

## CONSERVATIVE NEO-PROTESTANTS: ROMANIAN NAZARENES IN SERBIA

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### Introduction

In contemporary society, religious pluralism presents a range of complex challenges to religious groups and communities. The collapse of Communism and the emergence of renewed forms of nationalism in a number of post-Communist countries resulted in religious revival. The policy of atheism led by Communists led to the rejection of any authority of institutionalized religion. Between 1989 and 1991, after the Communist period, in Romania and in Serbia the number of those declaring themselves as "believers" increased considerably. This growth meant also moving away from traditional religious expressions towards new forms of religion. Neo-Protestants such as Baptists, Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists, according to Parushev and Pili, made their way to Eastern European countries in the second half of the nineteenth century and during the first decades of the twentieth century. Thus in that period there was a migration of Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and German Protestants into the northern areas of southern Slavs, while the colporteurs of the British and Foreign Bible Society distributed Bibles in the Balkans (Parushev, Pili 2004: 157).

This paper will focus on the existence of neo-Protestant religious communities among the Romanian ethnic minority in Serbia and the presence of conservative Nazarenes. In Serbia today, Nazarenes have less than 900 baptized members, even though at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century their number was 15,000. The majority of Nazarenes immigrated during the First and Second World War to the United States. There they were called *New Amish* or *New Mennonites*.<sup>1</sup> Today the most numerous group, with approximately 400 members, live in the Romanian village of Lokve, in the province of Vojvodina. This Romanian group – illuminates the position of small and minority religious groups in Serbia in general. Even though the dominant confession of the Romanian national minority in Vojvodina is Romanian Orthodoxy, a new dimension of religious identity is provided by the numerous small religious groups themselves. Many are not publicly visible in Serbia, and some, like the Nazarenes, are so small and located in remote corners to be almost invisible. This paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork research I conducted from 2008 in Romanian villages in Serbia within the larger research project "Ethnic and social stratification of the Balkans" conducted on behalf of the Institute for Balkan studies SASA.

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<sup>1</sup> Slavic sources used here speak of "new" Amish or Mennonites, but scholarship in USA on the Nazarenes that immigrated describes them joining with fellow believers (Neutäufer) from Switzerland (with whom some former Amish and Mennonites had joined in the 1890s), and are generally known as Apostolic Christians Churches (indeed with several sub-divisions). - editor's note.

## Religious Identity of Romanians in Vojvodina

The region of Vojvodina is a territory characterized by deep intercultural relationships due to its ethnic diversity. The Romanian minority in Serbia today number around 35,000 people who live in more than 40 localities in the central and southern part of the Serbian Banat, Vojvodina province.<sup>2</sup> In 1848, western Banat became part of Vojvodina, a Serbian autonomous region within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, under the Habsburg rule, a planned colonization took place which brought German, Hungarian, Serbian, Romanian, Slovak, Ruthenian, and Czech settlers into this region. The Banat had been inhabited by Romanians since the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest Romanian settlements date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century; other settlements with a majority Romanian population were formed during the great migrations of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Romanians inhabiting the region of Serbian Banat are not all of the same origin. Three different groups were distinguished, originating from the Banat, the Ardeal and Oltenia. They were not separately grouped but mixed in the settlements of the southern and central Banat (Maluckov 1985:31).

The religious identity of Romanians is not homogenous: different churches or religious communities in Vojvodina exist among ethnic Romanians. The Romanians from Transylvania and Banat in 1691 accepted the jurisdiction of the Orthodox metropolitan church of Karlovac (Karlowitz). By the decree of Emperor Franz Joseph I of December 1864, ethnic Romanians obtained their own national church. Ecclesiastical independence was an important factor in the development of national consciousness (Đurić-Milovanović 2007: 172). Besides the Romanian Orthodox Church, ethnic Romanians belong to the Romanian Uniate Church, which recognizes papal primacy, being an Eastern Rite or Greek-Catholic Church ranked as a Major Archepiscopal Church, which uses the Byzantine liturgical rite in the Romanian language. Today in Vojvodina there is only one active parish of that church in the village of Markovac near the town of Vršac and it consists of about 200 members. Until 1963 there was also a parish in the village of Jankov Most in the central part of Serbian Banat, but since then it was closed. These two parishes belonged to the Eparchy of Lugoj, which is a diocese of the Romanian Eastern Rite Church and was established in 1853.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the Romanian Orthodox Church which until 1863 officially used Church Slavonic in its Byzantine liturgy, the Romanian Eastern Rite Church used the Romanian vernacular since its beginnings.

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, various neo-Protestant denominations such as the Nazarenes, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Pentecostals appeared among the Romanians in Vojvodina. The first Romanian neo-Protestants were Nazarenes, with their congregations founded in the villages of Lokve and Banatsko Novo Selo between 1880 and 1890. Historian Bojan Aleksov emphasizes that, after the Serbs, Orthodox Romanians were the most numerous among the converted and are remembered as the strictest of all Nazarenes in their faith, customs and closeness of their community (Aleksov 2006: 77). Among the Catholics, there were only a few Nazarene converts, but this was not the case for other Protestant churches, especially for members of the Lutheran Church. Based on reports of British Quakers and Dutch Mennonites in the late nineteenth century, historian Peter Brock approximated the number of Nazarenes in Hungary to be 13,000-15,000 (Brock 1980: 54). Serbian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Dimitrijević at the end of nineteenth century wrote a more detailed review that placed the official number of the Serbian Nazarenes in present day Vojvodina to be 1,465 (only in the Banat to be 1,000) (Dimitrijević 1894: 103). The Nazarenes were the first and largest neo-Protestant group,

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<sup>2</sup> More about the history of Romanian settlements in the Serbian Banat in Măran 2003.

<sup>3</sup> For more about Romanian Greek-Catholic Eparchy of Lugoj see: Wallner-Barbulescu 2007.

inhabiting mostly the ethnically diverse region of today's Vojvodina.<sup>4</sup> The roots of the Nazarenes go back to the first half of the nineteenth century in Switzerland, but the largest growth of the community was witnessed in the Habsburg Empire and the Balkans. Founder of Swiss Neutäufer (Nazarenes) was Samuel Heinrich Froehlich (1803-1857) who was deeply influenced by the Anabaptists, the radical reformers in sixteenth century Europe. He embraced the following Anabaptist teachings: Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone is the sole rule of faith and practical living, separation of church and state, believers' baptism – adult baptism as opposed to infant baptism, holiness of life, nonviolence – as opposed to going to war in the name of Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

The Nazarene community left only a few written sources. The available information on the Nazarenes from the Habsburg Monarchy and Serbia usually appeared as anti-Nazarene propaganda published by Orthodox priests and historians. The most exhaustive critic of the Nazarenes by a Serbian author, was Vladimir Dimitrijević, who wrote several books<sup>6</sup> and published a number of articles in his mission to dissuade people from the Nazarene 'heresy' (Aleksov 2006: 25). The historian of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Đoko Slijepčević, describes, in one of his studies, the early expansion of Nazarenes in Serbia (Slijepčević 1943). The studies of historian Bojan Aleksov on Nazarenes in Serbia and Hungary (Aleksov 2006, 2000) provide a very detailed history of this community from its beginnings and also analyze the relationship between the state and the Nazarenes. Aleksov also examines the changes in the Serbian Orthodox Church in the period of Nazarene expansion and the appearance of a new Evangelical oriented movement within the Orthodox Church – later known as the *Bogomoljci* [God Prayers] movement, which actually developed an independent life from the Church, but continued to consider itself Orthodox. The available literature in Serbian tends to emphasize pacifism as a major factor of the Nazarene faith and is generally restricted to superficial observations. Coming from the wave of neo-Protestantism, the Nazarenes reasserted fundamental doctrines of the Reformation. Aleksov in his study *Religious Dissent between the Modern and the National Nazarenes in Hungary and Serbia 1850-1914* stresses: "The Nazarenes especially attracted members of numerous ethnic minorities living in Hungary at the time, the Orthodox Serbs being the most prone to conversion. These Serbian converts were in fact the first Protestant Serbs" Aleksov 2006: 11).

Similar trends can be observed among Romanians, who were under the jurisdiction of archbishopric of Karlovci from 1691 until the year 1863. At the time of greatest expansion at the end of the nineteenth century, the Nazarenes were the focus of much political and ecclesiastic attention. Nazarenes became known for their vehement opposition to accepting any oath or military service and also refrained from voting. Aleksov emphasizes that "in both Hungary and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Nazarenes were perceived as a kind of social movement of the oppressed, as their ethical and religious perfectionism prompted them to strongly criticize the prevailing religious and political order" (Aleksov 2000).

The influence of Anabaptists and German pietism, especially the belief in non-violent resistance, was reflected in their refusal to carry arms, but also regarding adult baptism. The congregations founded by Froehlich's followers in Switzerland, France, and Germany, many of

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<sup>4</sup> After the Toleration Edict of 1781 by Emperor Joseph the majority of colonists in contemporary Vojvodina were Protestants – Lutheran Germans and Slovaks of Augsburg Lutheran and Calvinist Hungarians. See further: Bjelajac 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Short overview of the early history and beliefs of the Nazarenes in: Peter Brock 1980, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> Some of Dimitrijević's books are: *Nazarenstvo: njegova istorija i suština* [Nazarenism: Its History and Essence], Novi Sad, Srpska manastirska štamparija, 1894; *Jeđan razgovor sa nazarenima* [One Conversation with the Nazarenes], Pančevo, Knjižara Braća Jovanović, 1894; *Zašto se nazarenstvo u nas širi i kako bi se moglo sprečiti* [Why are Nazarenes Gaining Ground Among Our People and How to Prevent That], Novi Sad, Štamparija srpske knjižare Braće M. Popovića, 1898; *U nazarenskoj skupštini* [In the Nazarene Assembly], Budimpešta, Štamparija Srpskih novosti, 1903.

which later immigrated to the United States of America, were often called *Amish* or *New Amish* or *New Mennonites*. In Switzerland and Germany they were known under a multitude of names: *Neutäufer*, *Gemeinden Evangelischen Taufgesinnter*, *Fröhlichianer*. In the United States the official name of the Nazarene community founded by Froehlich is *Apostolic Christian Church* and they are not to be confused with the Church of the Nazarene, founded in the United States in this century.<sup>7</sup> The name *Nazarenes* refers only to the members of this religious community in Vojvodina. Brock stresses that the name *Nazarenes* was officially coined in 1836 in Switzerland, but according to Aleksov, no one explains how the name came to be associated only with those in the Habsburg Empire (Aleksov 2006: 55). Members of the new churches in the United States consisted of immigrants from the Evangelical Baptist Church in Europe and American converts from those who had previously settled in those areas, especially Amish and Mennonite groups. Sharing their Protestant outlook, the Nazarenes were naturally the target of all newly emerging Neo-Protestant denominations, whose history indicates many references to former Nazarenes as their founding members.

From Hungary, the Nazarene faith spread throughout Eastern Europe. The Nazarenes were widely persecuted by the European authorities due their stance on peace and objection to weapons or war. During World War II many men were imprisoned and tortured for their beliefs because of non-violence. About Romanian Nazarene communities there are no written sources, they are only mentioned in the letter of the Romanian Orthodox Church as “dangerous sect that appeared in Romanian village of Sân Mihai<sup>8</sup> in Serbian Banat is gaining more and more converts, so we need more religious literature in the Romanian language as well as Bibles” (Nedelcea-Cotescu 2006: 166). Romanian Nazarenes have had believers in many Romanian villages, but also in ethnically mixed communities in towns, like Vršac, Pančevo, Novi Sad, and Zrenjanin. Services were held in several languages, so as our informants explained “Everybody can hear the word of God in their mother tongue” (LN, V, 2009).<sup>9</sup> One of the strengths of this religious community was its ability to recruit members from all the nationalities that inhabited this ethnically mixed area. Most of the converts were Hungarians, but there was also a considerable number of Romanians, Serbs and Germans (Brock 1980: 53). In Romania today the Nazarene community has about 1,000 members, with the center in the town of Arad (Romanian Banat). The oldest Nazarene community was in Sendlac, Arad County, founded in 1890. There were also Serbian Nazarenes in Romanian Banat, with the most numerous centers in Cenei, Gad, and Timisoara. Like in Serbia, Nazarene communities in Romania gained fewer and fewer members, while the number of other neo-Protestants, especially Baptists and Pentecostals is increasing.

Each congregation consists of full baptized members, called brothers and sisters, and non-baptized community friends. Strict discipline was imposed as a necessary rescue from irresponsibility and immorality regarding the previous way of life of the newly converted members. One of the most important religious practices in the Nazarene community is conversion. Becoming a true believer requires the experience of conversion, a dramatic change which implies the rediscovery of Christ and faith. The sinner becomes aware of his/her sins and through God, forgiveness is acquired again. This strict Nazarene discipline also prescribed the adoption of everyday behavioral norms approved by those who were already members of the community (Aleksov 2006: 102). Prohibitions include drinking of alcohol and coffee, smoking, cursing and using other bad language, and watching television, going to the theater and other public places.

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<sup>7</sup> More about the Apostolic Christian Church on the official website: <http://www.apostolicchristianchurch.org>, although the Nazarene communities in Serbia and Romania do not have their Internet web sites, which confirms their closeness and non-proselitism.

<sup>8</sup> Sân Mihai – present name Lokve.

<sup>9</sup> Quotations from interviews will contain only initials of informants name, initial letter of place and year.

Worship services are held on Sundays, but various churches also conduct additional mid-week services, usually on Thursday. Describing Protestant religious communities and their culture, Tomislav Branković gives some information based on the research of the Nazarene community from Zemun (Belgrade municipality): “the community prohibits the believers from visiting public places, such as theaters, cinemas, civil weddings or religious customs of the other churches” (Branković 2006: 7). With the Nazarenes, the preachers are the ones who spontaneously interpret the Bible, while all the other Nazarene believers take part in the collective hymn singing. Dissociating themselves from the Orthodox Church and other established churches, everyone willing to join the Nazarene community is offered an opportunity to learn to read and write and to speak about and interpret their spiritual experience (Aleksov 2006: 111).

The origins of Nazarene hymn singing can be found in German Lutheran hymn singing. Froehlich’s followers in Switzerland used various booklets and compilation of Pietistic hymns until 1852 when he composed the *New Zion’s Harp*. The Serbian poet Jovan Jovanović Zmaj together with Đorđe Rajković translated the *New Zion’s Harp* from German to Serbian and this translation appeared in 1878. Aleksov stresses that “these were the first religious hymns in vernacular since the Orthodox Church in its services used the nineteenth century translation of hymns” (Aleksov 2006a: 25). This first Serbian version of the *Zion’s Harp* was published in only 800 copies. Ten years later another 2,000 were added, while the third edition reached 8,600 copies. There were also, according to Aleksov, handwritten copies, which are the most treasured relics among the descendants of the first Nazarenes (Aleksov 2006a: 26). The Romanian translation appeared later, in 1894, in 200 copies. According to Aleksov the success of the Serbian translation of *Zion’s Harp* becomes even more apparent when compared with the Romanian edition of *Zion’s Harp*, which first appeared only in 1894 in two thousand copies and poor translation. Dimitrijević emphasized that Romanian Nazarenes could not find a poet versed in translation, nor a printing house (Dimitrijević 1898: 70). The Romanian translation was printed in a Neutäufer press in Zurich and it was signed by Ion Balnojan from the village of Banatsko Novo Selo (Serbian Banat) in the Banat (Rom. *bănățean*) dialect of the Romanian language.

The 1895 articles of Dimitrijević published in the church journal *Church and school (Biserică și școală)*: *Cu privire la nazarenism*, nr. 11 [About Nazarens], *O scurtă privire asupra istoriei și ființei Nazarenismului*, nr.18 [Short Overview of the History of Nazarens], *O nouă armă în mână nazarenilor români*, nr. 34 [A New Weapon in Romanian Nazarene’s Hands) are the first reports on Nazarenes among Romanians (Dimitrijević 1898: 70). Bible translations and vernacular language of the services had an important role for spreading of Nazarenism. During our field research in the village of Banatsko Novo Selo our informants have shown us examples of old *Zion’s Harp*, printed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Romania, and distributed among Romanian Nazarene believers. Today, versions of *Zion’s Harp* exist in German, Hungarian, Slovak, Serbian and Romanian languages. In some ethnically mixed Nazarene assemblies in Vojvodina services are held in different languages: in Slovakian in the villages of Kovačica, Padina, Janošik, in Serbian in Melenci, Bavanište etc. and in Romanian in Lokve, Nikolinci, Straža, Grebenac, Vlajkovac, Vladimirovac, Banatsko Novo Selo.

Language is a very important part of religious services, and in those communities with mixed ethnicities services are bilingual. The Romanian Nazarene community in the village of Lokve is perceived as the most closed and conservative one within all Nazarene communities in Serbia. Very few Nazarenes will speak about themselves or their community and religious practice. This additionally complicates fieldwork. Gaining access to the Nazarene community in the village of Lokve required the greatest effort, because this community is perceived as very closed off and more

conservative even by other Nazarene communities from this part of the Vojvodina. During our fieldwork research, conversations were conducted in the mother tongue of the interlocutors (Romanian), which facilitated spontaneous communication.

The method used in research is that of an open-ended interview where our informants usually choose their personal narrative or life story, which indicates the manner in which they relate to their past, community, memory, religious beliefs, implicitly portraying the manner they see themselves comparing to others. During the research, conversations were also conducted with members of local communities, usually Orthodox Romanians. From these conversations, we can see how the latter perceive the Nazarenes and what they consider to be the most important distinguishing elements in the Nazarene religion. Usually, Romanian Orthodox emphasize as different from them: the cemetery without crosses, singing in the Nazarene assemblies, and their way of dressing. During the conversations, the researcher adjusted to the informants and did not have a strict questionnaire, which gave us access to more complex identity constructions. During fieldwork in Nazarene communities of south Banat, our informants, narrating their life stories, tried to explain some basic elements of the Nazarene dogma, their way of life and relationships with other 'sister' communities from this region. The autobiographical method offers the interlocutors the chance to express themselves and it helps the researcher understand their world, and also sometimes provides more information which might not be mentioned in a questionnaire.

Doing fieldwork with marginalized groups and 'micro-communities' we try to find as adequate a methodological approach as possible. The interviews were largely conducted in Romanian, although a few were conducted in a combination of Romanian and Serbian. While conducting field research, very often we were refused by our potential Nazarene interlocutors. Even if we encountered subjects in public places, they usually refused to speak with the researchers. Members of the local community, especially in the village of Lokve, who were mostly Romanian Orthodox, discouraged us saying that they would not consent to a conversation, nor allow us to go to their assembly. Nevertheless Serbian Nazarenes in other villages were more willing to talk, even allowing the presence of the researcher at their religious service. This was also the case in the town of Vršac, where the Nazarene community consists of Serbians and Romanians. They were more open to accepting the researcher, which could also indicate a difference in closeness of urban vs. rural Nazarene communities. Due to the fact that the majority of Romanian Nazarene communities have only a few believers, an increasing number of followers go to the bilingual assembly in Vršac. The religious service cannot take place if a community has less than 3 believers, thus the Nazarenes would go to the neighboring assembly.<sup>10</sup>

The fieldwork research took place in several Romanian villages and in the town of Vršac. Our Nazarene informants emphasized that Romanian Nazarenes from Lokve are very strict in their beliefs, more so than others, that they wear only black clothes: "You cannot go inside if you are not dressed properly. Only long black skirts and head garments covering a woman's head and men with black hats and suits without ties" (JP, I, 2008). Usually Nazarenes organize gatherings in other assemblies once a month and they considered that as a very important way for socializing with young people from different assemblies. Romanian Nazarenes from Lokve rarely socialize. As one informant said: "They don't need anyone, they have a lot of their members and all of them are very old. They are so strict and conservative. We don't know why". Within the Nazarene community they are perceived as different, more conservative and more closed than other Nazarenes. They have also divided cemeteries in the villages without crosses, very simple graves and only with the

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<sup>10</sup> Aleksov stresses that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century if there was no assembly building in a village, the Nazarenes would go to the neighboring one despite the language barrier (Aleksov 2006: 2003).

name on it.

One of the hypotheses is that Romanian Nazarenes remained more numerous compared to others because of their double minority position – they constitute an ethnic minority and a religious minority at the same time. In Serbia “hidden religiosity” still exists among small neo-Protestant communities because of the fear that they could be characterized as a negative social appearance, namely as sects. In the villages where Nazarenes are more numerous, other neo-Protestants were not regularly establishing their churches. Today, according to the sources from the community, there are less than 900 members. As one of the informants emphasized: “It is very hard to leave your world costumes and you must not sin any more. We will not obligate anyone to come, everybody can decide of their own will. But after baptism you must change everything” (LI, V, 2008). Strictness, closeness and high morality remain the same as they were at the end of nineteenth century when communities were established. Romanian Nazarene communities in Vojvodina are more numerous than the Serbian, Slovakian or Hungarian one’s. Beside the village of Lokve, other communities in Romanian villages have from 10-50 believers.

### **Double and Hidden Minorities – Romanian Nazarenes**

Even though the dominant confession of the Romanian national minority in Vojvodina is Romanian Orthodoxy, a new dimension of religious identity is provided by the numerous small religious groups themselves. Many are not publicly visible in Serbia, and some, like the Nazarenes, remain small and hidden making them almost invisible. Using this group as an example, we turn our attention to the position of small and minority religions, the issue of what is called *double minorities*, as well as *hidden minorities*. In early 2000, an interdisciplinary group of researchers from Graz, Austria, suggested the term *hidden minority* as a scientific construct used to cover several officially non-recognized small ethnic communities in Austria, Slovenia, and Croatia. Later, in the year 2004, the volume *Hidden Minorities in the Balkans* was published in Belgrade as a result of mutual work of different profile researchers involved in fieldwork on *hidden minorities* in southeastern Europe (Sikimić 2004). Historian Christian Promizer indicates that from a scientific point of view, the existence of *hidden minorities* it is not a ‘hidden phenomena’, but rather something that was concealed (Promizer 2004: 19). In the case where we have no written documents on *hidden minorities*, the question of their visualization remains, among other, open in the domain of research ethics.

Lately, other neo-Protestant denominations have also appeared among the Romanians in Vojvodina. Their religious beliefs are usually spread by missionaries from abroad, who introduced more aggressive strategies, had stronger support networks in Romania, wrote publications and often their own religious education. Due to the closeness of the Nazarene community and to its non-proselytism, this community gathers fewer and fewer converts. Today, the most numerous are the Baptists, Pentecostals and Adventists, with many churches in almost every Romanian village in Vojvodina. The fairly speedy disappearance of the Nazarenes is almost certain, and so a study of them as a group becomes an urgent task of field research. One of the reasons for dealing with the Nazarenes in this paper is their endangered survival as a group.

In Serbia today the status of traditional church is recognized to churches with centuries-long historic continuity: the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Christian Reformed Church, the Evangelical Christian Church, the Islamic Religious Community, and the Jewish Religious Community. The majority of registered religious communities are not recognized by the Serbian state and only seven are considered traditional, being officially recognized as religious communities. Often religious pluralism is not considered

an aspect of cultural diversity; therefore small religious communities in the public discourse remain 'hidden' and sometimes prejudicially described as sects. While researching the position of minority religious communities, sociologist Zorica Kuburić emphasizes the existence of 'social distance towards different confessions', in other words the different level of acceptance and rejection:

Dominant religion (the Serbian Orthodox Church has tendencies to become a state religion due to its historical role) has a mostly negative attitude towards other small religious communities, sects, religious associations. Fear of rejection and common attacks on members of religious communities is mostly visible on their religious buildings which are often protected with bars on doors and windows (Kuburić 2008: 97).

Thus small religious communities are constrained to be the object of stigmatization, because they represent a minority which differs from the dominant religion (Serbian or Romanian Orthodox church). While researching the position of minority religious communities, special attention was paid to the existence of 'social distance towards different confessions', in other words the different level of acceptance and rejection of neo-Protestant communities in multi-ethnic region of Vojvodina. Even from their beginnings the small neo-Protestant group of the Nazarenes was politically and numerically weak and thus easily persecuted.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Differing from large confessions, which are usually developed within nation-states, small religious communities often give more importance to the religious identity, while belonging to a nation is less important for them. Nazarenes are against the 'national idea' because they consider all people to be their brothers and sisters (independent from the believers' confession). As the main aim of this research is to better the understanding of cultural, linguistic and religious identity of Nazarenes, the researchers' work was directed towards improving communication, and eliminating social stereotypes and cultural barriers. At the same time, fieldwork within marginalized communities, but also dedicated to other urgent anthropological questions, represents an attempt of scientific observation of the transformations (namely archiving knowledge) or, as in the case of the Nazarene community, the process of disappearance of religious and cultural identities.

Beside the historical churches, we have to note that an increasing number of neo-Protestant communities are flourishing among the Romanians in Vojvodina: Baptists, Adventists, and Pentecostals. Marginalization of different religious groups and their identities could be considered as one of the reasons for increasing interconnection between religious minorities. Often religious pluralism is not considered an aspect of cultural diversity; therefore small religious communities in the public discourse remain 'hidden' and sometimes prejudicially described as sects.

The attempt to explain the ethnic structure of the Nazarene community in Vojvodina, namely the considerably major presence of Romanians, represents one of the challenges to the future of field research. Problems of 'closed' field, and of fieldwork risk of failure, are very significant elements which the researcher must recognize when working with stigmatized communities, as well as when representing the community to the 'outside world'. Fieldwork in the future should be encouraged to provide a better and more detailed picture of the Romanian neo-Protestants in Vojvodina and other minority religious communities, as well as to answer the question: Is the closeness of Romanian Nazarene community the only way of its survival?

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