach me, so in most cases, I let my informants choose me. A self-selection effect was clearly at work, where I got to know the most talkative and sociable ladies (I was usually the one who opened a channel of communication with the men, who tended to be more reserved). Finally, Sliven's Bulgarian Gypsies, spearheaded by the women in particular, have been one of the best integrated Roma communities in Bulgaria for over a century, so it is difficult to make claims about the Evangelical churches doing anything to integrate them any further. Regardless of these issues, I contend that the Bulgarian Gypsy Evangelical churches affect the lives of their female members in a way that reflects the patterns described in the comparative literature. As typical church organizations that maintain a steady stream of communications with diverse external religious actors, these institutions preach and enact a form of Christianity that exhibits all traits identified as possible catalysts of social change.

CONCLUSION

Despite a popular tendency in the developed Western world to associate Evangelical Christianity with stifling cultural conservatism and socio-economic backwardness, voluminous evidence suggests that in the context of many developing societies, participation in Evangelical churches has actually improved the lives of many severely disadvantaged people on the personal, domestic, communal, and societal level. Even more surprisingly, scholars have credited the global Evangelical movement with empowering women in places where they have traditionally been subordinated to men. In the remaining few pages, I attempt to very briefly explain why this has not happened in Nadezhda. Specifically, I will analyze three features of the neighborhood: the extreme degree of ghettoization of its residents, their extreme stigmatization by the outside world, and the extreme subordination of women to men in every aspect of life. What makes Nadezhda distinctive in comparative perspective is the exaggerated degree to which these three features are at work here, reinforcing each other as they operate in combination. This applies especially to the Naked Gypsies, who live in a ghetto within a ghetto, who are treated like “untouchables” even by other Nadezhdans, and who have retained the most starkly patriarchal cultural practices. Even though I talk about “Nadezhdans” generally below, my account applies most fully to Naked Gypsies, since they best exemplify some of the most extreme aspects of life in Nadezhda. These characteristics of the ghetto are deeply intertwined and interdependent, but for analytical purposes, I will briefly discuss each separately.

A prominent Roma NGO leader from Sofia once told me that there are two kinds of Roma neighborhoods – “mahalas” and “ghettos.” The way to know the difference is to ask people if they want to live there. Mahala residents like their place and want to stay. Ghetto residents feel like they are in a prison and want to leave. By this admittedly analytically clumsy

rule of thumb, Nadezhda falls solidly in the ghetto category. Nadezhda also meets Loic Wacquant's (2010; 2011) definition of a ghetto (or a hyper-ghetto), which is a specific social form characterized by extreme poverty, segregation, stigmatization, and ethnic clustering, in addition to physical dilapidation, institutional dysfunction, and grinding collective demoralization and sense of social inferiority. Nadezhda is among the most segregated ghettos in Europe. For decades, the city of Sliven allowed thousands of stigmatized Turks and Roma to settle in an area that was technically an industrial, uninhabitable zone in order to contain, conceal, and isolate people who were considered hopelessly unredeemable. The socialist authorities even built a giant concrete wall around the ghetto in order to make its existence easier to ignore.

The fall of the socialist regime in 1989 put an end to forced literacy and employment, which had slightly bettered Nadezhdans' lives. At the same time, it allowed the resurgence of racism, aggravated the residents' spatial segregation, and enabled the reassertion of unchecked patriarchal practices, which has been especially problematic for Nadezhdan women and girls in contrast to their counterparts in Nikola Kochev, where Roma are more integrated to begin with. This has contributed to a stark separation of the social networks in the ghetto from those in the outside world, especially in the case of the Naked Gypsies. Today, very few outsiders venture inside, repelled by its daunting walls, gut-wrenching poverty, lack of basic infrastructure and sanitation, and rumors of certain grave dangers to befall anybody who wanders in. With an entirely segregated school that offers subpar education to students who tend to drop out early, the ghetto fails to prepare its residents for decent jobs in post-industrial Sliven. Uneducated and racialized, only a small percentage of them have reasons to go beyond the walls in order to work or to socialize. The vast majority of people survive on meager government assistance, child

subsidies, and odd jobs. They are also forced to rely heavily on extended kin networks, which are structured along patriarchal gendered and gerontocratic principles that further disadvantage young women. Even though tens of thousands of ethnic Bulgarians live only a stone's throw away beyond the walls, many Nadezhdans – and especially women – spend their lives in an encapsulated, distinctive reality that is surreally divorced from that of the nearby mainstream society.

The second characteristic that sets Nadezhda apart from other comparative contexts is that its residents suffer extreme stigmatization. Stigma has plagued Roma in Europe for centuries. Since the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe, in particular, growing socio-economic struggles of Roma have degraded their pariah status even further (Kligman 2001). Nadezhdans, in particular, are a doubly stigmatized population – both in ethnoracial and territorial terms. In addition to being shunned for being Roma, they are also despised as residents of one of the most notorious minority ghettos in Bulgaria. (By contrast, even though they still face some prejudice, the Bulgarian Gypsies in Sliven are much more accepted and occasionally called “our Gypsies” by ethnic Bulgarians.) The seemingly intractable social problem ironically named “Nadezhda” (“hope”) has long been of futile concern to national and international NGOs and IGOs, a nightmare and a nuisance for policy makers, the butt of jokes for bigoted TV hosts, and a source of “evidence” that Roma are impossible to “civilize” for radical nationalist politicians. The vast majority of Sliveners would not consider making eye contact with a Nadezhdan, talking to one on the street, or standing too close to one in line at a store, let alone entering into a Nadezhdan's house, shaking his hand, or eating at her table. And even worse off, within Nadezhda, Naked Gypsies face cumulative hyper-stigmatization, as they are despised and excluded not only by the members of mainstream Bulgarian society, but also by the members of other stigmatized

minority groups in the ghetto. In this respect, their territorial and ethnoracial stigmatization is nested: the Naked Gypsy are the most stigmatized of Nadezhdan Gypsies, which are the most stigmatized among Sliven's Roma. Similarly, the Naked Gypsy area in the ghetto is the most stigmatized part of Nadezhda, which is the most stigmatized neighborhood in Sliven, which itself is stigmatized for being "the Gypsy capital of the Balkans." In the case of men, the stigma also contains an element of emasculation, since Bulgarians have framed them as inherently primitive, cowardly, ignoble, dumb, clownish, unable to take care of their families, and unattractive (dark skinned, smelly, lacking teeth). This, in turn, hurts the women, because men seek to regain their self-esteem by wielding power within the walls of the ghetto.

The third feature that distinguishes Nadezhda is that poverty and prolonged geographic and social isolation have sustained a patriarchal cultural system that includes beliefs and practices that subject women to systematic domination, exclusion, and subordination. Examples include placing little value on the education of young girls by allowing them to drop out of school early; arranging for girls to marry as soon as they achieve puberty; kidnapping and raping girls as a way of forcing them into marriage; removing newly-married girls from school; subjecting young brides to servitude in the house of their in-laws; pressuring teenage newlyweds to have babies; discouraging women from pursuing employment and financial independence; discouraging women from seeking prominence in the public sphere and from competing with men in the economic sphere; condoning informal marriages, which make it easier for men to leave their wives and children; excusing domestic violence, and so on. In sum, women, especially young women, and particularly Naked Gypsy young women, are subjected to multiple forms of oppression. By virtue of entrenched understandings and practices, they are discouraged from planning or being in control of their lives from an early age, they have no voice in the

public domain, and until they are older and have sons and daughters-in-law, they often have little authority in their own households either.

In Chapter Five, I identified and explored four key doctrinal and organizational features of Evangelical Christianity that have helped to advance disempowered women in developing societies: (1) the participatory nature of church organizations and worship style, (2) the doctrinal emphasis on each individual's worth, (3) the focus on family values and the behavioral transformation of males, and (4) the churches' capacity to impart individuals with skills and experiences that make it easier for them to improve their lives in secular society. In the case of Nadezhda, however, the extreme ghettoization, stigmatization, and female subordination interact to prevent these potential religious catalysts for secular social change from working as they have elsewhere. Succinctly put, my argument is that the ghettoization and stigmatization of the neighborhood have led to the creation of a segregated religious field that remains largely detached from the religious networks on the outside. Within this segregated space, patriarchal understandings and practices that take female subordination for granted have been interwoven into an indigenous form of Evangelical Christianity whose institutional dynamics, beliefs, and practices do not, in fact, contribute to women's advancement in or outside of the home.

To begin with, the extreme ghettoization and stigmatization of Nadezhda – and the consequent extreme segregation of social networks – have prevented the local adoption of key Evangelical institutional arrangements and practices that have benefited non-dominant populations in other parts of the world. In the 1990s, some Bulgarian leaders and members of Protestant churches in Sliven attempted to create social and institutional ties with Nadezhda. However, due to a mixture of deep-seated prejudice and frustration with Nadezhdans' reluctance to be “proper” Christians (e.g., read the Bible) and establish “proper” churches (e.g., where

leaders operated transparently and were accountable), they eventually abandoned the ghetto. Today, almost every Nadezhdan church belongs to a handful of feuding charismatic denominations that established themselves in the Bulgarian religious marketplace after the fall of socialism and that have no other member churches in the Town. Headed by Bulgarians with extensive contacts abroad, these denominations seek domestic expansion and foreign funding primarily by attracting vulnerable residents of Roma ghettos, whose poverty and alleged child-like hunger for God fascinate many foreign religious actors. One aspect of their strategy has been to make it easy for poorly educated Roma, such as Nadezhdans, to pursue pastors' "credentials" in segregated, unaccredited, and substandard seminaries, where they tend to acquire a crude grasp of scripture and little know-how regarding managing religious organizations or shepherding congregations. Having certified numerous aspiring Roma pastors, these new denominations then create many new Roma churches by liberally registering competing local players who are granted full institutional autonomy. They do so in the hope of attracting more foreign sponsors by showing nominal growth among the most impoverished and racialized populations in Europe.

In the case of Nadezhda, this dynamic has led to the proliferation of dozens of organizations that are nominally "Evangelical Christian churches," but in practice share few traits with organizations that bear the same label in other contexts. As opposed to a spiritual calling, a means for saving souls, and a venue for serving their parishioners and the community, many pastors see their office as a source of scarce material benefits and social prestige. To borrow Weber's distinction, they live "off," not "for," religion. Consequently, Nadezhdan churches are not egalitarian and participatory institutions where many members, including women, share in the responsibility of leading and managing church activities. Instead, pastors

guard their power jealously, claim to monopolize spiritual gifts, and run the churches as authoritarian and opportunistic business owners. In many cases, there is no distinction between the church and the pastor's home, between the church's revenue and the pastor's income, and between the church's leadership and the pastor's circle of close male relatives. Combined with the widely shared patriarchal understanding that women should not seek prominence in the public sphere, the non-participatory, non-egalitarian, opaque, and unaccountable nature of Nadezhdan churches offers no opportunities for women's empowerment through leadership and engagement in ecclesiastic life. In the absence of other public institutions, wielding power in the local religious field has provided another venue for Nadezhdan men to regain self-esteem, after being emasculated by the broader society, at the expense of women.

In addition to providing no institutional oversight over their nominal affiliates, Bulgarian and foreign religious actors have failed to introduce Nadezhdans to key doctrinal concepts of Evangelical Christianity that have changed the lives of women elsewhere. To a large extent, this is because they have put little effort into establishing meaningful, regular, long-term relationships with the stigmatized residents of the segregated ghetto. Bulgarian Evangelicals who enter the neighborhood mostly do so as paid interpreters for touring foreign missionaries. Few stay to socialize or to discuss spiritual issues, especially not with shy women. Foreign missionaries are drawn to Nadezhdans, but they are entirely dependent on Bulgarian intermediaries when it comes to planning trips and communicating with Roma. Since Bulgarian mediators tend to overload missionaries' itineraries with visits to numerous impoverished Roma communities and to limit direct contact between foreigners and any one Roma congregation, most foreign missionaries who visit Nadezhda usually do so in passing, for a couple of hours in order to attend a service, to deliver a testimony, to sing a song, to leave some boxes with

donations, and to take some pictures. They do not talk to the locals or make any meaningful impact on Nadezhdans' religious beliefs and practices. Over the past two decades, only a couple of foreigners have become more invested in the ghetto, visiting for a day or two every year and initiating social projects that seek to bring about positive social change. However, even those rare individuals lack the communication skills, cultural understanding, trusted local contacts, and willingness to put in the time and effort necessary to make a difference.

Facilitated by their institutional autonomy and segregation from external religious networks, Nadezhdan Christians have borrowed heavily from locally prevailing cultural understandings to construct indigenous "Evangelical" beliefs and practices that diverge from identically labeled phenomena in the comparative literature. To be sure, some common elements exist: the belief in God's miracles, the belief in the need to have faith and to pray, and the belief in the redeeming value of abstaining from harmful substances and "sinful" behaviors. However, the local version of Evangelical Christianity has failed to raise awareness about the inherent worth and divine mission of each individual, especially in the case of women. Pulling girls out of school at early ages, having women do housework around the clock, and deeming it inappropriate for women to leave the house without a chaperone make it hard for women to engage in participatory activities with other women, such as reading the Bible in group settings, which is essential for developing a sense of elevated self-worth, confidence, personal divine mission, and responsibility for one's life. Since patriarchal tradition deems it inappropriate for women to compete with men for power in the public sphere, and since spiritual gifts designate coveted authority that is strategically monopolized by pastors, most local women (particularly Naked Gypsy young women) do not even imagine that they could be spiritually empowered through God's anointment. The rule against women expressing themselves in public similarly

prevents them from achieving a rewarding sense of subjectivity through the performative act of delivering personal testimonies of conversion and transformation.

The local version of Evangelical Christianity has endorsed patriarchal marriage practices and familial structures that severely disadvantage young women. It is true that going to church has stopped some men from drinking alcohol, smoking, gambling, cheating, and engaging in domestic violence, which has benefitted embattled women. However, these have constituted individual behavioral adjustments that just happen to have a positive impact on conjugal dynamics. Given that both pastors and parishioners – women as well as men – are deeply invested in Nadezhda's prevailing way of life, the local believers have found no doctrinal reasons to revisit such issues as arranged and early marriages, family planning, youth education, the practice of multiple generations living together, women's employment, the imbalance of power between spouses, etc. Consequently, Nadezhdan churchgoers are no more likely than non-churchgoers to delay marriage and children, finish their education, and find better employment in order to become reliable family providers without being financially dependent on older kin.

Finally, the Nadezhdan version of Evangelical Christianity fails to align with other, more typical examples of Evangelical Christianity along one last dimension: the ability of Evangelical churches to provide skills and experiences that benefit their members professionally, socially, and politically. First, since the churches in the ghetto exclude women from leadership positions and from organized activities, female members have not been able to develop useful skills – such as literacy, analytical reasoning, budgeting, event planning, communication skills, etc. – through experience. In the few cases where external actors have offered practical training to Nadezhdan believers – such as computer and ESL classes – it has been understood that only men could

benefit, since women do not to pursue education and professional development. Second, even though Nadezhdan churches have been excluded from foreign and Bulgarian religious networks, they have provided some men with social capital through contacts with members of Roma churches in nearby towns and villages. Female believers, however, have had few opportunities to form relationships with Christian Roma in the region because they are expected to retreat and to let the men host church guests. Household chores, objections by husbands and in-laws, and neighbors' gossip also discourage women from traveling outside of the ghetto in order to visit sister churches. Third, the segregated residents of the ghetto, especially the women, are completely alienated from the political arena. While many of the pastors have accepted bribes for delivering votes to politicians, they never talk politics outside of elections. They may be the most legitimate community leaders in the ghetto, but they reject the responsibility of mobilizing Christians in order to demand political action, even though the desperately run-down neighborhood could really use it. The churches also do not provide the kind of participatory organizational framework that is necessary to nurture grassroots communal activism. Hence, by joining so-called "Evangelical" churches, Nadezhdan women have not come any closer to becoming informed citizens who have the courage and the means to defend their individual and corporate interests and who can effectively make political demands.

The entrenched understandings and practices that sustain extreme female subordination have distorted key aspects of Nadezhdan Evangelical beliefs and practices. Earlier, I described Bulgarian and foreign religious actors as having no interest in shaping religious or secular life in Nadezhda. While this statement applies to the vast majority of those who visit the ghetto, there are, in fact, a few exceptions. Over the past two decades, a handful of Bulgarian and foreign Evangelicals have been deeply disturbed by what they have seen in Nadezhda, and they have

tried to do something about it. This includes a Bulgarian woman who visited the Naked Gypsies for two years to preach and to lead Bible discussion groups with children and youth; two American missionaries, who sponsored different kinds of programs to encourage children to stay in school; and two other missionaries – a Turkish German and a Korean American – who consistently criticized the Turkish congregations they sponsored about the practice of early arranged marriages and chronic youth unemployment. However, all of their efforts have failed because the same entrenched understandings and practices that sustain female subordination have made Nadezhdans unreceptive to their attempts. The Bulgarian lady eventually quit in exhaustion. The American missionaries visited infrequently and could not communicate directly with the locals; hence, they had no clue that their money was being misused, that some of the sponsored children had quit school a long time ago, and that some of the aid they provided was inappropriate and used as kindling. The German missionary, Kadir, was most familiar with the local culture and its challenges. He was also genuinely frustrated with Nadezhdans' resistance to change. He reported that he had spent years scolding pastors and church members – in sermons and individually – about their “non-Christian” lifestyle, but in one case after another, the locals listened, supposedly agreed, and then just continued in their old ways.

Patriarchal understandings and practices that sustain female subordination are deeply entrenched in Nadezhda, even among women, for a variety of reasons. In the case of early marriages, for example, some genuinely believe that this is how things should be done because “it is our way” and because they prevent “immoral” sexual relations among youth; some older women benefit from the practice by acquiring a young subservient daughter-in-law; some girls' parents claim to dislike the idea, but feel social pressure to follow the practice because otherwise they would doom their daughter to spinsterhood; and many girls themselves have been taught

that this is what is natural, and if they are forbidden to marry too young, some of them may (threaten to) elope and “marry” without their parents’ permission anyways. To change just this one practice, there needs to be a fundamental change in the attitudes, incentives, and rules of the entire community. Disengagement from the broader cultural environment, however, prevents change from starting within, as residents lack the grounds or the initiative to confront that with which they have little experience. Certain key aspects of Evangelical Christianity have facilitated this kind of fundamental transformation of people and communities in other contexts, but the ghettoization and stigmatization of Nadezhda have prevented these aspects from being imported into the neighborhood. The few feeble attempts that have been made have failed to find a receptive audience.

Perhaps if Bulgarian and foreign Evangelicals made a truly sustained commitment to long-term work in Nadezhda, to understanding the local social conditions and cultural complexities, and to getting to know the people on a personal level, then they could meaningfully exchange ideas and practices and begin to transform individual lives and communities. (I would argue that this kind of long-term physical embeddedness, cultural understanding, personal engagement, and patience is required not only for religious actors, but also for NGO staff and for government officials in Nadezhda.) This would certainly not be easy, and there would be obstacles. Nadezhdan pastors would not welcome genuinely invested outsiders intruding on their turf, believing (no doubt correctly) that this might challenge their authority and undermine local beliefs and practices. But the alternative to sustained engagement amounts to acquiescence to sheer and enduring human misery. In the heart of an EU member country to which the EU itself has committed much verbiage about Roma rights and substantial sums of money to promote programs to better their lot, thousands of stigmatized people live in

abject poverty and profound social isolation behind the walls of an outrageous ghetto. And in a world defined by expanding forms of moral and humanitarian engagement with distant others (Stamatov 2013), the failure to engage them is not only heartbreaking, it is unacceptable.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF INFORMANTS

Pseudonym	Approximate Age / Gender	Ethnic Group	Further Relevant Information
Albena	20s / F	Bulgarian Gypsy	Churchgoer; wife of Pastor Zahari
Adem	40s / M	Turkish	Pastor
Adriana	40s / F	Bulgarian Gypsy	Irregular churchgoer
Akila	30s / F	Turkish	Churchgoer
Alev	20s / F	Turkish	Churchgoer
Angelov	30s / M	Bulgarian	Scholar; international evangelist
Anita	20s / F	Bulgarian Gypsy	Non-churchgoer; NGO staff
Apostol	30s / M	Bulgarian	Orthodox priest
Archer	30s / M	American	Evangelist; mentor
Argir	40s / M	Musician Gypsy	Former Musician Gypsy pastor
Bedia	20s / F	Turkish	Non-churchgoer
Behice	20s / F	Turkish	Irregular churchgoer
Belgin	30s / F	Turkish	Churchgoer
Berat	40s / M	Turkish	Pastor
Berk	30s / M	Turkish	Pastor
Bilyan	Teens / M	Naked Gypsy	Churchgoer; Karamfila's husband
Boneva	40s / F	Bulgarian Gypsy	NGO Director
Boreva	40s / F	Bulgarian	School Principal
Bozhko	40s / M	Naked Gypsy	Pastor
Bryan	60s / M	American	Humanitarian missionary
Caleb	20s / M	British	Visits Antioch yearly as a youth counselor
Cenk	20s / M	Turkish	Churchgoer; health mediator
Damyan	40s / M	Musician Gypsy	Pastor
Dancho	30s / M	Naked Gypsy	Churchgoer; Mina's husband
Daskalov	50s / M	Bulgarian	Local historian
Delka	20s / F	Musician Gypsy	Irregular churchgoer; Dora's cousin
Demir	50s / M	Turkish	Pastor
Dimitra	20s / F	Bulgarian Gypsy	Irregular churchgoer; Labor Bureau staff
Dobrev	40s / M	Bulgarian Gypsy	Doctor; head of HOR
Dora	20s / F	Musician Gypsy	Churchgoer; Lazar's wife
Dragan	50s / M	Musician Gypsy	Churchgoer; Dora's father

Pseudonym	Approximate Age / Gender	Ethnic Group	Further Relevant Information
Egemen	50s / M	Turkish	Non-churchgoer
Emin	30s / M	Turkish	Imam
Euthemia	20s / F	Greek	NGO Director
Evstati	50s / M	Naked Gypsy	Pastor
Filip	30s / M	Bulgarian Gypsy	Churchgoer; church leader
Ganka	40s / F	Naked Gypsy	Preacher's wife
Gavril	30s / M	Bulgarian	Pastor
Gizem	20s / F	Turkish	Non-churchgoer; Behice's cousin
Hakan	40s / M	Turkish	Imam
Kadir	40s / M	Turkish German	Missionary; mentor
Kadriye	40s / F	Turkish	Churchgoer; Pastor Berat's wife
Kalcho	50s / M	Naked Gypsy	Pastor
Kalina	30s / F	Bulgarian Gypsy	Churchgoer; Pastor Zahari's sister; health mediator
Karamfila	Teens / F	Musician Gypsy	Churchgoer; Bilyan's wife
Keith	40s / M	American	Evangelist
Kerana	30s / F	Naked Gypsy	Non-churchgoer; Lambi's wife
Kina	70s / F	Musician Gypsy	Churchgoer; one of the first Christians in Nadezhda; Lazar's mother
Kolev	30s / M	Bulgarian	Denominational overseer
Lambi	30s / M	Naked Gypsy	Non-churchgoer; Kerana's husband
Lazar	30s / M	Musician Gypsy	Irregular churchgoer; Dora's husband
Linus	50s / M	Greek	Missionary; mentor
Lonev	50s / M	Bulgarian	Pastor
Luchezar	30s / M	Bulgarian Gypsy	Churchgoer; health mediator
Lyudmil	30s / M	Bulgarian	Mediator
Manev	30s / M	Ukrainian	Pastor
Manol	30s / M	Bulgarian Gypsy	Churchgoer
Matei	30s / M	Bulgarian	Churchgoer
Michael	50s / M	British	Humanitarian missionary
Mina	20s / F	Naked Gypsy	Churchgoer; Dancho's wife
Nadya	30s / F	Bulgarian Gypsy	Churchgoer
Nevena	40s / F	Musician Gypsy	Non-churchgoer; Dora's cousin
Ognyan	40s / M	Bulgarian Gypsy	Churchgoer
Pavlov	60s / M	Bulgarian	Churchgoer; international evangelist
Petra	50s / F	Musician Gypsy	Churchgoer; Dora's mother

Pseudonym	Approximate Age / Gender	Ethnic Group	Further Relevant Information
Petrov	30s / M	Bulgarian	Denominational overseer; foundation head
Ralitzia	30s / F	Bulgarian	NGO staff, Sofia
Samuel	50s / M	American	Evangelist and mentor
Sarah	20s / F	British	Missionary who visits Antioch yearly as a youth counselor
Semih	Teens / M	Turkish	Irregular churchgoer; Sevda's son
Sevda	40s / F	Turkish	Irregular churchgoer
Smith	50s / M	American	Kingdom Adventurer
Spasena	50s / F	Naked Gypsy	Churchgoer
Tanya	30s / F	Bulgarian Gypsy	Jehovah's Witness
Toncho	20s / M	Naked Gypsy	Churchgoer; health mediator
Toshka	50s / F	Naked Gypsy	Churchgoer; Pastor Kalcho's wife
Valeri	20s / M	Bulgarian	Churchgoer
Vasilev	40s / M	Bulgarian	Directorate of Religious Denominations, Council of Ministers, Sofia
Vela	40s / F	Musician Gypsy	Irregular churchgoer
Veliko	40s / M	Musician Gypsy	Pastor
Velina	20s / F	Bulgarian Gypsy	Irregular churchgoer; health mediator
Veselinov	40s / M	Bulgarian	Pastor
Veska	30s / F	Musician Gypsy	Dora's sister
Vincent	40s / M	Canadian	Evangelist
Vitan	30s / M	Naked Gypsy	Irregular churchgoer
William	50s / M	British	Humanitarian missionary
Yovko	40s / M	Musician Gypsy	Churchgoer
Zahari	30s / M	Bulgarian Gypsy	Pastor
Zara	50s / F	Musician Gypsy	Churchgoer; Dora's aunt
Zhelyazko	30s / M	Naked Gypsy	Pastor
Zhovko	40s / M	Musician Gypsy	Pastor
Zora	20s / F	Musician Gypsy	Churchgoer; band member

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