

## Annotation

The aim of my thesis is to discuss the possible uses of the concept of autonomy in the study of conversions of Roma to Charismatic/Pentecostal Christianity. Focus on empowerment and social inclusion has been prevailing in the field, and critical reflection of questions of governance and oppression is lacking. I use the thesis by Patrick Williams (1987; 1991; 1993a), according to whom the French Gypsies who converted to Pentecostalism achieved autonomy or at least a sense of autonomy, which allowed them to downplay the role of structural factors and other people behind their actions. Through a case study from ethnographic fieldwork in a Romani Charismatic congregation in Western Bohemia I extend and refine the concept. The main theoretical innovations come from the contemporary moral philosophy, especially the theory of autonomy (of the oppressed) by Christman (2014) who defines autonomy as a reflexive affirmation of an assumed practical identity, a “life worth living”. The story which missionaries in Márov, the place of my fieldwork, put forward, was that Roma converted from being pimps and drug dealers. The empirical realities and narratives about the change cast doubt on the easy account of radical change through the religion. Based on a detailed focus on conversion of one former drug addict I suggest that the converts took the practical identity of a convert while or even after leaving the business, which allowed them to remain autonomous and become seen as rational actors. In a Bible school, which was affiliated to the congregation, humbleness was promoted as a divine principle and possible road to salvation, and the converts seemed to have accepted the submission. Their model of autonomy through conversion contained the possibility of submission, while finding their own benefit in the situation – in this case learning a new speech code which they could then use elsewhere. In two chapters I also discuss questions of leadership and kinship with relation to conversions.