

“FORTUNE TELLING IS A CURSE ON YOUR CHILDREN”: CONVERSION, FORTUNE TELLING, AND BELIEFS IN MAGIC AMONG ROMA WOMEN IN ESTONIA

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ABSTRACT

Missionary work by Pentecostal Finnish Roma (*Kaale*)¹ started among the Roma in Estonia during the 1980s. These mission activities, carried out by both Finns and local Roma, intensified over the next two decades and continue today. The article looks into a specific case of how converted (Pentecostal and Baptist) and non-converted (Russian Orthodox, Lutheran, Catholic) Roma women in Estonia conceptualise the practice of fortune telling. For this purpose, the role of fortune telling as a traditional Roma skill and occupation is discussed as a part of the conceptualisation, together with the possible efficacy of fortune telling and its relation to beliefs in magic that also shape the women's attitudes towards it. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, the article argues that although fortune telling is considered satanic by born-again believers and is therefore abandoned, its condemnation is not straightforward in less controlled narration situations, thus posing an extra challenge for Roma women in the conversion process.

KEYWORDS: born-again Christians • Roma women • conversion • fortune telling
 • magic

INTRODUCTION

The conversion of formerly Orthodox, Lutheran or Catholic Roma, to mostly Pentecostal and Baptist churches, started in Estonia during the last decade of Soviet rule when the first charismatic evangelical mission reached the Roma in the form of Finnish *Kaale* missionaries conducting mission trips to Estonia, together with Finns visiting local Pentecostal and Baptist churches. In Estonia the mission activities among the Roma were most intense during the 1990s and 2000s. This correlates with the rise of interest in the occult sciences and rise in popularity of different New Age teachings. Similarly, in Rus-

sia during the early 1990s the search for esoteric knowledge, including astrology and fortune telling, became very popular (Wigzell 2011: 423). During the religious boom in Estonia traditional churches, free churches, New Age groups and new religions all caught people's interest (Altnurme 2005: 81). These general trends also had an effect on the scope and nature of Roma conversions.

Pentecostal charismatic Christianity can be described as ritualising discontinuity, which is based on dualism, meaning that the believers² separate themselves from their previous life and from non-converts by adopting a strict moral code, prohibiting pleasures that according to the dualism are seen as not approved by God, but instead coming from Satan (Robbins 2004: 127). Magdalena Slavkova (2007: 224) explains how the distinction that the converted Roma in Bulgaria make between themselves and the non-converted or worldly people is similar to the distinction that the Roma groups make between themselves and the *gadje*.³ The converted feel that they are the chosen ones who by changing their old lifestyle and leaving the worldly life behind, become part of the community of believers and act according to what they perceive as good and in accordance with God's will. They see themselves as the good Gypsies. In the Pentecostal cosmology ethnic boundaries become less important as they are considered part of the secular world of non-converts, who belong to the realm of Satan, while the converts have passed to the sacred world (Ries 2014: 131). For the converts the theological distinction between people of the 'world' and people of God, becomes a way to differentiate themselves as the community of born-again Christians who 'by accepting Jesus' become 'true believers'. Conversion can be seen as a transition that takes place over a long period of time because re-identifying is a process (Austin-Broos 2003: 2) and breaking with the past, leaving behind one's past social relations, is not complete and fully achievable immediately (Meyer 1998: 329). As part of conversion, believers should abandon the sinful practices that bind them to the 'world'. Converted people from pre-Christian societies found themselves in a state of tension when trying to reconcile the old and new practices and they do not just take over the belief as missionaries explain it, but rather they creatively adjust it (Bialecki et al. 2008: 1144).

To demonstrate the converts' commitment to their new lives as born-again, and to separate them from the previous 'worldly' life, they place great importance on the telling of conversion narratives. This itself acts as a performance that allows a person to construe their identity and keep transforming him- or herself (Stromberg 1993: 15). Susan Harding (1987: 168) concludes that the Word of God, which is manifested in written text or spoken, heard or read, brings about conversion among orthodox Protestants. Conversion stories are not only told to oneself and other believers but also as witnessing statements to possible new converts. In conversion narratives God's miracles often demonstrate the change that has taken place (Coleman 2004: 119). In the conversion narratives and the testimonies of believer Roma women in Estonia, stories about abandoning fortune telling become one of the reoccurring elements that emphasise this break from the pre-conversion life and allow the tellers to express their born-again Christian belonging.

Fortune telling has been a traditional occupation⁴ for Roma women of different groups, for example in America (Sutherland 1986), in England (Okely 1996), in the former Soviet Union (Marushiakova and Popov 2003; 2014; 2016), in Belarus (Bartash 2015), and in Brazil (Ferrari 2015). The prohibition on fortune telling by the church

causes a moral tension between the traditional occupation and the new way of life of the born-again believers, and has been discussed in several pieces of research on Roma conversion (Åberg 2014; Kwiek 2014; Laurent 2014), although it is also noted that fortune telling can still continue in spite of conversion (Slavkova 2007; Marushiakova and Popov 2014; Strand 2014).

Judith Okely (1996: 101) demonstrates how fortune telling, although viewed by the Gypsy⁵ as tricking the non-Roma, should not be seen only as skilful deception because it is considered telling the truth due to its effects. Okely explains how non-Roma perception of Gypsies as people who can do magic creates a fertile ground for fortune telling to become effective. Florencia Ferrari (2015: 169) tackles the questions of deceit and efficacy among *Calon* Gypsy fortune tellers in Brazil. She demonstrates that despite the *Calon* view that palm reading takes advantage of the non-Roma, the concept of deceit is omitted because the framework of fortune telling as an act creates another reality where the outcome, i.e. the truth about the future, starts to depend on the customer's actions.

The creation of the reality of the divination also takes place through the usage of words. It is the words that matter both in conversion narratives, in magical rituals, and during the performance of fortune telling. Stanley Tambiah (1985: 79–81) explains, drawing from John Austin's (1962) classification of speech acts, that ritual acts and magical rites are of a performative type, most of which closely combine words and action. The action, meaning the manipulation of objects and people, has a performative nature, while speech, consisting of utterances and spells, can be analysed within both 'predicative' (referential, information-carrying) and 'illocutionary' (performative) frames. Both frames exist together, therefore it is not meaningful test this performative act, in which saying the words changes the state of things, in a way that is appropriate only to a predicative frame and try to assess the result using a true–false scale. The communication in fortune telling and in sharing and listening to conversion narratives both create realities through their performative nature. Sharing of conversion narratives with miracle stories as well as the performance of fortune telling deal with the concept of truth. 'Telling the truth' is valued both by fortune tellers and converts as a way to distinguish them either from other fortune tellers or from non-converts. It is used as a way to evaluate the fortune teller's powers in connection to magic and the convert's moral change. The production of truth in these performances, which places great importance on speech, is also part of the creation of new realities.

The religiosity and cultural expressions of the Roma in the Baltics has been little researched (see Ariste 1940b; Tihovska 2017). To understand the way Roma women conceptualise fortune telling and how it changes with conversion, ethnographic fieldwork among the Roma in Estonia was conducted between in 2009–2010 and from 2015 to date as part of the author's MA and PhD research. The fieldwork comprised of semi-structured interviews, participant observation at prayer meetings and mission events, and non-formal communication situations among Roma in Estonia, and to a lesser extent in Eastern Latvia⁶ not far from the Estonian border. The fairly small⁷ Roma community of Estonia has family connections across state borders. Visiting relatives and attending events is common, especially in and near Valga, the town with the largest⁸ Roma population in Estonia, situated on the Latvian border. Linguistically the Roma in Estonia belong to *Lotfitka* (Latvian Romani) and *Xaladitka* (Russian Romani) dialect groups, which both belong in turn to northeastern dialect group (Tenser and Granqvist 2015: 3).

The languages used for communication during fieldwork were Estonian and Russian, as the Roma in Estonia use these in addition to Romani. The testimonies of the converts at mission events and prayer meetings have been combined with conversations in less formal situations. The fieldwork data consists of stories told by converted and non-converted Roma women from Estonia; conversations with a former Roma pastor and his wife in Estonia, and with a Roma pastor and a deacon from Latvia. All these Roma women are connected either through family bonds, and/or communicate with each other because of their shared belonging to the believer community.

The aim of the article is to discuss how Roma women in Estonia conceptualise fortune telling and how this is influenced by their conversion and beliefs in magic. This specific example of the challenges the Roma face when converting allows an in-depth view of the specific nature of Roma conversions in the Estonian context. First, I will discuss the role of fortune telling in the lives of Roma women in Estonia, demonstrating how it is both a traditional way to earn money and a skill passed down from generation to generation. I will also explain the interaction during fortune telling and introduce the concept of telling the truth about future because it is used by the Roma women in evaluating the skills of a fortune teller. Next, I will discuss how the views on fortune telling alter after conversion, demonstrating the situationality of condemnation and touch upon the role of magic in the conceptualisation of fortune telling. Then, I will elaborate further on the role of the concept of truth both in the discourse of conversion and of fortune telling. I will finally demonstrate how belief in (protective) magic relates to views on fortune telling and affect its efficacy.

FOR BREAD, TRADITION, AND TRUTH: THE PLACE OF FORTUNE TELLING IN THE LIVES OF ROMA WOMEN

Fortune telling and performing magic, although not as profitable as to provide for the whole family, was historically the main occupations of women in all Gypsy groups both in northern and southern parts of the Russian Empire (Marushiakova and Popov 2003: 300). Fortune telling was also the traditional occupation for Roma women in Estonia before World War II,⁹ in a similar way to Belarus, where the main occupations for Roma men were horse dealing and healing techniques, and for women begging, fortune telling and healing children in villages (Bartash 2015: 26). Roma women are remembered by Estonians as telling fortunes using cards and palmistry, mainly at fairs, but also on ordinary days (Anepaio 1996: 115, 117).

Fortune telling as a skill and way to earn money has not disappeared with lifestyle and occupation changes. The economic strategies of the Roma in Estonia during the Soviet period have not been topics of research, although in the neighbouring Latvia life story interviews reveal that many Roma took up jobs in factories and kolkhozes, had either permanent or short-term jobs, and also traded in goods, which was at that time considered to be speculation and therefore illegal (Garda-Rozenberga and Zirnīte 2014: 118). In addition to official work of different types, trading in a variety of goods also became a common way to earn a living for the Roma in Estonia. Volha Bartash (2015: 32), admitting that the actual experiences might differ in different Soviet Republics, explains that sedentarisation of the Roma in the Soviet Union generally seems to have

been a response to socio-economic change so it is quite probable that the Roma would have started to settle on their own even if there had not been an official program to oblige this with the decree on reconciling vagrant Gypsies to labour in 1956, which criminalised the nomadic way of life. In Estonia, according to my fieldwork data, the situation was similar to Latvia and Belarus in that what the Roma consider their traditional lifestyle declined over time, although travel during the summer,¹⁰ the children's summer holiday from school, was still practiced. Bartash (2015: 30) explains how in spring the nomadic season started with tabors travelling established short routes and meeting at camp sites next to rivers or woods from where women could go to nearby villages.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union fortune telling often regained its position as the main means of earning a living for the Roma in some parts of the Russian Federation (Marushiakova and Popov 2003: 307; 2016: 96). Zoltan Barany (2002: 175) suggests that labour market changes after the collapse of the planned economy affected Roma women less than men because women had often not worked officially but instead, for instance, practiced fortune telling. During the 1990s working at markets became a legal way to trade and many Roma used that possibility.¹¹

In contemporary Estonia Roma women still practice fortune telling, although it is not as common as before and is used less to earn a living in comparison with what is remembered as the more traditional period. Nevertheless, there are women who offer to tell fortunes on the streets and others who tell fortunes in their homes. Those women in greater financial need will actively search for and persuade customers, a practice that is also considered more traditional. Fortune telling at the teller's own home, where customers themselves arrive seeking the fortune teller because of her good reputation, tends to be regarded as more prestigious. A Roma woman in her early sixties, Linda,¹² who belongs to the Orthodox church, explains: "Oh yes, still basically everybody [Roma women] knows how to read fortunes. I can also, if needed." (FM: Linda) A younger converted Roma woman Christy comments on the current situation: "Many still practice it. In Tallinn they even have their own places and everything." (FM: Christy) A typical fortune telling situation in a public place occurs in the bus terminal in the town of Tartu in Estonia, where certain Roma women often spend time approaching the non-Roma (mostly women), trying to convince them to have their fortunes told. In addition to palmistry, Roma women might also offer taking off a curse.

For the women, fortune telling, whether conducted on the street or at their homes, is a means of earning a living. Often it is practiced in addition to jobs or if they are housewives in need for the extra income. Fortune telling in public places is more likely to be considered a job done out of bare necessity, as Linda and her friend Anna explain.

The poor women who do it on the streets, well it's their only way to earn some money, they don't have education. So, they're left with this. (FM: Linda)

Anna: Our lives are difficult, we must tell fortunes.

Question: Do people want you to tell fortunes?

Anna: Yes, they do. My friends, who know, come to my place. I do card readings. (FM: Anna)

These explanations demonstrate the view that fortune telling is practiced to earn money. Anne Sutherland (1986: 89) explains that for the American Roma fortune tell-

ing is always a method to earn money and – similarly to the other occupations of Roma women – needs skills of observation and the ability to evaluate customer personality. Sharon Gmelch (1986: 332) claims that social separation from non-Roma is fundamental to the preservation of the identity of Roma who belong to artisan, trade and entertainer minorities. They achieve this separation using a variety of techniques to manipulate clients during their economic transactions. From one perspective this can be viewed as providing a kind of separation for Roma women in Estonia, a way of distance themselves from non-Roma society while providing more flexibility in scheduling. However, today fortune telling is also viewed by the Roma in Estonia as a job practiced through lack of any other options.

Linda's and Lydia's grandmother used to tell fortunes on the streets "like a real Gypsy", as Linda explains, and was not 'cultured' like her great-grandmother (as Linda says when comparing the two women [FM: Linda]). This notion of *päris* or *õige mustlane* ('real Gypsy' in Estonian) triggers in the women the memory of a time when the Roma led a more traditional lifestyle, for example when they were a less well educated, more closed community that travelled during the summer. At the same time it refers to the Gypsy fortune teller stereotype that is common among the majority population and which the Roma are aware of. Linda makes a connection between greater financial need and telling fortunes on the streets, explaining:

Mother also knew, but did not go offering on streets, but if someone wanted, then yes. I also tell fortunes, if needed, it has still stayed with me. But we don't go on the street and so. We were also better off, had money for my wedding celebrations. (FM: Linda)

I have had two offers of fortune telling. On the first occasion I did not know the woman on the street and was undergraduate student at the time. I took the chance to chat with the woman about the Roma living in that town and expressed my interest in their culture and way of life. I did not mind offering her a bit of money for the encounter, but then to my surprise she changed her mind about telling my fortune, and after talking with me just wished me luck and gave blessings. In the other case I came across a woman I had known for ten years through my fieldwork. Her companion insisted on telling my fortune, seeing in me a possible customer. As I was politely declining the woman I knew said to her companion: "No, don't, no need to tell for her." Because she knew me she excluded me in this situation from the *gadje* from whom it is normal to receive money by telling fortunes. In both cases the Roma women considered that fortune telling had become inappropriate. Communication in both situations changed from service provider and service receiver, to a different kind of interaction with a *gadje*. Ferrari (2015: 173), discussing the palm reading offered by the *Calon* Gypsy women in Brazil, notes that when unknown *Calins* heard Ferrari was known to them, the women would not to attempt fortune telling using the stereotypes they think the Brazilians have of them. Similarly, in the Estonian case it makes less sense for a Roma to offer fortune telling to *gadje* if they don't hold the 'Gypsy fortune teller' stereotype.

In the cases above the Roma women in Estonia, similarly to the *Calins* in Ferrari's study, seem to consider fortune telling purely as a job, a service that they offer the *gadje* in return for money. Roma women in Estonia do not express strong opinions about fortune telling, much like the women in Okely's (1996: 90–91) pioneering study of Eng-

lish Gypsies in which she demonstrates how Gypsy women successfully practice fortune telling without believing in it themselves. Okely claims that the Gypsies consider fortune telling fake, although she distinguishes amateur and specialist fortune tellers based on their skilfulness while explaining that fortune telling is considered a skill that should be learned from a young age by observing their older relatives.

In addition to being a way to earn money, learning fortune telling from the older generation creates, for Roma women in Estonia, a bond with fortune telling that is based on more than financial needs. A more personal connection to fortune telling becomes apparent when women express it as their heritage, something that needs to be preserved as a Romani tradition. Linda recalls:

From our grandparents, it has been passed on generation to generation, this fortune telling. Already a long time ago, before our time, it was our custom and it has not died out; still we try to keep this culture.

Before there were many and authentic fortune tellers, they told everything what would come for you and knew also how to help. Grandmothers knew how to use herbal medicine also. (FM: Linda)

The unconverted Roma women in Estonia are more likely to express that fortune telling as a skill passed from generation to generation, a valuable part of Roma cultural practice. Regarding fortune telling as heritage makes it more important for the women than merely a way to earn some extra money. Fortune telling can be also considered a possessed skill that is not practiced as a job when there is no financial necessity for it. As the younger generation is more likely to have attained a higher level of education compared to their parents and has more choices of occupation, they are less likely to use fortune telling as work. A young woman, Cathy, explains that she knows how to tell fortunes, as the knowledge was passed on in her family, although she has not practiced it as a job: "I have never told fortunes for money, only for my friends. There hasn't been that kind of a need." (FM: Cathy)

In another case, a discussion between converted Lydia, her daughter and her niece reveals – in addition to showing that the main reason for fortune telling is earning money – that even when practicing it with friends for educational or entertainment purposes, fortune telling should not be done without an exchange.

Question: Did you tell fortunes also for money?

Lydia: Yes, I did.

Daughter: This is the reason why everyone tells fortunes.

Niece: No, it isn't. Also, girls do it.

Daughter: Oh yes, but it's different. You can't tell fortunes for free. You took money, so don't try to fool me.

Niece: Only some cents.

Daughter: You see! (FM: Lydia)

Even in cases when fortune telling is not a service offered to non-Roma, the fortune teller should still receive some symbolic amount of money because an exchange should take place.¹³ The need to reciprocate the service connects this interdependency to Marcel Mauss' ideas about gift and the obligation of return which sets up giver and receiver in a co-dependent relationship. Using the example of Polynesia, Mauss (2002 [1925]: 16)

explains that what the receiver receives is not only the object or thing, but in the case of Maori also something spiritual, or even part of the spirit of the giver. Even when fortune telling is practiced with no financial aim, the service should be at least symbolically compensated for. This hints that although the first goal of fortune telling is earning money, it has its own rules so that it can be conducted in the correct way even if not practiced on the *gadje*.

For the *Calon* Gypsies the customer's willingness to give money becomes connected with the fate of the customer, so that their actions in the present decide their luck in the future. In this case a curse from a Gypsy women also becomes self-fulfilling with each customer fulfilling it with their own problems (Ferrari 2015: 172, 175). Successful fortune telling also requires non-Roma to believe in the Roma women's mastery of the craft. In a documentary film about Roma in Estonia, director Vahur Laiapea asks a Roma pastor to say if a curse that a Roma woman cast on him years ago still exists (Mission of a Rom 2010). This shows how his belief created the curse and gave it existence for years until the pastor reassured him that it was not there. While discussing the making of the documentary, the director explains that as fortune telling is a traditional Roma occupation he was determined to include it in the film. Nevertheless, he did not enjoy participating in the act of fortune telling:

It was a very unpleasant procedure, for the film's sake I had to put myself into this situation. No matter what, there are unpleasant things that start bothering you. I've never before and would never again have my fortune told. (FM: Vahur)

The reaction of the non-Roma to fortune tellers on the street is often either dismissive, i.e. people claim not to believe in it, or, as in the case above, they do not want to be involved in this kind of interaction. If they do have their fortunes told it can be out of curiosity, because of the skill of persuasion of the fortune teller, or out of fear of a curse that often becomes self-fulfilling. If a non-Roma is seeking out the fortune teller the interaction does not involve this kind of persuasion, it is already based on belief that the Roma fortune teller can foretell the future. Okely (1996: 104) argues that fortune telling, although the English Gypsies themselves consider it a deceit, is skilful communication with a client that allows the fortune teller to produce information that fits the client. If this is the case, it is the client's belief in the powers of the Gypsy that makes fortune telling effective (see also Ferrari 2015: 164–165). Ferrari (ibid.: 174) takes this claim further by explaining that when a *Cigana* reads the fortune of a *Gajon*, a non-Roma, both parties must contribute to the discursive field with their speech, even though the *Cigana* has the leading role in the communication process. The non-Roma must get involved in the process of fortune telling; in fact only through their contribution can it function.

In the case of Estonia, fortune tellers are also distinguished according to their abilities. However, in addition to the kind of ability to communicate that Okely (1996) discusses, there appears to be another level of skill. Somewhat similarly to the observations drawn from Ferrari's (2015) study, the way the Roma women in Estonia express their views on fortune telling, and how they act in situations involving offering fortune telling as a service, demonstrate that the fortune teller is considered to 'have powers' or be able to tell the truth about the future when certain conditions are met. This means that in addition to the *gadje* believing in the prediction, the Roma themselves also start con-

sidering it true, especially after receiving positive feedback. It is possible that the told fortune can become true not only for *gadje*, but also for the Roma due to this additional level of skill.

In Estonia, the Roma connect less skilful fortune tellers with the use of ready formulas when communicating with customers, or even used to cheat customers. The more skilful women, with the ability to take the lead in fortune telling situations tend to be considered more credible. The fortune tellers who still work in public places are considered to be in greater financial need and are working 'for bread', therefore have lower status and credibility. As they do not have permanent jobs with better wages, they offer the gullible *gadje* this service irrespective of their level of skill. This means that some can be considered self-taught psychologists, although their abilities are less likely to be thought of as telling the 'truth' and people consider their predictions less likely to come true. This differentiation depends on the individual characteristics and skills of the fortune teller, and on a general level there is a distinction between those who are considered to have 'real power' and those who are trying to earn a living even if not gifted.

SATANIC, BUT NOT ALL THE TIME: CHANGING VIEWS ON FORTUNE TELLING AFTER CONVERSION

Although fortune telling is not viewed positively by the Lutheran, Russian Orthodox or Catholic church, to which the Roma in Estonia traditionally belong, it is the Pentecostal and Baptist¹⁴ churches that strictly require the practice to be abandoned. Fortune telling has been one of the traditional ways of earning a living and a part of life for the Roma women in Estonia. Nevertheless, converting and becoming a born-again Christian as discussed in the introduction, demands a re-evaluation of the previous moral system and a re-arrangement of one's life accordingly (Meyer 1998; Austin-Broos 2003; Robbins 2004; Slavkova 2007; Ries 2014). Joel Robbins (2010: 166) explains that the Pentecostals experience their daily lives as a struggle between good and evil, God and the devil that creates a tension between old and new moral order that makes them fear a return to their previous life. For *Kaale* believers personal problems become part of a larger religious context, for instance fighting alcohol addiction becomes a much wider battle between good and evil (Thurfjell 2014: 170). For Roma women in Estonia, giving up fortune telling and then telling others that they have done so becomes a way of demonstrating the change they have experienced as born-again Christians. Therefore, converted women have come to consider predicting the future as a sin and have ceased to practice.

As mentioned in the introduction, talking about the practice of fortune telling and its abandonment is used in conversations to reinforce one's believer identity and to inspire the non-converted to become believers (Stromberg 1993; Coleman 2004). Fortune telling and use of magic as examples of the personal change become part of the language of converts. A Roma deacon from Latvia talks both about fortune telling and practicing witchcraft as habits that, despite being difficult to give up, should be abandoned by believers: "In all the families there is this [fortune telling]. My mother, grandmother, all were telling fortunes. But also, fortune tellers and witches have converted." (FM:

deacon Henry) Similarly, Sandra situates fortune telling as part of her pre-conversion life. She and her sister are converted Roma from Estonia who had previously been baptised in the Orthodox Church. At a mission event organised in Latvia by Finnish *Kaale*, Sandra explains why she stopped fortune telling:

I used to tell fortunes, but it is a curse, it is passing on from generation to generation. It is Satan working when you tell fortunes. If you stop doing it then your children will be blessed for four generations instead. (FM: Sandra)

She deploys here the generational curse and blessing that can be found in the Old Testament.¹⁵ Although when expressing her view on fortune telling she does not explicitly say it, the Bible that she carries with her, thoroughly marked with notes and highlights, is a hint at the source. Her explanation shows how she uses the practice of fortune telling as part of the confirmation of her identity as a believer who has changed her life by abandoning a sinful practice that belongs to the 'worldly' life. Her dismissive reaction demonstrates a negative view of predicting a future, and this emerges through conversion. Typical of evangelical believers she uses biblical language to fortify her argument. Evangelicals should, through their interpretation of the Bible, find a meaningful link between its symbol system and their experiences, and conversion narratives enable this through shared religious language (Stromberg 1993: 11).

The conceptualisation of fortune telling in the converted women's accounts is based on a dualistic worldview, placing fortune telling into the realm of Satan rather than of God. Mary, the wife of a former Pentecostal Roma pastor Gregory in Estonia, used to tell fortunes before her conversion. She links the change in her views on fortune telling to the physical experience of encountering negative spiritual forces and explains it as Satan at work: "I used to tell fortunes, but I never really liked it. Once when laying out cards I felt so bad, I felt as if someone or something was standing right behind me and I felt terrible." (FM: Mary) Similarly, Helen, a young woman from a convert family, connects fortune telling to Satan: "If they [Roma women] tell fortunes they might unwillingly open themselves to dark forces, to Satan. It is dangerous. Then you are under Satan's guidance, not God's." (FM: Helen)

In addition to reading the Bible and listening to the preaching of pastors, the new conceptualisation of fortune telling is influenced by the mass media, where fortune telling is explained according to religious ideas. While I was visiting a converted Roma woman, Christy, she was trying to convince me of the satanic nature of fortune telling. She recommended that I find and watch a video on YouTube called *Svidetel'stvo tsyganki* ('Gypsy testimony' in Russian). The video involves narration of a Roma woman's conversion, talking about her life before and after her adoption of faith. It begins with the story of how she was telling fortunes and wanted it to be her profession, but through spiritual awakening understood the satanic nature of fortune telling, and thanks to this revelation came to conversion.

Additionally, Christy expresses a view that fortune telling is negative because it means deceiving people, cheating them. "My mother did not tell fortunes, no. Fortune telling is cheating. It is bad. It is Satan working, the women might not even know that themselves. That's why they do it and say that it's OK." (FM: Christy) In addition to being a sin, tricking is considered morally wrong by believers. While non-converted

Roma do not condemn fortune telling directly as cheating (even if they seem not to believe it but view it more as a service practiced out of need, and therefore have a more ambiguous moral view of it) converted Roma are more likely to view fortune telling as cheating and therefore not in accordance with the Christian moral code. They are more likely to talk about those examples where the fortune teller is considered to con the customer. Christy condemns cheating and stealing fortune tellers working on the street, whom she identifies as foreign Roma. This can be seen as converted Roma hoping for a better image among the (believer) *gadje*. Due to their new identity as believer Roma they wish to be seen as honest and trustworthy, contrary to the typical negative stereotypes held by non-Roma. Christy warns her *gadje* friend, who wants to have her fortune told, not to go to a Roma, but at the same time admits that among her communication circle there are skilful fortune tellers whose abilities she is convinced of, although she no longer approves of the practice:

I was walking with a [non-Roma] friend in Riga and we saw some Gypsies, but they were Moldovan, not from here, and they were telling fortunes to people. My friend wanted to go to them. I was telling her "No don't go, if you want I will take you to one whom I know personally." But she went and of course lost her money and golden rings and everything. (FM: Christy)

Converted women condemn fortune telling as satanic or as cheating based on their own experiences and views on it. When a fortune teller is thought to be telling the truth then for the converted her ability to do so comes from Satan. If a fortune teller is considered to be doing her job without being able to foresee the future her actions are cheating and therefore morally wrong. Condemning fortune telling as cheating hints that women are more likely to consider that the fortune teller cannot foresee the truth about what is going to happen. If fortune telling was not previously practiced in the family, it seems to be easier to perceive it as negative once one has become a believer. Not having a personal relationship with fortune telling seems to cause women either to dismiss it from their narrations altogether, or to condemn it.

However, converted women do not condemn fortune telling directly and fully in all circumstances. For instance, in communication situations that do not involve telling one's conversion narrative directly, believer women do not constantly use Biblical language, and when recounting daily life situations in which fortune telling had been used the condemnation of it is less severe. The degree of condemnation seems to depend in addition on the confessional background of the person, and on the context and situation of the encounter. For instance, Lydia, similarly to Sandra, brings up the abandonment of fortune telling when talking about her life before and after conversion. She expresses her view of fortune telling by condemning it as satanic. Nevertheless, she asserts that she used to tell the truth, meaning that she was a skilful fortune teller, and talks about others who are considered to possess powers and are capable of connecting with what she calls the spiritual world:

Before, I used to tell fortunes. I used the cards, palmistry I don't know, but cards yes. I told, ideally, the perfect truth. Yes, I told for others, and myself. But now, I don't do that anymore. Already, let me think, from '98. Now I am a believer. It is

from the Devil and the one who practices it... We [the Roma] do have people who do it... and there are some who tell much that will come true and tell fortunes and even help people. We also have soothsayers. (FM: Lydia)

In the following quote Helen, by not considering fortune telling to be black magic, is expressing a more fluid view of it than in the earlier quote where she said that it originates from Satan. She also makes a distinction between black and white magic. Fortune telling might in this case not be completely negative, but the attitude towards it and its position on a scale of right and wrong is left more ambiguous.

The Bible says it is black magic. But how to say... well, it is his [the pastor's] job to tell people that it is wrong, but he can't tell anyone to do this or not to do that. This is his own personal commentary, what he said. He thinks it is wrong, I would maybe not say directly black magic. You know, sometimes you feel that a person... there are people, who like... there is another world, a spiritual world, and some contact to it... I don't know how to explain. (FM: Helen)

Having researched protective magic practices in Estonia, Reet Hiiemäe (2016: 35) explains that although in real life protective magic is not always distinguishable from other forms of magic, for example fortune telling, it can be considered white magic. The distinction between white, which is supposed to bring about good and positive changes, and harmful black magic also varies as white magic has also been demonised by Christianity. Although, pastor Gregory expresses his own negative attitude towards fortune telling very clearly, he also seems to refrain from condemning it in certain situations. This changing and ambiguous attitude towards fortune telling illuminates its importance not only as a way of earning a living but as a tradition that binds the Roma community together. When the women consider it a part of their heritage, they place an extra value on fortune telling. Even if abandoning fortune telling as a job does not pose an unsurmountable challenge, then giving up considering it a Roma tradition that connects the generations and the community, among whom are both convert and non-convert kin, brings extra difficulty to the conversion process. Lydia, similarly to Helen, is unable to condemn the practice completely although she has abandoned it:

A few days ago, I had a guest. She was sitting here on the couch and at one moment I looked at what she was doing – she was laying out the cards and then said that it was for me! And she told the truth. She told about the apartment, that this time I won't be getting a new one just yet and other things too! (FM: Lydia)

Not condemning fortune telling may also be connected to considering fortune telling effective – as either white or black magic. Additionally, this boundary between black and white magic, together with the dualistic distinction between godly and satanic becomes stronger with conversion. As apparent from the distinction between black and white magic the Roma women themselves believe that a spiritual power, a connection to the world of the spirits, can be present in the act of fortune telling. Nastya, an Orthodox Roma, who has visited a Roma women's Bible reading group organised by Roma pastor's wife Mary and has converted kin, explains that although many Roma do sinful things and then ask for God's forgiveness, this is not correct understanding of God's rules. Nevertheless, she does not speak of fortune telling as cheating or as

directly satanic, nor does she express a negative view about it. Her affectionately told story about the practice of fortune telling as a traditional Roma skill involves expressing how the future was also told among Roma themselves and that she considered the predicted fortune to have come true:

I remember I was a small girl and my father was not at home, he was held by the police and we were waiting impatiently for him to return every day... longing. And then my mother checked the cards and said that he would be coming home. I was so excited that I went to the bus stop to wait for him and he really did arrive! Then I asked mother to teach me how to read the cards. (FM: Nastya)

For converted Roma answers to prayers often manifest themselves in dreams. Hopes and prayers can be answered, and what is going to happen can be foretold by God in dreams. Prophetic dreams are a longed for form of guidance and reassurance. Instead of relying on fortune telling, which has turned into a gift from Satan, the converts should rely on God for truthful predictions. Nevertheless, the ways dreams and prayers work are not always direct, although in turn this does not mean there is cause for doubt. Pentecostal woman Maria explains how she prayed to God for an accordion:

You know, I did a bit of circus myself, I prayed to God, I wanted an accordion. I started looking on the Internet and saw that there was an accordion there in town P. I called – 200 euros. It was being sold by A, a pleasant man. He sells old things there. Said the instrument is good, come look for yourself, and so on. We met in P somewhere there on street D, back there, where old Russian army buildings used to be there. I took the money and went. I liked it, looked, the same I had seen in my vision. I paid 200 euros. It was Czechoslovakian instrument. Used. I brought it home, was happy. I left it to stay a bit, you know, it has to stay a bit. Then I play a bit and the registers do not play, air comes through the bellows. Then I called town V, I found it on the Internet. There are two instrument masters in town V and in T. The man said don't ever buy such instruments and said in the town there are the greatest crooks. He said don't take this instrument, give it back and I'll find you a new one, I have. Then I called that A and said I'll bring the instrument back. He said I have a master who can fix it. He did not come to meet me, I went from here to town P. It was so heavy. There I went on foot, it was not far, some 200 meters. And people sell like this, in town V masters sell those instruments and give 3 months guarantee. Oh, with great pain and persuasion, he took it back. We prayed together with that woman who came from Germany and she saw that this new instrument will be blessed. To her God talks too.

Have you seen my new accordion? I went to all the way to T and came back straight away. By the bus station I met the seller. When I saw him, I could tell right away, so I asked him if he was a believer and he was! (FM: Maria)

At our next meeting she showed me the new instrument and explained how this time the purchase, from another believer, had gone well. Although the vision about receiving a new accordion was not as clear and straightforward as to come true straight away, ultimately it was still regarded as fulfilled. While for the non-converted Roma it is possible to have an idea of what will happen in the future through fortune telling or magic, converted Roma should rely on the visions granted by the Holy Spirit.

Truth, while a criterion used in evaluating a fortune teller's abilities, is also useful in studying Pentecostalism and miracles. Tambiah (1985: 18) draws attention to the importance of the usage of words in most rituals, explaining that for practitioners it is the ritual words that they consider to possess the power in ritual, although these need to be accompanied by ritual acts in a specific context. Both in the communication process between fortune teller and customer and when a believer is sharing a conversion story or miraculous stories, it is the words that create the context in which the production of truth takes place. In the case of fortune telling the fortune teller has to create the narrative through her performance, while in the case of miracle stories the sharing of the stories by believers functions in a similar way. When conversion is considered a process of acquiring a specific religious language and witnessing as a rite of conversion, as Susan Harding (1987: 178–179) explains then just willingness to listen to the gospel can be seen as marking the beginning of one's conversion. This kind of readiness to actively listen and understand the stories of believers induces a shared experience with the believer and can encourage the potential convert to cross over the thin line from disbelief to belief. Nevertheless, sharing the stories yourself is the kind of belief that changes the born-again believer, or, put another way, speaking is believing for the fundamental Baptists. (Ibid.) Similarly, in the performance of fortune telling the fortune teller and the customer should share the same version of reality for the fortune to come true either for the customer or for both the teller and the customer. For believers the Bible is what gives the context, while in the case of fortune telling the customer should believe in the abilities of the Roma fortune teller, which often obliges an awareness of the Gypsy fortune teller stereotype, as demonstrated earlier in the article. The rest of the creation of shared reality takes place through words.

The topic of truth should not be excluded when studying the miracles of Pentecostalism simply because a distinction between true and false miracles cannot be observed. Instead, how the truth is produced provides a topic of research in its own right, for instance, analysing how people make a distinction between true and false miracles and how this distinction affects believers' lives. (Pelkmans 2015: 178) For an event to be a miracle, Mathijs Pelkmans explains, it should have been caused by divine intervention, although to be recognised and acknowledged as such there should be: 1) a favourable outcome, and 2) the outcome should be unexpected. Additionally, alternative explanations for it should not be present and the event should occur after being prayed for. (Ibid.: 184) Slavkova (2007: 223) notes that in Bulgaria the wish for miracles and healing attracts many people to the Evangelical church, among whom members of Gypsy communities such as the Kardaraši, Thracian Kalajdzii, and Burgudzii are numerous.¹⁶ While I was visiting Roma homes in Estonia and Latvia together with *Kaale* missionaries joint prayers were almost always on the topic of health and healing.

The converts' speech involves explaining events in their lives using biblical language, with miracle stories playing an important role in the conceptualisation of positive life events after conversion. Pastor Gregory explains the importance of miracles in his life with an example:

There have been so many of God's miracles in my life that when I start counting them I could write a whole book. Once there was a very hard time in my life. I had little food. Had no work. With my wife I went to check on Friday just in case the child support money had been transferred, although it should have been Monday. So, we started to go to the bank to check when the children asked: "Father, please bring at least one sweet." At the bank we found out that the money had not been transferred yet, and we felt so bad because of the children. So, we started talking to God and praying not to let our children suffer. And then on the way back a black bird flew over us and from its beak a small package of candy fell down, button-shaped sweets in a red package. We were left speechless. (FM: Pastor Gregory)

Christy tells a similar story about God's intervention due to her prayers:

We were in a shop with friends. Then the security guard started accusing us of stealing some bottles of alcohol. My friends were able to escape, but I was taken to the police. I had to write a letter explaining what had happened, but the police station was out of town and it was already late at night when I left there. It was raining, it was dark, there were no houses around. Finally, I noticed a light! It was a garage. There were three guys repairing a car. They said they needed to fix the car by the next day. They said they would take me even to Riga but they couldn't because the car had broken down and they weren't able to fix it. I went a bit further and started praying silently to myself. And then I told the guys to try to start the car. One of them said to the other: "one, two, three", and it started! They thought I had done some magic as I am a Gypsy, but I said it's all God's work. Then they took me back to the town. (FM: Christy)

In the story Christy, as a Roma, does not deploy the image of the Gypsy magic practitioner and instead tells the story as an example of God's miracles. In this way for her it becomes a way of creating herself as a believer, of reassuring her identity as a believer. Her story also shows how she is aware that, according to the *gadje* stereotype, the Roma can perform magic. In addition to the non-Roma, the Roma pastor and deacon also share the view of the Roma as being active in practicing magic and fortune telling. Pastor Gregory considers the Roma to be more in contact with the spiritual world than the non-Roma and that religion is what can save them from fortune telling, which he considers negative and dangerous. As he says:

Actually, they [the Roma] know very many secrets that the world does not know. These are magical secrets. And among the Roma are witches, magicians, and psychics. Also, nowadays there are those who can do, and know about it. I have kept away from it and I recommend everyone to keep away from it. Once, some ten, fifteen years ago there were some people on the street and Gypsies approached wanting to tell their fortunes, but the people knew about me and said we'll go to Gregory and then immediately the Gypsies disappeared. This had an effect on them. (FM: Pastor Gregory)

The spreading of Pentecostalism and magic in the post-Soviet landscape can be compared because both have the potential to provide direction to agentic power and create

solidarity networks, as Pelkmans (2015: 186) has noted. Miracles are manifestations of the divine that transform a believer's life by, for instance, curing chronic diseases, helping people overcome personal flaws and addictions, providing jobs (ibid.). In the Roma believers' stories, in addition to positive miracle stories about an unexpected turn for the better, magic is used as an example of the negative that should be overcome. Pastor Gregory tells a story about a miraculous healing while visiting a Roma home. At the same time, he explains that a charm worn by a woman was disturbing his missioning:

One old person was paralysed on one side. We went there, but I understood that we are not in a good house. I went in. There was a mother with many children and the daughter asked us to pray. I said there is something in this house that disturbs prayer. Then the daughter showed us that on her mother's neck there was a small leather bag. She took it, tore it off and gave it to me. I was together with that Finnish Gypsy family. The Finnish Gypsy woman Saara was as far from me as that door here [a few metres away]. I looked at the bag and in it was a small letter, and it was like there were small white worms. Saara from that spot, that far, says what are you looking at those worms. Then I took that letter and all that bag and threw it into fire and then I could pray. I put my hands on the woman and called Saara and Esko and we put hands on her, Jesus, God, you are our healer. Through you we have been healed, we ask you our Lord and I said: "Walk!" And she rose up and walked in the room. I said now raise your right hand and she raised it and said: "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" This was miraculous. This was a confirmation and a sign [*tunnusmärk* is the Estonian translation of the Greek *sēmeion*]. God worked! (FM: Pastor Gregory)

Belief in protective magic against the evil or the black eye is actualised for instance by wearing a red ribbon with knots around the wrist. Protecting yourself or your children against witchcraft and using love spells are common among the Roma in Estonia. In different informal communication situations young converted Roma women have mentioned: "My husband was not interested in me at first at all, but then I put my eye on him" (FM: Julia); "I was now jokingly saying to the young man that he can drink it, no one has performed any magic on the drink, put anything in it" (FM: Helen); "It's not good to give your photo to someone, they might use it" (FM: Helen); "I know there is God's protection, but I still used the red ribbon on my wrist, maybe it's still good to use it, also to make people see that I have this for protection" (FM: Helen).

Linda explains the usage of protective magic:

Red thread was put around children's wrists [for protection], I remember this still. To date we have, we know, but youth knows less. Yesterday I was in sauna with my small girl and one *mustlasnaine* [Est: 'Gypsy woman'] asked me why I didn't put something on her because somebody would give her the eye. Giving the eye, it means like doing something bad, and then the woman said these bad words: "salt to their eyes and pepper on their tongue" etc, such words [expressions directed towards the curser to ward off the evil eye]. I said it won't get her, look she has on the neck, the eye.¹⁷ Then the woman said: "Ah, ok then it's ok." When there was a small baby and some women go to see her, they have looked at the baby with a bad eye. The baby became restless. Then had to wash the baby's face in a special

way, then, wipe it dry and then wash the door knobs. After that person has left you should also pray! This is very important for the baby. (FM: Linda)

The existing belief in the evil eye seems to be merged with wearing the currently widely available blue eye-shaped glass pendant. Linda also places importance on Orthodox traditions in her life, going to church on Christian holidays and on having fasted in her youth when her health was better. In addition, visiting an Orthodox convent and performing a ritual washing with holy water, as suggested by Orthodox relatives, can be viewed as not going against her being an evangelical born-again believer. Similarly, knowing the formula and rituals of protective magic do not always contradicting the lives of all converted women. Those who do not practice it seem not to fully condemn those who do. When Christy, who is converted, discusses these matters with her non-Roma husband, she explains that she understands the issue of God's protection as follows:

When I am riding a bus where there is a pickpocket then if I am under God's protection no harm can come to me and I will be spared from being robbed. Isn't it so? It [God's protection] makes a protective shield. (FM: Christy)

In this case God's protection seems to function similarly to protective magic that manifests itself in charms and spells used as protection against the evil eye and bad wishes from envious people.¹⁸ For instance, Birgit Meyer (1992: 103) demonstrates how pre-Christian belief in evil spirits and witchcraft among the Ewe in southern Ghana did not disappear but were connected with the notion of the devil in Christianity. The possibility of fortune telling having a connection to protective magic, and becoming effective because of this link, seems to remain. Believers can have the protection not by magic, but from God, or by combining the two using protective magic together with prayer to God. Although the Roma view fortune telling primarily as way to earn a living and do not seem to consider it necessarily effective when explaining its role as a traditional Roma job, they seem in certain cases to be convinced of its efficacy. Fear of spells may be connected to fear of having your fortune told, as Helen explains: "At big gatherings like funerals you don't want to sit with your palms upwards as someone might look at your hand, read your palm." (FM: Helen) In certain cases, fortune telling seems also to connect to belief in (protective) magic. In this way fortune telling not only functions in a similar way to convincing selling, but the ability to tell truthful fortunes also becomes dependant on the ability to cast spells and use protective magic.

Okely (1996: 90) notes that where the predictions came true the women became anxious, and one woman, not realising that it had become self-fulfilling, even gave up fortune telling. Although Okely does not explicitly concentrate on the cases when the women start believing in fortune telling themselves, she does touch upon this possibility. Ferrari (2015: 176–177) admits that although the *Calons* do not tell each other's futures, they do cast spells on each other. In the action of fortune telling it is the *Calons'* practice of casting spells that makes a potential curse real for both the fortune teller and the client, causing the prediction of the future to come into effect. Walter O. Weyrauch and Maureen Ann Bell (2001: 51), in their overview essay on the laws and legal processes of the Romani people, even claim that although to the non-Roma it often seems that fortune telling is a scam, the reason behind why the Roma do not practice it among

themselves is not that they do not believe in their ability to perform magic, but that they consider foretelling the future dangerous. The overlap of spells and fortune telling allows fortune telling to become more than a job, a service or even skill and tradition – it starts to become potentially effective.

CONCLUDING (BUT NOT CONCLUSIVE) DISCUSSION

Fortune telling has been traditional work for the Roma women in Estonia, although currently it is not practiced as much as before; the younger generation rarely uses this skill to earn money. Roma women, while explaining the role of fortune telling in their lives, make a differentiation between more and less skilful fortune tellers based on the level of craft learned. Moreover, skilful fortune tellers are also more likely to be linked to performing magic and to having 'real powers'. This means that the Roma themselves also consider that these fortune tellers are telling the truth when they predict the future. Beliefs in people capable of doing magic and casting spells on others can also cause fortune telling, in some cases, to become more than a service for the *gadje*. These boundaries are difficult to distinguish, and although the efficacy is not something that can be measured, its importance in the current case lies in its ability to affect the perception of fortune telling. The less skilful fortune tellers are considered to be offering a service to the *gadje* that can be viewed as a deceit, although it is something that the *gadje* themselves agree to willingly; it is therefore not considered direct cheating. However, fortune telling is still talked about as heritage, a traditional skill that is passed on from generation to generation, and thus valued.

The belief in the fortune teller's capacity for divination is considered dangerous and frightening by believers, for whom it belongs to the domain of Satan. They claim that fortune tellers open themselves up to the possibility of being cursed. Reading and discussing the Bible at prayer group meetings and listening to pastors and fellow believers' conversion stories, both in direct communication and through the mass media, influences views on fortune telling. Not only is it considered satanic, but also morally wrong because it is regarded as cheating. Converted Roma women start using the example of abandoning fortune telling in their conversion narratives to show the break with their previous sinful worldly lives.

With conversion the belief in magic is conceptualised through Christian dualism more strongly than before when (Orthodox) Christian rituals could more easily overlap with magical rites. After converting the protection that was before achieved with spells and charms, is taken over by the idea of God's protection. The believers, while telling of events in their lives that have followed their coming to faith, often also include God's miracles in their narratives. Nevertheless, although magic is perceived as satanic, it does not mean that the syncretism of pre-conversion time has disappeared completely. In less-controlled narrating situations the borders of the dualistic worldview of the believers become blurred. One can say that Satan is not always present but rather moves out of the picture in these communication situations. If there is not strong pressure from the pastor or congregation, condemnation of fortune telling can be less definite.

Conceptualisation of fortune telling also depends on its importance in a family's history, for instance having female relatives who practiced and taught fortune telling

affects the way women talk about it. The Roma women whose family has practiced fortune telling must comply with several conflicting moral systems, for instance when there is a need to condemn fortune telling, which the women might have considered, or still consider, their heritage. It can be difficult for the converted Roma to fully condemn other Roma who keep telling fortunes as they stay closely connected to their non-converted family while also needing to keep their belonging to the Roma community. Condemning fortune telling starts to depend on the situation of communication (with and among whom the women are, and whether they feel the need to share their testimonies). The rhetoric is adapted according to the changing conditions.

Analysing the conceptualisation of fortune telling demonstrates why conversion for Roma women in Estonia can be challenging. Although an abrupt change in worldview and lifestyle are supposed to accompany conversion, which is found in testimonies, in practice the change takes place gradually and the women have to prove their belonging, depending on which community they are communicating with – whether it is inside the Roma or believer community, or among possible converts. Thinking of fortune telling as a tradition, not just a way to earn a living, and the possible connection between fortune telling and existing beliefs in magic, makes it difficult for converted Roma to fully condemn the practice. Although converts are supposed to rely solely on prophetic visions in dreams granted by God, and on his miracles, in certain situations their conceptualisation of fortune telling still resembles that of the non-converted women's. This manifests in a more ambiguous and even positive view on magic and fortune telling, which is consequently placed into the domain of white magic instead of black. When talking about fortune telling, believer Roma women find themselves needing to balance the past and the future. From one point of view they should take into consideration the traditions and the history of their ancestors; from another they should take into account the changing environment and what one must accommodate to ensure a better future, which they see as a life in faith, for their children.

NOTES

1 *Kaale* is used in the text to mean the Finnish Roma because during my fieldwork the Finnish Roma missionaries referred to themselves as *kaalet*.

2 The converted Roma in Estonia refer to themselves either as believers or Christians.

3 The word used by the Roma to denote non-Roma people.

4 See also Leland 2008 [1891].

5 The word Gypsy is used in the article when cited authors use it to denote the groups they have studied and to translate the word *mustlane*, which has traditionally been used in Estonian for the Roma and is also used by the Roma when they speak Estonian (in unofficial situations).

6 This article concentrates on the Roma women who living in or are from Estonia and who consider themselves Estonian Roma even if their ancestors moved to Estonia from Latvia or Russia after World War II. During the German occupation of Estonia (1941–1944) it is estimated that approximately 90% of Roma were executed (cf. Lutt et al. 1999; Weiss-Wendt 2003; Kenrick 2007). After Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union Roma from Latvia and Russia started moving to Estonia and mixing with the surviving Roma there. Roma in Latvia are considered in the scope of their familial involvement with the group or when doing mission work among the Roma in Estonia.

7 According to the population registry from 2018 the number of Roma in Estonia is 649 (Registry of Population 2018). According to the 2011 census the number is 456 (Census 2011). Unofficially it is estimated that the number of Roma in Estonia might be 1,000–1,500 people. According to the European Council the number of Roma in Estonia is approximately 1,250 (see RIE).

8 Cf. IBS 2013.

9 The written history of Roma in Estonia goes back to their first mention in historical documents in the 16th century, although reference to them becomes more common from the 17th century (Ariste 1940a: 3–5). According to census data, by the end of the 19th century – when Estonia and Latvia were under the Russian Empire – there was a Roma population of 1,750 (Crowe 2007 [1996]: 170).

10 Yaron Matras (2010: 33) calls this kind of semi-nomadism seasonal travelling. Having homes but travelling during summers is still remembered by older Roma generations in Estonia, and before that staying at farmer's houses during the winter in a similar way to what Bartash (2015: 29) says for Roma in Belarus.

11 Nevertheless, the change to capitalism was not easy, therefore the Roma in Estonia tend to remember the Soviet period as providing more social and financial security. This correlates with the memories of Roma in Latvia who view the Soviet period positively because after state factories and kolkhozes closed many Roma were unemployed (Garda-Rozenberga and Zirnīte 2014: 118).

12 All the names in the article are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the interviewees.

13 Élisabeth Tauber (2018: 626) explains the logic of balanced or negative reciprocity for the Sinti (the endonym of a Romani group mainly living in Germany, northern Italy and Austria) in northern Italy. Payments for palm reading services or for items peddled are considered 'giving' so that when the Sinti collect money from non-Roma there is a kind of reciprocity; therefore Sinti cannot do business with other Sinti as this reciprocity is missing.

14 The Roma converts in Estonia have experiences with both Pentecostal and Baptist churches for practical reasons and because of practical preferences (accessibility of church, pastor's personality and oratory skills).

15 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20:5-6).

16 Similarly, among Kalderash Rom in Buenos Aires Pentecostalism became influential due to the miraculous healing act of pastor Ricardo Papadopulos's son in the 1960s, after which his family converted and established the first Pentecostal church for the Roma in Buenos Aires (Carrizo-Reimann 2011: 169).

17 In this case the girl was wearing a glass pendant in the shape of blue eye, a charm worn for protection against the evil eye.

18 Cf. Podolinska (2014: 98–99, 102) lists belief in magic among other elements of Romani Christianity in Slovakia that existed before conversion to Pentecostalism and therefore influence conversion, explaining that in comparison to the rural majority population the Roma are more prone to believe in both contagious and verbal types of magic.

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FM = Fieldwork materials. Fieldwork materials, in the form of interviews and fieldwork notes, were collected during the years 2009–2010 and 2015–2018. Materials are kept in the author's personal collection.

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