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von Herrn Giuseppe Tateo

geb. am 23.09.1989 in Putignano, Italien

Gutachter: Prof. Christoph Brumann

Prof. Chris Hann

Prof. Filippo Zerilli

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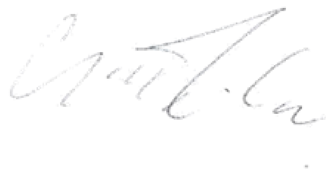

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die vorliegende Arbeit beschreibt und analysiert die Schaffung einer neuen religiösen Infrastruktur in der rumänischen Hauptstadt Bukarest seit dem Zusammenbruch des sozialistischen Regimes. Im Mittelpunkt steht als Fallbeispiel der Bau der „Kathedrale der Erlösung des Volkes“ (rumänisch: Catedrală Mântuirii Neamului, nachfolgend „CMN“), die im Dezember 2018 eingeweiht werden wird. Der Kirchenkomplex befindet sich in unmittelbarer Nähe zum bekanntesten Symbol der Stadt – dem Parlamentspalast, Wahrzeichen der kommunistischen Zeit unter Nicolae Ceaușescu. Der Fokus meiner Arbeit liegt dabei auf den wirtschaftlichen und politischen Machtstrukturen, die den Bau der bisher höchsten orthodoxen Kathedrale der Welt innerhalb eines Jahrzehnts ermöglichten. Anhand dieses Bauprojekts untersuche ich einerseits die komplexen Beziehungen zwischen Kirche und Staat und wie sich diese in den letzten 25 Jahren herausbildeten, und andererseits die Strategien der Rumänisch-Orthodoxen Kirche (nachfolgend ROK) zur Wiederherstellung ihrer Bedeutung im öffentlichen Bereich.

Die CMN ist allerdings nur das bekannteste Kirchenbauprojekt der postsozialistischen Zeit, denn etliche orthodoxe Kathedralen und Kirchen sind seit 1989 in Rumänien errichtet worden. Wenn diese Aktivitäten zusammen mit einem weiteren wichtigen Phänomen betrachtet werden – nämlich der Vielzahl neuer Kreuze und kreuzförmiger Denkmäler in der Hauptstadt – dann wird deutlich, dass im öffentlichen Raum Bukarests ein tiefgehender Prozess der Umdeutung stattfindet. Hauptanliegen dieser Arbeit ist es zu untersuchen, wie politische Regime im postsozialistischen Rumänien versuchen, ihre Legitimität durch den Bau orthodoxer Kirchen und Kathedralen sowie das Errichten kreuzförmiger Denkmäler zu stärken.

Die Rückkehr der Religion in die öffentlichen Räume postsozialistischer Städte und Kommunen zeigt sich sowohl anhand dauerhafter Strukturen wie Kathedralen, Kirchen und Kreuzen, als auch durch temporäre Ereignisse wie öffentliche Rituale, Umzüge oder Pilgerfahrten. Sozialwissenschaftler interpretieren solche Phänomene als Zeichen eines religiösen Wiederauflebens

(*revival*: Tomka 2011, Voicu 2007, Voicu and Constantin 2012), einer Revitalisierung (*revitalization*: Pickel 2009) oder Erneuerung (*renewal*: Heintz 2004). Entwicklungen wie diese beschränken sich nicht allein auf den postsozialistischen Kontext, sondern sind Teil eines allgemeineren Trends, der mitunter als Niedergang des säkularen Zeitalters (Berger 1999) oder als Anbruch eines neuen, postsäkularen Zeitalters (Baker and Beaumont 2012, Habermas 2008) interpretiert wird. Begriffe wie „Wiederaufleben der Religion" und „Sakralisierung des Raumes", die in der oben genannten Literatur häufig auftauchen, sehen die verstärkte Sichtbarkeit von religiösen Symbolen und Bauten als Zeichen einer Zunahme des Glaubens, religiöser Zugehörigkeit und Praxis. Dabei wird jedoch ausgeblendet, dass diese Phänomene gleichzeitig mit moralischer und politischer Bedeutung aufgeladen werden. Von Sakralisierung zu sprechen ist zudem irreführend, wenn neugebaute religiöse Stätten derart umstritten sind wie im Falle der CMN. Die neue nationale Kathedrale wird in Kürze eingeweiht, viele Kirchen wurden bereits gebaut und viele Kreuze aufgestellt, aber das heißt nicht (oder nicht nur), dass Religiosität im Vergleich zur Zeit vor 1989 stärker oder weiter verbreitet ist. Diese Entwicklungen gehen vielmehr mit einem unerhörten Maß an Kritik, einem aufkeimenden Antiklerikalismus und neuen Formen der Koexistenz von säkularen Empfindungen und religiöser Zugehörigkeit einher.

Um solch einseitige Schlüsse zu vermeiden, benutze ich den Begriff „Wieder-Weihe" (*re-consecration*) der den Prozess der inflationären Verbreitung religiöser Referenzen im öffentlichen Raum beschreibt. Wieder-Weihe deutet hier zunächst auf eine unbestrittene Tatsache hin: es werden Rituale der Weihe beim Bau von Kirchen und beim Aufstellen von Kreuzen durchgeführt. Sie sind als wichtige Akte der Umdeutung und Aneignung des öffentlichen Raumes nach Jahrzehnten des Staatsatheismus zu verstehen. Dieser Prozess wirft folgende Fragen auf: Welche Diskurse, Symbole und Bedeutungen werden durch die Umgestaltung des bebauten Raumes geschaffen? Welche Akteure sind an der Erschaffung solch neuer religiöser Infrastruktur beteiligt? Welche Narrative der Selbstdarstellung liegen diesen Praktiken zugrunde und welche Ziele werden damit verfolgt?

Die Dissertation ist in zwei Teile gegliedert. In der Einführung wird ein Literaturüberblick zu den zwei für diese Arbeit zentralen Forschungsrichtungen vorgestellt: erstens, die Anthropologie des (orthodoxen) Christentums im postsozialistischen Kontext und zweitens, die Anthropologie der Stadt als bebauter Umwelt. Die nachfolgenden vier Kapitel (Teil 1) behandeln das Projekt der nationalen Kathedrale. Zunächst wird die Geschichte der CMN von der Konzipierung bis zum aktuellen Stand sowie deren geographische Umgebung beschrieben. Nach einer Darstellung der Bewohner, die in der Nähe der Kathedrale leben und arbeiten, geht es im nächsten Kapitel um die unmittelbaren Akteure, die an der Realisierung des Baus beteiligt sind, von den Bauarbeitern bis hin zu den öffentlichen und privaten Geldgebern. Dabei erfolgt eine detaillierte Analyse der Rechtsgrundlage, die die Übergabe von Grundstücken und Geldern an das Rumänisch-Orthodoxe Patriarchat im Zuge der Bauprojekte regelt sowie ein umfassender Überblick zur Finanzierung der CMN in den Jahren 2008 bis 2017. In Kapitel 4 widme ich mich den Kontroversen, die das Projekt begleitet haben. Die Debatten reichen von Themen wie den nationalistischen Implikationen des Namens über ästhetisch-architektonische Fragen bis hin zur Diskussion der Nutzung öffentlicher Gelder für die Realisierung des Baus.

Im fünften Kapitel beschreibe ich die neuen sozialen Konstellationen, die sich in der Hauptstadt zwischen Nichtgläubigen und Gläubigen, Kirchgängern und dem Klerus herausbilden. Die Unbeliebtheit der Kathedrale bei vielen Akteuren hängt erstens mit der Finanzierung durch öffentliche Mittel zusammen, da – wie viele argumentieren – der Staat diese Gelder stattdessen in die öffentliche Infrastruktur oder das Bildungs- und Gesundheitssystem hätte investieren sollen. Zudem sind in diesen Skandal sowohl hohe orthodoxe Würdenträger als auch Priester verwickelt, wobei letztere auf alltäglicher Ebene insbesondere für die hohen Preise kritisiert werden, die sie für die Durchführung von Lebenszyklusritualen wie Taufen, Trauungen und Bestattungen verlangen. Denn obwohl die orthodoxe Theologie dazu ermahnt, keine moralisierende Haltung einzunehmen, beurteilen die Bukarester Gläubigen ihre Kirchenvertreter in der Praxis nach moralischen Kriterien. Infolgedessen lässt sich behaupten, dass die Autorität der Priester und Bischöfe häufiger angefochten wird, als dies früher der Fall war. Vor allem erklären die Gläubigen das ihrer Meinung nach tadelnswerte

Verhalten des heutigen Klerus durch einen Mangel an Charisma (*har*). Vermeintliches Fehlverhalten wird demzufolge als spiritueller Mangel verstanden und moralisch stigmatisiert.

Teil 2 dieser Arbeit beschäftigt sich dann im weiten Sinne mit der Kirchenbauindustrie Bukarests und Rumäniens. Kapitel 6 enthält einige Überlegungen zur landesweiten Zunahme an Kirchenbauprojekten. Obwohl hier vorschnell ein Wiederaufleben von Religion angenommen werden könnte, argumentiere ich stattdessen, dass wir es vielmehr mit einem Wiederaufleben der Kirche als Organisation zu tun haben. Die hohe Anzahl an kirchlichen Bauprojekten ist nämlich weniger auf spirituelle Motivationen als vielmehr auf spezifische Territorialstrategien zurückzuführen, welche von der Heiligen Synode nach 1989 beschlossen wurden. Diese Politik der administrativen Restrukturierung, die die Erschaffung neuer Bistümer und somit auch den Bau neuer Kathedralen umfasste, ging mit Bürokratisierungsprozessen, der Erweiterung wirtschaftlicher Aktivitäten und einer Verstärkung der Medienpräsenz einher. Im Anschluss daran widme ich mich in dem Kapitel eingehend der Hauptstadt und analysiere kirchliche Bauprojekte während des Sozialismus und danach. Gewiss ist ein Mangel an Kirchen nach jahrzehntelanger atheistischer Stadtplanung auch ein Grund für die enorme Zunahme an Bauaktivitäten (während des Sozialismus wurden beispielsweise ganze Stadtviertel ohne Kirchen erbaut), aber diese ist nicht allein durch liturgische Bedürfnisse zu erklären. Weitere Faktoren kommen hinzu: zum Beispiel die Art der Evaluierung von Priestern durch ihre Vorgesetzten, das Interesse von Bauunternehmern, sich Zugang zu öffentlichen Geldern zu verschaffen sowie bestimmte Rechtsmittel, derer sich Priester bedienen, um Gelder einzuwerben. All diese Aspekte leisten einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Beantwortung der Frage, wie und warum neue orthodoxe Kirchen in Bukarest gebaut werden, und warum diese Bauprojekte in den letzten Jahren Gegenstand solch heftiger Debatten sind.

Um die Wieder-Weihe (*re-consecration*) von Bukarest zu verstehen, muss man untersuchen, wie sich das Politische – nicht nur das Religiöse – im Zeichen des Kreuzes materialisiert. Das Errichten kreuzförmiger Denkmäler überall in der Hauptstadt bedeutet zugleich, die politische Sicht auf Rumäniens jüngste Geschichte im öffentlichen Raum der repräsentativsten Stadt Rumäniens zu

manifestieren. Die Hauptfragen in Kapitel 7 sind daher: wann genau wurde das Kreuz zu einem Denkmal? Und welche Bedeutungen und Ziele sind – über ein Gedenken der Toten hinaus – mit der Monumentalisierung des Kreuzes verbunden? Ich zeige, dass durch die Umgestaltung des bebauten Raumes im heutigen Rumänien ein bestimmter antikommunistischer Diskurs zum Ausdruck kommt: die Verurteilung des Kommunismus ist nicht bloß eine Ablehnung der jüngeren Vergangenheit des Landes, sie ist vielmehr ein Instrument zur Legitimierung der politischen, sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Konstellationen in der Gegenwart.

Die vorliegende Arbeit basiert auf zwölf Monaten Feldforschung in Bukarest. Auf Basis eines holistischen Ansatzes kamen die Methoden der teilnehmenden Beobachtung, Literatur- und Archivrecherchen sowie juristische und wirtschaftliche Untersuchungen der staatlichen Finanzierung von religiöser Infrastruktur zum Einsatz. Um festzustellen, wie der Bau von Kathedralen bezahlt wird, sammelte ich zunächst Daten aus unterschiedlichen Quellen wie Zeitungsartikel und Aktenmaterial des Staatssekretariats für Religiöse Angelegenheiten („Secretariatul de Stat pentru Culte“) – die Einrichtung, die als Schnittstelle zwischen Staat und Kirche fungiert – sowie Materialien der Kreis- und Gemeinderäte. Indem ich dem Fluss des Geldes folgte, wurde deutlich, dass der Staat auf allen Verwaltungsebenen, von der Landesregierung bis hin zu den regionalen und lokalen Behörden, eine entscheidende Rolle spielte. Dadurch war es mir möglich, passende Interviewpartner zu finden und den Inhalt der etwa fünfzig halbstrukturierten Interviews genauer zu definieren. Meine Gesprächspartner hierbei waren Staatsbeamte, Architekten und Stadtplaner, Priester, Mönche, Kleriker in unterschiedlichen Verwaltungsebenen des Rumänischen Patriarchats, Theologen, Künstler und Journalisten.

Die Durchsicht verschiedener Finanzbücher und Regierungsbeschlüsse war notwendig, um Einzelheiten zur Finanzierung des Kathedralenbaus zu verstehen. Teilnehmende Beobachtung war dagegen die Voraussetzung, um herauszufinden, wie die Nationalkathedrale von den Ortsansässigen wahrgenommen wird und welche Veränderungen in der Nachbarschaft sowie in der gesamten Hauptstadt dies mit sich brachte. Zu diesem Zweck bezog ich eine Wohnung, die nur einige

hundert Meter von der Baustelle entfernt war, und die mir einen besonderen Zugang zu den Menschen erlaubte, die dort wohnen und arbeiten. Ich nahm nicht nur an Unterhaltungen teil, sondern besuchte auch täglich die Kapelle neben der entstehenden Kathedrale, die wegen der Anwesenheit eines renommierten Mönches aus einem Kloster im Osten des Landes täglich hunderte von Gläubigen anzog. Die Kapelle selbst war somit ein lokaler Mittelpunkt kollektiver religiöser Efferveszenz.

Als Ergänzung zu den Monographien, die die orthodoxe Kirche selbst herausgibt, waren Sekundärliteratur und, in geringerem Maß, archivarische Quellen unerlässlich, um einen historischen Überblick des CMN-Projekts zu rekonstruieren. Insbesondere lieferten die Haushaltspläne des damaligen Bildungsministerium („Ministerul Instrucţiunii Publice“) wichtige Einsichten. So wurden etwa im späten 19. Jahrhundert die für die Kathedrale vorgesehenen Mittel zugunsten des Bildungssektors umverteilt. Heute dagegen wird der Bau der CMN komplett mittels öffentlicher Gelder finanziert. Solche Vergleiche geben Anlass zu weiterführenden Überlegungen zu den unterschiedlichen Erscheinungsformen des Säkularismus in Rumänien damals und heute.

Wie bereits dargelegt, bietet eine Fokussierung des Aufbaus einer neuen religiösen Infrastruktur einen wichtigen Beitrag zur Erforschung Rumäniens in der postsozialistischen Ära. In dieser Arbeit stelle ich hierzu drei wesentliche Prozesse dar: Erstens, das Wiederaufleben der Kirche als Organisation („organisational revival“). Da der CMN-Gebäudekomplex nach dem Parlamentspalast zu den bedeutsamsten, teuersten und ambitioniertesten Projekten zählt, die je in der Hauptstadt lanciert wurden, ist es im Falle Rumäniens nicht übertrieben, von einem Wiederaufleben, einer Rückkehr der Kirche ins Zentrum des öffentlichen Lebens zu sprechen. Ausgehend von der Behauptung, dass die Religion während des Sozialismus nicht verschwand und danach wiederkehrte, sondern fortdauerte und gedieh (Steinberg und Wanner 2008: 6), rückte für mich die Frage der Religiosität in den Hintergrund und ich betonte stattdessen die organisatorischen Aspekte und Gründe dieses Prozesses.

Aus dieser Perspektive zeige ich, dass der Bau von etwa 30 orthodoxen Kathedralen im Laufe der letzten 25 Jahre weniger das Ergebnis liturgischer und

pastoraler Bedürfnisse ist, sondern vielmehr einer von der Heiligen Synode eingeführten territorialen Restrukturierung zuzuschreiben ist. Die Errichtung neuer Gotteshäuser und die wieder erstarkte Präsenz der Kirche als sichtbarem öffentlichem Akteur ist untrennbar mit der Stärkung ihrer Medien- und Kommunikationsdienste verbunden sowie mit den Lobby- und Fundraising-Aktivitäten der Kirche gegenüber der Regierung (ibid: 139-140). Diese Zusammenarbeit mit dem politischen Sektor wird durch die Finanzierung der nationalen Kathedrale bestätigt, die dank verschiedener Regierungsbeschlüsse zwischen 2005 und 2007 komplett mittels öffentlicher Gelder gedeckt wurde. Solche Erlässe – genau wie andere Verordnungen, die um die Wende des letzten Jahrzehnts verabschiedet wurden – sind beispielhaft für die Entstehung einer neuen Art von Beziehung zwischen Kirche und Staat, die nicht mehr auf dem byzantinisches Konzept der *symphonia*, sondern auf „Partnerschaft" (Stan und Turcescu 2012) basiert.

Nach dem Niedergang des sozialistischen Regimes stellte sich die orthodoxe Kirche einigen Herausforderungen: ihrer strukturellen Neuorganisation sowohl in Rumänien als auch im Ausland, der Ausbildung des Klerus und der Laienmitarbeiter, der Wiedereröffnung und Renovierung geschlossener Klöster und Kirchen, der Etablierung einer effektiven Abteilung für Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und dem Bau neuer Gotteshäuser. Die ROK musste sich zudem gegen die Konkurrenz anderer Konfessionen durchsetzen; später, in den 2000er Jahren, kam der langsame Aufstieg säkularer humanistischer Vereine dazu. Daher dehne ich meine Untersuchung anschließend auf den wachsenden Antiklerikalismus und die Zunahme einer privateren, individualistischen Form der religiösen Praxis und des Glaubens aus. Auf eine für die Befürworter unerwartete Weise führte das CMN-Projekt selbst zu neuer Kritik an der Kirche und zu einer zunehmenden Popularität säkularer Sichtweisen auf die Beziehungen zwischen Kirche und Staat.

Vor diesem Hintergrund gewannen säkular-humanistische Vereine während der Proteste im März 2004 und November 2015 neue Sichtbarkeit und soziale Anerkennung. Im letzteren Fall verknüpften sie den Antikorruptionsdiskurs geschickt mit ihrer antiklerikalen Position und trugen dadurch zur Vermittlung der Botschaft bei, dass die hohen Amtsträger der Kirche

gemeinsam mit den Politikern für den wirtschaftlichen, sozialen und moralischen Verfall des Landes verantwortlich seien. So verdeutlicht der Fall der CMN auf paradoxe Weise die Entwicklung humanistischer Vereine hin zu einflussreichen Akteuren in öffentlichen Debatten sowie die Zunahme säkularer Ansichten unter den Stadtbewohnern. Der säkulare Humanismus wird in Rumänien in erster Linie durch zwei Vereine vertreten – der Asociația Secular-Umanistă din România (ASUR) und der Asociația Umanistă Română (AUR). Sie profitieren von der finanziellen Unterstützung und den Erfahrungen ähnlicher, bereits gut etablierter Verbände im Ausland wie dem norwegischen Human-Etisk Forbund. Anstatt den Fokus einseitig auf die Finanzierung und die Organisationsstruktur (wie im Fall der ROK) zu richten, konzentriere ich mich verstärkt auf die ideologische Orientierung einiger Mitglieder sowie darauf, wie diese Haltungen in einem humanistischen Ferienlager herausgebildet und reproduziert werden. Im Gegensatz zu den rumänischen Säkularisten des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts, die sich auf französische und deutsche Intellektuelle als ihre kulturellen Vorbilder bezogen, stammt das ideologische Fundament vieler heutiger Aktivisten aus dem englischsprachigen (insbesondere US-amerikanischen) Raum und aus der Debatte über das Verhältnis von Wissenschaft und Religion, wie sie sich in den USA entwickelte. Die Zugkraft, die die Vereinigten Staaten auf die Länder des ehemals sozialistischen Blocks ausüben ist zwar bekannt, wurde bisher jedoch nicht hinreichend beachtet. Bereits vor einem Jahrzehnt haben einige Sozialwissenschaftler auf die Relevanz postkolonialer Ansätze für den postsozialistischen Kontext hingewiesen (siehe z.B. Verdery 2002, Chari und Verdery 2009). Die von mir erhobenen ethnographischen Daten über die Bukarester Humanisten bestätigen diese Annahme. Folglich ist es sinnvoll, die anthropologische Untersuchung des Säkularismus auch auf Länder wie Rumänien zu erweitern, die im Postsozialismus ein Wiederaufleben der Religion erfahren.

Nach dem Wiederaufleben der Kirche als Organisation sowie der zunehmenden Bedeutung des Antiklerikalismus, ist der dritte und letzte umfangreiche Prozess, den ich in dieser Arbeit untersuche, die hegemoniale Funktion des antikommunistischen Diskurses in Rumänien nach 1989. Mein Ziel ist aufzuzeigen, wie antikommunistische Rhetorik in die neubebaute religiöse Landschaft der Hauptstadt eingeschrieben wird. Im Bau beeindruckender

Kathedralen und der Monumentalisierung des Kreuzes in der Bukarester Stadtlandschaft sehe ich einen übergreifenden Prozess. Diese Eingriffe in den öffentlichen Raum nenne ich „Wieder-Weihe“ (re-consecration). Die Verurteilung der kommunistischen Vergangenheit wird als Strategie von unterschiedlichen Akteuren benutzt, die nicht unbedingt selbst Leid unter dem sozialistischen Regime erfahren haben, sondern vielmehr eine Selbstdarstellung wählen, in der sie als Opfer dieser Ära auftreten. Das Kulturministerium (Ministerul Culturii), die ROK, und der rumänische Geheimdienst haben zum Beispiel kreuzförmige Denkmäler in der Hauptstadt errichten lassen, nicht nur, um der Toten zu gedenken, sondern auch um sich auf der richtigen Seite der nationalen Geschichte zu positionieren. Demnach ist Religion eine bedeutende Ressource im Prozess der Schaffung einer neuen beherrschenden und moralischen Ordnung (Wanner 2014). Die Legitimierung der politischen und intellektuellen Akteure, die nach 1989 an die Macht kamen, findet, so mein Argument, „im Zeichen des Kreuzes“ statt. Der Kirchenbau und das Errichten von Kreuzen sind keineswegs nur Ausdruck des Glaubens, sondern haben vielmehr eine große politische Bedeutung.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

CMN = Catedrală Mântuirii Neamului

ROC = Romanian Orthodox Church

ASCOR = Romanian Christian-Orthodox Students Association

AUR = Romanian Humanist Association

ASUR = Romanian Secular Humanist Association

SSRA = State Secretariat for Religious Affairs

Notes on terminology:

The interviews with Marian Papahagi, Radu Preda, and Teodor Baconschi were conducted in Italian. The interview with Remus Cernea was partially conducted in English. Translations from Romanian are always mine, unless specified otherwise.

When people are mentioned by name and surname they are public figures who agreed on giving me an interview and on being cited in this script. When, instead, I only mentioned one name (i.e. Vasile, Father Sofronie, etc.) or one surname (i.e. Mr Retinschi), I used pseudonyms.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

At the top of the Arsenal Hill a big construction site is at work, day and night. Hectic rhythms have to be kept up to build the "Cathedral for the Salvation of the Romanian People" (in Romanian "Catedrală Mântuirii Neamului", henceforth CMN) before the inauguration date in December 2018. The religious complex is being erected near the best known symbol of the city, the Palace of the Parliament, a landmark reminiscent of the Ceaușescu regime's final years. Like chapters following one another in a history handbook, the godless Romania's socialist past and the contemporary religious revival stand now close, epitomised by two imposing buildings towering over the capital. Or, at least, this was my impression, when I heard about this ambitious project for the first time.

Rather than following such grand narratives and concentrate on breaks and discontinuities, I find it helpful to study the structures of economic and political power that made it possible to build the world's highest Orthodox cathedral in less than a decade, just like the People's Republic under Ceaușescu was able to erect the impressive House of the People in only five years. Anthropologist Bruce O'Neill argued that this was "more than just an illogical investment" (O'Neill 2009: 97), as it was meant to shape a new kind of society through the transformation of the built environment, making Bucharest "the new socialist city for the new socialist men" (Ibid: 94). Similarly, the national cathedral has been received with criticism because of its impact on public spending. Just like its bulky neighbour, it is more than a controversial investment. Through the prism of the cathedral, I will look at the complex church-state relations that have emerged in the last twenty-five years and at the strategies of the Romanian Orthodox Church (henceforth ROC) to restate its prominence in the public arena.

Most importantly, the CMN is just the most famous among dozens of Orthodox cathedrals and thousands of churches that have been erected in the country after 1990. By juxtaposing such an intense church-building activity with another phenomenon of major importance – the multiplication of crosses and cross-shaped

monuments in the capital – it becomes apparent that the public space of Bucharest is under a process of deep re-signification. I borrow this term from Katherine Verdery, who examined the intersections of ritual burial, nationalism, and re-appropriation of property in postsocialist Romania and the former Yugoslavia:

> The most common ways in which political regimes mark space are by placing particular statues in particular places and by renaming landmarks such as streets, public squares, and buildings. These provide contour to landscapes, socializing them and saturating them with specific political values: they signify space in specific ways. Raising and tearing down statues gives new values to space (re-signifies it), just as does renaming streets and buildings (Verdery 1999: 39-40).

It is the main purpose of this thesis to investigate how political regimes have been marking space in postsocialist Romania by raising Orthodox cathedrals and churches and placing cross-shaped monuments. I do not deny that these artefacts have also a strictly religious function, but that aspect has been discussed more than others that are equally important. The comeback of religion in the public space of postsocialist cities and towns unfolds through permanent (churches, crosses, cathedrals) or temporary (public rituals, processions, pilgrimages, etc.) means, and has been interpreted by social scientist as a proof of religious revival (Tomka 2011, Voicu 2007, Voicu and Constantin 2012), revitalization (Pickel 2009) or renewal (Heintz 2004). It is part of a more general trend which is not restricted to postsocialism, that has also been read as the sunset of the secular age (Berger 1999) or the dawn of a new post-secular era (Baker and Beaumont 2012, Habermas 2008).

Formulations like "religious revival" and "sacralisation of space", which are widespread in the above-mentioned literature, tend to link the visibility of religious symbols and edifices with a growth in faith, belonging, and practice, but ignore that they are – at the same time – laden with moral and political significance. Talking of sacralisation can be highly misleading when newly built religious sites are being contested. The national cathedral will soon be inaugurated, many churches have been erected and crosses placed, but this does not necessarily mean – or, at least, not only –

that religiosity is higher or more widespread than before 1989. All this comes with unprecedented criticism, inchoate forms of anticlericalism, and also new modes of coexistence between secularist sentiments and religious belonging.

In order to avoid such misrepresentation, I call this process of dissemination of religious signifiers in the public space "re-consecration". I am not interested in understanding whether such interventions on space make it effectively sacred. To talk of re-consecration means here to start from what is incontestable: that rituals of consecration were conducted for rising churches and placing crosses. These are to be understood as acts of re-signification of the public space after decades of state atheism. What discourses, symbols, and meanings are bestowed through the modification of space? And which are the narratives of self-representation that lie behind such interventions?

Re-consecration is a specific way to give new significance to space which is concerned with the usage of religious edifices, symbols, rituals and practices. The reader may have noticed how frequently the prefix "re-" has been used so far. Albeit the religious nature of the interventions on the urban public space is evident, it does not exhaust their social significance. Erecting crosses and cathedrals in topical places of the city means saluting the resurgence of religion in the public arena, in a country whose religious identity is strong and well-recognisable. Therefore, the appearance of new houses of worship can be considered a form of revival in the sense that "religious revival is above all a return to tradition" (Borowik 2002: 505).

What is more, crosses assume their original function of marking boundaries, although this time they do not separate portions of space (as they used to do in rural areas), but portions of time: the condemnation of the socialist past is and moral order re-established. Therefore, the anticommunist discourse is being articulated in Romania through the modification of the built space. To quote again Verdery: "In the first few years following 1989, the route to new moral orders passed chiefly through stigmatizing the communist one: all who presented themselves either as opposed to communism or as its victims were *ipso facto* making a moral claim (…) Alternatively, the moral outcome may be seen as lying not in purification but in compensation" (Verdery 1999: 38).

The construction of the national cathedral in the current location on Arsenal Hill is carried out exactly according to such a compensatory logic. Presenting itself as a victim of Ceauşescu's deep urban re-organisation, the ROC claims the right to erect the cathedral as partial reparation for those churches torn down by the socialist regime between 1977 and 1989, but also because it was put aside for decades in the name of atheist propaganda. Likewise, the monumentalisation of the cross has not a solely religious connotation but becomes rather a token of anticommunist identity. Acts of re-consecration are by definition related to purification and are meant to deliver a place from evil, in this case represented by any connection with communism. Therefore, the urban space is not just the setting but also the medium[1] through which moral statements about the communist past are made. The actors partaking in this process are manifold and so are their goals, motivations, and tactics. Before proceeding with presenting the contents and the methods I used, I will go through the most salient literature dealing with two main strands of research: the anthropology of (Eastern) Christianity after socialism and the anthropological study of the urban built environment.

1.1. Religion, Christianity, and postsocialism

Anthropologists of postsocialism have the great merit of having criticised the abrupt transition to Western models of market economy, at a time when mainstream social scientists invoked shock-therapy measures so to fill the gap with the West as fast as possible. As they concentrated primarily on property issues (Verdery 1996, 2003), social and existential upheaval (Yurchak 2006), and changes in informal economy (Burawoy and Verdery 1999), the religious question attracted wider scholarly interest only one decade after the fall of the socialist bloc.

Despite the heterogeneousness of the attitude of socialist regimes towards religion as a competitive ideological system and churches as organisations potentially impervious to state control, the years immediately after 1989 coincided with

[1] Nonetheless, such interventions on space end up producing new places: beyond "setting" and "medium", space is transformed and new outcomes are generated. To put it with Lefebvre, space should be understood both "as instrument and as goal, as means and as end" (1991: 411).

resurgence of religious visibility all over the former socialist bloc. Churches became influential social and political actors again, and consequentially religious practice and literacy started to flourish publicly anew (Hann 2000). Stemming from the question of how the anthropology of religion could contribute to postsocialist studies and vice versa, Douglas Rogers was among the first scholars to sketch an overview of the anthropological works on religion written since the late socialist period. In doing so, he singled out four broad themes: "religion and ethnic/national identity; religion and economic transformation; missionaries, conversion and self-transformation; and ethnographies of secularism and desecularisation" (Rogers 2005: 14-15).

All these themes will be addressed throughout this dissertation in a more (the first two) or less (the last two) systematic fashion. The revival of national identities and inter-ethnic and inter-denominational competition over resources became an issue of major relevance not only in Romania but all over the postsocialist bloc, as shown by research in the Balkans (Hayden 2002, Verdery 1999), Georgia (Pelkmans 2006), Ukraine (Wanner 1998), and Siberia (Lindquist 2011), as well as by Hann's edited volume (2006), which brought together cases from Eastern Europe to Central Asia within the framework of power relations.

The intersections of economy and religion have been discussed in relation to ritual transformations (Creed 2003, Gudeman and Hann 2015) and to the emergence of new spiritual figures in urban contexts (Humphrey 2002) marked by uncertainty (Lindquist 2006); while studies about anticlericalism in both Western (Badone 1990) and Eastern Christian settings (Just 1988) anticipated by more than a decade the efforts of Asad (2003) and Cannell (2010) to establish the secular as an object of anthropological investigation. More recently, Engelke (2014) called for considering this domain as self-standing and separated from the anthropology of Christianity.

Conversion, lastly, was another topic which has raised academic interest along multiple directions: firstly, as linked to the opening of local religious markets (Pankhurst 1998, Wanner 2007); secondly, for it was deeply rooted in the postsocialist socio-economic disruption (Pelkmans 2009); and thirdly, because of its relationship with break and continuity, two terms at the very heart of contemporary anthropology of Christianity (Robbins 2007, Cannell 2006). In recent years some

scholars have deplored a serious Protestant bias that has relegated Eastern Christianity at the margins of the discipline (Hann 2007). The works of Simion Pop (2011), Tom Boylston (2014), and Sonja Luehrmann (2017) should thus be read as attempts to reserve to Orthodoxy more attention within the domain of anthropology of religion.

Following an approach that is problem-oriented (Robbins 2007, Hann 2007, 2010), I will now discuss a few topics that appear to be particularly significant when dealing with Orthodoxy and that ended up leading my research efforts within and outside fieldwork. There are several entry points for studying the re-appearance of houses of worship and crosses in Romania. Firstly, this process can be observed as the outcome of a full-working church-building industry. It would not have been possible, in fact, to erect twenty-six cathedrals and four thousand churches in less than three decades without the decisive economic and legislative support of the state. According to this perspective, it is crucial to take account of the stakes of all the actors directly involved, such as politicians and political parties, civil officers, construction firms, the clergy (both high and low), the Holy Synod, and the community of believers at large. The allocation of public resources – in the given case, taxpayers' money – towards the construction of churches and cathedrals engendered debates, anticlerical reactions and the emergence of secular humanist associations in the public arena. Against this background, multiple moralities deploy contrasting views of money redistribution, church-state relations, and the prioritisation of public infrastructure over houses of worship (or vice versa), in a way comparable to cases drawn from Russia (Zigon 2011) and the post-Soviet world (Steinberg and Wanner 2008) that privilege a focus on morality.

While demonstrations against the corrupted political class occur every year in Bucharest with striking regularity, the expression of moral judgements towards church representatives, be they prelates or simple priests, brings into question the notion of charisma and the way it is related to the fluctuating authority of the clergy in the eyes of believers. The importance of charisma for legitimising power and exerting authority was firstly analysed by Max Weber ([1922] 1978) and occupies a privileged position in the anthropological study of Neo-Protestantism (Coleman 2000) and

Catholic ritual (Csordas 1994, 1997). In the context of a majority Orthodox context such as the Russian Federation, good examples are Irina Paert's (2010) historically and theologically grounded study of spiritual elders and Galina Lindquist's (2001, 2006) contributions on how the ritual expertise of charismatic figures could serve as a tool for coping with the uncertainty deriving from the postsocialist condition.

In Bucharest, forms of dissatisfaction with the clergy varied in content according to the high or low hierarchical status of the latter, but had the same starting point: "the majority of the priesthood do not have *har* at all", as I heard not just from non-practitioners, but also from many believers from all walks of life. *Har* is the divine grace that descends on priests after their ordination, and of which they become a channel through the ritual and liturgical functions they fulfil. The word *har* is often translated as charisma, and these two terms share the same etymology, as they both come from Greek *kairos.* This is why a focus on charisma is indeed needed for understanding the relationship between the laity and religious experts in Orthodoxy, and the most recent works of Simion Pop – based on fieldwork in Romania – seem to go into this direction (Pop 2017a, 2017b).

The construction of new houses of worship started immediately after the end of socialism and was supposed to meet the needs of the religious population and fill the gap that five decades of state atheism had created. New churches rising are built not only with state money, but also with the donations of thousands of faithful. The impressive religious revival of the 1990s and early 2000s was already analysed by Romanian scholars focusing on forms of publicly lived religion (Banica 2014, Heintz 2004, Stahl 2010, 2011) and I certainly do not intend to belittle the importance of microethnography for understanding contemporary Orthodox religiosity, to which I dedicated time and efforts both during and after fieldwork. It is by attending churches with regularity that one gets to know priests and churchgoers, observes and participates in ritual life, and experiences feelings of familiarity with or estrangement from one's own cultural background. An anthropological study of Orthodox Christianity will thus pay attention to how sacred space and matter are conceived and consumed.

Lastly, the way people conceived and relate sacred space in urban context has received renewed scholarly attention (Bielo 2013). This means, for instance, studying houses of worship, shrines, monasteries, pilgrimage sites, etc. as such, that is, considering all the parts they are made of (the function of the interior, halls and backyards, the presence of gardens, paths, fences and so on) and how spaces are transformed and converted into places that are deemed holy. Furthermore, religious interventions must be studies also according to the changes they bring to the urban landscape and economic and social life. It is not by chance that this chapter started by mentioning the closeness of the national cathedral to Ceaușescu's House of the People.

Beyond the powerful symbolic clash, the CMN project also poses some questions on the impact that the construction of religious buildings have on Romanian cities and towns, starting from the capital itself. This is particularly true not just when we think at the dozens of Orthodox cathedrals that have been erected in the last decades, but also in relation to the impressive growth of Neoprotestantism, which is reflected by the thousands of churches that their members were able to build after 1990. By devoting special attention to the political underpinnings of religious buildings, signifiers, and rituals; to the functions of public and semi-public religious spaces; and to the meanings they inscribe onto the Bucharest's cityscape, the present work can be situated at the crossroad of urban anthropology and the anthropology of religion.

1.2.The social and political life of the urban built space

To study the emergence of new cathedrals, churches, and cross-shaped monuments means also to reflect over the ROC and the Orthodox religion in the contemporary Romanian society. In this way, the Cathedral for the Salvation of the People becomes "a point of spatial articulation for the intersection of forces of economy, society and culture" (Lawrence and Low 1990: 492). The merit of the so called "material" and "spatial" turns in sociocultural anthropology is exactly that of removing notions of space and matter from the background to bring them at the center of the anthropological lens: places, buildings, and objects have now agency, and are laden with cosmological formulations, affective states, moral values, etc. Such a

line of research has promoted fresh heuristic perspectives and has helped considering matter and space as categories worthy of analysis as much as traditional components of social life such as religion, kinship, modes of production and subsistence, ethnicity, political organisation, etc.

While the study of the home and material culture was already part of the holistic efforts of the forefathers of socio-cultural anthropology, scholars started to conceive architecture as an object of research as such – and not just an element in the background of ethnographic action – together with the cutting-edge contributions of Levi-Strauss on house societies (1982), Bourdieu on the Kabyle house (1977), Humphrey on the Mongolian tent (1974), Foucault on the power relations inscribed in spaces of coercion (1975), and De Certeau on tactics and strategies of self-orientation in space (1984). This paradigm soon became very popular and inspired a new generation of anthropologists to consider the social and political properties of things (Appadurai 1986, Gell 1998), empty or futuristic buildings (Pelkmans 2009 and Grant 2014, Laszczkowski 2016), and cityscapes (O'Neill 2009). Material culture (Buchli 2002, Miller 2005) and architecture (Amerlinck 2001, Vellinga 2007, Buchli 2013) became thus self-standing areas of anthropological enquiry, with their own subsets such as the study of religious architecture (Hazard 2013, Verkaik 2013).

It is within this well-established strand of research that I look closely at the realisation of the new Bucharest cathedral: as the building is not finalised yet, I was forced to focus on the process of construction and on the multiple meanings it has accumulated since it was first conceived in the late 19th century. Conducting fieldwork in Bucharest, on the other hand, allowed me to gather dozens of interviews with both technical and religious experts, and to juxtapose their opinions about how a national cathedral should look like and in what ways it should interact with the surrounding environment.

Devoting attention to the notions of space and place (Lawrence and Low 2003, Feld and Basso 1996, Crang and Thrift 2000) is as important as acknowledging the role of materiality and architecture. An engaging monograph not just set in Brasilia, but *of* Brasilia, James Holston's *The Modernist City* (1989) provides an ethnographic account of modernist city planning intended as "an aesthetic of erasure and

reinscription" and of modernization "as an ideology of development in which governments, regardless of persuasion, seek to rewrite national histories" (Holston 1989: 5). Such a premise would have fit perfectly for a study of Ceaușescu's Bucharest as well. Holston draws on architectural terminology for thinking cities as formed by solids and voids (that is, by buildings and the spaces between them) that are replaced and reshaped in time, endowed not just with agency but also with different meanings and purposes in the course of history.

Ironically enough, the national cathedral is being erected on an area that was bulldozed by Ceaușescu after the 1977 earthquake, in the attempt to wipe out the old Bucharest and build the new capital of socialist Romania. The House of the People was supposed to be the heart of the new "administrative civic centre" imagined by Ceaușescu: rising on one of the city's highest hills, it was connected to the central Union the newly built Victory of Socialism Boulevard (today's Freedom Boulevard). This grand blueprint for the capital of the future People's Republic turns out to be, thirty years later, the dystopic background of the national cathedral. One of the main arguments of this work is that Arsenal Hill in 2018 epitomises the dominant cultural and political register established in the country since the demise of the regime: the anticommunist discourse. Such a discourse can be articulated in multiple ways – in respect to economic policies, political organisation, welfare state, etc. (Poenaru 2013, 2017, Racu 2017) – and it is my purpose to deal with its relationship with religion at large and with Orthodoxy in particular.

The profound transformations occurring in Arsenal Hill over the last decades have made it a controversial place. In this area the processes of "social production and construction of space"[2] are particularly visible and often conflicting. Those locals who were living or working in the neighbourhood before the so called re-systematisation inaugurated in the late 1970s have experienced both the unsettling urban interventions under Ceaușescu and deep postsocialist restructuring (Nae and Turnock

[2] "The processes concerned with the social *production* of space are responsible for the material creation of space as they combine social, economic, ideological and technological factors, while the social *construction* of space defines the experience of space through which people's social exchanges, memories, images and daily use of the material setting transform it and give it meaning" (Low 2000: 128 in Lawrence and Low 2003: 20).

2011, Ioan 2006, 2007). The ambitious project of the new cathedral complex is just the most recent inscription on the local urban fabric, like a palimpsest where each erasure and re-writing leaves a trace on the city-text.

1.3.Research methods[3]

For Setha Low, urban anthropology is not just concerned with the city as the setting or the object of investigation, but requires the researcher "to combine the strengths of participant observation and intensive research with small groups with holism and political economy within a comparative framework" (Low 2002: 15999). All the elements she includes sound rather clear – the importance of doing microethnography, of comparing different cases, and of being aware of economic and political variables – except for one: what exactly does holism mean in this context? And how can it orientate the researcher in the field? The way I organised my work in the field is inspired to a holistic understanding of anthropology as a social science that mixes multiple methods, from participant observation and ethnographic description to bibliographical and archival research and legal and economic investigation. I will now explain in what ways I follow Setha Low's definition, and why holism is still relevant in contemporary anthropological research.

In an edited volume dedicated to holism, Otto and Bubandt aimed to show how such a fraught and problematic concept "is still at the heart of the anthropological endeavour" (2010: 1). The term is indeed an ambivalent one, as in the very same volume different contributors tend to identify two (Holbraad) or three (Kapferer) main kinds of holism. Let us consider, for instance, the definition proposed by Bruce Kapferer (2010: 187):

> Holism has at least three distinct uses in anthropology: (1) anthropology as a holistic discipline in which potentially all branches of human knowledge may be engaged to understanding the specific practices of human beings, (2) the study of human society and communities as wholes in which all practices are interconnected and mutually

[3] This paragraph interpolates material from one journal article I published at the end of my fieldwork (see Tateo 2016).

influential, and (3) holism as a search for the principles whereby assemblages or forms of human social realities take shape.

The very first thrust of holism stands somehow outside of socio-cultural anthropology, calling for integration with biological anthropology on a broader level (a recent example being Parkin and Ulijaszek 2007). One could call it a sort of "multi-disciplinary holism". The second kind that Kapferer detects is perhaps the most sharply recognizable one, at least until the 1980s. Classic social anthropologists like Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard are among those who adopted this form of holism. Such an approach is holistic methodologically, because of the all-encompassing attitude the researcher used to adopt when facing a given community – namely by studying its kinship, ecology, economy, cosmology etc. – but also in terms of ethnographic description, since it led to the "presentation of societies as institutionally integrated wholes" (Kapferer 2010: 187). The third kind quoted is relevant because it stands for the desertion of any monolithic description: the old analogy between wholes and societies is deconstructed in favour of more flexible concepts (like the reference to the assemblages suggests). Therefore, to operate in accordance with a holistic perspective could mean many different things: to call for a multi-disciplinary approach, serve as a descriptive figure of speech, guide the ethnographer in the field, or work as analytical tool.

Other scholars discussing the sitedness of ethnographic fieldwork found themselves evaluating the relationship between the holistic logic engendering multi-sited research and possibilities to overcome its shortcomings, like "bounded-site research" (Candea 2007) and "un-sited research" (Cook, Laidlaw and Mair 2009). This specific form of holism is firmly rooted in the "world-system" strand that developed in the social sciences starting from the late 1970s, whose main by-product in anthropology was George Marcus' multi-sited ethnography (1995). We can label this fourth kind as "systemic holism". Its theoretical point of departure holds that "accounting for local ethnographic phenomena must involve locating them within an encompassing trans-local 'system' located theoretically at a 'higher' level" (Cook,

Laidlaw and Mair 2009: 48). Candea calls it "new holism", setting it against the old society-based one (Kapferer's second kind of holism). According to him, anthropologists cannot escape the arbitrary framing of their field-sites and multi-sited ethnography is not going to change this: "with multi-sitedness we have eschewed the contrived totality of a geographically bounded space for the ineffable totality of a protean, multi-sited 'cultural formation'" (Candea 2007: 180). Criticism here is not addressing holism itself – which is a moving target – but rather the system-orientated nuance it adopted in multi-sited research. Still it sounds odd to define as "new" an approach whose ideological roots date back to the late 1970s and which has been already downgraded because of its totalising tendencies. This is why it seems reasonable to focus on the new guise that holism has assumed in more recent years.

First, it must be acknowledged that Marcus himself has adopted in recent years a softer understanding of holism. The interest in grasping whole systems comes out more cushioned, leaving room for a less value-laden definition. Thus, holism becomes "a particular style of thinking [which encourages the researchers] to be broad-minded, to contextualize the particulars in which they specialize in wider scale and scope, and to discover unsuspected connections and make something of them" (Marcus 2010: 29). Therefore, the choice to put aside any interest in parts and wholes is a decisive one when it comes to rethink holism from a new perspective: for Tim Ingold it is thus necessary "to dissociate [it] from a concern with wholes. Holism is one thing, totalisation quite another, and [the] argument for holism [must be] … an argument against totalisation" (Ingold 2007: 209 in Willerslev and Pedersen 2010: 263). Stripped of its etymological root, holism is not anymore about *olos*: its understanding becomes "dehomogenized, destructured, fragment-friendly" (Murawski 2013: 62) and its mission is not dedicated anymore to "grasp whole systems" (Marcus 1986: 91). The transformation from "wholism" to "hole-ism" is complete (Murawski 2013: 62).

It is exactly this kind of holism which is informing some well-established paradigms in contemporary urban anthropology. If we stick to Low's definition quoted at the beginning of this section, then handling different scales should become a precondition, rather than a simple analytical or methodological choice among many others. Driven by scale-thinking, holism is better seen as a theoretical and

methodological commitment to fill some lacunae by tracing "causal connections running all the way from national law and macroeconomic processes to the peculiarities of historically grown neighbourhood boundaries" (Brumann 2012: 10). It is taking inspiration from such a double movement – jumping from political economy to the ethnographic ground and back – that I tried to structure my work in the field. My point is that the wider process of postsocialist re-consecration would not emerge properly without a multi-scalar methodological effort.

"Scalar holism" – this is how we could name the most recent tinge holism has assumed in anthropological research sine the end of the 1990s – is then an approach which encourages the researcher to take advantage of different levels of social interaction in the name of causal open-endedness. I am not trying to say that this orientation is anything new, quite the opposite: holism is visible – but remains unmentioned – in methodologies that are influential and appreciated still nowadays. As for the case of Burawoy's "extended case method", for instance, which was conceived exactly for maintaining a holistic gaze as to "locate everyday life in its extralocal and historical context" (Burawoy 1998: 4) without falling in the trap of top-down reductionism which had already affected systemic approaches.[4]

The starting point of this research was the construction of the national cathedral, which I firstly heard about in the Romanian press. It appeared to be a very rich case study because of its many controversial aspects (location, funding, architectural plan) on the ground. As soon as it was clear that the CMN was not an isolated endeavour, but just the most famous among the twenty-six Orthodox cathedrals that had been built or were still under construction all over the country, a first research question took shape: Is the impressive church-building industry triggered by a simple religious revival? Who is actually funding the realisation of religious buildings, and what does the renewed visibility of public religions actually say about postsocialist Romania? I collected information on how cathedrals are

[4] This emerges when he brings the example of his fieldwork in Zambia: "I could have extended the principle of structuration by regarding the arrangement of state and classes within Zambia as a structured process nested in an external constellation of international forces. Instead I stopped at the national level and looked upon 'international forces' not as constraints but as resources mobilized by the ruling elite to legitimate its domination." (Ibid: 20).

financed, putting together data from different sources: various newspaper articles, documents released by the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs (SSRA) – the organisation that manages the relationship between the government and the denominations – and by regional and city councils. Following the money, it was evident that the role played by the state was decisive on all administrative levels, from the government down to regional and local authorities.

With reference to the Bucharest cathedral, this intense work of data-gathering was indeed necessary for two reasons: first, the Romanian Patriarchy was unwilling to share any detailed information about the percentage of private and public funding, and when I finally obtained replies from some the clerics working for it or for the Bucharest Archbishopric, these were conflicting. Secondly, newspapers did publish from time to time some reports, but never in a systematic manner: it would have been impossible to have a clear idea concerning the financing of religious buildings without spending weeks on reconstructing a broad picture of how the church-building industry works. The role of the government in this regard is of primary importance, via the SSRA, which depends directly on the Prime Minister, but also through the promulgation of government resolutions and emergency ordinances. In fact, the manipulation of the legal framework was central for funding the CMN – a project belonging to a private organisation like the ROC – almost entirely with public money. What is more, this kind of semi-journalistic work I had to carry out was instrumental for identifying the right interviewees and for defining the content of the about fifty semi-structured interviews I conducted in the field, which involved civil servants, architects and city planners, parish priests, monks and spiritual elders, clerics employed in the Romanian Patriarchy at different administrative levels, theologians, visual artists, and journalists.

In particular, getting in touch with priests gave me access to data I could not obtain otherwise. Without them it would have been hard try to get specific information about church-building strategies. Since the mid-2000s, Romanian media started to publish reports and articles – in a more or less sensationalist manner – about the ROC as well, thus engendering among the Orthodox clergy a sort of a persecution complex. This made many clerics wary and loath to express themselves

outspokenly. Nevertheless, some of these interviews were just the first – and most formal – of long series of meetings, as some priests were ready to continue our engagement and allowed me to join some of their daily activities, or simply to come by their parishes any time for having a chat.

While going through all kind of balance sheets, laws, and government resolutions was indeed necessary for understanding how cathedrals were financed, there was no other method but participant observation to grasp how the national cathedral was received by locals and in what ways it brought about change in the neighbourhood and in the whole capital. For this reason I settled in a flat a few hundred meters away from the construction site and started "nosing around", talking to the people working or living in the surroundings. This did not only involve simple chit-chats, but also meant attending on a daily basis the chapel built next to the rising cathedral: the presence of a well-known monk coming from a monastery in the east of the country, in fact, attracted hundreds of faithful every day, making the chapel itself a hub of religious effervescence in the surrounding area. Likewise, I partook in several Orthodox pilgrimages, processions, and life cycle rituals throughout Bucharest, as they are also part of the process of re-consecration of the city.

On the other hand, resistance to the new cathedral was well-visible and voiced by different people, from young urbanites to middle-aged believers or aged taxi drivers. The demonstrations of November 2015 constituted a privileged point of view for understanding anticlerical sentiments. Even though big street protests have been occurring every year in Bucharest since the early 2010s, the ones I witnessed were particularly intense, for they were caused by the death of over sixty young people and the injury of hundreds after a fire in a club. Dozens of thousands of people initially took to the street in Bucharest to protest against corruption, but many ended up also criticising the construction of majestic cathedrals whereas the public health system proved to be incapable to manage the emergency. In the background of such growing dissatisfaction, the role played by secular humanist associations was influential. Agreeing with Asad (2003) that the secular has too long avoided ethnographic attention, I attached special importance to the role of humanists in shaping the public debate about the national cathedral and the resurgence of the ROC as the main

religious actor in the public sphere. For doing so, I met some members of such associations multiple times, attended the public meetings they organised, investigated the way they receive support in terms of money and expertise, and conducted participant observation during a so-called "humanist summer camp".

Bibliographical and – to a lesser extent – archival research were crucial for tracing an historical overview of the CMN project that did not simply hinge on the monographs published by the Orthodox Church itself. Sifting through the budgets of the then Ministry for Public Education and Religious Denominations at the end of the 19th century, for instance, showed that the money destined for the new Bucharest cathedral years before by King Charles I was almost entirely re-allocated to school infrastructure. While, most probably, back then the project did not attract criticism from everyday people as much as it does nowadays; the attitude of state authorities in relation to it has changed significantly, and what was not possible in over fifty years (between 1881 and 1933, when the project was shelved in favour of the less expensive renovation of the patriarchal cathedral) has become reality in one decade of postsocialist governance.

Lastly, the history of the CMN lends itself to comparison with other national cathedrals built after 1990, such as the "Temple of Divine Providence" in Warsaw and the "Cathedral of Christ the Saviour" in Moscow. These three buildings have a common denominator, as they were all conceived in relation to events which were central for the formation of the modern nation-states, and stood for a process of "national monumentalisation" (Sidorov 2000). At the same time, being realised only after the end of the socialist experiment,[5] they are today laden with new values and motivations rather linked to a process of anticommunist monumentalisation. I will expand on this further on, leaving now some room for a brief explanation of how the contents are sorted in the dissertation.

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[5] The Moscow cathedral was actually reconstructed, as it was finalised in 1881 (after being under construction for six decades) and destroyed by Bolsheviks in 1931.

1.4. Outline

This dissertation is divided in two parts. Part One deals with the project of the national cathedral and consists of four chapters. Chapter 2 traces the history of the CMN from its conception to the current stage of works, and describes the geographical setting where the cathedral is being built. From the people living or working in the surroundings, the following chapter moves to the actors directly involved in the realisation of the cathedral, from construction workers to public and private financial contributors. Here I engage with an in-depth analysis of the legal background which regulates the transmission of property and money to the Romanian Patriarchy for sustaining building works, and offer a broader picture of the financing of the CMN from 2008 to 2017. The closing section of the chapter is about those who have most opposed the public financing of the CMN (and, in general, of religious denominations): the secular humanists.

Controversies constitute the heart of Chapter 4, which deals with the main debates stirred by the CMN, ranging from the nationalist implications of the name of the cathedral to the aesthetical predicaments linked to its architecture and to the usage of public money for its implementation. Chapter 5, instead, aims at portraying new social configurations taking shape in the capital between non-believers, believers, churchgoers, and the high and low clergy. The spread of anticlericalism among Bucharest urbanites, for instance, is a phenomenon unprecedented in the postsocialist era in Romania, and I look at it from the privileged angle of the demonstrations of November 2015.

Part Two moves to the whole church-building industry in Romania and in Bucharest. Chapter 6 offers some reflections on the trend of erecting cathedrals all over the country. This indeed underscores a form of revival, but more than "religious" I prefer to define it as "organisational", as it illustrates how the construction of new cathedrals is due to specific territorial strategies adopted by the Holy Synod after 1990. Such policies of administrative re-structuring, which implied the creation of new bishoprics and therefore the construction of new cathedrals, are accompanied by

forms of bureaucratisation, expansion of economic activities, and reinforcement of the media sector.

Then, the focus zooms in on the capital for analysing church-building activities during and after socialism. The expansion of Bucharest after WWII did not include houses of worship, whose realisation was slowed down abruptly at the end of the 1950s. Believers and church representatives tried to catch up and build churches in those new neighbourhoods which had none already since the early 1990s. Along the importance of liturgical and pastoral needs, I try to single out further factors that contribute to the multiplication of churches but that are too seldom acknowledged. These include the personal motivations of young clerics, which are connected to the way they are evaluated by their superiors, the stakes of political actors and construction firms in handling the public money earmarked for religious purposes, and the presence of specific legal stratagems that parish priests can exploit for building a new church without the time restrictions usually imposed by the City Hall.

The re-consecration of Bucharest is better understood if one looks at how the political – not just the religious – materialises under the shape of the cross. Placing cross-shaped monuments in the capital also means to inscribe a political view of the recent history of Romania onto the streets of its most representative city. The main question Chapter 7 posits is: when exactly did the cross become a monument? And which meanings and goals are attached to the monumentalisation of the cross, beyond the commemoration of the dead? Joseph Brodsky once noticed that modern military achievements are celebrated with men on tanks, while before we were accustomed to statues of generals on a horse (Brodskij 1987: 45-46). When it came, instead, to celebrate political achievements such as the overturn of the Ceaușescu regime (which was actually much more than a merely political event), postsocialist governments celebrated the democratic transition with the erection of crosses. The cross-shaped monuments inaugurated in the capital in the last three decades are promoted by actors who belong to different – if not opposite – sides, adopting the same symbol and the same anticommunist discourse for pursuing their own purposes. The legitimisation of political, entrepreneurial, and intellectual figures taking over after 1990 has happened, I argue, "under the sign of the cross". Far from being exclusively

an expression of faith, church-building and cross-placing activities retain a highly political significance.

The last section of Chapter 7 reveals an unexpected usage of crosses as means of profanation, in this case against the construction of a mosque in the north of Bucharest. It demonstrates how cross-placing can be intended as a form of desecration, and not just as consecration, as I show elsewhere in Part Two. This case study addresses the growing importance that online media consumption and conspiracy theories play in shaping the perception of the migration crisis in the EU among nationalists, m and radical Orthodox Romanians. Such phenomena contribute to re-activate revanchist sentiments in an area that was a buffer zone between empires for centuries. In this context, crosses are markers of Christian identity, but, most importantly, they are used to ward off the religious and cultural other, which is identified with the Muslim danger and the feared Islamisation of Romania.

Part One – The Cathedral

CHAPTER 2: THE CATHEDRAL AND THE PEOPLE AROUND IT

> We have the responsibility to erect in the Capital of all Romanians […] the Church of the Salvation of the People, as a symbol of spiritual union of the whole kin.
>
> King Ferdinand
> 10.05.1920

This chapter is divided in four main sections. It starts with a brief history of church-state relations since the formation of the Romanian nation-state. This is essential for understanding contemporary modes of interaction between political and religious actors. The second section also provides some historical background, as it traces the trajectory of the national cathedral since its first conception in 1881 up to the most recent developments. It illustrates the context in which it was conceived, the reasons why it was postponed multiple times and the conditions in which it is finally becoming true after more than 130 years. After this historical detour, I move on to a detailed description of the religious complex currently under construction, as the cathedral is provided with a variety of auxiliary spaces and will be surrounded by four minor buildings, a park and several other facilities. The very same fact that the project includes non-religious spaces such as apartments, a hotel and a restaurant constituted a matter of debate in Romania, and is telling of the controversial nature of the project.

The fact the construction site is located on uncultivated land – albeit it is in a quite central area – is due to the profound transformation this quarter experienced during the late Ceaușescu era. The Rahova and Uranus neighbourhoods had been, until the 1970s, among the most picturesque of the capital, where low-density apartment buildings stood close to villas, theatres and churches of great architectural value. With the complicity of the 1977 earthquake,

Ceaușescu tore down most of it to build imposing blocks of flats and administrative edifices, among which was the famous House of the People. The postsocialist commerce-orientated development made this district more heterogeneous both in terms of built environment and social composition. This is the area where I settled down during my fieldwork and to which is dedicated the second section of this chapter. Moving there gave me the chance to mingle with the people living and working there, hearing their stances and expectations about the project. Shopkeepers and owners of small businesses, for instance, had sometimes mixed feelings regarding the new cathedral, as they were involved both as contributors (being taxpayers) and possible beneficiaries of the new flows of people that may visit the area in the future.

In recent times, scholars have signalled how the anthropology of Christianity has privileged the study of Pentecostalism, leaving aside Eastern Christianity (Hann and Goltz 2010, Hann 2007, Boylston 2014). In this regard, Hann expressed the need for researching the "ways in which Orthodoxy structures the community at all levels – its use of space, its rituals, and the everyday social interaction of its members" (Hann 2010: 5). I attended the recently erected chapel of the cathedral all along my fieldwork, looking closely at how the CMN project has already started to influence the lives of locals through a simple, small auxiliary house of worship, at a time when the building works were still underway. In the attempt to consolidate a strong community of faithful around the new cathedral, Patriarch Daniel sent one of the most appreciated spiritual fathers from a Moldovan monastery to the heart of the capital. The chapel was originally built for the workers of the construction site in 2011 but has rather become a small independent parish which attracts hundreds of faithful everyday thanks to the popularity of Father Ciprian. The future of this chapel after completion of the cathedral is still uncertain, as it was intended as a provisional house of worship (and thus not consecrated)[1], but its role today is crystal clear: to make believers accustomed to this area and perceive it as the new heart of Bucharest Orthodox Christianity. This is not an easy task, as the CMN is literally surrounded by

[1] The consecration of a house of worship (*târnosire*) consists in a complex ritual of santification that involves, among other things, the anointing of the edifice with the holy chrism (*sfântul şi marele mir*). The cathedral's chapel, instead, was only blessed with holy water (*aghiasmă*).

communist apartment blocks, administrative buildings and the House of the People itself.

First, however, I provide some basic information about how Orthodoxy works in terms of priest-believer relationships and about the lay and clerical composition of pastoral communities such as parishes and chapels. This religion presents certain features regarding, among other things, the interaction with the sacred and the way the latter impregnates space and objects that a reader who is less familiar with Eastern Christianity may find obscure. This is the reason why I prefer to illustrate them now, at the beginning of this dissertation. Also, the adoption of the ethnographic method in the milieu of the chapel allowed for local religious practices and concepts to emerge, both on occasion of main religious celebrations and during the usual routine of the liturgical week. Such findings complete the last section and conclude the present chapter.

2.1. Church-state relations in Romania (1859-2017)

The few scholarly works that address the case of the national cathedral have been published in the form of journal articles and book chapters within the domains of sociology (Novac 2011), political science (Stan and Turcescu 2006) and architecture (Ioan 2004, Mihalache 2008, 2010). Outside academia, Nicolae Noica, an engineer who was counsellor of both Patriarchs Teoctist and Daniel, contributed with two monographs which are written from the point of view of the Orthodox Church (Noica 2010, 2011). However, as soon as we move the focus from the current implementation of the project to its historical trajectory, the evolution of church-state relations emerges as a theme of major importance, as proved by the rich existing literature on the topic.

The formation of the United Principalities in 1859 under the rule of prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza was a pivotal moment in the path towards the creation of the modern Romanian nation-state. A few years later, taking inspiration from the French model, Cuza, "a forty-eighter and a liberal" (Hitchins 1994: 6), sought to break with the past by establishing a secular polity: in 1863 he reformed church-state relations by expropriating the former of its assets and establishing a system of centralised remuneration for both cleric and lay personnel. Until then, local political authorities and the Orthodox Church – which was still part of the

Constantinople Patriarchate and would become autocephalous only in 1885 – had based their interaction on the principle of *symphonia.* Firstly conceived and applied by emperor Justinian I (482 – 565) in the Byzantine Empire, it stated that the imperial authority and the priesthood were to be complementary and had to offer mutual support. Being an ideal rather than a legal norm, this concept did not always guarantee equality between the two actors. Rather, religious power ended up being subordinated to the state; accommodating it regardless of the (un)democratic inclinations it assumed (Stan and Turcescu 2007, 2012). Therefore, Cuza's reforms brought church-state relations to a new stage – not only in terms of property[2] – and established new conditions of ownership and retribution that are still in force.

As soon as Cuza was overthrown and forced in exile in 1866, both liberals and conservatives agreed on installing a foreign prince as political leader of the newly-formed United Principalities, for he would guarantee more political stability (Hitchins 1994: 13). Prince Charles, of the German family of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, would then become first king of the Kingdom of Romania after the 1877-1878 independence war against the Ottoman Empire. After his conversion to Orthodoxy, King Charles and his successor King Ferdinand attempted to assure to Orthodoxy a privileged position among religious denominations. While the new constitution of 1866 already granted a dominant role to the ROC, active collaboration with it was instrumental for carrying out a successful nation-building process: it is within this background that King Charles financed the construction of the Bucharest Orthodox Cathedral in 1881, but whose implementation would only start 130 years after.

On the one hand, the creation of the modern Romanian nation-state implied almost automatically the emergence of the ROC as the national church, thus strengthening the centuries-old alliance between religious and secular authority. On the other hand, alongside the symphonic intermingling of state and church, it

[2] "Of all the groups and classes composing Rumanian society at mid-century, the Orthodox clergy had suffered the most drastic change in status. Its upper ranks, once members of the highest administrative and judicial councils of state, had gradually been relieved of their secular duties, while the parish clergy had lost such civic responsibilities as the keeping of vital statistics. The church itself came under the increasing supervision of the state and suffered the intrusion of bureaucrats even into such intimate matters as the education of priests and discipline in the monasteries." (Hitchins 1994: 10).

was at the turn of the century that – although in a coy fashion – some secularist policies were adopted and secularist thinking started to sprout among Romanian intellectuals. For instance, the money allocated for the national cathedral by King Charles was redirected multiple times by ministers like Spiru Haret towards the reinforcement and creation of the educational infrastructure. The intellectual scene was not lacking voices claiming for a separation of religion and politics, a point to which I will return in Chapter 5.

On a general basis, scholars agree on the fact that state and church went hand in hand between 1878 and 1945, as the latter contributed to the formation and consolidation of the nation-state. Hitchins (1994), who draws abundantly on historian Pacurariu, tends to underscore the role of Orthodoxy in coagulating national sentiments throughout the second half of the 19th century. This was instrumental for cementing a strong national identity that would have led to the union of Wallachia and Moldova in 1859 and in the independence war against the Ottomans in 1877-1878.[3]

In this regard, several scholars have noticed how inter-denominational competition between the two churches is basically a matter of parallel historiographies (Verdery 1999, Stan and Turcescu 2007, Boia 2011). This is the case for self-representations as bulwarks of national identity, but also as victims of the socialist regime. While it is an undisputable fact that Greek Catholics were harshly persecuted under the People's Republic, the position assumed by the ROC towards the regime is a hot topic still nowadays.[4] Orthodoxy was a natural interlocutor for the communists for the whole length of the socialist experiment. At first, it was instrumental for Gheorghiu-Dej to distance Romania from the West,

[3] In the context of the national movements spreading in Eastern Europe throughout the 19th century, Iordachi noticed how the mutual influence of nationalism and religion assumed in Romania a strong internal differentiation: "the Romanian national ideology has encompassed also an important religious dimension, with two main components: Eastern Orthodox Christianity in the Old Kingdom and Greek Catholicism in Transylvania. Although not valued as the most salient features of the 'Romanianness', these religious elements ensured nevertheless a significant socio-political influence for the ecclesiastical leadership, which could occasionally mobilize ethno-religious loyalties for obtaining strategic political gains" (Iordachi 1999: 2).

[4] To bring a recent example, the ROC has entitled the year 2017 to the memory of Justinian Marina, Patriarch between 1948 and 1977, in the attempt to rehabilitate his image of collaborator of the regime. Even though he is known as the "red Patriarch", scholars like Stan and Turcescu (2007: 81) and Leustean (2009) contributed to highlight the tacit opposition he at times enacted against socialist authorities.

which was also the main reason for the disbanding the Greek Catholic Church. After the death of Gheorghiu-Dej, the new course ushered in by Ceaușescu was marked by an autarchic drift, whose main ideological tool consisted in brushing up on the nationalist discourse.[5] Again, the ROC could adapt more easily than other denominations.[6] Therefore, the promotion of a nationalist ideology after the mid-1960s facilitated the collaboration between communist leaders and religious representatives; the outcomes of this process resulting in the reinforcement of nationalist sentiments (Kligman 1988) that lead to postsocialist inter-denominational (Iordachi 1999, Verdery 1999) and ethnic conflict (Verdery 1993).

How should the interaction between the Orthodox Church and the state between 1948 and 1989 be understood? Did the ROC deliberately make a deal with the regime? Or was coming to terms with the atheist counterpart rather an act of tacit resistance? Conovici (2009) and Dungaciu (2004) are among those who championed this latter perspective, looking at the behaviour of church representatives in a more indulgent (if not apologetic) manner, that is, explaining the compromise with communists just like Orthodox leaders themselves did: as the only viable path to guarantee the survival of the church and continuity in ritual practice. Instead, according to Leustean (2009: 190), both positions fall short of explaining the dynamics of power behind church-state relations in socialist Romania. First of all, the submissive attitude of the ROC towards the regime must be read "within the Byzantine tradition of symphonia between church and state" (Leustean 2005: 454-455). Obviously, rather than a balanced agreement of mutual support, the terms were mostly dictated by the communists and hardly negotiable. Differently from other denominations, the exploitation of Orthodox clerics as agents of propaganda[7] or informers – and of Orthodoxy as a locally well-rooted

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[5] For an in-depth analysis of the so called "national communism", see Verdery (1991).

[6] The process of self-determination of local Metropolitanates that resulted in the formation of national Orthodox Churches originated in the second half of the 19th century in neighbouring Bulgaria (Gillet 1997) and was related to the independence struggles spreading around Europe throughout the century. This set the ground for a new general understanding of Orthodox Churches as entities inseparable from their respective nation and for the acceptance of nationalist symbols and ideology within the religious community at large. Therefore, in Romania the separation from the Costantinople Patriarchate and consequent formation as an autocephalous church was a direct consequence of the birth of the Romanian nation-state.

[7] This would happen not only by threatening the clergy, but also by "gradually promoting its own people [faithful to the Communist Party] into [the church's] hierarchy" (Leustean 2009: 190).

institution – was instrumental to persuade the population in favour of the socialist cause, or simply to tighten control over it (Leustean 2009: 190).

In the same vein as Leustean, political scientist Lavinia Stan and theologian Lucian Turcescu compared the condition of the Church under socialism to that of a "privileged servant" (Stan and Turcescu 2007: 7). If it holds true that the ROC suffered serious limitations – especially in the end of the 1950s – assuming an obedient attitude let the church benefit from the obliteration of religious competitors such as the Greek Catholic Church. If the ROC can nowadays claim to represent the overwhelming majority of the religious population, it is also because of the persecution that Greek Catholics underwent during socialism. All in all, this perspective encourages a differentiated appraisal of the complex cohabitation of socialist power and Orthodoxy in Romania and is preferable to one-sided views which end up simply condemning or absolving the ROC.

The collapse of the People's Republic and the installation of the current democratic polity marked a new phase in the historical trajectory of church-state relations. Coined to portray the formal and informal exchanges between state authorities and church leaders after 1990, the concept of "partnership" (Stan and Turcescu 2012) replaced the long-standing symphonic paradigm, as the latter was judged out-dated not just by scholars but by Orthodox hierarchs and theologians as well.[8] In the context of high political instability, which is a typical aspect of the postsocialist restructuring, political parties – regardless of their ideological orientation – often sought to obtain the support of the church for gaining electoral support.

In turn, after decades spent under illiberal conditions, churches finally had the chance to enter the public sphere again. This was true for the ROC as much as for its competitors, especially those which could benefit from foreign economic support like Pentecostal Churches. The liberalisation of the religious market pushed the Orthodox Church to secure its dominant position through lobbying on legislation concerning religious freedom and the public financing of denominations, accruing real estate property, and gaining privileged access to

[8] This does not mean that the clergy do not conceive the relationship with state authorities in terms of *symphonia*, as I heard priests mentioning this concept many times, both during public events and private interviews.

public institutions such as hospitals, army units, prisons, and schools (Andreescu 2007, G. & L. Andreescu 2009). Therefore, since the end of socialism, the ROC has tried to take its role of main public religion back, that is, to reaffirm its presence in all three areas of the polity identified by Casanova: the state, political society and civil society (1994). Whereas Stan and Turcescu resorted to the concept of "partnership" for defining this strategy, and did so especially in the light of the protocols of cooperation in social work and public education signed in the end of the 2000s (eventually never coming into force), I rather take the cue from the construction of houses of worship to illustrate the modes of interaction between state and Church authorities at multiple levels, and attempt to offer a perspective that looks at the resurgence of the ROC without dwelling exclusively on religiosity.

2.2. From the construction site back to the 19th century: a brief history of the project.

The idea of building a national cathedral coincides with the enthronement of Charles I Hohenzollern in the new-born kingdom of Romania in 1881. The country had gained independence from the Ottoman Empire only three years before, thus the importance to erect buildings of national significance and public infrastructure proper for a modern nation-state. All along the 19th century Bucharest passed gradually from the Byzantine influence of Phanariotes and Ottoman rule to the French cultural sphere, which brought profound transformations in language, literature, and in local visual culture (Harhoiu 2005: 57). Bucharest was declared capital of the United Principalities of Romania already in 1862 and since then started to attract investments for modernising the urban grid and enhancing the industrial sector with new factories. Yet it was only after the establishment of the kingdom that it experienced a spectacular architectural development: the Royal Cotroceni Palace, the headquarters of the National and Saving banks, the Roman Athenaeum, and the Palace of Justice date all back to the 1881-1914 period and were realised by French architects or by Romanians that had studied in Paris (Machedon and Scoffham 1999: 22).

Therefore, the construction of a new Orthodox cathedral fell within the programme of re-organisation of Bucharest as a modern European capital, and, at the same time, was essential for the church to legitimate its primary role in the

newly established Romanian state. After the formation of the United Principalities, the then Metropolitanate of Romania separated off from the Constantinople Patriarchate in 1872, constituting an autocephalous Church that was recognised by the latter only in 1885. The "Bucharest Cathedral", as was its original name, appeared for the first time in the historical records in March 1881, in the statutes of an association formed *ad hoc* for managing its realisation (Noica 2011, Vasilescu 2010). The effective weight of this association became soon negligible and the Brătianu Government took over its tasks a few years later: in 1885 the budget of the Minister of Public Educations and Religious Cults allotted for the first time five million Lei for starting the project.

BISERICI ŞI MĂNĂSTIRI

105.—Catedrala din Bucurescĭ

Pentru acéstă clădire s'aŭ acordat următórele sume:

		Leĭ	Banĭ
Prin creditul No. 1.750 din 5 Iunie 1884	. . . .	5.000.000	--
„ „ „ 1.863 „ 1 Iulie 1887	. . . .	53.544	32
„ „ „ 2.293 „ 29 Maiŭ 1892	. . . .	27.000	--
Total	. . .	5.080.544	32

Din acéstă sumă s'aŭ anulat

		Leĭ	Banĭ
Prin legea de credite No 966 din 13 Aprilie 1888	. . .		
„ „ „ „ „ 2.542 „ 16 Maiŭ 1895	. . .		
„ „ „ „ „ 1.723 „ 9 Aprilie 1897	. . .		
Decĭ in total	.		

Rĕmânênd disponibilă suma de leĭ 616.107, banĭ 87.

Table 2.1 – An official document published by the Ministry for Public Education and Religious Denominations in 1898 reporting the funding allotted (*acordat*) and successively revoked (*anulat*) for the Bucharest Cathedral.

However, only a very small part of this sum was actually used for the original purpose for which it was earmarked, as 4.5 million Lei were redirected multiple times by Ministers Titu Maiorescu, Take Ionescu and especially Spiru Haret, who preferred to use the money for the construction and renovation of school facilities. Almost twenty years after it was first conceived, the project was still stuck at the very early stage of discussing where to place it. At the turn of the century, during the first cabinet of Gheorghe Cantacuzino, Minister for Public

Works Constantin Istrati relieved the responsibility over fundraising activities from the government, so that the Holy Synod had to take care of it (Noica 2011: 38). Once again, the cathedral was not considered as urgent as building public infrastructure or elegant administrative edifices, like the Palace of the Chamber of Deputies and the National Military Circle Palace, both built by a Romanian architect inspired by French Beaux-Arts style, Dimitrie Maimarolu.

After WWI, the Kingdom of Romania left the Paris Peace Conferences with a territory more than twice the size it had before the war. Greater Romania now included parts of Transylvania, Dobrugia, Bucovina and Bessarabia (Hitchins 1994: 281-289). This turned out to be a mixed blessing for the realisation of the project. On the one hand, the acquisition of irredenta gave it momentum, as it became even more urgent to celebrate the unity of national and religious identity in a country that had now to cope with an unprecedented ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity. On the other hand, it was exactly the question of dealing with new minorities like Hungarians in Transylvania that shifted church-building activities from the capital towards the north-west of the country, as exemplified by the erection of the Dormition of the Theotokos cathedral in Cluj in 1933 (Iuga 2015: 96).

The fact that the ROC was raised from the rank of Metropolitanate to Patriarchate in 1925 constituted a further reason for insisting on the project of the Bucharest cathedral. Metropolitan Miron Cristea – who became Romania's first Patriarch – succeeded in getting the City Hall involved by asking for a list of possible future locations and obtained some state funding for organising the first planning competition in the history of the national cathedral. After a few years of heated debates over the most suitable location, that involved famous personalities like prime minister Octavian Goga and historian Nicolae Iorga, the Patriarch took matters into his own hands. On 11th May 1929[9] a ritual of consecration was conducted in Bibescu Voda Square, which culminated with the placement of a cross on the land where the cathedral would have risen. Nevertheless, according to Vasilescu (2010), the great depression affecting global economy a few months later

[9] This happened just one day after the Romanian national day, which between 1866 and 1947 was the 10th of May, the date celebrating the enthronement of Karl Hohenzollern Sigmaringen as King of Romania.

pushed the church to revise its plan and opt for the renovation of the St Helen and Constantine Church, which was located on top of the Patriarchy Hill and was already serving as Patriarchal Cathedral (and still does nowadays). Once again, the dream of erecting the national cathedral was shelved and postponed to more prosperous times.

The interwar period has a special place in the collective memory of many Romanians as it coincided with the maximum territorial extension of the country. This is true also for priests and episcopes that, during chats and interviews, referred to it as a glorious epoch for the Church. For instance, some priests I met found it odd to apply secularist measures such as impeding the clerics to run for local administrative elections, when between the two wars the Patriarch was even nominated Prime Minister for a short time and episcopes were senators. Yet when it came to financing the construction of the new cathedral, funding was allocated only for preliminary assessments and only by the City Hall. In the 58 years netween 1881 – when it was firstly devised – and the start of WWII in 1939, the project was delayed multiple times and for different reasons. The simple fact that at the end of the 19th century, ministers like Spiru Haret preferred to channel the funds allotted for its realisation towards education, while nowadays the CMN is being entirely built with public money provokes reflection over variations in secularity in Romania now and then.

Claims that the state should rather invest in infrastructure, the health system, and education instead of raising imposing cathedrals have been leading the criticism against the project since the 2000s. It is noteworthy that there was a time in Romania when politicians were doing exactly what many people would expect them to do today: to prioritise the right to health and education, according to their moral understanding of how public resources should be employed. Unfortunately, the secularist orientation of the policies adopted in the late 19th century has been overlooked so far, both in scholarly works and in contemporary local debates. The archival data concerning the funding of the cathedral demonstrate that if such a major work was never realised in the Kingdom of Romania, this was because it was never really considered a first concern by political leaders, who deemed that the basis of the young Romanian state should rather consist in school infrastructure and in edifices of cultural, financial, or

administrative relevance. While in other newly-founded neighbouring states like Bulgaria and Serbia Orthodox national cathedrals were finalised (Sofia) or at least partially erected (Belgrade), in Bucharest construction works would start only in the 21 th century, in a social and cultural environment much more secularised and, thus, more critical of the project.

As soon as the patriarchal cathedral was renovated in the mid-1930s, the debate about the new national one was shelved due to the delicate political situation that affected the whole continent before the outbreak of WWII. Needless to say, the entrance of Romania in the Soviet sphere of influence after the war made the CMN project stay off the grid until the socialist experiment ended in December 1989. Already in January 1990 the National Church Council addressed the SSRA and City Hall for finding an appropriate location (Noica 2011: 96), while the official gazette of the ROC (1990: 11-12) reports that Orthodox hierarchs meeting prime minister Petre Roman on 25th July 1990 brought up the topic of the Bucharest cathedral. For the following twenty years the discussions about where to place this religious complex continued and three different places were chosen and successively discarded before the final decision fell upon the current location in Arsenal Hill.

At first, Patriarch Teoctist – advised by the then Minister of Public Works Nicolae Noica – opted for raising the religious complex in Union Square, a few hundred meters away from Bibescu Voda Square, the first place ever consecrated for the new cathedral in 1929. A new ritual of blessing was conducted in February 1999, in the presence of the main episcopes and Romanian president Emil Costantinescu, during which a marble cross was installed. Things went smoothly notwithstanding the election of former apparatchik Ion Iliescu as president of the Republic one year later: in fact, the social democratic cabinet led by Adrian Nastase granted a plot of land in the middle of the square through a governmental resolution in 2001.

However, construction works never started because of the intervention of the City Hall, which was worried by the conditions of the soil in Union Square. Rightly so, as several experts – from architects to engineers and environmental specialists – had voiced their concerns multiple times. This was confirmed to me by Mr Neagu, who worked as architect in the bureau of the City Hall in the late

1990s. His words well depict the atmosphere of major public works, where the interests of different actors can complicate the decision-making process: “Engineer Noica, who was back then Minister of Public Works, proposed to build it [the cathedral] in Union Square. Unfortunately the dam under the square that deviated the river is at risk and the question is *when* it will collapse, not *if*. It was clear enough that Noica wanted to place it in Union Square because this would have required more funds and more engineering expertise”.

A second attempt was made in Alba Iulia Square, several hundred meters in the east of Union Square. Even though it was not as central as the previous location, the government could offer a bigger plot of land and the Romanian Patriarchate set up a planning competition in 2002. The proposal put forth by architect Augustin Ioan won first prize, as “it was able to combine the criteria sorted out by the board: the liturgical function, the relationship with the urban context, and the blending of tradition and modernity” (Noica 2011:121). Rather unexpectedly, a few months later the Nastase cabinet promulgated a new resolution that reduced the size of the plot of land from four to three hectares, which made impossible the implementation of the winning project. Apparently, this area was particularly attractive for its high market value: had it been transferred to the church, this would have disappointed real estate entrepeneurs (Mihalache 2008: 779). Other scholars suggested that the project was hampered also by political tensions “between the central government and Bucharest Municipal Council, dominated by the Social Democrats, and the mayor of Bucharest, the leader of the opposition” (Stan and Turcescu 2006: 1138).

Bothered by such an unforeseen change of plans, the church targeted a third location: Carol Park. The land where the park is had belonged to the Metropolitanate of Walachia for centuries until Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza confiscated monastic estates in 1863. Looking for the most appropriate place for hosting the new cathedral, the Romanian Patriarchy had already tried to obtain a plot of land there in the mid-1990s, unsuccessfully. A major reason for choosing Carol Park is the tombstone of the Unknown Soldier that it contains since 1923, as the celebration of national heroes is one of the main purposes mentioned for justifying the construction of the new cathedral. On the other hand, Romania’s socialist past left a mark in this park as well, not just by renaming it but also

through the 48 meters high Mausoleum placed there in 1963 in honour of Romanian socialist militants. The erection of the cathedral would have required the relocation of this monument and the profound transformation of the whole park. This is why, as soon as the government assigned to the Church a plot of land in Carol Park, ASUR, a secular humanist NGO which will be introduced in the next chapter, and the Romanian Union of Architects organised a protest in March 2004 and formed the Save Carol Park Group.

For the third time in four years the project was halted, on this occasion because of the dissatisfaction of the many citizens that took to the streets and not due to economic interests or technical difficulties. This event was unprecedented in the socio-political context of postsocialist Romania, where the popularity of the church had never been in discussion until then: "the Orthodox Church is used to winning, as it has done on other issues such as obtaining generous annual financial contributions from the state, securing the postponement of the return of places of worship to the Greek Catholic Church, or establishing control over public school religious education […] Their defeat over the location of the cathedral is the first time the church has lost a battle as a result of civil society protests" (Stan and Turcescu 2006: 1138).[10]

The current location in Arsenal Hill was proposed by the City Hall already in the end of the 1990s, but this solution was adopted only some years later, through the law 261/2005. Eventually the practical advantages offered by this last solution turned out to be decisive, as stated by architect Neagu:

> In November 1998 we provided five locations to the beneficiary. One of these is the place where they are constructing right now. This place was considered the most suitable already in the 1927 competition, but then it was discarded because considered too expensive […] There are many reasons for choosing this location: it is an area totally cleared up and spacious, where you can build without disturbing the locals; it is easy to access from the train station – as we aspect many pilgrims

[10] While I subscribe to this report about the Carol Park case, I found problematic the one-sided usage of civil society. Such term is advocated by Orthodox Christian associations as well, and I heard Orthodox faithful affirming many times that "the true civil society is the church itself!". Therefore, it may be a better solution to talk about "certain segments of civil society" instead of treating civil society as a well-defined whole.

> coming by train from all over the country – and the soil is perfect for construction purposes. It is also on the top of a hill, as according to the Orthodox tradition. On the other hand, the closeness of the House of the People is unfortunate…

What one urban planner deems unfortunate can be considered an advantage by another colleague in the urban planning bureau. Architect Barbu was involved in the 2006 urban plan, which was drafted as soon as the National Church Council finally accepted the proposal of the City Hall to build in Arsenal Hill. For him the current location "refers to the strong relationship between state and church, as it is right next to the Palace of the Parliament, in front of the Ministry of National Defence and not far away from the Romanian Academy". It is indeed in the spirit of the *symphonia* principle that the centres of religious and political power rise next to each other: before moving to the current Palace of the Parliament (the former "House of the People") in 1996, deputies used to gather in the Palace of the Chamber of Deputies on the top of Patriarchate Hill, a few meters away from the Patriarchal Cathedral. This palace was erected in the mid-17th century next to the residence of the Metropolitan bishop, since he was the president of the boyars during legislative assemblies. As soon as the CMN will be finished, Church leaders, senators and deputies will be based again on the same hill, not more than a few hundred meters apart.

The overlapping of national belonging, state authorities, and Orthodoxy is not epitomised only by such spatial strategies, but also by temporal symbolism. Patriarch Daniel, who had succeeded to Teoctist only a few months before, celebrated the first rite of blessing of the place on 29th November 2007. Before performing the religious service and laying the foundation stone, the Patriarch delivered a speech in front of the members of the Holy Synod and about one thousand priests and believers:

> Today, November 29th, we sanctify this place for the new Cathedral. This happens on the eve of St. Andrew's day, who is patron saint of Romania and of this Cathedral (…) Right after this, we have December 1st [the Romanian National Day], to which it is related, because the unity in apostolic faith we witness and unity of

thinking and sentiment we share as Romanian people are represented in these two days: the 30th of November and the 1st of December.[11]

On the occasion, a marble cross was placed on the spot. It would be removed a few years later – before the start of the construction works on the surface – and placed in the foundation. On 1st December 2018 the erection of the cathedral will be presumably over, right on time to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the Great Union declaration of Alba Iulia.

The planning competition – the third one organised in one decade – this time was not public, but it envisaged a shortlist of architecture firms invited by the ROC. The winning project was designed by a company from eastern Romania, Vanel Exim, which was already assigned the construction of the Bacău cathedral when Patriarch Daniel was still Metropolitan bishop of Moldova. Figure 2.2 shows the plan of the whole complex. The way leading to the main edifice is surrounded by two colonnades. Parking lots for cars and a helicopter, some green areas and a ritual park with a symbolic Mt. Olivet (on the plan marked as *Muntele Inalțarii)* are also included.

The minor buildings placed at the four corners should host a medical centre,[12] a cultural centre and two boarding houses for lay and clerical pilgrims. Although, this will not be sure until is mentioned in the respective building permits. In fact, the permit granted by the city district in 2010 is the sole official document released until now by the local administration, and it concerns exclusively the cathedral. It is likely that authorisations for erecting the rest of the religious complex will be granted upon completion of the main building. The cathedral itself is more than a simple house of worship. The three underground floors house two halls, two chapels with a crypt, four nuclear shelters, offices and cells, a café, a canteen, a religious articles store, an operating room and a council hall (Noica 2011: 179). The new museum of Romanian Orthodox Christianity will

[11] See http://basilica.ro/pf-parinte-patriarh-daniel-a-pus-piatra-de-temelie-pentru-noua-catedrala-patriarhala/ (Accessed on 11.12.2017).
[12] According to the words of Patriarch Daniel during his speech on 20th November 2007, “close to the new cathedral we plan to build a centre for medical diagnostics and treatment, so that pilgrims who are ill (…) can get a free medical examination and (…) those who need immediate medical care will be nursed”. See http://basilica.ro/catedrala-nationala-inima-spirituala-a-romaniei/ (Accessed on 11.12.2017).

be set up here as well. Some of the fourteen storeys of the building also host galleries, exhibition rooms, apartments and a council room.

Figure 2.1 – The national cathedral viewed from the main entrance (Source: catedralaneamului.com)

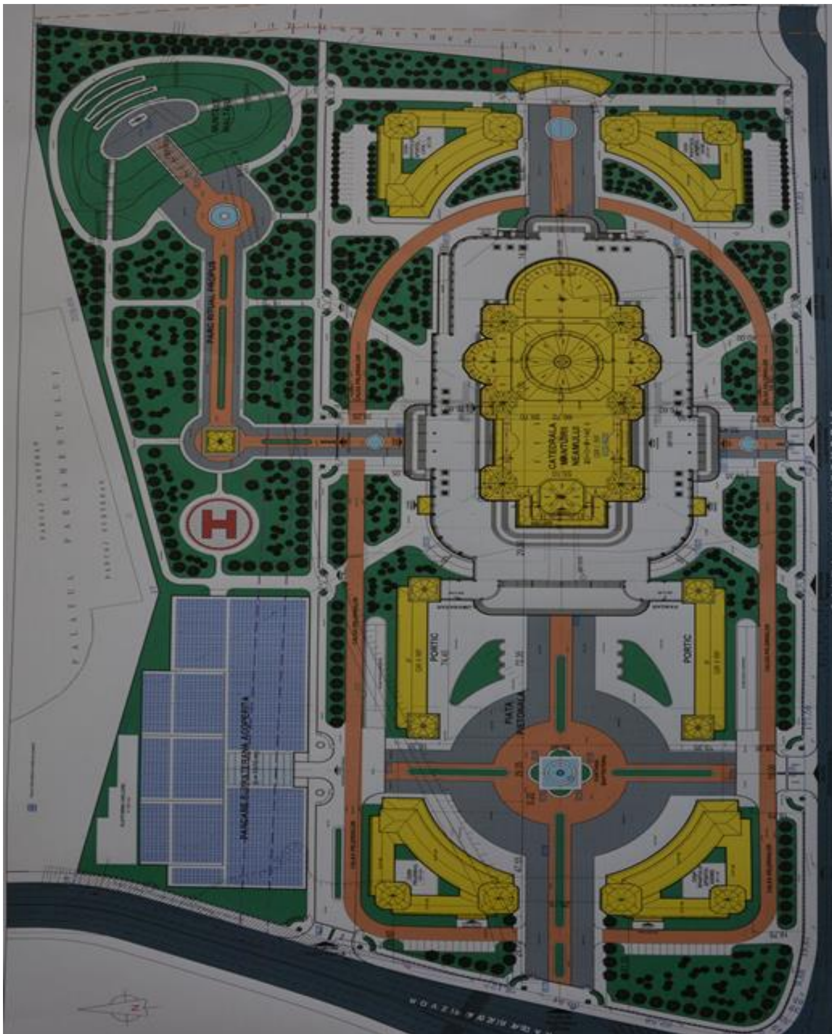

Figure 2.2 – The official plan of the CMN complex

2.3. The local area: Arsenal Hill and the Uranus-Izvor Neighbourhood

There are two words that refer to the urban spatial policies of socialist Romania: one is “re-systematisation” (*resistematizare*), a rather neutral term that was firstly conceived by the Communist Party. The other is less wide and more specific, as it dwells on the impact that the late Ceauşescu regime had on the Romanian capital: “Ceaushima”. The Uranus, Vacareşti and Izvor quarters were part of the city’s historical heritage, as they dated back till to the 17th century. Taking advantage of the earthquake that hit the city in 1977, Ceauşescu launched the project of the new “Civic Centre”: 380 hectares south of the city centre were bulldozed and 40,000 people forcefully displaced (O’Neill 2009: 104; see Turnock 1990, Danta 1993 and Cavalcanti 1997 for an in-depth portray of this massive intervention).

The transformation of the local urban landscape was so impressive that it was compared to the atomic bomb released on Hiroshima during WWII (hence the portmanteau). Art-deco buildings, neoclassic palaces and Romanian renaissance churches and monasteries were torn down for making space to huge concrete edifices. Standardized apartment blocks were built for welcoming members of the Party and of the secret police, together with government buildings, wide avenues (like the "Victory of Socialism" avenue) and the "House of the People" itself, a gargantuan project that was supposed to demonstrate the splendour of socialist Romania.[13] As rightly noticed by Bruce O'Neill (2009: 103), even though such a grand and expensive undertaking stood in sharp contrast with dire economic situation of the country, it should not be understood as simply celebrating Ceaușescu's cult of personality. Instead, the rationale has to be found in socialist social engineering enacted through the re-organisation of the urban space and the consequent removal of the local historical identity:

> Given that memory is a spatial phenomenon, the manipulation of public space is a manipulation of collective memory. Ceausescu's systematic destruction of historic Bucharest was not simply a way to make room for his Civic Centre; the Civic Centre in theory could have been erected elsewhere. Instead, the (…) project allowed Ceausescu a way to govern collective memory – to remove from the cityscape those mnemonic devices that reference a heritage at odds with the one that he himself sought to produce; it was a process of forced forgetting, of (…) levelling the reminders of Bucharest's medieval and capitalist past

Since all this happened in a relatively recent past, locals still have vivid memories of their neighbourhood before and during re-systematisation. This topic is delicate for many people, as it is certainly part of their bad memories about the 1980s, together with the infamous shortage of electricity and food and the hours spent queuing for basic foodstuffs. For instance Bogdan, the person who hosted me

[13] As mentioned by Giurescu (1989: 47), suburban areas and small towns did not escape Ceaușescu's systematization plan as well: "All attempts made in the late 70's and early 80's to stop the destruction of the traditional heritage produced little results. Up to 1989 at least 29 towns have been razed and 85 to 90 %reconstructed […] The traditional architecture and urban fabric have been levelled and replaced by the collective dwelling with multiple apartments and by a different street network. Another urban world has emerged opposite the earlier one with almost no connection to the past, but with isolated historic monuments and a few other buildings kept and sometimes even hidden within the new structures."

when I firstly arrived in the field, moved in an apartment block on Arsenal Hill when he was adolescent, right before the construction of the House of the People. He remembered with clarity the tramlines that ran along 13th September Avenue and passed over the Dambovița River, going up to the top of the Mihai Voda hill. From there, one could see stairways, churches, the grid of narrow streets and small houses that composed the Uranus and Izvor quarters.

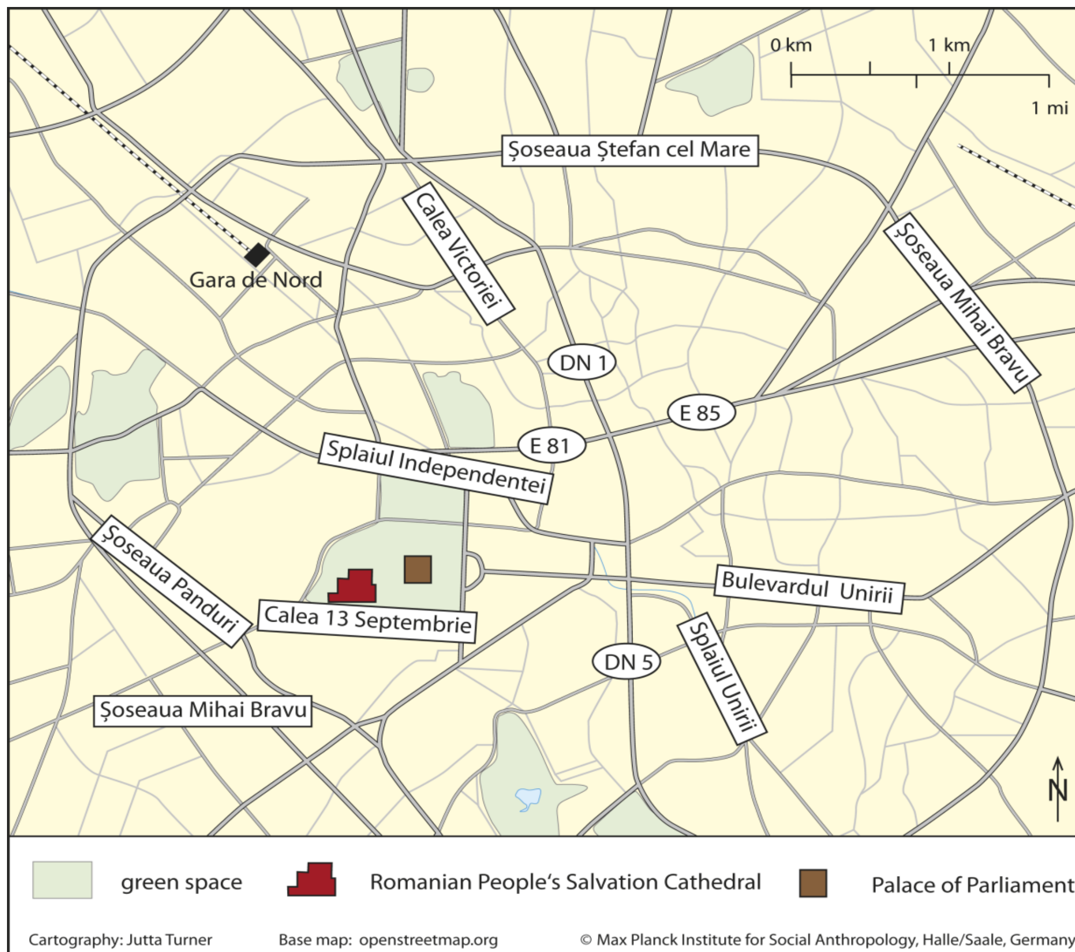

Figure 2.3 – A map of Bucharest showing the location of the cathedral.

The new national cathedral rises today on a plot of land that was cleared up by the regime in a context of radical intervention on the built space. The church considered that building there would be a chance for commemorating those churches that were torn down in the 1980s, and branded the new religious

complex as a token of moral rehabilitation of the whole area.[14] If, for such reason, Arsenal Hill is an entangled place from the symbolic point of view, it certainly is so from the architectural one as well. Standardized apartment blocks and government buildings stand close to old detached houses now. Deputies and senators come daily to the Palace of the Parliament; the neighbouring Romanian Academy hosts intellectuals and researchers while officials get access to the Ministry of National Defence that rises up in front of the cathedral's construction site.

Given that the most relevant case study of my research regards the new national cathedral, I settled in a small flat a few hundred meters from the construction site. Even though the Uranus-Izvor neighbourhood is rather centrally located, it is quite diverse from the point of view of its social composition. The street where I lived reflected the last century's history of Bucharest: small, decaying houses built before WWII stand side by side with communist-style apartment blocks and newly built housing complexes. It is an area marked by the interaction of "the kitsch and the vernacular, the official architecture of the Ceaușescu regime and the traditional small scale of (…) central Bucharest" (Ioan 2006: 339). Similarly, workshops and small businesses cohabit with the skeleton of dismissed industrial plants like the Rahova beer factory (Mihailescu 2003: 249-256). Other factories, like the Vulcan steel plant, have been demolished and relocated to the outskirts, replaced by brand-new shopping malls. The postsocialist urban re-structuration reshaped the cityscape of this neighbourhood as well, as new apartment blocks, fast foods, betting shops, shopping facilities and cheap casinos mushroomed to the detriment of green areas (Turnock and Nae 2011).

My apartment block rose close to a couple of small houses dating back between the end of the 19th century and the interwar period. In Sabinelor Street, social life blossomed between the general store and the car-washing, placed one in front of the other. Clumps of men or youngsters usually met in front of the latter

[14] As if things were not complicated enough, it seems that the CMN may have itself contributed to the demolition of the old Bucharest. The new urban plan approved in 2013 envisaged the widening of the Buzeşti Street, which leads from northern Victory Square up to Rahova neighbourhood, next to the cathedral construction site. This would have meant creating an easier way to access the cathedral also from the main train station, placed north-west. However, the modification of Buzeşti Street affected an old marketplace dating back to the end of the 19th century, Hala Matache, which was destroyed by the City Hall by illicit overnight action. (http://stage.kmkz.ro/de-pe-teren/reportaje/hala-matache-a-fost-demolata-ca-sa-poata-trece-pelerinii-spre-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului-lui-oprescu, accessed on 11.12.2017)

for chatting and killing time, smoking a cigarette or drinking a bottle of beer bought from the shop. The general store was, by contrast, a female milieu, since all the workers were women between 30 and 50 years old. It was part of my everyday life to mingle with men in front of the car-washing and with the women of the general store, getting to know their take on the cathedral, if they had any. The small talk about everyday issues constituted the base of our chats, while religious matters were coming up only every now and then, for instance when criticism against the cathedral increased in the media or around the main Orthodox feasts and celebrations. The middle-aged women working in the general store nearby were often moderate when expressing their point of view. Some were glad to see a major religious work being erected; others simply preferred not to say anything or considered that the project did not affect them. In general, the people I talked to in Sabinelor Street and the area around it were rather indifferent to the project, and if I had not introduced the topic during everyday chats, it might have not come up at all. Sometimes my curiosity aroused a bit of suspicion, which nevertheless did not cause anything but funny misunderstandings: "is he studying for becoming priest or what?" Maria, one of the clerks of the general store, asked once to my neighbour.

Living close to my object of research gave me also another advantage: every time I was coming back home by taxi I told the driver to drive me to the cathedral.[15] This was a good starting point to hear what they knew and thought about it. The drivers I talked with, males of all ages, were – with few exceptions – sceptical about the CMN, considering it a waste of money, a clear case of money-laundering driven by the state, or a megalomaniac display of pride by the Romanian Orthodox Church. Almost all of them, however, in order not to be considered atheist, quickly pinpointed their Christian-Orthodox identity, which is something straightforward for an ethnic Romanian in Bucharest. Those chats with taxi drivers were an inexhaustible source of information, bad jokes, conspiracy theories and urban legends.

For instance, one of them was convinced that the underground of the cathedral is now connected with the pre-existing tunnels running from the Palace

[15] Taxies are extremely cheap and popular in Bucharest, and by night they are often the only way to get home quickly. Moving around by taxi does not represent a "class cleavage" as much as it would in Western Europe.

of the Parliament to the Cotroceni Palace and through other state institutions like the Ministry of Defence and the Romanian Academy.[16] Another one considered the similar names of the House of the People and the Cathedral for the Salvation of the People as evidence for Romania's passion for megalomaniac projects that are totally disconnected from the reality of everyday people, despite their populist names: "Back then Casa *Poporului* and now Catedrala *Neamului*, do you see the connection now? Times change but we remain poor as we were…"

Things became more nuanced when I entered the shops in the main avenue, right in front of the construction site. In some cases the taxpayer's point of view, generally negative or sceptic, overlapped with the retailer's one, eager to get more customers, such as for an employee working in a store specialised in art and antique trade adjacent to the construction site:

> From the work point of view, the cathedral is a good thing. We will get more requests from tourists, from pilgrims that will come here from the rest of the country … and maybe from the Church itself (…) but from an ethical point of view, I don't agree with it, it is a very expensive project made with state money. Don't get me wrong, I am Christian-Orthodox, I believe in God, but I am not a practicing believer (…) I don't think we really need the cathedral. A lot of churches have been built in the last years, not only here but also abroad [for the Romanians who migrated].

The usage of public money is what makes the project really controversial. It forces people to express their values, as the redistribution of the resources of the citizenry is an argument laden with personal expectations and moral judgments. This aspect is fundamental and is thus given more attention further on (see Chapter 4.3). In an edited volume, Chris Hann invited scholars dealing within the burgeoning anthropology of Eastern Christianity to "explore local understandings of the various dimensions of secularization" and "emphasize the local syntheses that people achieve in everyday life" (Hann 2010: 15). I believe the reflections of this middle-aged woman in respect to the CMN are telling in this respect: people

[16] The hearsay about such tunnels is actually a long-established urban legend, as it is mentioned also by architect Augustin Ioan (2006: 344).

can find themselves having mixed feelings towards disputed urban interventions, and be both pro and against them according to the point of view they adopt, which can be the one of taxpayer, believer, worker, inhabitant etc. Later on, a younger colleague of the employee entered the discussion:

> I don't agree with those who protest loudly and bark without proposing any alternative solution (*oameni care latra fară soluți,* referring to the protests in University Square in November 2015) [...] It is true that the cathedral is in an unsuitable location... it is strident there, close to the House of the People. But apart from this, the Church does not just build churches, it also carries on philanthropic activities, but they don't talk about it. Do you know what *smerenie* (humbleness) is? It means you shouldn't show off your charity work, your good deeds [...] I come from Iași, an area where spirituality is very important; it is an area famous for pilgrimages and monasteries [...] Personally I have never been to such pilgrimages, because I have a different relationship with spirituality (*hrana spirituală lucrează altfel*).

The idea that the CMN somehow misleads people from understanding the role of the Church in society is widespread among those who do not have a negative impression of the project. A similar and equally popular stance consists in imagining how this money would have been employed otherwise: building a cathedral is always better than seeing public money ending up in the politicians' bank accounts or wasted in more futile undertakings: "I am for it [the cathedral]" said another shopkeeper from a general store "because when it is for the Lord... it is better than for stupid or useless things, at least we don't waste money". Building a house of worship is for some an act of love and respect for God: this is enough for legitimising its realisation and for judging the criticism about it as unnecessary (the arguments and motivations of donors are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 3.5). Moreover, the cathedral is an ambitious and, most of all, very visible project and this is important from the point of view of some taxpayers. This is also

why Bucharest mayors[17] spend every year part of the budget for new monuments or for street furniture: to show they did something tangible for the citizens.

All in all, my general impression was that people living or working in the surroundings of the cathedral were mostly disinterested in it, also because the debate has been going on for years, with the new location blessed already in 2007. The fact that – at the time when I was in the field – nobody was really sure whether the cathedral would be finished within two, five or ten years made shopkeepers sceptical about raising their revenues in the short term.[18] Another possible reason behind such attitude is the low level of information and transparency regarding the financing of the project. It was never entirely clear how much money were spent, whether the Church contributed and to which extent. "It does not affect us", said another woman working in a grocery store. But as soon as I asked whether it really did, despite the fact that the taxes she paid were also involved, she became more thoughtful and argued that then it would have made sense to "renovate hospitals, which are decaying", and that she did not know that the project was publicly financed.

Public transportation was, lastly, another environment where to observe reactions to the cathedral. Bus 385 goes to the top of Arsenal Hill and the people on it can see the construction site from its large windows. Travelling daily on this bus, I could see how common it was to switch the conversation to the CMN while the bus was passing by. Once, three middle aged women were sitting and talking in a low voice. As soon as the bus passed in front of the building, they firstly made the sign of the cross. Then, one of them told the others, with a certain confidence and authority in her tone, that some relics of St. Parascheva will be moved from the Moldovan city of Iaşi to the cathedral. While watching out of the window, their attitude towards the imposing edifice was of respect and admiration.

At times, the CMN was received with mockery and sarcasm as well. Two men around fifty, probably hailing from the countryside, were chatting on a

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[17] Bucharest municipal administration is organized on two levels: the City Hall, headed by the city mayor; and six city district, each managed by a local mayor.

[18] Nevertheless, the expected flow of tourists and pilgrims that will presumably reach Arsenal Hill in the forthcoming years made some entrepreneurs invest here. For example, an antique trade shop named "Cathedral Antiques" was opened in 13th September Avenue (exactly in front of the southern side of the religious complex) a few years after the works at the CMN started, but it closed down already in summer 2016.

Saturday morning in the bus, which otherwise would have been totally empty if it was not for them, me, and my friend Gabi. They were speaking fast and their tight accent made it hard for me to follow the discussion. But as soon as Gabi started to giggle, he promptly translated to me the joke of one of them made when we passed by the construction site: "The Church has found the relics of every possible saint, they just lack Jesus', and then they're done!"

2.4. The new religious community: the chapel of the national cathedral

Even though the cathedral is still under construction, the impact of the CMN complex locally is already apparent. Not only in relation with the built environment, but also in the religious landscape of Arsenal Hill, not to say of the whole capital. In 2011, in order to provide to the hundreds of workers of the construction site a place in which to pray – at least, this was the official reason – a chapel was built on the south-western border of the land destined to the CMN complex. Patriarch Daniel personally chose to send there one monk from the famous Moldovan monastery of Sihastria, Father Ciprian Gradinaru. This monk is considered one of the most popular spiritual figures currently alive, after the last two major spiritual authorities of the former generation of monks died in 2011 (Father Arsenie Papacioc and Father Bartolomeu Anania). This small chapel is the only house of worship that I have never seen empty: when Father Gradinaru was present there were always at least a dozen of people – even late at night – queuing for confession or to ask him advice about personal concerns. People came from every part of the city and even farther. The strategy of the Patriarch was clear: to cement a proper community of believers in the area already before the cathedral will be completed.

The purpose of this last section is to offer an ethnographic description of the CMN chapel as it represents a first, visible factor of change brought by the cathedral project. By doing this, I will also offer some introductory information about Orthodox religiosity, which may turn out to be particularly useful for those readers less familiar with Orthodox Christianity. The chapel has two patrons, St. John Chrysostom and the Virgin Mary Prodromiţa: some relics of the former (some parts of his tongue) and an icon of the latter are kept inside. Coming in from Arsenal Square, there is a small religious goods store on the right, a path leading to

the chapel in the front and an area for lighting candles on the left. In the garden surrounding the church there is a small playground for kids, so that parents can leave them there while they are inside. Lastly, behind the chapel there are the parish house and an area for outdoor celebrations.

As I said, what is particularly interesting about this chapel is the fact that – differently from the majority of the other parishes – it was a sort of spiritual hub that believers used to frequent every day of the week, all day long, and not just during the main celebrations of the liturgical week. This was happening because of the growing popularity of Father Ciprian in the city: the long-term presence of a charismatic monk in the middle of capital is unusual, as spiritual elders are rather to be found in the beautiful monasteries spread all over Romania (although important abbeys, like Antim and Radu Vodă, are present in Bucharest as well).

Figure 2.4 – The entrance of the chapel on the day of the Virgin Mary procession. In the background is visible the western side of the national cathedral.

Figure 2.5 – Patriarch Daniel represented as offering, with the help of St. Andrew, the cathedral to Jesus. The painting is from the interior of the chapel.

Father Ciprian is about 45 years old and comes from the Botoşani region, which is famous for the high number of monasteries and for being the birthplace of the most famous Romanian poet, Mihai Eminescu. He spent twenty-three years at the Sihastria monastery, ten of which as disciple of Father Cleopa Ilie, the abbot of the monastic community and one of the most important Romanian Orthodox spiritual elders of the 20th century. In 2011, he was sent by Patriarch Daniel to Bucharest for taking care of the chapel and, since then, this small house of worship emptied out only when Father Ciprian went back to Sihastria for a few days. The role of spiritual fathers (*duhovnici*) like him is not only related to pastoral activities, as people visit them whenever they have any serious personal issue. In fact, it is hard sometimes to say where their strictly spiritual role ends and where their social function begins. An aphorism widespread in the religious milieu goes:

“What the psychologist is for the rich, the priest is for the poor”.[19] Spiritual fathers, who are monks, spend many hours per week welcoming the churchgoers who come asking for advice, assistance, solace, etc. They are trustworthy figures who play a prominent role in the life of believers, especially those at risk of social exclusion like the poor and the elderly.

Due to the ascetic life they lead, some charismatic monks are deemed to have particular powers such as clairvoyance or performing miraculous healings. Father Ciprian was famous for the former, as believers considered him able to understand their problems before they could tell him anything. For instance, while once I was queuing waiting to talk with Father Ciprian, one woman told me that he was able to foresee things happening and thus give useful suggestions. The woman brought the example of a relative of her, who once asked advice about her ill daughter: the monk said there was nothing to do and that she should not undergo an operation, because that would be pointless if not dangerous. This ability of Father Ciprian is called *harul clarviziunii* (gift of foresight), wherein *har* can stand for “divine grace” or “charisma”. Even though the divine grace descends on every cleric at the moment of his ordination, only some charismatic monks are believed to be endowed with special powers. Most importantly, the features associated with charisma in Orthodoxy have nothing to do with the idea of a charismatic leader in Pentecostalism. They are, to some extent, even antithetic: to the mild voice of the former is opposed the loud one of the latter; Orthodox monks are famous for being meek (*blând*) while Pentecostal preachers are for their energetic attitude; monks wait for the faithful inside the church or within the monastery walls, while preachers are by definition missionary etc.

The growing hearsay about the outstanding gifts of Father Ciprian is one of the reasons why the chapel was never empty when he was around. A young woman told me once that she came just because she heard about this *duhovnic* with the “special *har*” of foresight. As she had to take an important decision about her life, she felt she should consult Father Ciprian first. This young woman treated

[19] During an interview released for a religious magazine, Father Ciprian expressed a similar point in this respect: “the mind-set of Romanians is pretty strict: when they are ill, they go to the doctor; when they have troubles, they go to the priest“ (See http://www.formula-as.ro/2017/1262/societate-37/un-izvor-de-lumina-in-bucuresti-parintele-ciprian-de-la-sihastria-22194, accessed on 29.11.2017)

the topic and talked about the monk with great respect and deference. For instance, kissing the hands of priests is a customary practice in Orthodoxy that is not restricted to monks, as it is a way to venerate the Holy Orders of ordained priests. Nevertheless, the way believers treated Father Ciprian was often full of awe, and not comparable to simple forms of everyday respect that churchgoers show to clerics. Every single time the monk left his usual place in the chapel's choir, he was followed by a group of faithful. Also, believers often became very emotional when they could finally get in front of him, not just because of their reverence for the monk but also due to the sensitive topics they brought up during the conversation and the many hours spent queuing.

It should be no surprise that, so far, I have reported mostly female voices: women were the overwhelming majority within the walls of the chapel, and things were not much different in the other churches I happened to visit in the capital. Another woman I talked to was a regular in the chapel. I saw her many times coming with her daughter, spending hours in the church or in the courtyard outside. Once she told me she had been there the whole morning, in order to get Father Ciprian's blessing for her and her family: "She (pointing at her daughter) is blessed from her toes to the top of her hair [because] Father Ciprian is full of *har*. [...] You have to know that he was the apprentice of Father Cleopa, the most important *duhovnic* of Romania."

The experience of this middle-aged woman is telling because it reveals the actual importance of contact[20] when the faithful interact with a spiritual figure that is "full of *har*". Charisma becomes almost material, as if people could see it as matter being part of Father Ciprian's body. Inasmuch as divine grace is conceived materially, it is also transferable through contact: this is why believers were always thronging around the monk when he was conducting religious service, or stood under his stole when he was uttering the final blessing after the *acatist* and *maslu* liturgies.[21] Especially in such moments, I had the sensation that everybody

[20] Even though in this section I deal with forms of religiosity that deal mainly with touch, Orthodox spirituality is obviously not limited to it. For a more detailed study of the role of the senses in Orthodox Christianity, see the new edited volume by Sonja Luehrmann (Luehrmann 2017).
[21] The *acatist* is a type of hymn that can be dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the Holy Trinity, the saints, a holy event etc. *Maslu*, instead, stands for the sacrament of holy unction. The respective liturgical

inside the chapel, from the old zealot woman to the young deacon, was part of a whole, as during this part of the ritual each faithful put their hands on the neighbour's shoulder, so that everybody was connected – directly or indirectly – with Father Ciprian.

Figure 2.6 – Pilgrims venerating the icon of the Virgin Mary Prodromița are anointed with the Holy Oil.

Those who were far from anybody else kept a hand on the icon of the Virgin Mary or on the relics of St. John Chrysostom. The divine grace which descends through the Holy Spirit on Father Ciprian is thus imagined as propagating by means of physical contact among the participants, who feel protected and delivered from evil. Such understanding of how ritual practice works is rather a form of folk religion, as from the theological point of view the Holy Spirit rather goes where the faithful demonstrate devotion by means of faith and prayer.

Likewise, discrepancies between popular practice and "orthopraxis" can emerge in relation to the usage of sacred objects. For instance, believers interact with the saints, martyrs, Christ, or the Virgin Mary through the veneration of icons.

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service is composed of hymns, prayers and the anointment of the faithful with the holy oil (Kazhdan 2005).

They look at them with great intensity, kissing and caressing them, and all this is of course sanctioned theologically speaking. The icon is, in fact, more than simple representation: as soon as it is blessed, it is matter indeed full of *har*. For this reason some believers tend to see sacred objects as sources of divine grace that can be indeed transferred by contact, as for the case of a churchgoer who once put her CV on the relics of a saint, in the hope of making it "powerful" and finding a job.[22] But according to Orthodox theology, what actually makes miracles is the "prototype", the saint or holy figure that is made visible through the icon, and not the object itself (Lossky and Ouspensky [1952] 1999, Schönborn 1994). Nevertheless, as aptly theorised by theologian Vladimir Lossky, differences between orthopraxis and folk praxis are not really conflicting but rather belong to two different traditions, one "vertical Tradition", concerning the god's truth and thus not prone to modifications, and the other "horizontal", which stands for how the word is understood, expressed and transmitted by humankind (Lossky [1952] 1999).

In this sense, in Orthodoxy relations are "characterized by correctness and deferral – formal modes of relating to authority that are open-ended and non-definitive" that set the ground for "certain kinds of pluralism, heterodoxy, and dissent within an overarching structure of faith and obedience" (Bandak & Boylston 2014: 25). One of the reasons behind this pluralist understanding of Orthodoxy is that, differently from Catholicism, the leader of the Church is not defined by its infallibility but is rather a representative figure whose limited power does not even entail obedience by the other bishops. Authority over theological issues is thus more fragmented and popular religious practice is not necessarily perceived in opposition to doctrine.

The open-endedness Bandak and Boylston talk about is also visible in the way the sacred space is set up, lived, and understood. The interior of Bucharest Orthodox Churches was certainly a suggestive place, where natural light, silence,

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[22] Many other examples could be given in relation to contemporary folk religion in Romania: for example Bănică (2014: 365) reported of pilgrims putting their wallets over the relics of saints in order to be successful in their business activities, or of a woman who put her mobile phone over them while calling his son who lived abroad, in the hope of "sending" him the sanctifying power of holy relics and protecting him. Therefore, religiosity and contact magic (Frazer [1889] 1922) coexist in the main public celebrations like pilgrimages, processions, and blessings.

and the smell of incense created an atmosphere of intimacy and favoured the interaction with the sacred. To this kind of personal, everyday spiritual practice is opposed the outstanding nature of processions and pilgrimages, which are instead often loud and chaotic events, and whose relational and communal aspect is prominent (Bănică 2014).

The constant presence of a long queue of believers waiting to meet Father Ciprian gave me the impression that a sort of small pilgrimage was occurring at the chapel on a weekly basis: the queue is, in fact, a founding element of it and not at all an unpleasant drawback that separates the faithful from relics and sacred objects (Ibid: 372). Standing in queue generates an immediate sense of solidarity and complicity with the people around, whom one mingles with to share information, emotions, and expectations. This is why the chapel was a sacred place lived in many different ways by churchgoers, and the stillness we may expect in a house of worship was an exception rather than the norm.

The faithful were not just praying in silence: often they were chatting with their relatives, friends, or acquaintances they used to meet at the church. Some others used to munch some food or to talk on the phone while sitting on the chairs at the two sides of the nave, though they were trying not to be too loud. The presence of children also contributed to create such an informal atmosphere. While in summer they would rather play in the garden, in the playground or simply in the courtyard, this was not the case in winter times. I recall, for instance, one kid driving his remote-control car through the legs of the bystanders without getting scolded by anybody. Notwithstanding the great variety of behaviours one could observe there, the fact that the chapel was not solely dedicated to strictly religious purposes but also a place for social interaction proves that – so far – the idea of Patriarch Daniel to bring Father Ciprian from rural Moldova to the heart of the capital was indeed successful.

However, Father Ciprian's foresight and meek attitude were not the only reasons why believers came to the chapel. Traditional liturgical activity in the form of masses and confessions (*spovedanie*) was also performed. Prayers for the beloved ones, both dead and alive, were carried out not just by believers but also by the priest. The former usually hand in to the latter a folded piece of paper with the names of those they want to protect or to commemorate (*pomelnic*), containing

a monetary contribution for the priest as well. On a general basis, the services that parish priests offered to the faithful consisted in ritual activity (confessions, prayers, blessing of houses and objects, celebration of sacramental rites, etc.), psychological support, and affective work, as in the case of Father Ciprian advising the churchgoers concerning their personal problems.

In exchange, the faithful support the priests through donations which can be monetary or non-monetary (sacred objects, volunteer work, specific expertise, etc.). In the specific case of the chapel of the national cathedral, believers volunteered by cleaning the house of worship: by wiping carefully the furniture, the icons and the casket with relics, or hoovering the carpets several times a day. The people cleaning were always different, and according to Petru, the sexton (*paracliser*), everybody was free to help anytime. Furthermore, volunteering can involve philanthropy and is not just carried out inside the church. Even though the low engagement of the Church in charitable activities is a hot topic in the country (see also Chapter 4.3). Father Ciprian and some volunteers of the chapel have been very active in this respect, providing food to the poor and promoting blood donation campaigns and free check-ups in disadvantaged rural areas.

This chapter was intended to illustrate the historical trajectory that led the project of the national cathedral to be implemented 130 years after it was proposed for the first time. By resorting to both bibliographical and archival research it was possible to understand the reasons why – differently from other capitals of Orthodox south-east European countries like Sofia and Belgrade – in Bucharest this project was postponed so many times. The secularist policies adopted in the end of the 19th century tell us that the ideal of *symphonia* between church and state has not always regulated the relations between these two actors. Likewise, the generous financial and legislative support granted after 1990 by political actors (like the Social Democratic Party) towards religious denominations and especially in favour of the Romanian Orthodox Church generates widespread criticism among Bucharest citizens, as will be shown in the next chapters.

However, everyday chats, interviews and talks I had with the people living and working nearby the cathedral left me with the sensation that many people were uninterested in what was going on at the construction site: for some, the

religious nature of the project was enough for looking at it with sympathy, while for others it became a matter of concern only after they found out that their taxes were involved. Lastly, those who were expecting some financial benefits from the new cathedral also had mixed feelings about it, as in the case of the shopkeeper who was more or less happy with it according to the point of view she adopted (moral as a taxpayer, or capitalist as a retailer).

At the time of my fieldwork the cathedral was still under construction. This was a good reason for writing a history of a project in the making, even though I could not research how people live with and experience the completed cathedral. Instead, I could conduct participant observation inside the chapel of the CMN and discover how effective the strategy of Patriarch Daniel to build a community around the charismatic figure of Father Ciprian proved to be. The construction of a national cathedral is not made just with bricks and concrete, but also with the help of popular spiritual fathers, who are able to attract hundreds of believers and thus transform a land which was uncultivated and cleared up by the atheist Ceauşescu into one of the main religious hubs of Orthodox Bucharest.

CHAPTER 3: THE ACTORS

> God never forgets somebody who did something for God. A Ktetor[1] (*ctitor*) lends his hands to God in order to erect the church of the Holy Trinity for the salvation of the faithful.
>
> Patriarch Daniel Ciobotea
> 29.11.2007

When we talk about the people around the new national cathedral, this can be meant literally or figuratively. It was one of the purposes of the last chapter to give a look at how the people physically located in the vicinity of the construction site understand this project. It is the purpose of the present one to offer a clear picture of all the actors gravitating around it, that is, to illustrate how the world's highest Orthodox complex is finally becoming reality, after having been only a project for more than a century. At first, the structure of the beneficiary – the Romanian Orthodox Church – is discussed, together with the official reasons proposed by the Romanian Patriarchate for the erection of the national cathedral. I will introduce the various organs (the Holy Synod, the Romanian Patriarchate, the National Church Council etc.) the church consists of and that make it perceived as an organisation endowed with agency (Halemba 2015: 13). Among these, the committee for the construction of the cathedral plays an important role, as it connects the ROC to the firms involved in the planning and implementation of the

[1] A Ktetor is a "founder (*ktistes*), patron, or owner of an ecclesiastical institution (a church or a monastery)" (Kazhdan 1991: 1160)

project. The latter are the topic of the following section, which also expands on the organisation of the construction site and the workers operating in it.

Since the CMN came back on the public agenda, the ROC has benefitted from the support of several political parties and the project has been endorsed by almost all the postsocialist governments. Therefore, it is no surprise that even a specific law for funding its erection was promulgated. As the law 261/2005 is not the only one regulating the public funding of denominations, the third section of this chapter is dedicated to the legal background against which the CMN finds its own place. By looking at how legislative tools are implied to realise the national cathedral in a short period and through public money, I draw some conclusions on contemporary church-state relations in Romania. Also, the legal background is strictly connected to the topic of public and private funding. The data I put together show that – up to the moment I write – public funding has covered the totality of the costs announced by the church's press centre, and gives a general idea of how the state contributed and at which administrative level. Differently from other postsocialist countries like Georgia, Ukraine, or Russia, the financial support coming from businessmen and oligarchs in Romania is much less prominent. Besides the money donated by some professionals and entrepreneurs, private contributions consist of the offers made by everyday believers. The fundraising campaign started in 2008 in every parish of the country, but unfortunately the sum of money collected since then is still kept secret and, most likely, will not be revealed in the future either.

Having depicted the supporters' side, all is left is to get to know who actively opposes the construction of the cathedral. I have already mentioned that the CMN is not a popular undertaking at all, and will present the point of view of those who are dissatisfied with it all along this dissertation. Following Engelke's attempt to establish an anthropology of secular humanism (2014), "secular humanists" is the label I use for the activists of two associations: AUR (Romanian Humanist Association) and ASUR (Romanian Secular Humanist Association). I interviewed one representative each, attended some of the events they organised through the year, and, most importantly, spent six days with some of their members at the summer camp they set up in August 2016. Differently from weekly or monthly meetings, this event welcomed humanists from foreign countries and –

since it was addressed to youngsters – focused on what humanism means and humanists do, offering valuable self-representations (and, consequently, representation of the "other", that is, religion). Beyond this, there are two main reasons that make it worth to dwell on the role played by humanists in contemporary Romania: first, former members of such NGOs contributed to thwarting the construction of the cathedral in Carol Park in 2004, thus becoming one of the actors partaking in recent history of the CMN project. Second, through their several public activities – that range from legal battles about teaching religion at school to launching catchy advertisement campaigns – they started a debate about the public presence of the church in the postsocialist Romanian society.

3.1. The Romanian Orthodox Church and its motivations

The term "church" is not univocal and can have different meanings. For instance, in a general sense, Christians conceive the church as a community of believers – lay and clerics – which sees its founder in Christ. However, the most widespread sense of the word refers to churches as religious organisations that are perceived as agents able to manage social life (Halemba 2015: 13). It is the latter that I intend to focus at this point. The Romanian Orthodox Church is organized in the form of the Romanian Patriarchate (henceforth RP), which is officially the beneficiary of the project. The Holy Synod is the highest authority of the Romanian Orthodox Church. It is formed by six Metropolitanates, sixteen Archbishoprics and thirteen Bishoprics accounting for Romania, plus some representatives for Romanian Orthodox communities abroad. The Patriarch is the head and representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church, but decision making is a prerogative of the Holy Synod, which meets twice per year. On a local scale, Bishoprics and Archbishoprics are divided in Protopopiates and, eventually, in parishes, which are the smallest units.[2]

As shown in the previous chapter, it was Patriarch Teoctist to put the CMN back on the agenda of his political interlocutors in the 1990s. Nevertheless, it was only in the second half of the successive decade that the project finally came true.

[2] For the time being, I find it less confusing to introduce here the sole territorial administration of the ROC. An explanation of how the Romanian Orthodox clergy is structured is to be found in Chapter 5, which specifically addresses the relationship between clerics and laymen.

As soon as legal issues were settled (law 261/2005 guaranteed public funding and gifted the plot of land), the advertisement and fundraising campaigns were launched. When questioned during interviews and TV programs, both church leaders and the church's spokesperson mentioned a number of reasons that justify the construction of a new national cathedral. I will now present them as they are reported in the official website of the project.[3]

First, the CMN is needed from a liturgical point of view. The current patriarchal cathedral is inadequate in terms of space to conduct properly liturgical life. This building was renovated in the 1930s and since then has been a provisional solution while waiting for the construction of a more equipped and capacious house of worship. Its maximum capacity is of only three-hundred people, so that many church services must be carried outdoor.

Second, the cathedral will host events of national relevance. The public utility of denominations is ratified by the law on religious freedom 489/2006, and consists also in celebrating feasts of national and civil significance. Religious ceremonies of public and national relevance like the commemoration of the heroes of December 1989 and the celebration of the Great Union Day will be held in the new cathedral. Moreover it will host exhibitions, cultural events and anniversaries of national relevance in the adjacent six-hectare park.

Third, church leaders often referred to the new cathedral as a symbol of social and spiritual unity. In fact, charitable purposes are expected to join to liturgical, catechetical and homiletic ones. In order to fulfil the philanthropic spirit of the Orthodox Church, the whole complex under construction will thus include a canteen, small hotels for pilgrims and a medical centre.

Fourth, the cathedral will stand as a symbol of cultural unity. By means of its traditional Byzantine-Romanian architectural style, the cathedral will represent the faith of the vast majority of the Romanian people. The icons and mosaics decorating the interior, in fact, will depict saints and houses of worship typical of every Romanian region, and will include Romanian communities abroad. A "Museum of Romanian Christianity" will be set up as well.

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[3]See http://catedralaneamului.ro/_dev/index.php/31-prima-pagina/41-de-ce-construim-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului-si-care-este-semnificatia-acesteia (accessed on 15.03.2018).

Fifth, the CMN will fill a gap in terms of “national dignity”. The ROC is currently the only Orthodox Church without a proper cathedral representing the religion of the majority of the Romanian people. Moreover, the erection of a building of national relevance is even more legitimate considering the fact that in Bucharest it was recently built the ‘National Arena’ football stadium – a major work able to host 55.000 people – using public money. Instead, this cathedral, with a capacity of only 5.000 people, will be built only partially resorting to public funds.

Lastly, in order to debunk the arguments of those comparing the construction of churches to the poor conditions of health and education infrastructure, church leaders have tried to underscore the complementarity of church-building activities with schools and hospitals. The church – as reported in the official website through an audacious metaphor – should be considered as the only school which can’t be fulfilled by a bachelor examination or doctoral studies, but that rather functions as a permanent, spiritual school all life long, being able to lead people to eternal life. Moreover, it is the only hospital for the soul, which forgives the sins of humankind and cultivates virtues through the achievement of spiritual health.

These arguments are related to both practical and symbolical issues: some of them have always been a concern since the idea to build a national cathedral was conceived, while others (like number six) came up as a reaction to recent criticism. The first point is also the one I heard the most when talking to priests and believers: the current patriarchal cathedral is too small and people are forced to attend the mass outside not just during main feasts but also on simple Sunday masses. Also, if the patriarchal cathedral is so small, the problem of representativeness emerges: how could it be less spacious than many other cathedrals built around the country (and even smaller than other Bucharest churches, like St. Spiridon church)? This is what Father Emanuel, a middle-aged priest serving in a parish close to the construction site, told me when I met him in his church:

> How many bishops are in Romania, forty-six? Well, if all of them get inside the [current] cathedral, it will be already full! And where should we put all the

faithful?! […] That cathedral has an average church size. This is why there is need of a new one. Some people say it is megalomaniac, or that is too big, etc. I don't know whether is too big or not, but if you build it for eternity … we all like to go to St. Peter in Rome, or to see the one in the Red Square in Moscow […] They are all monuments of architecture, why shouldn't we have such a monument as well?

There is little doubt that the election of the new Patriarch Daniel in 2007 gave new impetus to the project: the former Patriarch Teoctist was very old and such a demanding endeavour like the CMN benefitted from the vitality of Daniel, who was at the moment of his election only 56 years old. Differently from other priests, Father Emanuel was enthusiastic about the impact that the new Patriarch had on the church, and ascribes the implementation of the CMN project to the huge efforts he made since he was elected:

When he [Daniel Ciobotea] became Patriarch in 2007, a colleague of mine told me that His Beatitude is like a locomotive, and his advisors are the coaches. He sorts out some desiderata and goes for them, nothing stops him. The coaches can change from time to time, as they cannot keep his pace, still he does not stop. He is such an active man, and I say wholeheartedly that he is a great gift (*câstig*) for us because, well, maybe he does not look gentle (*blajin*), but all he does is for the church's sake.

Some of these "coaches" have been chosen by the Patriarch as members of the executive board that manages the whole CMN project. Both clerics and engineers are part of it[4]. Father Nicolae Crângaşu, council member at the RP, was a central figure of the committee at the time of my fieldwork. He was in charge of the fundraising campaign, dealt with the press, and worked with the technical experts and the construction firms. Beyond Father Crângașu, the board was formed by four engineers. Some of them had a life-long experience[5] and worked side by side with the youngest member of the board, engineer Vasile Cracaoanu, who had already

[4] See Noica (2011: 167) for a complete list of members.

[5] One of them, Eugen Iordăchescu, was able to save dozens of sacred buildings like churches and monasteries from the will of the Romanian dictator to torn down anything that hindered the realisation of the new civic-administrative centre. His bright idea consisted in transferring the edifices of few dozens of meters away through special rails mounted for the occasion.

collaborated with Patriarch Daniel at the Bacău cathedral when the latter was Mitropolite of Moldova. Cracaoanu welcomed me at the construction site on a summer day, then outsourced the task to give me a tour of it to his colleague, engineer Mateescu.

3.2. The construction firms

Mateescu had been working for Bogart for many years. Bogart is the company which won the contract for the underground works of the cathedral. But after Bogart lost the contract for the works on the surface, he was hired by the RP and remained employed at the construction site. It is Wednesday, the day of the week when representatives of the three main parts meet: the architects of Vanel Exim, the technical experts of the RP, and the engineers of Strabag, the firm on charge of the construction works on the surface.[6]

Vanel Exim is the company which designed the architecture of the cathedral, while Altfel Construct and Air Control Systems are on charge of the engineering planning. Concerning the execution of construction works, beyond Strabag and Bogart, a number of small Bucharest-based firms are involved: Construct Edil manages the organisation of the construction site, Foretis Inject the realisation of cut-off walls, Lufin Construct the excavation works, and Conarg the coating of the walls.

The construction site functions at full speed every day but Sunday and the main religious feasts, when it remains closed. The schedule of workers is organised in three shifts of eight hours each, so that the works continue night and day nonstop. At the time when I visited the site, about three-hundred workers were employed during daytime, but Mateescu said that the number of employees reached five-hundred in the past (and grew to one-thousand in 2017 for the realisation of the cupolas). In fact, living nearby it was easy to see workmen getting in and out of the site, especially during lunch-break. Some of them, albeit unwilling to talk about anything related to their job or employer, told me that they were

[6] Strabag is also the only foreign company involved in the project, being originally from Austria. According to Noica's engineering-based account of the CMN project(2011), Strabag won the competition because it was able to offer the best quality-price ration, notwithstanding the intention of the ROC to count exclusively on local Romanian enterprises.

qualified workforce earning 1500 RON per month, about 335 euros, a sum still above the minimum wage.

While walking around the building, Mateescu explained me a few details about the project and gave instructions to his colleagues from time to time. Every worker we came across greeted him respectfully. The aspect technical experts like Mateescu dwelled on the most was how sturdily the cathedral would be built. It seems that Patriarch Daniel expressively demanded a construction that could last one-thousand years, but the current building is certified to last minimum five-hundred. Such concerns are justified by the fact that Bucharest rises on a seismic-hazard zone. In order to make it as earthquake-proof as possible, the walls of the edifice are multi-layered: two different kinds of bricks have been used for the external layers: the one facing the interior of the cathedral is a more apt surface for paintings, the one in the exterior is, instead, a thicker kind of brick. Between the bricks there is a layer of concrete covering a structure of steel. "It won't fall down even after an atomic bomb!" said a young engineer nearby, and I started wondering whether that was actually a joke or not. From the inside the cathedral looked huge. The distance between the choir and the altar was impressive and it took a while to walk it. Between the altar and the nave, the concrete structure of the *iconostasis* struck me for its height.

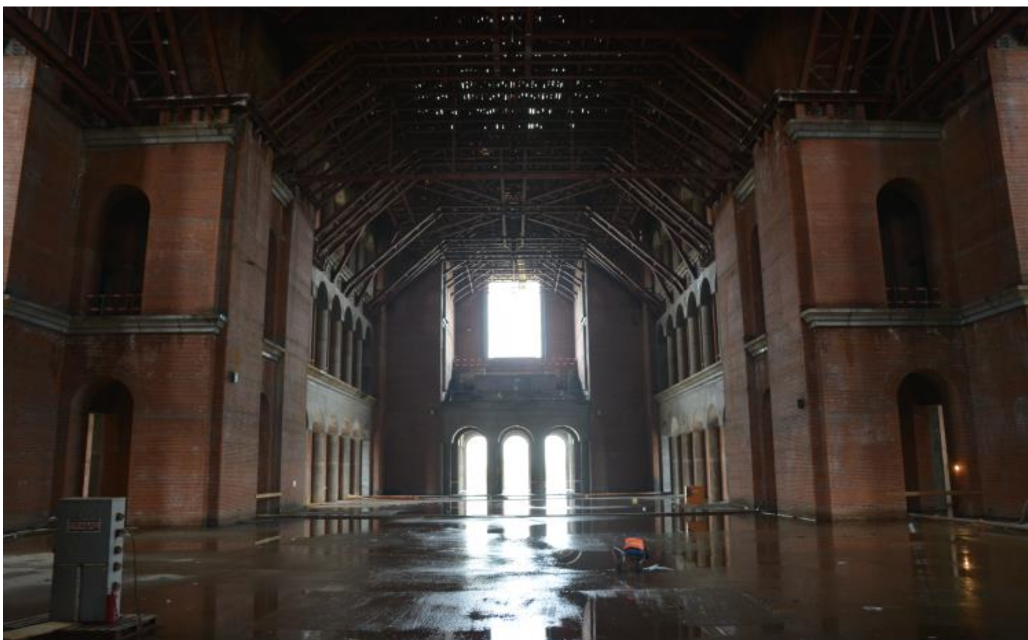

Figure 3.2 – The nave viewed from the *Iconostasis*

Figure 3.3 – The *Iconostasis* of the national cathedral

When we went down to visit the underground of the building we found some cathedral models covered with dust, stored one close to the other. They were from the official competition and will be exhibited in the Museum of Romanian Orthodoxy. The miniature model of the national cathedral stood close to the others, all of them lying in the basement of the actual cathedral. Before our tour ended, I asked Mateescu his take about the protests against the CMN, and whether this affected him in doing his job. The engineer replied calmly, in a relativist spirit: "No, it did not [affect my job], because in every project, in every single thing in life there are people against and people for. When nobody is against anything, then it means that we are back at Ceauşescu's times…"

Fig 3.4 – The miniature model of the national cathedral stored in the basement.

3.3. The political actors and the legal framework of the CMN

The construction of the national cathedral is regulated by the government emergency ordinance 19/2005, which was specially-written for the CMN project and promulgated by the Tăriceanu cabinet. Before illustrating what this law establishes, it may be worth taking a step back to look at the legal background in respect of church-state relationships. First of all, Article 29 of the Constitution affirms that religious cults shall be autonomous from the state but shall enjoy support from it. Similarly, Law 498/2006 on religious freedom states that all the eighteen recognised denominations are to be considered "public utility organisations". This condition makes them eligible for receiving specific economic assistance – of a kind inaccessible to non-religious associations – from local, regional and national authorities, so to establish a relation of partnership with the state (Andreescu 2008).

Article 10 starts by clarifying that "Expenditures for maintaining denominations and for their activities shall be financed primarily form their own income, as created and managed under their bylaws.", but clause 10.4 specifies

that "On request, the State shall support the pay funds for the clerical and nonclerical staff of recognized denominations through contributions, based on the number of their worshipers who are Romanian citizens and based on their genuine needs of subsistence and activity". However, law 489/2006 was enacted right on the occasion of the then imminent access of Romania in the EU. Other norms indicating in which cases denominations could apply for state funding were adopted already some years in advance, as for two government resolutions (82/2001 and 1470/2002, which modified the former) [7] promulgated by the social-democratic Nastase cabinet.

Government Emergency Ordinance 19/2005, which would become Law 261/2005 a few months later, sets the terms for the construction of the national cathedral. This legal measure has much to say, I argue, about the privileged relationship the ROC has with the state. Article 1 begins with a rather bold statement: "The CMN represents two thousand years of Christian faith on Romanian land", an affirmation on which very few historians would agree without reservations. Clause 1.2 originally stated that funds would have been earmarked by the ROC, but a new law from 2007 modified it, adding the Romanian Government and local administrative authorities as contributors to the financing of the whole complex. Clause 1.3 is a further reminder for state authorities to provide, "to the Romanian Orthodox Church Patriarchate's request, all the necessary support, under the conditions laid down by law". Article 2 goes even further and transfers the whole plot of land (eleven hectares, estimated value of 200 million euros) from state property to the Romanian Patriarchate.

With the pretext that the church is a "public utility organisation", this law imposes to state authorities to provide full economic support for the construction of a religious complex that belongs to a private organisation, the RP. In addition, it donates to it a plot of land of great value and which belonged to state property. We are dealing here with the public sector massively financing a single, private juridical person. One of the most widespread arguments of the project's supporters is that nobody protested against the expensive construction of the National Arena football stadium in Bucharest in the early 2000s. Nevertheless,

[7] See http://www.arhiva.culte.gov.ro/_site/culte/detaliu-legislatie/vrs/IDleg/47, accessed on 19.03.2018.

even if the National Arena is a project entirely funded with public money, it remains property of the state. As I just pinpointed, this is not the case for the CMN.

The conveyance of the land on Arsenal Hill to a private organisation like the RP is the most apparent case of the process of "de-secularisation" of property, which is engendered by laws like the aforementioned 261/2005 and 239/2007. The latter ratifies that real estate granted in free loan to religious denominations can become property of the respective denomination if this submits a request. It is up to state authorities to examine and eventually accept such requests. The previous chapter already addressed the important role played by the so called "secularisation" of church property inaugurated by A.I. Cuza in 1863, when real estate belonging to Orthodox Churches and monasteries became state property. Going in the opposite direction, the body of legislation analysed in this section represents a new stage in the history of church-state relationships in Romania.

Over the 2000s, several laws, government resolutions, and emergency ordinances have set the ground for religious denominations to engage in hectic church-building activities via public financing, or to accrue state property in a perfectly legal manner. Concerning the ROC, the legal framework here discussed undergirds the church's powerful organisation revival (see Chapter 6). Similarly, the realisation of the world's highest Orthodox cathedral unfolds due to the legislation produced in these years. This has happened regardless of the political hue of the governments involved; as such laws were established by cabinets led by liberals like Tăriceanu as much as by social democrats like Nastase. However, the neoliberalist blueprint launched by Tăriceanu entailed a widespread privatisation program which comprises the aforementioned concessions to the ROC and religious denominations in general.

	SSRA	Bucharest City Budget	Bucharest Sector 1	Bucharest Sector 2	Bucharest Sector 3	Bucharest Sector 4	Bucharest Sector 5	Bucharest Sector 6	Other regional councils	Other city councils	TOTAL SUM RECEIVED
2017	20	19.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
2016	57	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
2015	35	0.43	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	
2014	47	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.1	5.9	
2013	24	0	0	0	0	-	-	-	0.1	-	
2012	19	10	4	10	5	-	-	3	-	-	
2011	16	10	-	10	5	-	-	0	-	-	
2010	0	-	-	4.5	0	-	-	0	-	-	
2009	5	0	-	0	0	-	-	0	0	0	
TOTAL	223	62.93	4	29.5	10	-	-	3	1.2	5.9	**344.53**

Table 3.1 - Public financing of the national cathedral, 2009-2017 (in millions of RON. "-" stands for unavailable data, "0" for no money allocated)

SOURCES:

City Hall Budget / Budgets of Sectors 1, 2, 3, 6 (Sector 4 and 5 did not make public their budgets or did not answer)

State Secretariat for Religious Affairs (SSRA)

http://www.romanialibera.ro/actualitate/eveniment/bucurestenii-finanteaza-fara-voie-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului-228502

http://www.gandul.info/stiri/statul-pusculita-bor-cati-bani-au-dat-autoritatile-la-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului-si-la-biserici-in-2014-13989682

http://www.b365.ro/cati-bani-a-inghitit-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului-pana-acum-cat-au-cotizat-primariile-din-capitala_255101.html

3.4. The public contributors

Table 3.1 illustrates how much money has been allocated from the public budget for the CMN between 2009 and 2017. It also shows which state authorities have contributed and to what extent. In these nine years, the costs for design, planning and implementation of the construction works have amounted to 345 million RON (more than 77 million euros). This sum corresponds closely to an earlier estimation made by Father Crângașu, who had affirmed that the construction of the sole cathedral (VAT, painting and finishing touch excluded) would cost between 80 to 100 million euros.

In September 2016, in order to reply to the criticism voiced against the project, the ROC press agency released on its official website a statement listing all the legal measures that allowed the church to apply for public funding. The press release specified that only 5-6% of what the church had demanded was effectively granted.[1] Considering that the costs declared by the ROC and the money received by the state coincide, it seems hard to believe this affirmation. If true, the ROC asked much more than it actually needed.

From the data shown in the table, it emerges that the national cathedral has been funded, so far, entirely through public money. The main channel of distribution of economic resources is the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, an institution directly depending on the prime minister that serves as mediator between the government and the denominations. During the postsocialist era, relationships with the religious sphere have not been always managed by this authority, as for some years it was replaced by the Ministry for Culture and Religious Cults, which was more independent from the government. Even though the table is incomplete, it still allows for some reflections. First of all, it is not by chance that the highest sums of money were allotted in 2014 and 2016, as parliamentary elections occurred in those years. Secondly, after the SSRA, Bucharest City Hall is the second most important contributor. Both mayors Sorin Oprescu (2008 – 2015) and Gabriela Firea (2016 –), both members of the Social Democratic Party (albeit Oprescu stood as independent candidate), supported the

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[1] http://basilica.ro/lamurire-privind-modul-de-folosire-si-justificare-a-fondurilor-pentru-finantarea-lucrarilor-la-catedrala-nationala/ (Accessed on 19.03.2018)

project during their mandates. City District 2 subsidized it substantially as well: Neculai Onţanu, the local district mayor since 2000, is famous for having constantly sponsored church-building activities. Unfortunately, data about district 5, the one where the cathedral is placed, have not been made available. Having said all this, if state authorities have entirely funded the works, what is the role of private fundraising?

3.5. The private contributors

The ROC never made public how much money it received from donations. When I asked to what extent this money contributed to pay construction works, replies varied substantially according to the interlocutor. A priest working in the church press agency said that, until 2016, private donations had covered 35% of the expenses. Another priest employed in the Romanian Patriarchate told me that the percentage was rather around 20%. As the expenses have been entirely covered by state money, such donations have rather an auxiliary role: first of all, it is liquid money that can be used to guarantee that construction works never stop while waiting for funds coming from the public budget. Second, private contributions can be used for paying VAT and welfare contributions for workers.[2]

The fund-raising campaign for private donations started in 2011 and was not limited to every single parish in the country but involved Romanian Orthodox communities abroad. Due to accounting reasons, every donation is supposed to be registered by the local parish priest, while the donor is given a receipt. In Bucharest, many priests confirmed to me that the Patriarch does not impose to single parishes to send a specific amount of money on a monthly basis. Nevertheless, some of them felt under pressure because they were expected to send *some* money every month, regardless of the financial condition of their parish or whether they had collected any donations or not. This could expose priests to an unpleasant situation in front of the faithful, as they have to find a way to collect donations without being perceived as greedy or pushy by the churchgoers.[3] Every

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[2] It must be said that for some years, until Romania became part of the EU, the construction of houses of worship was exempted from VAT, according to the Order of the Minister of Public Finance 1326/2004.

[3] This issue is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5, which expands on the relationship between the laity and the low clergy.

parish affixed at the entrance a poster with basic information about the project (including the ROC's bank account for donations). At the end of the Sunday mass, when the ceremony is closed, priests usually gave general information about the schedule of the following week. On this occasion they could also invite the faithful to support the project.

Private contributors can be simple believers but also big companies, tycoons and entrepreneurs. One of the most famous businessmen bankrolling the construction of new Orthodox Churches is Gigi Becali, a businessman who made his fortune in real estate thanks to shady deals with the Ministry of Defense in the early nineties. He is currently the owner of the *Steaua București* football team and lately has earmarked two million dollars for the national cathedral. Alongside well-known personalities like Becali, the CMN benefits from the generosity of Orthodox professionals of the capital: from bankers to politicians, doctors and notaries. One of these is Mr Balasa, a renowned Bucharest lawyer. Raised in a religious family, once his law office made a name for itself he represented *pro bono* the Metropolitanate of Moldova in a legal controversy against the Romanian state. Thanks to the brokering of a priest working at the Romanian Patriarchate, I had the chance to meet Mr Balasa and to listen why he decided to finance the project:

> I come from the old Opera neighbourhood, which was largely demolished in the 1970-1980s. Many churches there were destroyed or relocated […] I was born in 1973 and used to go to church with my parents only during the main religious feasts. Fearfully so, because of informers and the secret police. After 1990 I joined the student league […] and there I learned to fast, to go to church every Sunday, and so on… […] In 2005 I became president of the privatisation committee under the Tăriceanu government. Since then I started collaborating *pro bono* with the ROC. I donated both expertise and money to the church […] for many reasons: first of all, we Romanians feel a sort of envy, or admiration, towards Western cathedrals, so that we also desire a building that could represent us all. Second, at the moment we have no space even for celebrating a *Te Deum* here; you have seen by yourself how small the current cathedral is! And lastly, it [the CMN] is about the Romanian people, the essence of its kin, so we are not building it just for us, but for those ahead of us. […] I was not the only donor in my office, rather I was the one who came with this idea, and proposed it to five colleagues who are co-founders of

> the company. Each of us donated a sum between 1000 and 2000 euros. For humbleness, I never talked about this. The only person I consulted was my wife, as that money belonged to our family. We thought that it was time to give back something to this country that gave so much to us…

Mr Balasa's life story combines a personal attachment to Orthodoxy with his specialist knowledge in jurisprudence. He lived first-hand the profound transformation of his neighbourhood and the demolition of churches and historical buildings perpetrated by the atheist regime, and experienced as a young student the religious revival of the 1990s. After a decade working as a lawyer specialized in privatisation issues, aged only 32 he was nominated president of the Authority for the Valorification of State Assets (*Autoritatea pentru Valorificarea Activelor Statului, AVAS),* by the then prime minister Tăriceanu (whose efforts towards the ROC were presented a few pages above). In this period he organised an heavy privatisation programme, which comprised the privatisation of the biggest Romanian bank together with other members of the government who were also the signatories of government emergency ordinance 19/2005 (like former ministers Ionuţ Popescu and Adriean Videanu).

As independent lawyer, Balasa made his professional competence available to the ROC, while as an Orthodox believer, he collected monetary offers among his colleagues and donated himself a sum of money. This must have strengthen his relationship with church leaders, as he has defended again the interests of the church in a recent controversy against the firm in charge of the construction of the cathedral. Therefore, donations intended in a larger sense can be composed also of expertise put at the beneficiary's disposal. Benevolent juridical measures promoted by the government do fall within the same category: for instance, the concession made by the Tăriceanu government to grant for free a plot of land of eleven hectares for the construction of the cathedral is to be understood also as a proper donation made by the state to the ROC. Politicians like Tăriceanu and Videanu did not just finance personally the construction of houses of worship, as witnessed by some priests leading newly built churches in Bucharest. Most importantly, they did play a significant role in preparing the ground for a large privatisation plan that included the transfer of real estate to the ROC.

Spending a lot of time in churches, I asked several times churchgoers whether they donated for the cathedral. Many of them replied affirmatively. Some were well informed and donated multiple times, convinced that a new cathedral was indeed needed for logistic reasons, or that it was time for Romania to finally have an imposing, representative religious building. Many others paid their share because they simply trusted their parish priest: the latter can be an outright leader, whose authority within church's walls remains undisputed no matter what. As a priest serving in a parish in the centre once told me, "The intellectual churchgoers, here at my parish, have a negative perception of it [the cathedral]. You know, whether it was the right moment, whether it was necessary to build such a big building … Other practitioners, instead, had no problem with it. They do not judge, because otherwise they would not be authentic Christians".

On the other hand, there are also zealots who do not fully appreciate the CMN. For example, the wife of a priest acknowledged that she had donated money for the cathedral, because "it will stand there for centuries, as a symbol of our faith", but, at the same time, she despised the project because it is allegedly carried out by Freemasons, among whom there is also the current Patriarch, she said. Even though it may sound bizarre to be both a staunch believer and, at the same time, to dismiss the authority of the Patriarch, this was a pattern I observed multiple times among zealots and radical faithful. I will dedicate more space to similar stances in Chapter 7.4, while the practice of donating money in Orthodoxy will be addressed again in Chapter 6.3.

One of the churches I visited most was the so-called Russian church, located in the centre of Bucharest, close to University Square. This house of worship was initially built by the Russian embassy at the beginning of the twentieth century and had been for decades a bone of contention between the Russian and Romanian Orthodox Churches. Since 1992 it is the chapel of the university students and welcomes the Bucharest branch of the biggest Romanian association of Christian-Orthodox students (ASCOR). Generally, though, the activities of this organization do not envisage debates about hot, unseemly topics. I tried many times to talk about the cathedral case with my some of the students I got to know at ASCOR

meetings, but they rarely took up the discussion. As the then president of the association explained to me, "we only look for what quenches our spiritual needs".[4]

One of the few who were eager to have a chat over the matter was Ştefan, a geology student in his early twenties. Ştefan regularly reads nationalist and Orthodoxist blogs, even though he defined himself as a simple patriotic person. He was introduced to Orthodoxy at school and, most importantly, by his mother. Nevertheless, he was not a practicing churchgoer until he moved to Bucharest for starting his BA. Looking for friends in the new metropolitan environment of the capital, he started to attend ASCOR meetings: gradually, he became more reflexive about his spiritual needs which he now cultivates with the help of his spiritual father. With his discreet and delicate way to express himself, he told me he was happy about the construction of the national cathedral and rather annoyed by the criticism that mounted against it: "If everybody reasoned like them [i.e. the opponents], mankind would not have built any cathedral in the world, not even St Peter in Rome! [...] Now that our kin will also have a symbol, something that could represent us... they shout against it". For Ştefan it would be inconceivable to be critical against the church or his motherland. He sees his religious and national identities as inseparable, both converging in the ideal of the Cathedral for the Salvation of the (Romanian) People.

3.6. The fiercest opponent: the secular humanists

The most delicate issues concerning the CMN project have been repeatedly raised by non-governmental organisations in the last fifteen years. The biggest ever demonstration organised against it was in 2004, when people took to the street for preventing the construction of the cathedral in Carol Park. Remus Cernea, the organiser of the protest, was then member of the first Romanian humanist association ("Solidarity for Freedom of Conscience", today replaced by ASUR and AUR). Some years later, in 2013, twenty-three NGOs signed an open

[4] This does not mean that many members of the association are not active supporters of those segments of civil society that define themselves as defending Christian values. For instance, many of the ASCOR students partake in pro-life events or strongly support the idea of a referendum that aims at making same-sex marriages impossible in Romania (by changing the definition of family in the Romanian constitution).

letter for stopping the flow of public money towards the new cathedral.[5] And, lastly, thousands of citizens voiced their dissatisfaction with it every day for a week in November 2015 (see Chapter 5). Considering that, in each case, they were the most active agent of dissent, secular humanists did play an important role in the recent history of the CMN.

While the area of studies dealing with such groupings has been receiving some scholarly attention in the last decades, the idea to develop an "anthropology of secular humanism" as a field separated from the anthropology of Christianity is very recent (Engelke 2014). Engelke's aim is to distance himself from those who "claim that what humanists want is not so much a break with the past [i.e. religion] but a repackaging of it" (Engelke 2014: S293). Such an argument is not simply inherited by political theology (Engelke mentions Karl Schmitt and John Milbank, for instance), but is more widespread than expected, as "there is a tradition of sorts here — a certain kind of intellectual critique – not unique to anthropology, based on debunking or challenging our supposed secularity and difference" (Ibid: S294-295). In a nutshell, the main reason for taking a step away from the already established domain of anthropology of Christianity is, in the end, extremely simple: "Humanism is not Christianity. Humanism is not 'a religion'" (Ibid: S299). What is true, instead, is that humanists tend to identify the general notion of religion with the denomination they know best: in the case of Engelke it is Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, in mine, Orthodoxy. I will return on this aspect further on.

Secular humanists in Romania are organised today in two main organisations: ASUR and AUR. Together, they have around 70 - 80 members. Beyond having a similar name and goals, they also share one of their sources of funding: the Norwegian Humanist Association (*Human-Etisk Forbund).* For Toma Patrascu, president of ASUR, it was one of the main merits of his association to start a debate about the encroachment of religion in education and public spending. At first, they launched an advertisement campaign for criticising the alleged massive flow of money from state budget to churches.

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[5]See http://revista22online.ro/22267/.html (accessed on 20.03.2018). In response, other thirty-three NGOs and associations defending religious and patriotic values wrote a letter for backing religious denominations and their right to receive economic support by the state: http://www.wall-street.ro/articol/Social/143924/reactie-ong-uri-crestine.html (accessed on 20.03.2018).

Figure 3.5 – One of the placards of the campaign promoted by ASUR. The writing goes: “18.300 churches, 4.700 schools, 425 hospitals. Amen.” (Source: in.plata-domnului.ro)

Alongside this, in the last decade they reinforced their press release activity, lobbied against a few laws that would have threatened the basic principles of laicism, and were active promoters of projects of scientific outreach both in public education and in cultural institutions. It goes without saying that they strongly criticised the CMN project on every possible occasion, highlighting that they targeted the government and the political sphere, not the ROC. As Patrascu said during our interview, “We have no problem with the ROC or other religions. We address the government. As long as they [religious denominations] use their own money, they are free to do whatever they want”. Few minutes later a simple question bringing the role of the church in the foreground provoked in him a visceral reaction, which showed a rather anticlerical attitude: “It is not my business what happens inside the church, I do not care about it. Inasmuch it does not infiltrate the state, pollute children’s minds and leaves public education and administration, it’s their business what they do”.

Dissatisfied with how the current system finances religious organisations, activists like Patrascu and Cernea aim at establishing a sharp separation between state and church. While they mention French or German models as viable paths for the future, they also notice how Romania itself has its own secularist tradition. Already for a few years, ASUR have been celebrating in many Romanian cities the “day of lay action” on December 29th, the day when in 1863 Cuza secularised

church property. In Bucharest, it consists in meeting in front of the statue of Cuza on Patriarchate Hill and leaving flowers at his foot. Remus Cernea steadily identified him as a source for inspiration during our interview:

> GT: If you propose a new model of financing inspired to France or Germany, the church will say that those have nothing to do with the Romanian tradition in terms of state-church relationships…
>
> RC: Well, we will say that we also follow a tradition. This is our tradition, Cuza. The first modern Romanian state. This is our democratic tradition. Because if we speak about pre-modern traditions, we find no democracy there. Do you want to go back to feudal state, under the Ottoman Empire? Let me follow the democratic traditions of Romania. And the starting point of the Romanian modern state was a secular one.

In fact, the reforms made by Cuza are still debated nowadays and representatives the ROC have pointed out multiple times that the church is ready to renounce to the fiscal exemption they benefit from if the state returns the property which was confiscated in 1863.[6] This solution is clearly a provocation more than an actual proposal, mainly because of the many ownership disputes that would arise consequently. However, the image of Cuza as the champion of Romanian modernisation is the way secularists cope with the idea of tradition, somehow paying back their ideological opponents with their own coin. In line with the secular past of their country, Romanian humanists are today very attentive to the intrusion of religion in secular spheres such as politics and public spending:

> RC: I think it is time to propose a new model for religious contributions, because nowadays the state gets involved [in religious affairs] with big sums of money. State institutions say they don't have money for many serious problems: people with HIV and cancer who queue up for medicines, children that cannot go to school, schools closing down and so on. But then they give money for the cathedral.

[6] See http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-20644303-patriarhul-daniel-declara-din-nou-biserica-este-acord-impoziteze-veniturile-conditia-bor-primeasca-inapoi-proprietatile-confiscate.htm, accessed on 20.03.2018.

> And after that, priests end up campaigning for the [former] prime minister at the presidential elections![7] At this point I have to be critical! All this seems to me profoundly immoral…

Many Orthodox believers would probably find it ironic that a self-declared free-thinker like Cernea charges somebody else of immorality, as it is common practice to blame humanists, atheists and agnostics of having no moral guidance in their life. Instead, ethics is the very first point in the 2002 Amsterdam declaration of the IHEU (International Humanist and Ethical Union), the organisation inspiring Romanian secularist NGOs as well. Defining what humanism stands for was the very first task opening the Summer Camp organised by ASUR and AUR in the Bucegi mountains in the summer of 2016. The camp was intended for youngsters between 18 and 26, lasted six days, and welcomed around 40 people divided into young participants, organizers and speakers. It included conferences, workshop and excursions, without ignoring the importance of social time, group games and film projections at night.

As soon as the camp begun, I had the chance to meet Lavinia, one of the organizers. She was in her mid-twenties and, like many other young Romanian urbanites, spoke a sort of a pidgin between Romanian and English, using English words and idiomatic expressions in every single sentence. She was in charge of introducing the program of the summer camp to the participants and of giving a short presentation about what humanism is. Alongside ethics, another word that recurred often throughout the six days was "rational". While reading out another excerpt of the Amsterdam declaration, Lavinia told us that "Humanism is rational […] Humanists believe that the solutions to world's problems lie in human thought and action rather than divine intervention". This point was largely shared by my interlocutors, be they long-standing members or young newcomers.

One of the first workshops introduced a more specific question: how do humanists think religious people think? The programme included two invited

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[7] Cernea refers to the scandal erupted in 2014, when, a few weeks before the elections, an Orthodox bishop suggested the faithful to vote for the social democrat Victor Ponta (See http://www.digi24.ro/special/dosare/cotroceni-2014/preotii-fac-campanie-electorala-pentru-candidatul-care-sa-fie-ortodox-sa-faca-sfanta-cruce-ce-spun-reprezentantii-bor-320419, accessed on 20.03.2018).

guests from the Norwegian Humanist Association, each giving a presentation about humanism. One of them, Anne, about twenty-five, was born in a humanist family near Oslo. She was never baptised but underwent humanist rites like confirmation.[8] Anne's workshop was entitled "Are some people better than others?" and illustrated many good reasons for being a humanist. One of the slides of the power point presentation showed a person thinking with an angel and a devil above the head: "A humanist is supposed to rely on his (or her) brain, with no angel or devil to suggest him (or her) what to do", Anne told us. Be they Protestant like in Norway or Orthodox like in Romania, for Anne religious persons orient their behaviour according to supernatural entities whispering to their ears.

Like for Engelke's British humanists, such concept enacts Tylor's definition of religion as "belief in Spiritual Beings" (Tylor 1871: 383), it takes "what Tylor said out of the scholar's study and into the high street pub, into daily life. They [humanists] take it from theory to praxis" (Engelke 2014: S300). Even though the respect for the "religious other" is a value that humanists mention often when defining themselves, such respect does not result in any true interest in understanding how religious people think.

Therefore, a very common self-representation of humanism is that it is rational. However, leaving for one second the emic aside for using an etic term, I would rather say that humanism – as declined among my informants – is rationalist. It means that, for many of its adepts, the difference between humanists and religious people resides in a higher or lower degree of rationality. Sever, another young organiser of the camp, was rather clear-cut about this: "there are people more rational than others, this is a matter of fact". Sever had never heard of humanism until 2013, when he partook in a conference organised by AUR in Bucharest. Many speakers from foreign humanist association (from the US, France, and the UK) were invited, and the talk of a young British humanist simply changed his life:

[8] "Confirmation" was the English word that Anne used during our chat, but the original name of the rite is "Coming of Age", as the former is evidently linked with the Christian sacrament. Humanism is so widespread in Norway that over 250.000 people received this kind of rite, while active humanist members are esteemed to be 85.000.

> After that talk I realised that I was a humanist. The speaker talked about homosexuality. I have to confess that until then I had considered homosexuality as a mental dysfunction […] but his argumentations were so convincing that I realised I never saw things from that perspective. Since then I joined AUR and now I am part of the executive board.

Interestingly enough, Sever presented his story as a sort of revelation, something he definitively shares with many converted religious people. Sever is the only atheist in a very religious family. Like many of my interlocutors at the camp, when associating religion with irrationality, he brought as examples the cases of his practicing relatives and acquaintances, especially from rural areas. It seemed like religion, irrationality and backwardness were part of the same set of values humanists took distance from, as they rather inspired by opposite values such as rationality, scientific knowledge, and progress.

For one of the humanists described by Engelke, Christian theology was "so illogical" (Engelke 2014: S 296). Similarly, Calina, a freshly graduated Law student, appeared to be genuinely bothered not just by theology, but by religion as such. While discussing the role of religion in society (indeed one of the most recurrent topics), she considered that "when it comes to evolution, you do not need religion anymore". As rightly observed by Engelke: "Humanists want to break with the past, they want to break with religion, to expunge the signs of religion from society and its workings" (Engelke 2014: S293). In fact, some of them believe that religiosity is an obstacle for the progress of their country. Toma Patrascu explained this very clearly during our interview a few months before the camp:

> TP: All in all, a very high degree of religiosity is correlated with a very high degree of ignorance […] Sociological research shows that a population which is poor, ignorant, isolated, rural, and not open to the world is also a population which is very religious! At the same time, such population offers resistance to education. And at a certain point, links between ignorance and religiosity emerge...
>
> GT: Then religiosity is a consequence or a cause of lack of knowledge, education etc…?

> TP: It is a consequence but at the same time also a cause! Because they are not always strictly separated. To bring an example: nowadays we don't teach sexual education at school. Why? Because the church is against it.

Religiosity – or religion – was understood by humanists like Patrascu as a monolithic whole. There was no difference between the church as a community of believers, the church as an organisation taking decisions, and Orthodoxy as an institution regulating social life (Halemba 2015: 13).

Nevertheless, not everybody looked at religion as a "cultural other" to tolerate while keeping it at distance. Stelian was a 35 years old engineer and a long-standing member of ASUR. During an open session, he shared his experience in a neo-Protestant Church. Once he went to a meeting out of curiosity – not as a believer – and appreciated their approach aimed at exploring "what is truth" and based on "self-knowledge". Stelian seemed to be more reflexive about differences between religions and thus found it wrong to venture in far-fetched generalisations.[9]

Workshops, discussions and everyday chats at the summer camp offered both self-representations of how humanists see themselves and representations of how they see religion. However, what are the theoretical guidelines they follow? From whom do they take inspiration in forming their identity of rational, ethical, secular humanists? A main source of influence is to be found in the long-established "science versus religion" debate as it developed in the US. First of all, some speakers at the summer camp resorted to the works of "atheo-stars" like Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins. One of them, Marius, was around forty and owns an IT company. He was an active member of ASUR and had a blog where he shared his views about the controversial presence of religion in public education. The way he understood human sociality was bound to technological metaphors: inspired by Dawkins' "Egoist Gene" and interested in human etology, he insisted

[9] Engelke reports as well of humanists who do appreciate some specific aspects usually related to religion: some of his interlocutors referred to the sense of community it purveys, others to the power of religious ritual practice (Engelke 2014: S297). After all, as I already mentioned, rituals mark also humanists' lives. The existence of humanist *rites de passage* celebrating births, confirmations, weddings and funerals indicate that ritualisation is given great importance among humanists as well.

that humans “are programmed for” and “use specific mechanism” in their behavioural attitudes. It is no surprise that many active members of AUR and ASUR work in IT or hold dear the cause of Science Outreach, especially in schools. Science is then an antidote to superstition, ignorance and irrationality that many humanists tend to associate with religiosity. Exactly as Carl Sagan – one of the heroes of many activists at the camp – put it once: “science is more than a body of knowledge; it is a way of thinking” (Sagan 1995: 259).

Therefore, American new atheists did play a role in the humanist formation of many of my interlocutors. But the powerful cultural impact of the US is not limited to Science Outreach and atheist thinkers. For instance, when during the presentation round we were asked to name one of our models, one of the young participants named George Carlin, a famous American comedian known for his anti-religious stance. Moreover, as I already mentioned, English words and expressions (in a more or less faithful American accent) floated around during all the six days of the camp and reached their peak during the workshop of Adrian, another senior member of ASUR. Adrian works in the pharmaceutical industry but was educated both in Medicine and Business Administration. His talk focused on ethics as an intrinsic part of mankind. It was entitled “How do we reply to today’s ethical dilemmas?” and illustrated five moral principles through the words of their most famous representatives: Aristotle (Virtue); Immanuel Kant (Duty); John Stuart Mill (Utilitarianism); Franz Boas (Relativism); and Ayn Rand (Moral egoism).

It was interesting to notice that, together with figures that would appear in every philosophy handbook like the first three, Adrian chose to introduce two thinkers that are popular in the US but unknown to the general public in Europe. The idea to include Ayn Rand is particularly suggestive. Rand is known as one of the most committed champions of *laissez-faire* capitalism and is a point of reference for Republicans (albeit she was a staunch atheist). Such choice is hardly free of ideological implications. It rather shows how humanism on the ground (as performed in a summer camp, for instance) can promote extremely different (if not conflicting) meanings and articulations, some of them originating in the US cultural system and closely linked to libertarianism and neoliberalism.

Humanism as I have described it here is one of the many products coming from the West that is contributing to mark the current postsocialist era. Romanian secular humanists received inspiration, know-how and funding from similar foreign organisations, yet the local Romanian context in which they live certainly shaped their way of conceiving what humanism is and why to embrace it. This last section was intended to expand on how humanism slowly takes root in a country that is known to be highly religious. Most importantly, secularist groupings have successfully taken advantage of the controversial CMN project so to find some space in the debate concerning the presence of religion in society. As this chapter has shown, the construction of the national cathedral brings together a number of different actors that collaborate, interact, or clash according to the values they put forward and the interests they pursue. As some introductory information about the ROC, an historical background of church-state relations, and data about the funding of the CMN have been provided, the following chapter moves to a deeper level of analysis and interprets a few major controversies related to the cathedral project.

CHAPTER 4: CONTROVERSIES AND PREDICAMENTS

> It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.
>
> Anderson, Benedict (1983: 12)

Thus far, we have discussed the exact location where the cathedral is being erected, the whole historical trajectory behind the current project, how the construction is received by the people living or working nearby, the role of its active supporters and opponents, and the legal and economic framework that have made it possible for Romania to host what will be the biggest religious complex of the Orthodox world. Some of the issues related to it have already emerged, though not systematically. This chapter focuses on a number of key aspects of the national cathedral that are a matter of discussion. An element of social interaction, conflict has always been a question of crucial importance for anthropologists, as it allows for a sharp manifestation of personal stakes, motivations, and dispositions. Therefore, my aim here is to shed light on: the source of controversy that fuels the construction of a religious complex in today's Romania, the arguments deployed against it, and, finally, some of the individuals that express those arguments.

The first section deals with the name chosen for the cathedral that has left many people cold or puzzled. This sentiment was shared by renowned Christian intellectuals as well, who noticed a nationalist danger in this formulation. Recent shifts in the strategies adopted for branding the cathedral confirm – I think – that such concerns have not been ignored by church leaders. The way the church handled this issue remind us once again how misleading can be any description of it as anti-modern and reluctant to change. Next, I take into account aesthetical and stylistic appraisals of the CMN. At a first glance, size, location, and style are the most obvious features of which any observer tends to make sense. As the cathedral is supposed to be, according to the definition of the beneficiary, "a symbol of

national dignity"[1] meant to attract tourists and to enrich Bucharest's cultural heritage, I linked such expectations with the opinions of local experts and the impressions of simple Bucharest citizens.

Third, this project has been financed almost exclusively by public money. This is by far the thorniest issue. Had the financial sources been private, the anticlerical repercussion suffered by the Romanian Orthodox Church (henceforth ROC) would probably have been less serious. Debates on how public spending should be structured call morality into question: to pay for a majestic cathedral with taxpayers' money is often perceived as a lack of social justice. This is the reason why the budget for religious purposes has been compared with education and health system, renowned theologians try to develop a new Orthodox social theology, and the ROC has started to disseminate more information about the philanthropic activities it conducts.

As Robbins reminds us, "the situations of cultural change are particularly good ones in which to study the way morality shapes culture and experience" (Robbins 2009: 79). Let aside the fact that it may be hard to spot any situation of cultural "stagnation", the construction of the world's highest Orthodox cathedral a few hundred meters away from the bulky landmark of Ceaușescu's state atheism epitomizes the postsocialist cultural change in Romania, while revealing at the same time astonishing continuities in terms of the employment of a nationalist rhetoric, a visual culture devoted to gigantism and the abundant usage of public resources. It is against this background that multiple moralities – of clerics, theologians, lay taxpayers, militant secularists, etc. – clash with one another not because they are in contradiction but because they operate on different grounds, in a way that evokes Lambek's idea of "incommensurability [between different] recurrent establishments of criteria for evaluating practice" (Lambek 2012: 341), that is, between religious and secular moralities.

Lastly, I compare the CMN with other national cathedrals built in the former socialist bloc. The recently built "Temple of Divine Providence" in Warsaw is an example that well fits for comparison, when it comes to the controversial involvement of public money. Ukraine's complex interdenominational background

[1] See http://www.catedralaneamului.ro/index.php/31-prima-pagina/41-de-ce-construim-catedrala-mantuirii-neamului-si-care-este-semnificatia-acesteia (accessed on 28.03.2018)

has produced sixteen cathedrals, the biggest one of these being the Kiev brand-new Greek Catholic one; Tbilisi's cathedral reflects the role of oligarchs in church-building activities, which is less prominent in the Romanian case; while Moscow's "Redemption of Christ" cathedral stands out as a famous heritage monument bulldozed by Bolsheviks but steadily reconstructed in the 1990s. Comparing the CMN with similar projects casts light on some peculiarities of the Bucharest cathedral and, at the same time, draws attention on the crossroad between religion and nationalism these major works represent.

4.1. A contested name

The current name of the cathedral appeared for the first time on 10th May 1920, when Metropolitan Miron delivered his speech in favour of the construction of a new national cathedral, which was meant to celebrate the birth of Greater Romania. "The Cathedral of the People (*Catedrala Neamului*)", he said in front of the Holy Synod and King Ferdinand, "will prove (…) to be a visible symbol of our unity in faith and law" (Vasilescu 2010: 8). After him, King Ferdinand himself took the floor. When naming the future cathedral, he resorted to another phrasing, "Church of Salvation (Biserica Mântuirii)", while it was Metropolitan Pimen who talked first of a "Church of Salvation of the People" (Vasilescu 2010: 9). This formula puts together religious identity with nation-building strategies by suggesting that the annexation of regions populated by ethnic Romanians accomplished through the Trianon pact.

The word *neam* is difficult to translate in English, as the term 'people' does not convey properly the sense of unity of blood and lineage that *neam* suggests, and it is maybe better expressed by formulas like 'kin' or 'ethnic nation'[2]. The close relationship between nationalism and kinship was already explored in the Romanian context by Verdery, who proposed to consider "national identities into the larger category of social relations within which I think they belong: kinship. (…) Nationalism is thus a kind of ancestor worship, a system of patrilineal kinship in which national heroes occupy the place of clan elders in defining a nation as a

[2] I owe this last suggestion to Lavinia Stan.

noble lineage"[3] (Verdery 1999: 41). In his speech in front of the Holy Synod in 1920, King Ferdinand offered a perfect example of what Verdery meant: while explaining the reasons for constructing the national cathedral, he took inspiration from "our good ancestors: Stephen the Great (…) Micheal the Brave (…) Matei Basarab (…) up to King Charles I". Interestingly enough, foreign kings like Charles and Ferdinand Hohenzollern – whose family hailed from modern day Baden-Württemberg – became part of the patrilineal lineage constituting the Romanian ethnic nation. Against this background, the decision to name the new cathedral after the salvation of the Romanian people becomes clear: to celebrate Greater Romania as the realisation of a national project aiming at territorial, religious and ethnic homogeneity.

To adopt such a name in the 1920s – in the context of a monarchic state that sought legitimacy for its new borders also via the church – probably did not engender any misunderstandings. It does, however, almost one century later. Already in June 1990, church leaders proposed to the Prime Minister Petre Roman to start discussing the construction of the national cathedral, whose official name remained unchanged.[4] The choice to keep the name of the cathedral untouched, to establish a bishopric in every county, to let clerics get into politics, to teach again religion in public schools, and to try obtaining the status of official religion; reveal the blueprint the ROC has been pursuing after the end of socialism: to restore the privileged status it had during the interwar period.

As much as *neam, mântuire* too is a complex term that requires explanation. Even though it is commonly translated as 'salvation', it retains a spiritual nuance that makes 'redemption' a good alternative. It is exactly this latter connotation that has been understood by the majority of people, after the project was re-launched under Patriarch Teoctist in the 1990s. 'Salvation', or 'redemption', has been intended in a purely theological sense, not a geo-political or national one. After all, who would ever think about the salvation of the Romanian nation from the threat of neighbouring enemy empires more than seventy years after WWI? Church

[3] The ancestor worship practiced on a national basis can even serve as a source of inspiration for moral behaviour and "civic" engagement. In Chapter 7 I discuss the case of an activist who started a protest against the construction of a new mosque, inspired by, and for the sake of, his glorious ancestors fighting against the Ottoman Empire.
[4] Decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church. 1990. CVIII (11-12): 177-78.

leaders decided to keep the name conceived in 1920 for the sake of continuity with the interwar period, thus giving evidence of their "utopian and static theology of history",[5] but ended up being misunderstood by the general public and criticized by the most famous Christian Orthodox intellectuals and theologians of the country.

Teodor Baconschi is a renowned theologian and former Romanian ambassador to the Vatican. After the revolution he was part of the "Group of reflection for the renewal of the church", together with the current Patriarch Daniel (archbishop of Moldova back then) and other prominent figures of the Orthodox clergy and laity. Until recent times, he has been also a conservative politician with reactionary and Islamophobic tendencies. According to him, the cathedral's name is an outright "manifesto of ethnophiletism"[6]. In a nutshell, ethnophiletism admits the territorial organization of the church on an ethnic basis. Hence, salvation is no longer a matter of personal interaction with God, but can be reached by an individual as part of a collective, be it a nation, *ethnos*, or tribe (the English translation of the ancient Greek *fulé*, from which the term comes). It is considered a heresy since 1872, when the Council of Constantinople intervened against the self-proclaimed independency of the Bulgarian Church from the Constantinople Patriarchate (Gillet 1997).

A position similar to Baconschi's is held by Adrian Papahagi, a Cluj-based philologist and former politician who is famous for his Christian and neoliberal stance. Beyond the inadequacy of the name from a strictly theological point of view, Papahagi focuses on the sheer continuity of the nationalist rhetoric endorsed by church leaders during and after the Ceauşescu regime. Papahagi supports the idea of building a national cathedral. Nevertheless, due to its name, location, and architectural style, the current project is an "unfortunate encounter between nationalist and communist ideology"[7]. Thus, the name of the cathedral is not just a reference to the original project elaborated in the 1920s, but also reflects the more recent communist past, as it seems to re-use some of its nationalist tropes (a view

[5] This is the definition that Radu Preda, one of the most appreciated Romanian contemporary theologians, gave to me during our interview.
[6] Teodor Baconschi, interview with the author.
[7] Adrian Papahagi, interview with the author.

shared also by Stan and Turcescu 2007). What stroke me in the field was that even conservative figures like Bacoschi and Papahagi, who had no reason for criticising the project and are often apologetic towards the ROC, considered the name of the cathedral totally inappropriate.

For Petre Guran, well-known Byzantinist and former state secretary of the Ministry of Culture, “this name is subject to nationalist interpretations nowadays. Which nation or *ethnos* should be represented by this monument? (…) The political efficacy and the juridical relevance of the concept of ‘nation’ fall down day after day” (Guran 2007: 55). Differently from the aforementioned intellectuals, Guran noticed the exclusivist danger lurking behind the name of the new cathedral, defining the choice to propose the very same name despite a totally different historical context as anachronistic.

Between the two world wars, the school of thought of philosopher Nae Ionescu was at its best and influenced young students who would become influential Romanian thinkers of the twentieth century, like Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, and Mircea Eliade. Drawing on mysticism and spiritual practice, Ionescu aimed at creating a Romanian philosophy by considering Orthodox identity a founding element to start from. However, nationalism and Orthodoxy evolved in his thought to the discrimination of ethnic and religious minorities. For Ionescu, only Orthodox Romanians were to be considered true Romanians, while Romanians adhering to other denominations were assigned a lower status and could aim for being at best “good Romanians” (Ionescu 1990 [1937]: 201).

A theological interpretation of the cathedral’s name calls to mind Ionescu’s thinking (as it links ethnic and religious identity, leaving out non-Orthodox ethnic Romanians), and even though this would have been somehow understandable back then, it cannot but stir criticism today. Leaving the cathedral’s name untouched means for Father Daniel Avram – spokesperson of the Greek Catholic bishopric of Cluj-Gherla – to promote an exclusivist ideal. By contrast, the Greek Catholic Church is also building a cathedral in Cluj, whose name “Martyrs and Confessors of the Twentieth Century”, Father Avram said, rather puts emphasis over the persecution suffered by denominations – “all of them!”, Father Avram pinpointed – during state atheism.

When I asked Orthodox clerics about the cathedral's official name, they usually went along with the idea that redemption is not exclusively an individual matter, but concerns one's ethnic belonging as well. Father Horia is a priest in his sixties who leads a parish in the west of the city. He had worked in the Chancellery of the Romanian Patriarchate in the past, and this was no surprise considering how elaborate his language style was (up to the point that I had to ask for explanations a few times). During one of our chats sitting on the veranda of the parish house, drinking some homemade *horinca,*[8] he said to me that the salvation of whole ethnic groups was acceptable, theologically speaking, because "at the crack of doom every *neam* will be in front of God (...) And I imagine it like this, with Jesus' words from John's Apocalypse: 'My Father's house has many rooms'". Therefore, for Father Horia, it is no heresy to say that every *ethnos* has its own place in heavenly kingdom. Clerics justify collective salvation by referring to the Gospel – like in this last case – or in a more patriotic fashion, not directly inspired to Holy Scriptures. "God will judge us also according to our ethnic belonging, considering how much we loved and defended our country", I was told by a young monk in a monastery in northern Romania. Independent of how convinced by the cathedral's current name they were, many priests I met read it in a purely theological sense. This is why it was with great surprise that I read the interview released by the ROC spokesperson Vasile Bănescu in October 2016:

> Only in the unfortunate case of theological illiteracy one could believe that ethnic groups get salvation collectively, therefore it is not a matter of a group redemption of the whole Romanian *neam* (…) Such an expression strictly refers to the salvation of our country, of our *neam*, using the terminology of that time, from foreign domination. We are talking about the independence war which resulted in the independence of the united Romanian principalities, the future Romanian state (…)[9]

[8] A brandy made with plums and distilled two times to increase the alcohol content.
[9] See http://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/interviu-se-vor-face-multe-teze-de-doctorat-despre-constructia-catedralei-583785 (Accessed on 15.12.2017). In fact, Bănescu refers here to the origin of the project itself, not to the name of it, which dates back to 1920 (according to the historical sources promoted by the ROC itself, like Noica 2011 and Vasilescu 2010).

My first impression was that the ROC spokesperson had just defined as "theologically illiterate" some of the most appreciated Orthodox intellectuals and theologians of contemporary Romania, not to mention all the Orthodox clerics who interpreted – and supported – in theological terms the title of the cathedral. Beyond this, Bănescu's declarations are the confirmation of the strategic turn executed by the ROC. In (silent) response to the growing criticism, the National Church Council equalised the denomination "Cathedral for the Salvation of the People" with "National Cathedral" in February 2016.[10] The source of inspiration for such re-branding comes, interestingly enough, from the West, as stated by the former spokesperson Father Constantin Stoica:

> We are now trying to impose the label 'National Cathedral', just like Americans have the Washington national cathedral … and like in all other European countries where it exists a representative cathedral of the religion of the majority. Not just Rome, the Vatican, St. Peter … see also St. Stephen's Cathedral in Wien or St. Paul's in London.

The reference to the US is not Father Stoica's personal interpretation but is explicitly mentioned by the National Church Council itself. First of all, the choice of the ROC to justify new branding strategies by looking at the near or far West indicates a versatility that has been too often denied by visions of Orthodoxy as anti-modern, stuck in the past, hostile to Western Christianity, and lacking adaptive skills. In this particular case, the ROC is attracted by the Washington cathedral model as it serves as "national house of prayer", that is, it is used for state funerals of US presidents and for memorial ceremonies (Nelson 2010). The fact that this cathedral is formally part of the Episcopal Church has no relevance; what counts instead is the privileged relationship it has with state institutions and national identity. The new Bucharest cathedral aims at similar tasks, such as celebrating the dead soldiers and national heroes who died during wartime. By switching the label to "national cathedral", the emphasis was moved from the theme of salvation to that of national belonging.

[10]See http://Basilica.ro/o-catedrala-pentru-capitala-date-corecte-si-semnificative/#_ftn1 (accessed on 28.03.2018)

Once the cathedral will be finished, national heroes of all times will be paid a tribute on two special occasions per year: on the national day, which celebrates the birth of the Romanian nation-state and falls one day after the cathedral's patron saint, and on Ascension Day. The Parliament has, in fact, voted a law establishing that national heroes must be commemorated on the same day of the Feast of the Ascension. To modify the calendar is rarely a neutral operation, as states have been using this tool for social engineering purposes or to implement their ideological agendas. Such practices have not stopped in present-day Romania, as shown by the decision to celebrate a religious feast and an utterly national one on the very same day. The presence of nationalist symbols, discourses, and practices within the walls of Orthodox Churches is widely acknowledged and has been an element of continuity all along the history of the Romanian nation-state. However, the line dividing Romanian state, nation and Orthodoxy keeps blurring also in postsocialist Romania, as testified by the realisation of a grand religious project financed almost entirely with public money, for which specific laws were promulgated, whose location is right between the Palace of the Parliament and the Ministry of Defence, and whose name has no theological connotation but honours the memory of national heroes.

4.2. "It is like a fly oversized a thousand times": aesthetical predicaments

Many Romanian Orthodox intellectuals and artists are unhappy with the nationalist tendencies manifested by the ROC. For some of them, the new cathedral should rather take inspiration from one of the most evocative cities in the history of Christianity, Byzantium. Sorin Dumitrescu is a famous icon painter who also publishes books about Eastern Christian theology. He was also part of the "Group of reflection for the Renewal of the Church", which was founded in the early 1990s to cope with the re-organisation of the ROC after the end of socialism. Dumitrescu told me that he tried to sway the Patriarch, but unsuccessfully: "So I wrote to the Patriarch saying: 'please renounce the current project and make a new Hagia Sophia, a replica' (…) because Hagia Sophia does not look like an oversized fly. If I take a fly and I enlarge it a thousand times, it is one of the most bloodcurdling things you could ever see. The same here: they are magnifying a simple neighbourhood-style church." Dumitrescu believes that true Christianity was

before the Schism, epitomized by the model of the Byzantine theocratic state. Taking Hagia Sophia and Byzantium as a model[11] would have been the best way to escape the provincialism pursued by the current project through nation-inspired branding, architectural and iconographic choices. Petre Guran also proposed to build a neo-Byzantine cathedral based on the Hagia Sophia basilica. The new building, he writes, should firstly avoid any concern with national identity, secondly, it should not aspire to the magnificent scale of the communist-style built environment around it, and lastly, it should refrain from any architectural *pastiche* (Guran 2007: 53). In a few lines, the Romanian Byzantinist was able to single out some of the most debated aspects of the CMN. Leaving aside the nationalist purposes of the project, which we already discussed, two main issues emerge: one is about the architectural style chosen, while the other has to do with the size of the cathedral in relation with the other buildings in the area.

In December 2009, the Romanian Patriarchate organised a meeting for discussing the project of the future cathedral. During his speech, Patriarch Daniel clearly stated that the new religious complex aimed at condensing autochthonous stylistic elements: "we don't wish a building whose style was never built before on the Romanian land (…) The new cathedral should be a Latin-Byzantine basilica, traditional, especially in the interior, but with a Romanian taste, a point of connection between East and West" (Vasilescu 2010: 47). A nationalist spirit infuses the CMN not just because of its name but also from an architectural point of view. This sounds ironic, as the Patriarch obtained his theological education in the West and was criticised for his ecumenist tendencies by fundamentalist Orthodox believers. However, the winning project of the 2010 competition was chosen for it had followed very faithfully the beneficiary's requests. The head architect described it as combining the Byzantine style with specifically Romanian features (the so called Brâncovenesc style), complying with tradition and adding no

[11] Projects inspired to a similar standpoint were proposed during the last competition for the national cathedral, on 2010. Architect Augustin Ioan, who already won of the 2002 competition, described to me the project he submitted together with a team of architects and engineers in this manner: "So we did not draw from historical, consecrated forms from 14th, 16th or 17th century or whatever. Some elements were strictly contemporary, but at the same time rigorous and traditional. We did contemporary architecture according to the principles of the Christian-Orthodox architectural tradition. The first of these principles is (…) the Greek-cross plan".

element of modernity.[12] In the Orthodox world, the eternal conflict between tradition and modernity is a well-known *topos* which frequently ends up being depicted in an essentialist way. Yet the construction of the Bucharest cathedral epitomizes it well: how to balance centuries of theological reflection about the liturgical sense of space with the aspiration for innovation that animates architects' creativity? Former professor of History of Architecture, Catalin Berescu took part as jury member in the 2002 competition for the national cathedral. Sadly, he remarked, the impressive growth of the church-building industry has not been matched by any significant achievement from an architectural point of view, as only in few cases clerics and architects could satisfy both liturgical and architectural needs:

> It is essential for an architect to be original, or at least to be in line with a form of modernity. (…) But according to these people [Orthodox clergymen] there is no other solution [but sticking to tradition]. They would say: 'What are you doing? Do you want to invent a new church? Do you want to bend the walls of my church? And how should I put the painting then?' (…) On the other hand, architects think through forms … but they have also understood, in the end, that frescoes [and sacred iconography] have their own logic and order that must be respected.

Just like the great majority of his colleagues, Berescu considers the new rising cathedral a failure for several reasons, from the stylistic *pastiche* to the usage of inappropriate materials:

> There is a professional culture that radically sanctions a specific way to make architecture. I mean that it is immoral to use a specific material which is inappropriate to the structure. For example, the vault made of bricks is somewhat poetic and it has its own sense. But if the vault is made of concrete, ten times bigger (…) and mimics an old form with new materials … this is a scandal from a strictly architectural point of view! No architect would reproduce old forms using new materials (…) but the most important thing is not to make a *pastiche.* That is the utmost sin!

[12] Architect Constantin Amâiei, personal communication by email.

The harsh criticism that the current project has received from the local professionals[13] clashes with the ambitions nurtured by the beneficiary and its supporters. In a few years, Orthodox Romanians will finally have their own national cathedral "like in the West", but the architectural value of the rising edifice has been judged as negligible by the vast majority of the local experts.

Divergent understandings of what a "symbol of national dignity" should stand for emerge: for architects, the national cathedral should aim at originality in order to catch up with international standards and develop a proper city-branding strategy; for the church, instead, it means to synthesise Byzantine and Romanian elements for the sake of tradition. This does not mean, of course, that pilgrims and tourists will not visit the cathedral after its inauguration: the aesthetic and cultural prestige of a building does not determine its popularity, as demonstrated by the flock of visitors thronging the entrance of the neighbouring Palace of the Parliament every day. Moreover, just like Eric Roose noticed in regard of the design of recently built mosques in the Netherlands, even though experts may sanction architectural *pastiche* or replicas of traditional styles, such stylistic choices conceal powerful political and strategic statements (Roose 2009). All the press releases from the Romanian Patriarchate have been, in this sense, rather clear: aside from the logistic need to welcome more churchgoers during the main religious feasts, one of the main arguments marshalled was always the urge of having an edifice where to commemorate national heroes properly. The new cathedral becomes the place where Romanian and Orthodox identity merge into a whole whose parts are not discernible anymore.

As much as the architectural style, size immediately captures people's attention. Architects and urban planners often point out that an edifice is never too big or too small until it is considered against the built environment around it. Yet the most frequent comment I heard about the cathedral was on its volume:

[13] As the architect Dan Marin from the Romanian Association of Architects (*Ordinul Arhitecţilor Români*) declared, the current project "represents an unfortunate combination of a Byzantine plan – which is central – with a longitudinal Gothic plan. (…) Moreover, the urban environment surrounding it has been ignored, as it would not exist" (See http://www.evz.ro/blocul-lui-nastase-frate-cu-catedrala-900007.html). Mixing up these two styles seems to be one of the project's most serious flaws: while the Byzantine style is familiar to Orthodox visual culture, Gothic is often compared to scholasticism and Western Christian radical rationalism (Yannaras 2004).

Megalomania! (*Grandomanie!*). The magnificent size of the cathedral – already about fifty meters high when I was in the field – was often perceived as a display of pride. Officially, the immense height of the cathedral (120 meters) is to ensure that it has the same monumental scale as the Palace of the Parliament behind it, the socialist apartment buildings on the South side, and the Minister of Defence on the West side.

There are two main issues relative to size. First, the bigger the house of worship, the harder it will be, presumably, to experience a sentiment of spiritual intimacy. Second, such a monumental complex obviously requires huge investments. Self-representations of Romanian Orthodoxy are based on the concept of intimacy. If the northern small wooden churches from Maramureş and the Bucovina monasteries are amongst the most iconic symbols in the Romanian Orthodox imagery, this is also because of the specific atmosphere they create. The small size of a house of worship is a fundamental feature which influences all the other elements: the smell of incense, the natural light entering the edifice, the iconographic motives, the furniture in the interior, etc. Size, therefore, is decisive in shaping not only sacred spaces, but also the religious experience that people live inside them. I am not suggesting that magnitude prevents *a priori* any spiritual experience, but simply that it is an aesthetic quality which has been alien to Romanian Orthodox visual culture up to the formation of the modern nation-state.

What is more intimate than the idea of home? In the countryside, told me once Sorin Dumitrescu, "home is like in the church, and in the church is like home". Peasant life has been the main form of social organization for a long time in Romanian history, so it seems normal that the wooden churches in Romanian villages share common elements with the country house, starting with their small size: "This is the mystery of the Romanian village. I mean … churches smell like quince, there are carpets … like at your grandma's house (…) At the same time, the country house is built church-wise. Very austere. White walls, black window frames. Very little furniture … Therefore, the warmth you have at home is also in the church, and the sanctity of the church is also at home". The idea that being small is a positive, "good to think with" (Levi-Strauss 1966) quality is part of the widespread historical discourse depicting Romania as a small country always struggling against foreign empires, such as the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg

ones. The transposition of such rhetoric in the religious field contrasts the small-sized heritage of Orthodox Romania with Western Christian monumentality. The magnificent architectural scale of western cathedrals can be fascinating, but it comes with a price to pay in terms of spirituality and faith: "in the big cathedrals in the West you can't find yourself (*nu te regasești*), because they are too big! Maybe it is also because of this that the church is losing the faithful there" said, for instance, a student during a "theology of architecture" class. Instead, she continued: "Orthodox Churches surround you giving a sensation of warmth (*te înconjoara cu căldură),* they have nothing imperial". However, even within the Orthodox world there are significant differences in regard to the volume of houses of worship and their internal components. Higher iconostas, for example, come from the Russian Orthodox tradition and were adopted in Romanian churches and cathedral after the 19th century.

"God prefers wood, wood and small spaces" sang a group of Romanian celebrities in 2016, in an ironic video accusing the current church leaders of lacking humility (*smerenie)*. The majestic project of the national cathedral was, of course, the main issue at stake. The video tells of a man who looks for God everywhere in the whole complex (not just in the cathedral itself, but also in the polyvalent halls, in the twelve lifts, in the underground parking, etc.), but ends up finding it only later, in a small wooden church on a hill. Even though the video was criticised, as celebrities should not lecture about humbleness, it is informed by a rationale that is widespread in the country or, at least, among Bucharest citizens. Small size and wooden materials are associated with a sense of spirituality, humility, and intimacy, at a time when big size and concrete stand for a display of power and pride. Furthermore, a bombastic construction does not just contravene local stylistic tradition (in spite of the wish of the Patriarch to build a genuinely Romanian cathedral), but also requires huge financial efforts.

4.3. Welfare concerns and moral implications

A survey conducted among Bucharest citizens by the Şoroş foundation[14] in 2011 reported that 49% of the interviewees agreed with the construction of a new

[14] See http://www.fundatia.ro/romanii-aproba-construirea-catedralei-neamului-dar-nu-din-buzunarul-lor, accessed on 28.03.2018.

cathedral in the capital, while 25% were against and 26% gave no answer. However, when asked whether it was right to implement the project by drawing substantially on the taxpayers' money, only 19% of the interviewees agreed. This illustrates that the construction of the cathedral is not an issue by itself, the discussion being fuelled instead by the constant drain of public money for its realisation. Chapter 3 has shown that the CMN is a proper major public work, for it had a significant impact on public spending (at least 70 million euros in the period 2009-2017). So far the great majority of the costs have been sustained by public money, even though the fund-raising campaign has never stopped since it started in 2009 and is carried out in every single parish of the country. After it came back on the agenda during the 1990s, the CMN project periodically unleashed indignant reactions from some segments of the civil society (the latter being an emic term widely used by many actors, from church supporters to militant secularists). Many people have contested the choice to allocate such a large amount of resources to erect a grand religious complex, at a time when funds should rather be used to strengthen the public infrastructure, starting with schools and hospitals. The construction site becomes a threat to social justice and an already weak welfare sector.

Let me bring an example from the neighbourhood where the cathedral is being erected, and where I lived during fieldwork. If it is rather common for ethnographers to collect data from a grocery store down their street, the urban setting where I lived offered multiple sites of interaction, like a hair salon. Alina, a hairdresser from Bucharest in her early thirties, noticed my foreign accent while fastening the barber cape around my neck. As soon as I told her that I was there for the cathedral, we began a long conversation. Alina was so outraged by it that she could not cut my hair and discuss at the same time. From time to time she stopped and pointed with her scissors to the cathedral towering outside the shop window, a few hundred meters away from us, to express all her dissatisfaction:

> The Orthodox Church should be obliged to pay taxes like every other institution, but instead, *we* have to pay for this cathedral. You know what, with all the problems we have in this country, from schools and hospitals… to the retirement system! You know how much an average pension is here? I don't understand how

> we can throw money away for this [pointing at the cathedral] … megalomaniac building [*Gigantomanie*]. […] Education is another big problem in Romania. But when I see money spent on projects like this, I start to think that there is no interest for education, maybe they [both politicians and church leaders] prefer this country to be full of ignorant, God-fearing people […]

Alina was unique in the heated way she expressed opposition towards the project. Other opponents of the projects were typically far less impassioned in their views. Nevertheless, some of her arguments enjoy widespread support: the assumption that such a huge construction reveals the church's pride; the tendency to compare the money spent for the cathedral with the poor budget assigned to the welfare, education and health systems; and the conviction that it is wrong to grant tax exemption to denominations. The views expressed by people like Alina reflect the extent to which this controversial project has in fact whipped up secularist and anticlerical sentiments (discussed in the next chapter).

Building a major work for a private beneficiary – as the ROC is, even though it is acknowledged having an important public function – by resorting to the state budget engenders a moral conflict over socio-economic matters. When taxpayers' money becomes visible, taking the shape of an imposing edifice, people start asking themselves whether that is the right way to use their taxes. The moral sanction expressed by many citizens applies, therefore, not only to church leaders but also to political cadres at every administrative level. The former is blamed for demanding funds, the latter for granting them. "It is a mockery towards the citizens!" I heard many times, from white collars to taxi drivers and shopkeepers. As just discussed, the health and education systems are the sectors towards which those who criticised the CMN would have preferred to see money flow.

A similar position is supported by secular humanists like ASUR and AUR (see Chapter 3.6), who, by spreading the slogan "We want hospitals, not cathedrals", indirectly suggests that churches act as social parasites and contrasts religious organizations with the welfare state. From this point it derives the argument according to which the church does not fulfil its duties towards the poor and disadvantaged people as it should. Therefore, allocating millions of euros for erecting a massive edifice would prove that the church does not consider social

and philanthropic activities among its priorities. Far from being a neutral financial measure, the redistribution of public money is also a moral act, or, at least, it is perceived as such. On the one hand, the cathedral case offers the chance to look at how institutions and organisations relate to public resource. On the other hand, it leads people to express what the church should and should not do, and how the State should re-distribute public resources. Anticlerical sentiments and general dissatisfaction with the church grows on account of the role the ROC is supposed to play in society. In the case of the Bucharest cathedral, different, non-“isomorphic” (Lambek 2012: 345) moralities meet one another when the redistribution of public money and the re-signification of the public space are at stake.

Romanian Orthodox theologians and clergymen I spoke with often held a clear stance on this topic: the main interest of the church is to save souls; its mission is first and foremost a matter of salvation, of encountering God (*entheosis*). Social and charitable goals are undertaken as long as they are not separated from the aim of “existential fulfilment” (Yannaras 2004: 225). The renowned Greek Orthodox theologian Christos Yannaras, whose works were mentioned by my Orthodox informants repeatedly, remarks in his volume “The Freedom of Morality” that the church has its own morality which differs from lay social ethics (Yannaras uses “morality” and “ethics” interchangeably). When speaking of the morality of the church, Yannaras described it as “overcoming every form of social utility” (Yannaras 2004: 205). The auxiliary role given to philanthropic activities lies in the “refusal to bind the Church’s morality with the improvement of the objective conditions of human life (…) It is a hard task to separate the truth from utopia, what is possible from what is a romantic illusion” (Ibid).

What should be made clear at this point is that this is only one specific, ideologically driven interpretation of how the church (intended here as a community made of both clerics and faithful) should fulfil its duties in terms of social engagement. To put it with Scott Kenworthy “the Orthodox Church has typically been portrayed – *and sometimes conceived of itself* – as “otherworldly”, focused primarily upon ritual and eternal salvation, and therefore encouraging a passive relationship with this world” (Kenworthy 2008: 22, my italics). Whereas Yannaras (and his supporters and readers) establishes a hierarchy between spiritual and social activities, for Kenworhty this represents a gross

oversimplification, as Orthodoxy admits several approaches to salvation not characteristic of a ranked order and, most importantly, not entirely separated one another. To label the one considered basic or default for every Orthodox believer – "liturgical worship and sacramental participation" (Ibid: 48) – as unrelated to "thisworldly" moral action is misleading if not even harmful: "the only 'unorthodox' and destructive position is that taken by the adherents of one tendency who deny a place for others" (Ibid: 50).

Following Yannaras, the engagement of the Orthodox Church does not really aim at changing the condition of the poor or the disadvantaged, both because this is considered being the responsibility of the State and owing to a "fatalist" conception of poverty as intrinsic to the human condition. Such a standpoint is considered mainstream also among Romanian Orthodox Church leaders, as shown by the declarations of archbishop Pimen wth reference to the CMN,[15] and by those Romanian Orthodox intellectuals dismissing any interest for social equality, who seem to be inspired by neoliberalism rather than by Christian ideals (Racu 2017). Trained as political scientist, Racu writes from his point of view of Orthodox believer with strong socialist sympathies. The work of Racu is indeed a breath of fresh air in the postsocialist studies in Romania, as it demonstrates how the local Christian Orthodox intelligentsia has often made use of theological arguments for promoting their neoliberal ideological orientation.

While theologians like Yannaras justify the hesitant involvement of Orthodox Churches in fighting inequality or social and economic exclusion, thus preparing the groundwork for the unfortunate encounter of neoliberalism and Orthodoxy in the postsocialist area, Racu illustrates that an Orthodox tradition in matter of social theology does exist and, if developed properly, could even be a valid alternative to the "antisocial" (as his book title suggests) paradigm prevalent today. Racu's argument is supported by a rich, heterogeneous reference literature that comprises church fathers (St. Basil the Great, St. John Chrysostom), theologians from the Orthodox world at large like the Russian Orthodox Serghei Bulgakov or the contemporary Greek Orthodox theologian Georgios Mantzaridis, and the official position of Russian Orthodox Church on social doctrine.

[15] "If all the money used for the new churches was given to poor people, would it cover their needs?" See http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23420668, accessed on 28.03.2018.

In response to the criticism towards its alleged lack of commitment in charity work, the church has started making public its involvement in this domain. An interactive map of all the projects organised is now available on the official website of the Romanian Patriarchate. Moreover, the church's press centre releases every year a report about the social and philanthropic activities carried out, among which there are soup kitchens, medical centres, retirement homes, foster houses, kindergartens, after-schools, shelters for homeless people, etc. The data I put together show that the budget allocated by the ROC for carrying out charity work has been growing year after year after the last economic crisis. Even when – like in the case of the 2016 budget – the total sum allotted diminished, the financial and material assistance to the needy has remained almost untouched.

	Direct financial assistance	Material assistance	Salaries, Structural costs	TOTAL
2009	4.303.957	9.612.398	31.033.477	44.949.833
2010	-	-	-	49.584.926
2011	-	-	-	54.000.000
2012	5.773.412	13.518.335	50.183.029	69.474.776
2013	-	-	-	80.828.191
2014	10.855.632	17.230.904	59.278.785	87.365.322
2015	11.605.048	22.912.063	88.290.803	122.807.914
2016	11.936.934	21.628.323	62.276.345	95.841.602

Table 4.1 – Money allocated by the ROC for charitable purpose in Romanian Lei, 2009-2016. Sources: basilica.ro / patriarhia.ro / gandul.info

However, such data are only partially reliable for two reasons: first, the aforementioned partnership with State authorities consists also of monetary contributions given to the church. The data published by the RP do not clarify whether a part of this money are originally public money or not, but report the number of projects financed by public or external funding.[16] Second, an accurate

[16] For instance, the 2016 report states that 451 of 617 projects carried out by the bishoprics are financed by the church own funds, 74 are lead thanks to public funding, 15 by external funding and

calculation of such expenses is extremely complicated, as donations to the poor are given also informally by both clerical and non-clerical personnel and are not always monetary. Things have changed not just concerning the implementation of charity projects by the church and its implementation, but also in terms of theological research. Relevant personalities of the Romanian Orthodox intellectual world like Father Ioan Ica and the theologian Radu Preda[17] have started to enquire how Orthodoxy relates to social ethics: the former by editing a book on the topic with the Italian Jesuit Germano Marani (Ica & Marani 2002), the latter by founding the first chair in Orthodox social theology. When I met Preda in his office, he explained to me why he decided to orient his academic career towards this direction:

> On the one hand, there is a legitimate fear [in Orthodoxy] for not repeating the mistakes of Western Christianity, which uses arguments of moral utility in front of the faithful [to justify its importance] (…) But on the other hand, I always asked myself how to live the Sunday liturgy all along the week (…) that is, how do we bring the Sunday *ethos* in all the other days? A German Catholic bishop who is a dear friend of mine once asked me: "How is it possible that a country with a great Orthodox majority is at the same time so affected by corruption?" (…) Well, these questions had persecuted me so much that, in the end, I founded the first chair of Orthodox social theology [in Romania].

As observed by Preda, the relationship Orthodoxy has with social theology is delicate. On one hand, the necessity for the Church to get more involved in activities of social utility is related to the need of elaborating a proper social theology, taking inspiration both from its own doctrinal tradition and from Catholic established praxis. On the other hand, this is a hard task to achieve, for the ROC is a heterogeneous community traversed by very different stances regarding

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77 by mixed funding. (See http://basilica.ro/in-anul-2016-biserica-ortodoxa-romana-a-cheltuit-in-scop-filantropic-95-841-602-lei/, accessed on 28.03.2018)

[17] Racu as well includes Preda in his analysis. While he shows appreciation for the efforts made by the Romanian theologian in relation to social doctrine, he ends up criticizing him for his ambiguous stance regarding welfarism. I do not share Racu's view in this respect, as his criticism does not address Preda's theological contributions but rather his political orientation (which, I think, should not be discussed).

interdenominational relationships. However things will develop in the future, it seems that recent controversies about the public funding of denominations and their social engagement in society have raised general awareness on multiple sides: among local theologians, within the ROC, and among Bucharest's citizens.

4.4. Building national cathedrals in the former socialist bloc

Throughout this chapter I presented three different predicaments affecting the construction of the national cathedral, namely its title, architecture and funding. Nevertheless, despite the debates it stirred in Romania, It is hard to say why the Bucharest cathedral is so controversial without resorting to comparison. The dynamics of re-consecration of public space have affected large areas of the postsocialist world, and imposing cathedrals have been built in capitals like Moscow, Kiev, Tbilisi, and Warsaw. In this last section I will briefly describe each of these cathedrals, whose differences from the CMN indicate other pathways of the religious re-signification of the space after socialism. On the other hand, the striking similarities in relation to the historical trajectories they share suggest looking at national cathedrals as cumulative projects: along the original purpose to strengthen ethnic and religious homogeneity in the name of nation-building, the anticommunist discourse has gained control over the social significance of these edifices.

Moscow's cathedral of Christ the Saviour is currently the highest Orthodox house of worship in the world, until the Bucharest one will be brought to completion. Its story is unique and unfolds from tsarist splendour up to the post-Soviet present. Built over five decades in the nineteenth century for celebrating the 1812 victory over Napoleon, it was razed by the Bolsheviks in 1931 who wanted to replace it with the magnificent Palace of the Soviet. As this was never carried out beyond the realisation of the foundation pit, the site became a huge outdoor swimming pool in 1960. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the local Muscovite authorities opted for rebuilding the original cathedral, thus promoting the pre-Soviet past as a crucial element of the new-born Russian Federation (Sidorov 2000).

The most striking similarity with Bucharest lies in the fact that historical circumstances were decisive for the decision of erecting a representative

cathedral. In both cases, in fact, victory in war was explained with God's benevolent intervention and, thus, honoured with a majestic house of worship. The first section of this chapter has shown that such mechanism has inspired the name itself of the Bucharest cathedral. Similarly, the French invasion of Russia in 1812 was interpreted by the local Moscow population through the lens of religion: the invasion and the destruction of vast areas of Moscow were therefore a divine punishment, and the final victory a sign of divine salvation (Sidorov 2000: 553).

Moscow's cathedral well exemplifies the process of the re-consecration of space. That specific place defiled by Bolsheviks first and then transformed into a swimming pool under Khrushchev, was re-habilitated by building the new cathedral according to the original architectural style[18] and in its former location. Importantly, the usage of public money (apparently coming mostly by the City Hall budget) did not engender criticism; as it was justified by the re-construction of a heritage site. Therefore, in Moscow, heritage-related motivations were crucial for attracting funding and consensus. Instead, the CMN project has a long history dating back to the 19th century, but has only recently been implemented, and many local experts have already dismissed the idea that it will boost Bucharest's cultural heritage. This helps to explain the criticism levelled against the Bucharest cathedral in recent years: the abundant usage of public money has never been properly legitimised for the ordinary Romanian taxpayers.

The role of oligarchs in financing the church-building industry in Eastern Christian countries has recently drawn the attention of social scientists, at least regarding Russia (Köllner 2011), Armenia (Antonyan 2014), and eastern Ukraine (Kuzio 2017). Even though this phenomenon does also have a spiritual connotation, by investing in religious architecture entrepreneurs and businessmen are often able to convert their economic capital into a social and political one. A major example is the new Holy Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi, which was built between 1995 and 2004, financed by the tycoon Bidzina Ivanishvili. The Georgian oligarch would become Georgia's prime minister almost one decade after the

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[18] The same fidelity cannot be claimed for the materials used, as the marble decorations of the façade are now made in bronze. Moreover, Sidorov reported that "as a result of the high costs and rapid pace of the process, the cathedral is being built in ferroconcrete, an unsuitable surface for (...) paintings. (...) The use of cheap, brick-faced ferroconcrete walls, as well as structural changes made to accommodate modern conveniences, has caused criticism from the Church" (Sidorov 2000: 563)

cathedral was built, and the coalition he founded has currently the majority of seats in Parliament.

The Tbilisi case, where a single patron bore the expense of the whole project, is an exception. When public money is not involved, the fund-raising campaigns organised by the respective beneficiary attract donations coming from prominent stakeholders, sponsors and entrepreneurs and, at the same time, receive small contributions from the faithful. In the Romanian context, however, there are no oligarchs or wealthy businessmen investing in the church-building industry to the same degree of other postsocialist countries. This has pushed the ROC to invoke – and obtain – specific laws that could guarantee a constant funding by public institutions for building the national cathedral.

While almost thirty Orthodox cathedrals have been built in postsocialist Romania, and only one Roman Catholic and one Greek Catholic, the Ukrainian context has proven to be more heterogeneous: among the (at least) sixteen cathedrals erected after 1990 one is Roman-Catholic, five belong to the Orthodox Church affiliated to the Moscow Patriarchate, three to the Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate, and seven to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). The UGCC representatives affirmed to have raised enough funds for erecting a sixty meters high cathedral in Kiev thanks to the donations received both within the country and from the diaspora. At the same time, no state institution was asked for money in order to avoid any compromise with politicians.[19]

Catholic Poland has produced two major cathedrals after 1989. "Our Lady of Sorrows" now stands in Lichen, where the local cult of the holy icon of Mary grew in popularity in the 1960s and reached worldwide reputation with the construction of the basilica itself (Sekerdej et al. 2007: 432). This massive house of worship – the largest of the country – was entirely financed through private donations, as "neither the Polish government nor the Catholic Church authorities supported this venture" (Ibid: 439). Albeit it was a contested decision,[20] financial support was instead offered by the state for the erection of the "Temple of Divine

[19] https://www.unian.ua/society/824110-glava-ugkts-sobor-voskresinnya-hristovogo-syae-yak-noviy-erusalim-na-ves-svit.html (Accessed on 13.12.2017)

[20] http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/191419,%E2%80%98No%E2%80%99-to-state-funding-for-Divine-Providence-complex (Accessed on 13.12.2017)

Providence" in Warsaw, inaugurated in 2016. Once again favourable political circumstances were interpreted as divine intervention: the original name of the temple, in fact, was meant to honour the Lord for giving Poland the first constitution of the country, in 1791. Here as well religious and civil purposes intertwine, as the complex contains also a funeral site where iconic national figures are buried.

Some of the cases presented share a common historical pattern, as the original projects date back to pivotal moments for the formation of the modern nation-states. Thus, cathedrals were meant as a "thanksgiving" to God for military and territorial achievements (Bucharest), for a desperate win over the invader (Moscow), and to celebrate the country's first constitution (Warsaw). It would be hard to infer that such projects are coming to life today because people in Poland, Romania or Russia are more religious than in the past. Instead, these projects are, in a way, cumulative: with their realisation postponed for decades if not centuries, new motivations have been added to the original purposes. Their official name may remain unchanged but new meanings overlap with the original nationalist blueprints. These new cathedrals towering in many countries of the postsocialist bloc are now intended as anticommunist symbols, standing for the resurgence of religion as a powerful public institution – and of Churches as visible organizations – over decades of state-atheism. For instance, adopting the very same logic that inspired the conception of these national cathedrals, Archbishop Andrei Andreicuţ read the December 1989 revolution as God's intervention to save Romania from Ceauşescu's dictatorship (Andreicuţ 1999).

The anticommunist discourse has represented a common ground for very different political actors in Romania after 1990. From neoliberals to neo-fascists, Christian conservatives and Social Democrats, all of them gained political capital by blaming their opponents of being communist or nostalgic of the regime (Poenaru 2017). Most importantly, the populist rhetoric embraced by such discourse dwells on the ruptures between "now" and "then". For the same logic, the national cathedral is supposed to purify what was defiled by communists, to celebrate the victory of religion over the atheist regime. All this will be soon epitomised by an evocative image: the Cathedral for the Salvation of the People towering over the House of the People. But how this could ever happen, when the

likeness between the two is so patent? Sharing the subject to which they are dedicated, the magnificent scale, the public funding and the very same location, one would be rather convinced of the striking continuities that bind Romania before and after that December of 1989.

This chapter was meant to explain why the construction of the Bucharest cathedral has engendered heated debates, and in relation to which issues. Criticism and dissatisfaction with the Church are topics that have been rarely addressed in the reference literature. In fact, the body of scholarship dealing with religious life in postsocialist Romania has focused thus far mainly on forms of religious revitalisation (with good reason, as the country was finally leaving decades of state atheism behind). Nevertheless, since then, an entire new generation has now become adult, and the time is ripe for addressing also inchoate secularist and anticlerical sentiments. It is not my ambition to do so in a systematic way, but rather to draw attention to such themes by dedicating to them the next chapter, which builds on data gathered in an urban setting and in a general atmosphere of contestation and mistrust against the Orthodox Church.

CHAPTER 5: CLERGYMEN'S AUTHORITY AND THE RISE OF ANTICLERICALISM

> Intellectuals did not communicate with the masses in those countries which did not experience the Renaissance, the Lutheran reformation or the Enlightenment. They did not communicate with them neither in Russia, nor in Bulgaria, nor in Serbia [...] In Orthodox countries intellectuals do not know the people, and I would not have known it either without the Church. The priest is the one who has a direct contact with this world [the people]. *He has an a priori ascendancy over the masses.*
>
> Ciachir, Dan (2014: 87, my italics)

The present chapter focuses on the link between burgeoning anticlerical practices in Bucharest and the drop of credit and trust the Church is experiencing recently. The phrase in italics from the excerpt above, which quotes a contemporary Romanian Orthodox writer, serves as a useful starting point. It is not my purpose to assess whether priests' authority has actually been always undisputed in the past. Instead, my concern here is with the image that Orthodox believers (practitioners or not) construct of both hierarchs and parish priests in a highly urbanized context. A recent nationwide survey[1] has reported that the trust in the Romanian Orthodox Church clerical representatives has been constantly falling over the last years, and similar results were given by a survey conducted in Bucharest in May 2016.[2] How and why do clergymen lose legitimation? And

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[1] http://www.ires.com.ro/articol/311/romania---societate-cu-incredere-limitata (accessed on 21.03.2018)

[2]http://www.dcnews.ro/sondaj-avangarde-procente-oc-de-ultima-ora-scadere-dramatica_505608.html (accessed on 21.03.2018)

according to which social process their ascendancy shrinks to a smaller group of practitioners? These questions worry the Church leaders as well. The Holy Synod itself – the ruling body of the Romanian Orthodox Church – admitted in January 2016 that "we need growing co-responsibility and cooperation between the clergy, laity and believers *in a secularised society that becomes more and more hostile to the Church*".[3]

Since the very first days in the field, I could observe a clear cleavage between many people's Orthodox identification (still generally unquestioned, if we exclude young generation) and their relationship with the ordained representatives of the Church (which appears to be in constant weakening). As reported in other Orthodox countries like Russia (Agadjanian 2011) or Bulgaria (Ghodsee 2009), religious and national identity are very often non-separable entities, and the identification with one implies the automatic adoption of the other. This is why every time I heard criticism towards Orthodox priests and bishops my interlocutors, in order not to be considered atheist, quickly pinpointed that they were Christian-Orthodox and that they believed in God. Those times when it was me asking whether he or she was Orthodox, a specific reply came more often than others: "of course, I am Romanian, thus I am Orthodox!"[4] This is to say that the heart of the matter is not related to personal faith or religious identity, but rather to the perception of Church representatives, at a time when their presence is being strongly reaffirmed throughout many layers of public life. Clergymen's disputable behaviour has become a major topic of discussion in Bucharest (and in the whole country) since the mid-2000s, that is when the digitalisation of media started to spread at a fast pace.

It should be first clarified to whom the expression "Church representatives" refers. A common emic definition of the Church is "human-divine institution" (*așezamănt divino-uman*), as Christ started it. The saints, the clergy, and the whole community of believers compose the human part of the institution. The clergy

[3] http://www.activenews.ro/stiri-social/Sfantul-Sinod-al-Bisericii-Ortodoxe-Romane-anunta-ca-sustine-initiativa-de-modificare-a-Constitutiei-128924 (my italics, accessed on 21.03.2018)

[4] Such a reaction wouldn't be so common in the north-west of the country, where the presence of Romanian Greek Catholics is more substantial and questions the assumption stating that to be Romanian means to be Orthodox. The same applies for the younger generation, who have experienced enthusiastically the postsocialist re-encounter with the West and are often strongly secularised.

consists of bishops, priests, and deacons. Leaving aside the deacons – whom I will not discuss due to their limited influence – I refer to the former when talking about the "high clergy" and to the latter when mentioning the "lower clergy". Bishops include archbishops, metropolitans, and the patriarch; are drawn from the ranks of the monks and are required to be celibate. Moreover, clergymen are divided also according to their activity, as priests and deacons are defined as "secular", differently from monks.[5] Criticism against the high clergy is treated in the following section, where I provide an ethnographic account of the demonstrations that occurred on November 2015 in Bucharest. Such anticlerical sentiments come both from believers and non-believers, who blame the bishops of being nothing more than a corrupted, money-seeking elite. Hence follow some reflections over the rise of anticlericalism in Romania, its historical precedents, and its current specificities.

The form of anticlericalism directed against the lower clergy is discussed in the last section of this chapter, which deals with priests losing the trust of the faithful and thereby discouraging them from attending church service. Two different kinds of criticism are examined: dissatisfaction with the way priests interpret the fire of the club and with the worldly oriented activities of the priest, like gathering big sums of money by carrying out religious services. Even though it is peculiar for Orthodox theologians, monks and priests to warn the faithful from acquiring a moralising stance (to the point that it is deemed marking a sheer difference with Western Christianity), this is exactly what happens when the laity blames the clergy in the capital. However, anticlerical sentiments spreading in recent years in Romania do not usually result in disrespectful behaviour against the priests. Even though I hold in this chapter that clergymen's ascendancy and authority is not at all *a priori*, but contingent on the changes produced by the secular age, personal interaction with ordained representatives of the church requires the laity to adopt a reverent attitude both in verbal and non-verbal terms. This includes weighting one's words and addressing the priest with expressions of deference (like *sarut mâna,* "I kiss your hands"). Non-practicing believers accusing the clergy of hypocrisy would avoid getting in touch with priests instead of

[5] Here is meant in the most literal sense of the term: the Romanian translation is *de mir,* which in Old Church Slavic meant "world", not too differently from the Latin meaning.

adopting an aggressive demeanour, and when attending main religious celebrations they would still show respect towards them.

Having said this, one should bear in mind that a specifically secular understanding of religion is more likely to spread in the quintessentially urban setting of a national capital. Asad convincingly sketches it as "anchored in personal experience, expressible as belief-statements, dependent on private institutions, and practiced in one's spare time'" (Asad 1993: 207). The religious background against which anticlericalism rises includes more and more secularised believers like the one imagined by Asad. Criticism towards priests and bishops does not come exclusively from non-religious people, but is likely to be found in the words and actions of believers and practitioners as well.

I consider rigorists and zealots, churchgoers, non-practicing believers and non-believers (that is, agnostics and atheists) disposed in sequence in a continuum whose one pole is represented by high church attendance[6] and intense religious practice, while the other stands for militant, anticlerical atheism. It goes without saying that people do not belong to a specific category, but rather move along this continuum during their life. For "zealots" I do not necessarily mean believers sticking to religious dogmas – popular religion would otherwise find no explanation – but rather frequent churchgoers, who coordinate their everyday activities also according to the liturgical calendar. They would, thus, attend the church not just during the Sunday mass, but also on other main weekly celebrations. The same applies to religious practice: zealots and churchgoers would attend rituals, pilgrimages and processions, go to confession (*spovedanie*), and pray in church on a more regular basis than other believers. People get a different idea of the clergy depending on how much they participate to church life, practice rituals, have a personal connection with the clergy and so on, thus they

[6] On the other hand, church attendance is – when considered by itself – a tricky issue. The 2008 European Values Survey showed that church attendance in Romania is not that high, the first places being occupied by Catholic countries like Poland, Italy and Ireland. In a way, to attend the main feasts of the liturgical year, to fast before Easter and take part in pilgrimages is deemed more important than regular church attendance. An Orthodox believer is often told not to feel bound to go to church just because – being part of the religious community – she is expected to do so: "We should not feel like slaves!" (*Sa nu ne simţim slugi!)*, used to repeat a young Orthodox priest during a weekly meeting organized for university students.

manifest anticlerical attitudes that differ in targets, motivations, and ways of expression.

5.1. The November 2015 demonstrations

On October 30th 2015 the *Colectiv* nightclub took fire during a hard-rock concert, causing 64 dead and almost two hundred people injured, mostly youngsters. The tragedy moved not only Bucharest citizens but the whole country. Immediately after the news was circulated, people showed their solidarity by forming long queues for blood donations, setting up a fund for the victims' families, and thronging the yard in front of the club for leaving flowers and candles. At the same time, inquiries were started to evaluate the responsibilities of the owners (for not respecting safety measures), and of the city district administration (which in turn did not carry out inspections properly).

On November 3rd, after three days of national mourning, tens of thousands of people stood up in the capital against the main political institutions, deemed corrupted to the bone and, thus, responsible for the dramatic accident. The crowd first met in University Square, a place laden with meaning[7] for locals, since it is where people gathered during the December 1989 revolution and during the protests against the first postsocialist democratic government in June 1990 (the so-called "Mineriad"). Then, it made its way towards the Victoria Palace, seat of the Romanian government, calling for the prime minister to resign. The following slogans were heard regularly during protests: "All the parties are the same filth!", "Resignation!", "Romania, wake up!" Marching all the way back to the city centre, the demonstrators scattered in different directions: some headed to the House of the Parliament, the majority went straight towards the seat of the city district administration, while a few others went protesting towards the Patriarchal see, shouting slogans against the new cathedral and the Patriarch. The day after, the Prime Minister, Victor Ponta, resigned in the morning. In the evening, seventy-five

[7] See Chapter 7.1 for a thicker description of this square, the place the most filled with crosses in the whole city.

thousand people all around the country took to the street, demanding a radical change of the political class.[8]

The alleged lack of public participation and support for the victims by the ROC during the three days of national mourning was the spark for the burst of anticlerical sentiments. Many people's discontent was due to the cold attitude that some Orthodox priests assumed regarding the fire of the club: since it happened during a hard-rock concert, they justified the tragedy as a direct consequence of the celebration of Satanist music. The absence of any representative of the Orthodox Church at the wake organized after the events kindled an already heated atmosphere. The way the church managed this predicament turned out to be clumsy and detrimental. Patriarch Daniel declared that "people should go [praying] to church and not to clubs, because we pray in churches",[9] while the then spokesperson Father Stoica tried to explain the misunderstanding by stating that "they [i.e. ROC representatives] had not been invited".[10] Only some days later, on occasion of a video message broadcasted to defuse the situation, Patriarch Daniel apologised "in case our words were misunderstood".[11]

This inability to step back and apologize with clarity stirred resentment against Orthodox hierarchs. The anticlerical component was not crucial since the very beginning; it arose, instead, after the ROC failed to show its solidarity for the tragedy, and peaked when the local health system turned out to be unequipped to cope with hundreds of wounded. In Sibiu, a Transylvanian city whose identity is strongly forged by its German-speaking roots and Habsburg heritage, media reported that, at the sound of the cathedral's bell, the people started booing and shouting "We want hospitals, not cathedrals!" (*Vrem spitale, nu catedrale*), "Shame on you!", "No politics in churches!", and "Thieves!" When some members of the crowd faced one of the cathedrals' priests, a few minutes later, the entire clamour

[8] http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/noi-proteste-sunt-anuntate-si-pentru-miercuri-seara-ce-vor-manifestantii-sa-se-intample-dupa-caderea-guvernului.html (Accessed on 21.03.2018)
[9] http://www.cotidianul.ro/patriarhul-daniel-lumea-sa-vina-la-biserica-nu-la-club-270752/(Accessed on 25.11.2017)
[10] http://www.romaniatv.net/bor-preotul-nu-putea-veni-neinvitat-la-clubul-colectiv-nu-am-fost-chemati_254488.html (Accessed on 25.11.2017)
[11] http://www.agerpres.ro/social/2015/11/05/patriarhul-daniel-ne-cerem-iertare-daca-unele-cuvinte-ale-noastre-au-fost-insuficient-de-lamuritoare-16-17-01 (Accessed on 25.11.2017)

ended up in all the bystanders saying together the Our Father. In fact, the authority people contest is not at all divine, but human.[12]

In Bucharest – where big rallies have been carried out quite often in the last years – outright anticlerical performances took place: for example, a man dressed like the Patriarch went collecting money for indulgences among the protesters. This instance – together with dozens of derisory picket signs – is the kind of satire people resort to in a context of general de-legitimization of the main political and religious authorities. Patriarch Daniel was one of the most frequent targets: not only because of the recent unfortunate declarations; but also for his role of first representative of the church.

Figure 5.1 – Writings on the window of a shop of Orthodox articles in Bucharest. The writings go: "We want hospitals, not cathedrals" and "Are you happy, 'preafericitule'?" "Preafericit" stands for "His beatitude" and is the title of the Romanian Orthodox Patriarch, but literally it means "too much happy".

[12] As a taxi driver glossed once while driving me back home, during the demonstration days in Bucharest: "Romanians don't go against God, they go against the Church!"

Figure 5.2 – Demonstrators in University Square, 4.11.2015. Source: Andreea Retinschi.

Every evening, for one week, thousands of people were meeting at University Square. The vans of the media were parked in a row one side of the square, ready to report the event. Right in the middle of the crowd, a sort of speakers' corner provided with a megaphone was set up to let everybody express themselves for a short while. Romanian flags were waving here and there, some placards were asking for change and justice whereas others mocked the main political and religious representatives. In the midst of all this, a young woman was preparing an anonymous questionnaire in order to draw up a coherent list of demands to fight for. Close by, all around the fountain, hundreds of candles were celebrating the victims of the fire. The big banner nearby went "Corruption kills".

According to the results of a sociological survey,[13] the majority of people protesting in University square were young adults already active in the labour market: 78% of the interviewees were between 21 and 40 years old, while 75% were working or both working and studying. Interestingly enough, the percentage of atheists was very high (14%), if compared to the data gathered during the last census in 2011, when atheists represented 0.48% of the Bucharest citizens. In the

[13] www.snspa.ro/images/fisiere/snspa/info-snspa/Raport_ _Cercetare_protestatari_Universitate_noiembrie_2015.compressed.pdf (Accessed on 25.11.2017)

name of social justice, many were calling for a public spending more oriented towards welfare priorities. The slogan „we want hospitals, not cathedrals", first adopted by secularist NGOs during their public campaigns and actions conducted some years before, gained popularity and media attention. *Vrem spitale, nu catedrale*: was this slogan just propaganda spread out by atheists and radical secularists? Is public funding for religious buildings indeed outstanding, in the Romanian case? The national cathedral represents here the tip of an iceberg made of more than 4200 Orthodox Churches, monasteries, cathedrals and chapels erected in 26 years, about one in every two days and a half.

How is it possible, then, that anticlerical sentiments burst out so vocally even if the *Colectiv* tragedy had originally no direct connection with the church or any other religious actor? According to many churchgoers and priests, the demonstrators had been manipulated not just by secularist NGOs unfairly comparing churches and hospitals in their slogans, but mainly by the sensationalist spirit infusing media campaigns against the church. This idea was shared also by a member of the SSRA, according to whom the reason for today's anticlerical atmosphere is to be found in the capacity of mass media to influence everyday people:

> During the interwar period, [if you were living in the countryside] you couldn't know anything else than what the priest of your town told you. During communism you had the TV, but you could watch only Ceaușescu. After 1990 things changed. The press started to reveal stories about priests, and citizens who do not belong to any parish community got to know the church exclusively by means of the media. […] It is from there that anticlericalism comes from. People meet the priest first on TV or, more recently, on the internet.

However, regardless of the motivations behind such anticlerical outburst, the protest in University Square was a sort of a breaking point. Safety measures were checked in all the downtown clubs, forcing some of them to close down. The ROC replaced the former spokesperson, a cleric, with a layman. The new technocrat government – which took office right after the November demonstrations – gave a strong signal of breaking with the past by not financing at

all the construction of new churches (including the national cathedral).[14] Lastly, many people expressed publicly and loudly dissatisfaction for the representatives of the Orthodox Church like they never did before. The Romanian Orthodox Church did not suffer from such a widespread unpopularity not even during communist times.

It holds true that Patriarch Teoctist, the one who experienced the transition to postsocialism, was contested and was shouted "Teoctist Antichrist!" because of his uncritical – if not openly complicit – approach towards the regime. Discontent, however, never rose to the point to contest the whole church by such a large number of people and in such a vocal way. Bishops had come to be perceived as part of the "system": many protesters in University Square considered them as a clique of devious people made from the same cloth as politicians. Hence it follows the question I intend to reflect upon in the next pages: if clergymen and politicians are the same, how could the former properly maintain their role of spiritual guides, ritual experts and intermediary figures between the faithful and God?

5.2. Anticlerical practices and discourses taking shape

Anthropological studies on anticlericalism have been mostly dedicated to rural areas of Western European Catholic countries (Cutileiro 1971 and Riegelhaupt 1984 in Portugal, Behar 1990 and Maddox 1995 in Spain, Badone 1990 in northern France), one of the few exceptions being Halemba's study (2015) from Greek Catholic western Ukraine. These scholars showed that criticism against the clergy is many-sided, comes from different actors and addresses both high and lower clergy for different, with sometimes antithetical reasons. Joyce Riegelhaupt (1984: 96-97), for instance, categorizes anticlerical tendencies in accordance with whom or what they target:

> We should analytically recognize an anticlericalism that is anti-Church and a broader one that is anti-religion. In each of these dimensions, however, the attacks against the Clergy

[14] The state budget approved by the same government on 31.07.16, though, financed the construction of new houses of worship by earmarking 120 million Lei, whose 57 were destined to the CMN via the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs. Since the official start of the project in 2009, this was the highest sum ever allocated by the state budget (cf. Chapter 3). By hindsight, the choice to allocate no funds at all in the first state budget after the instalment of the new government had been a simple marketing strategy to show a clear rupture with the former resigning government.

> are part of a larger attack on the Church as an institution. Another set of concerns focus directly on the behaviour of the parish priests and do not seem to question the larger socio-political institutional structure […] Finally, and again not always clearly separable from the above, are a range of anticlerical criticisms that are explicitly directed against the way in which a local priest handles his religious duties […] In both these [last two] 'anticlerical' attitudes, the priest, *qua priest*, is the target, not the institution of the Church nor religion (Riegelhaupt 1984: 96-97, italics of the author)

Anticlericalism can be meant against a whole cosmological order, against the institution regulating it, or the human component of the institution; thus respectively being "anti-religious", "anti-Church", or "anti-priests", even though all these are somehow connected with one another. In a similar way, Jose Cutileiro distinguishes between "elite" and "popular" anticlericalism. The former concerns "the larger structural questions of Church/state relations, and explicitly against the economical/political power of the Church" […] the latter "arose from daily life and did not seem to be 'matters of principle'" (Cutileiro 1971:267 in Riegelhaupt 1984:97).

It is certainly intriguing to get through forms of disdain, resistance or mockery pointed towards the clergy in Romania, where the grand narratives about priests' undisputed ascendancy and Christian bi-millenarian identity are the rule in the common imaginary. Such an idea is reinforced by the fact that Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches indeed played a role in shaping nationalist ideals, empowering ethnic Romanians in front of urban elites (be they Hungarians, Saxons, or Jews), and fostering the idea of a Romanian state. Even the period of constitution of a national identity and the following transition to the nation-state model – which yet was marked by the secularisation of property conducted by A.I. Cuza – did not produce – or was accompanied by – any anti-religious movement.[15]

To trace a genealogy of the anti-religious thinking in Romania, it is necessary to look at the intellectual life at the beginning of the twentieth century. By that time Romania was undoubtedly still a religious country, but this did not

[15] "The period 1700-1848 describes the gradual transformation of an identity that was initially religious and based upon the Romanians' membership in the international Orthodox community into one that was national and broadly European. National, but never anti-religious, anti-clerical or anti-church" (Hitchins 1999:7 in Dungaciu 2006: 251).

prevent some urban intellectuals from getting inspired by enlightenment, positivist and evolutionist ideals. The magazine "The Reason" (*Raţiunea*) was distributed in the capital between 1911 and 1914. Its founder was Constantin Thiron, a medical doctor from Iaşi who cherished deep admiration for the German evolutionist Ernst Haeckel and his monist philosophy (Rotar 2016). Thiron had also founded, two years before the *Raţiunea* magazine, the first Freethought Romanian Association. According to Riegelhaupt's categories, Thiron's thought was utterly anti-religious: inspired by positivist idea of religion and science, he proposed to close down monasteries and seminaries, considering the monks simple social parasites. In an article from 1912 he exhorted his compatriots to donate for educational purposes instead of subsidising the church: "Folks! We need schools, light, culture, instead of priests, darkness, ignorance, and exploitation of human naivety by other humans […] then please donate for schools, because school education will be the gospel of the future!" (Thiron 1912: 14-15). Such elitist anticlericalism struggled against the idea of religion itself, and not just against the church or the priests. It was based on rationalist thinking and its heritage is now carried on by NGOs like ASUR and AUR, which have adjusted secularist ideals in accordance with principles of tolerance and freedom of religious practice.

Another well-known example of anticlerical thinking – though coming from more recent times – is the criticism raised against the hierarchs who did not oppose the communist regime. Ioan Ianolide was imprisoned in 1941 owing to his affiliation with the young section of the Iron Guard, and spent 23 years in the some of the most infamous Romanian jails (Aiud, Gherla, Târgu Ocna, and Piteşti). In the early 1980s – when still monitored by the secret police – he wrote his most famous work, a vivid witness to faith and to his life spent in jail, being persecuted for political and religious motivations. From his standpoint of committed believer, Ianolide (2006: 410) does not address the institution of the church or its theological basis, but rather blames the church leaders for the ambiguous relationship they maintained with the atheist regime:

> Let us not mistake the Church of Christ with the clergy […] the official Church is a factory of power of the atheist state. […] Between hierarchs and the people there is

> an outright rift. They [the hierarchs] live outside the Christian spirit. They are part of the state elite. Even though we do believe in the divine grace they received from God, we do not believe in them as men. Their words do not reach our souls, since they have a political smell. They claim to obtain, in this way, freedom of faith, but we hold that their major work is the justification of the atheist belief.

These two examples show that current forms of anticlericalism in Romania have some historical precedents, be they coming from atheists or from zealots and blaming the Orthodox Church as a whole (the institution of the church) or just some parts of it (monks, hierarchs or priests). What is new is the spread of anticlerical attitudes among vaster parts of the population, also because of the popularity that social networks and online newspapers gained in the last decade. On the urban scale, the November 2015 facts testified that anticlericalism – practiced and expressed on street demonstrations and not just through books or newspapers – is becoming a wider social reality rather than an isolated phenomenon, as it was in the past.

Dealing with contemporary anticlericalism in the Eastern Christian world requires an engagement with the concept of authority or, more specifically, with the connection between secularisation and the deterioration of clergymen's authority in front of the laity. As shown by Agnieszka Halemba for rural south-western Ukraine, even Marian apparitions can concern the complex relationship between the (Greek Catholic) clergy and the parishioners. One of the main messages of the Virgin Mary of Dzublyk is about her will to "restore the authority of the priests among the people" (Tsipesh 2002: 15 in Halemba 2015: 2), a goal that differs from usual calls for faith and prayer at other Marian apparition sites. In Dzublyk, the message of the Virgin Mary hints at priests negotiating their leading role with a local community that self-organized an underground religious life during communism, when the Greek Catholic Church was disbanded. Even though the Bucharest case and Halemba's differ in denomination, country and socio-economic setting, they both deal with change in the relationship between the priests and the people.

The main reason for dedicating this chapter to clergymen's authority, and not only to their public image, lies in the fact that more and more faithful have

started to ask themselves whether all ordained priests have *har. Har* comes from the ancient Greek "kairos" (*χαιρος*), whose etymological root is also at the base of the English term "charisma". It is the divine grace of which priests become medium once they are ordained (*hirotoniți*), and they are not supposed to lose this quality even in case they get defrocked (*caterisiți*). Corruption scandals involving the high clergy, the Patriarch's alleged greedy attitude, and business-oriented parish priests push some believers to wonder whether divine grace really infuse every clergy representative. When bishops are targeted, the church as an institution is affected. When, instead, it is the lower clergy that are criticised, the impact is rather on a local scale, as believers may change their religious habits in terms of church attendance and ritual practice.

This last point shows how the individualisation of faith and the "privatisation of religion" (Casanova 1994, 2006) take their course: the faithful express a moral judgement upon priests' comportment which affects the religious authority of the latter. By sidestepping the figure of the priest, as urban secularised believers often do, faith tends to become a more personal issue and ritual practice gets sporadic, thus downplaying the communitarian aspect of religion. For example, it is quite common among lay people to blame priests for asking exorbitant sums of money to celebrate baptisms, marriages and funerals. Such behaviour is deemed to be greedy and puts them in a bad light. Instead of being considered endowed with charisma, priests end up being seen as simple petty bourgeois, with a family like anybody else and doing a job like any other. A few instances are presented in the last section of this chapter.

The weekly meeting for Orthodox-Christian students organized by a parish in the centre of the capital was a great opportunity for hearing what kind of questions young churchgoers posed to the priest. Once, Father Matei, who leads these gatherings, reminded the students that "all priests have *har*, but some of them have a special one". *Har,* then, can mean both "divine grace" and "charisma": if all the priests are endowed of the divine grace when ordained, only some of them get that "recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma" (Weber 1978: 242). Major spiritual personalities like Fathers Cleopa Ilie, Constantin Galeriu, Arsenie Papacioc and Bartolomeu Anania, were all particularly charismatic priests who enjoyed great popularity among the

faithful. Some of them had spent many years in prison, either under Antonescu's regime or under communist rule. This had the effect of endowing it with a halo of sanctity. As already highlighted in Chapter 2, the death of the last of this generation of spiritual fathers (Father Papacioc) left a lacuna that today's spiritual authorities have not filled yet. One of the biggest problems the church is facing deals with the absence of personalities able to communicate and interact with people. Charismatic monks and priests are supposed to be outright vehicles of divine grace, and such transmission of grace happens not only by means of their bodies, but also via the words they use and the mild (*blând*) attitude they adopt.

Unsurprisingly, humbleness is the feature most believers recognize as crucial in a good cleric. The demonstrations of November 2015 have shown how bishops can be perceived as lacking of such quality and rather be seen as a detached caste living in an ivory tower. This is considered to be even more reproachable because they are not simple priests but monks, that is, they have taken vows of stability, chastity, obedience and poverty. Patriarch Daniel himself is often perceived as a manager rather than a religious leader, not just by ordinary laymen but also by some zealots and even parish priests. A telling anecdote comes from one interview with one of them: "the current Patriarch said once 'we do need to gather money. Whoever cannot do this, well, no problem, we will send him away and replace with somebody else!' I don't think this is the right attitude for a priest, who is actually even a monk!" Here the interviewee refers to the economic pressure priests like him face by reason of the bishops. Parishes are supposed to buy religious objects of every kind (icons, candles, calendars, books, church newspapers, etc.) from their diocese and are thus encouraged to sell them in order to recoup the investment. The construction of the national cathedral is now another item parishes must contribute to on a monthly basis, even though my informants affirmed that such contribution has no fixed price. Father Iustin leads his parish in the city centre and, by the time of our interview, seemed to be rather stressed because of the demands of his superiors:

> Somehow there is a pressure for sustaining the construction of the cathedral. There is not a precise amount, you are just expected to send them some money on a monthly basis […] I do not ask money anymore to the parishioners for the

> cathedral, because, you know, you cannot ask them for money all the time […] The money I send [200 Lei, about 45 euros per month] comes directly from us, from the monthly budget of my parish. If I do not send money at all […] I could get scolded by my superiors […] This is what I do not like about Orthodoxy. The internal system is awful (*aiurea*). I am sorry, but I can't stand it anymore. This is one of the problems of the ROC: the priests end up asking for money all the time. Because the bishops [*episcopi*] can do absolutely everything with us … this is not a Christian approach. […] No matter how, they [the bishops] must obtain what they want.

Parish priests – who like father Iustin above blame their superiors – consider the bishops as being too involved in fundraising, which is seen as a betrayal of their role as revivers of the Christian faith. Because of such pressure, they fear to be sanctioned if they do not fulfill their expected duties. For instance, when I joined Father Iustin during the customary door-to-door round of Christmas blessing, it was apparent that he wanted to sell a parcel of calendars before the end of the day. Sometimes he just gave them away for free, when people left a rich donation. This is not to say that this ritual is all about money. We went door-to-door in the apartment blocks nearby the church for the entire afternoon, singing Christmas carols and blessing houses, giving sweets to children and getting invited in to eat some delicacies. In order to satisfy their superiors without sounding greedy to their parishioners, parish priests like Iustin are forced to enact specific strategies.

Based on a moral economy that requires not asking too much from churchgoers, he rather draws on the church budget to pay the "monthly toll" for the national cathedral. Whether this method can work in a parish located in the richest city of the country, it becomes way more challenging to do so in rural areas, where donations coming from the churchgoers are scant. A civil servant working for the SSRA told me that priests in rural areas often get into financial troubles because of the high demands of local bishops: "Bishops usually impose some tolls. For example, he demands priests to sell one-thousand candles, but if you have only five grannies in your church, how the hell will you sell one-thousand candles?! And you have to pay for them in advance. So you have to sell, say, five icons and one-

hundred calendars, and what if nobody buys them? What are you going to do? This is how some priests end up accumulating debts".

Priests often denounce the excessive freedom that bishops enjoy in their bishoprics, claiming that, according to Canon Law, every church belongs to the local community and not to the bishop ruling the dioceses. On the other hand, the almost absolute power every bishop holds in his diocese is justified by divine sanction. As Ware put it: "a bishop is appointed by God to guide and to rule his flock […] he is a 'monarch' in his own dioceses" (Ware 1963: 249). Differently from Catholicism, the Patriarch has no power over the bishops, as the highest authority in eastern Orthodoxy is represented by the Holy Synod.

If anticlerical sentiments demonstrate the widening gap between urban, secularised believers and the clergy, a similar rift exists also between high and lower clergy. Some of the priests I got to know in Bucharest were critical of the bishops or the Patriarch. Their reasons differed: some had developed a broader understanding of Christianity and interdenominational communication by studying abroad, others could take the liberty of being critical because they were seniors and less intimidated by possible retaliation. Orthodox custom regarding clergymen's celibacy also marks a difference between bishops and priests. Differently from Catholicism, celibacy is required for monks and discouraged for priests: by experiencing the challenges of family life, the latter conduct a life that is rather similar to the laity (Ware 1963).

After the fire in the club, the anticlerical discourse suddenly exploded in the media as much as in the streets of Bucharest. Trying to clarify who blames whom for what, and to describe the socio-economic character of such anticlerical sentiments, I have presented some examples showing how criticism against the high clergy is expressed in Bucharest. In the next section, instead, it is the priests who are the blamed ones. Urbanized, secular understandings of faith and religious practice include anticlerical expressions and entail a less deferent approach to religious ministers: the criticism that believers express in regard to priests casts light on new ways to witness, understand and perform Orthodoxy in today's urban Romania.

5.3. All too modern, or maybe not enough: forms of dissatisfaction with the clergy

Criticism of how the priest manages the religious life of the parish has been labelled as "pious anticlericalism", as opposed to the "secular anticlericalism" that targets the worldly activities of the priests (Cutileiro 1971). The anticlerical character of the protests in November contained both a pious and a secular aspect: on one hand, indignation arose against those who justified the death of dozens of people as God's sanction. On the other hand, as the public healthcare system proved to be inefficient, the project of the national cathedral became the symbol of irresponsible public spending in today's Romania. During one of the last days of the November demonstrations, I joined some men in their forties who were talking about what was wrong with the ROC. One of them started commenting on the attitude that Orthodox priests had assumed in relation to the fire of the *Colectiv*:

> Faith, the Bible… they are modern! Their message is modern! But they [Orthodox priests], are not! They are not able to keep up! You know what the parish priest from the Codrea church [close by in the city centre] said? I was there last Sunday. He said that those youngsters died because they asked for it[16] and God just pleased them! Just because it was a rock concert! That's middle-age thinking!

Here is a good example of pious anticlericalism: a churchgoer blames the priest of being incapable to convey what he thinks is supposed to be a still valuable message ("Faith, the Bible"). Like for the Spanish case of Santa Maria del Monte studied by Behar (Behar 1990), priests are perceived by the faithful as a hinder – not at all a medium – for the transmission of a truly Christian message. By talking of modernity and "middle-age thinking", this churchgoer touches on an old debate about the traditionalism of the Orthodox Church ordained representatives, unable to adapt to contemporary life (explained by some scholars with the pre-modern nature of Orthodoxy, see Kokosalakis 1994 and Dungaciu 2004). For some, hard rock music harbours Satanist sympathies that suffice for explaining the tragedy with the intervention of supernatural entities. Even though such an interpretation of the accident was not main-stream, some members of the church at its large (that

[16] The lyrics of one of the songs the band played went: "The day we give in is the day we die".

is, also some churchgoers) shared it. After all, according to Orthodoxy, man is capable of interacting with God as much as with evil forces already in this world, and this is told the believers during weekly church services.[17] However, the fact that some supernatural forces had been considered provoking the accident – instead of the lack of security measures and rampant corruption – made many protesters scornful.

The anticlerical drift assumed by the demonstrations was itself interpreted as the work of the antichrist by a priest to whom I talked once, while he was receiving the faithful in his church in the city centre. Queuing for talking to priests was a way to get to know the faithful and conduct participant observation discreetly. Since I found many priests taking a rather defensive position after they heard that I was a researcher, from time to time I introduced myself in a different way. This was one of those times. As soon as it was my turn to approach the priest, I said I was born in Italy from Romanian parents and I had recently got back to my roots. And I told him I found something I could not expect to see here in Bucharest: many people unsatisfied of the church representatives, starting from the hierarchs and the Patriarch. After a few questions about me and my personal life, he turned out to be well disposed in tackling this topic. "First of all, you have to consider that there are some forces going against the church [...] that manipulate the people [protesting in University Square]". After I asked who was behind these forces, I expected the priest to refer to secularist NGOs or to liberal political agendas. Instead, his answer was blunt: "The antichrist. He is very smart, St Paul already warned us from him". Secularist ideals spreading in recent times are – according to the same rationale – perceived as the realisation of fake democratic ideals lying behind the label of modern civil society. To say a popular wordplay among some clergymen, it is the fulfilment of a "demonocratic" polity and society *(Demonocrație)*. [18]

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[17] For instance, during the final blessing the priests asks for „protection from the enemies, visible and invisible".

[18] Father Constantin Necula is currently one of the most popular Orthodox priests, especially among the youngsters. He used this term during his public speech at the Icoanei church in October 2015. His Eminence Sebastian, Bishop of the Slatina Diocese, gives a more detailed explanation of this concept in a pastoral letter from 2009: "I believed, in December 1989, that democracy also meant religious freedom and, for this, we all agreed on tolerance. For this, I consider that we still have the right – given that Christian representatives are 'demonized' because of an intolerant tolerance – to

To perform rituals, believe or embody moral codes on behalf of a vast majority are the main ways churches operate vicariously, according to the definition of Grace Davie (Davie 2007:22). In the previous case, conflict arose over the interpretation of a tragic event: according to some churchgoers, some priests failed to "believe" in the right way, stirring up indignation among the "vast majority" (which is composed of the laity, not only of the practitioners). What happens, then, is that the laity questions the authority of priests. Concerning non-practitioners, this situation has been described by Davie: "Pressures emerge with respect to behavioural codes: people who are not themselves participants in church life want the church's representatives to embody a certain social and moral order, maintaining a way of living that has long since ceased to be the norm in the population as a whole. Failure leads to accusations of hypocrisy but also to expressions of disappointment" (Ibid: 24).

This was the case of Mrs Chelaru, one of the secularised believers described by Asad in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. She explained to me that she did not use to go to church on a regular basis because of the bad opinion she had of clergymen: "The cathedral? It's all about money!" Our discussion switched immediately from the cathedral to clerics' moral conduct, like if there was an immediate connection between these two topics: "Priests can ask even 500 euros (*doi milioane*) for celebrating a marriage. That's the average monthly wage here. Do you think it is normal? Of course not all the priests are like that, but the humble ones (*cei smeriți*) are the minority". Mrs Chelaru well represented Bucharest middle class. Graduated as an engineer, she had three children, lived in a residential area in the north of the city and drove an expensive SUV. Her uneasiness with priests aiming for business seemed to have nothing to do with personal spirituality and faith. She pointed out to be a religious person even though she was not properly a practitioner: "I pray and go to church when I need it [...] and during main celebrations, of course".

Complaints about the high prices set for celebrating main *rites de passages* like baptism, wedding and funeral is a common issue, as they still play a crucial

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wonder whether we are facing a demono-cracy, and not an authentic democracy" (See http://www.episcopiaslatinei.ro/2009/12/17/pe-cine-deranjeaza-simbolurile-crestine-pastorala-la-nasterea-domnului/ accessed on 21.03.2018).

role in the social life of individuals, independently the strength of their faith. Mrs Chelaru was disappointed by the speculative behaviour priests assume when the faithful approach them for celebrating rituals. Here priests are not seen as dogmatic persons anchored in the past, but are rather blamed to run after money, even though they already receive a salary and the churches they manage benefit from tax exemption. Priests' alleged interest for business makes some believers re-adapt their personal spiritual life in a way that avoids interaction with Church representatives. The idea Mrs Chelaru had of Orthodox priests is common among non-practitioners, and, generally, in local popular culture. Jokes like the one below often reveal lingering social conflicts in an ironic fashion, and give a vivid example of folk anticlericalism:

> Three Orthodox priests discuss how they manage the money they get from the churchgoers. The first says: "I draw a circle on the ground, then throw the money in the air: what ends outside the circle goes to God [that is, to religious purposes], what ends inside the circle, I keep for myself". The second goes: "That's too complicated, I just draw a line on the ground, then throw the money: I keep away for God the money ending on the right side, and keep for myself what ends on the left side". Lastly, the third one: "Guys, you make it too complicated: I just throw the money in the air, what remains in the air goes to God, the rest I keep it for myself!"

Since the priest is a consolidated and clearly recognisable public figure, it is a character often present in proverbs and folk wisdom. To bring up another instance, a famous Romanian saying goes: "do what the priest says, not what the priest does!" *(fa ce zice popa, nu ce face popa!*), which indicates that priests are not to be intended as role models, their importance lying rather, more generally, in the pastoral activity they conduct. In today's Bucharest, everyday believers do not seem to follow this suggestion, as they tend to read morally the behaviour of the priests, like in the case of Mrs Chelaru.

In the Orthodox world, it is not hard to find theologians, monks or simple priests discouraging the faithful from adopting a moralising attitude. Dumitru Staniloae, the most renowned Romanian Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century, reminded that "right when the moralising element prevails in religion, we

get closer to sectarians" (Ciachir 2013: 79), his term for Protestants. Similarly, hieromonk Rafail Noica considered that "the lowest step of faith is morality" (Ciachir 2014: 92), while Christos Yannaras warned that "ethics taints the Church, [...] it is the most apparent form of secularisation of the Church" (Yannaras 2004: 129-130). To suspend moral judgments and escape legalistic interpretations of religious life is a peculiarity on which Orthodox spiritual leaders often dwell and that is believed to mark a clear difference from Western Christianity. Without bearing this in mind, it would be hard to understand the joke Father Matei told once his young audience: "One priest, once, was frankly talking about his worldly activities to the faithful: 'Am I a drunkard? Yes, I Admit! Lustful? Well, yes, maybe ... but am I a heretic? Never!'".[19]

In this regard, scholars studying Eastern Christianity have cautioned from assuming that theological differences between different denominations also occur in religious practice (Halemba 2015, Hann 2010).[20] Exhortations to avoid moral judgments are easy to find in homiletics and theology, but this does not prevent believers from shaping their religious life according to the opinion they have of Church ministers. The faithful distancing themselves from the Church do so from different standpoints: in the above cases, clergymen can be perceived as anti-modern (that is, incapable to adapt to contemporary times) as much as ultra-mundane (that is, revealing a non-Christian spirit when charging the faithful with a big amount of money, allegedly in order to maintain their wealthy lifestyle). Priests, thus, fail to embody the social, economic and moral order imagined by some believers in multiple, almost contradictory ways. Be they too modern or not

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[19] The original version of this joke is actually a parable from the "Sayings of the Desert Fathers" (*Patericul Egiptean*), a collection of sayings and tales about early Christian hermits, ascetics and monks who lived in the desert of Egypt. It goes like this: "It was said concerning Abba Agathon that some monks came to find him having heard tell of his great discernment. Wanting to see if he would lose his temper they said to him 'Aren't you that Agathon who is said to be a fornicator and a proud man?' 'Yes, it is very true,' he answered. They resumed, Aren't you that Agathon who is always talking nonsense?' 'I am.' Again they said 'Aren't you Agathon the heretic?' But at that he replied 'I am not a heretic.' So they asked him, 'Tell us why you accepted everything we cast you, but repudiated this last insult.' He replied 'The first accusations I take to myself, for that is good for my soul. But heresy is separation from God. Now I have no wish to be separated from God.' At this saying they were astonished at his discernment and returned, edified." *(Aa.Vv. 1984: 20-21)*

[20] As Hann put it: "notions of belief and individuality highlighted in the theological discourses of particular strands of one world religion are a poor guide to actual differences in the way persons think and behave" (Hann 2012). Halemba has also come to similar conclusions: "the assumption of a correspondence between religious ideas and beliefs on the one hand, and lived social practices [...] is not borne out by close ethnographic practice" (Halemba 2015: 149).

modern enough, the cleavage separating priests from urbanized believers is deepening, at a time when the church-building industry in Romania works at full speed, the capital city is re-adorned with crosses and the national cathedral grows brick after brick.

The protests of November 2015 highlighted something relatively new in Romania: the open contestation of the most solid institution of the country, the Romanian Orthodox Church. The church is a human-divine institution, but only its human component has been under attack, since anticlerical sentiments did not manifest any “anti-religious” (Cutileiro 1971: 267) element: secularist NGOs, the only ones which could welcome similar stances amongst their members, are today very careful to assume a tolerant attitude. Even though protesters were mostly urban young adults, dissatisfaction with high and lower clergy in the capital was palpable on an everyday basis and was shared by many believers, be they practitioners or not. The protests of University Square epitomize the secularisation process going on in Bucharest and in the whole country.

Save the socialist period, in the past the public expression of dissent against the church was peculiar to cultural niches or targeted specific personalities (like Patriarch Teoctist) instead of a whole category (the clergy). Therefore, today’s criticism is unprecedented and is tightly related to several factors: the increased access to digital media and social networks digitalisation of media, the effects of the secularisation process (in the form of the privatisation of religion), and the general distrust towards public institutions typical of postsocialist countries. Scandals concerning the exchange of financial support for influence peddling between political actors and church representatives, as much as publicly financed major public works like the national cathedral, certainly contributed to compromise the church’s public image among Bucharest citizens.

Nevertheless, the cathedral was not always the first target of the demonstrators. Beyond the vaults of the new “Cathedral of Salvation of the People”, dozens of cathedrals and thousands of churches have been erected lately in the whole country. One of the most effective slogans shouted during the demonstration days compared the number of churches and hospitals in Romania. The rationale behind it accused state institution of granting too much money to

build new houses of worship, and the Orthodox Church of not engaging enough in activities of social utility. Is the church-building process in Romania indeed so remarkable? And is it unfolding only because of liturgical necessities? An attempt to answer such questions can be found in the next chapter.

Part Two – Churches, Crosses, and a Mosque

CHAPTER 6: WHY AND HOW ORTHODOX CHURCHES MULTIPLY IN BUCHAREST AND IN ROMANIA

> [After 1990] There has been a tacit tendency by the Holy Synod to found a new bishopric for every county […] but this tendency has been declining recently. [In some cases] new cathedrals have even preceded the establishment of new bishoprics.
>
> Father Sofronie, Romanian Patriarchate

Maramureş County is one of the most valuable touristic areas of Romania. Located in the very north, near the Ukranian border, it is well known for combining natural attractions, like the Carpathians and the Lapuş Valley, with bucolic villages where customs and traditions are said to be kept unaltered still nowadays. Since I was already familiar with the area, I spent one week there for visiting some friends. Before returning to the smoggy air of the capital I stopped by the Rohia Orthodox Monastery in the hope of having a chat with the monks and to pass some time in a tranquil atmosphere. Once I stepped in, I immediately realised that I could not fulfil my desire for peace: a giant nine-storey building was under construction right in the middle of the religious complex. The sound of chainsaws and the shouts of workmen reminded me of the hectic rhythm of the capital. A brand new cultural centre was rising on the placid hills of Lapuş valley. Though, as one of the monks put it, it was not in their plans to build such a massive edifice:

> It was planned to be smaller but then we found out that the ground was not solid enough, so we kept on removing the soil. At that point, with only three floors the building would have not benefitted of enough light. This is why some other floors have been added. […] The money came principally from donations and from the

> State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, because Theodor Paleologu in 2008 was running the institution [he actually was Minister of Culture and Denominations, the SSRA was re-introduced one year later]. His father had been a very good friend of Nicolae Steinhardt,[1] so he decided to finance the project.

Putting aside the legitimate need of erecting a new building that could host offices, a bigger library and a conference room, it is telling that major works could be financed simply in the name of an old friendship. I could not find an example better than this to exemplify the tendency of religious construction all over the country. After more than ten years from the last quantitative enquiry, in December 2015 the SSRA circulated the data concerning the number of houses of worship built after 1990 in Romania by all the recognized denominations. These data have been collected by every single religious institution and put together by the SSRA, and will be discussed in the first section.

Much has been said about the religious enthusiasm flowering immediately after 1989, but significantly less effort has been made to approach the "religious" through concrete units such as representations (Heintz 2004), experiences, institutions, and organisations (Halemba 2015). To this end, some anthropologists of Christianity have recognised that the organisational aspects of religious life have been too often neglected (Halemba 2015, Robbins 2014, McDougall 2009). Following this latter strand of research, I look at church-building activities in Romania as engendered by an organisational revival. With reference to Orthodoxy, in socialist Romania religious belonging and belief was not eradicated like in Soviet countries but remained rooted, the most apparent difference marked by the postsocialist transition being related to the visibility of religion in the public space.

For some local observers (Dungaciu 2004, Conovici 2009) the support that high clergy offered to the regime was the price to pay in order to guarantee continuity in religious practice. There is no doubt that, during socialist times, cities became vaster and more populated whereas church-building had stagnated for decades. Nevertheless, the church boom taking place in contemporary Romania

[1] Nicolae Steinhardt (1912-1989) was a Jewish-Romanian intellectual who was imprisoned by Gheorghiu Dej in 1959 and freed five years later for the amnesty granted to political prisoners. He was baptized Christian Orthodox in jail, then became monk in the late seventies and managed the library of the Rohia Monastery for over ten years. The new cultural centre will bear his name.

cannot be explained exclusively by liturgical needs, but is better understood when the strategies adopted by the Holy Synod in terms of territorial administration are taken into account. In fact, a number of crucial events like the Holy Synod of January 1990 or the election of Patriarch Daniel in 2007 have influenced religious activity and contributed to shape the public space of Romanian cities in the postsocialist era.

After considering nationwide data and the blueprint adopted by the ROC to enter the public sphere again after socialism, the chapter will zoom in on the capital. More than 25% of Bucharest parishes have been created in only twenty-five years, between 1990 and 2015. Throughout the last years, the trend has slowed because of the economic crisis, the drain of financial resources needed for the construction of the national cathedral, and the growing difficulties in finding free plots of land. The data I collected on a national and on a local level present a whole church-building industry working at full speed, composed by many different actors, stakes and motivations: the religious revival paradigm alone gives us a too blurry picture. Instead, I find it more useful to examine the "economic and political relationships [that] shape the conditions of possibility for reclaiming and reconstructing religious life" (Steinberg & Wanner 2008: 9).

6.1. An overview of the houses of worship built in Romania after 1990

According to the data put together by the SSRA, almost ten thousand houses of worship were built between 1990 and 2015 in Romania. Such a centralized survey is unprecedented and reveals many relevant aspects on how the church-building process has developed in recent times. The table in Appendix 1 shows that the most active denominations in building houses of worship have been the Baptist, the Adventist and the Pentecostal Church. The Pentecostal and Adventist Churches own today respectively 10.68% and 4.63% of the houses of worship, even though they correspond only to 1.92% and 0.43% of the population respectively. At a first glance these data contradict those voices who blame the ROC of building too many houses of worship, as the Orthodox Church has built – in proportion – as many churches as the Roman-Catholic Church and far less than Neo-Protestant religions. According to the 2011 Census, the ROC represents 86% of the religious population but owns only 60% of the houses of worship: in 1989,

before the postsocialist religious pluralisation took place, it owned 70% of them. The restitution of a few hundreds churches to the Greek Catholic Church[2] and, most of all, the boom of the aforementioned Neo-Protestant Churches[3] contribute to explain this change.

According to the Romanian Constitution and the Law 489 on Religious Freedom promulgated in 2006, there is no state religion in the country. Law 489/2006 asserts that the Romanian state is neutral in regard to inter-denominational affairs, but encourages religious expression, belonging and practice. This means that it seeks to guarantee equal treatment to all recognized denominations and supports them financially. On a national scale, religions are financed by the SSRA, which is a governmental institution. It receives funding from the state budget (and from the state reserve funds) and redistributes it in accordance with the number of believers belonging to every denomination. Consequently, the ROC is due of 86% of the funds earmarked by the SSRA on a yearly basis; the Roman-Catholic Church is due of 4.6% and so on. This is why it is extremely important for a church to keep the number of self-declared believers high. This complex relationship between public funding, the number of churches owned, and the number of faithful is well illustrated by Verdery:

> The Orthodox Church employs a definition of property entitlement very different from that of Catholics. For the latter, the buildings belong to the church as an institution: even if all believers quit, the church-building still belongs to the Catholic Church. For the Orthodox hierarchy, according to a 1993 treatise on canon law, the buildings belong collectively to the faithful; the more numerous the faithful, the more the buildings they should have. […] One priest I spoke with claimed to have asked Orthodox Archbishop Anania of Cluj pointblank why he was

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[2] The Greek Catholic Church was the only denomination disbanded by the socialist regime and had survived in an informal way for over forty years. Tismaneanu consider that it was in the interest of the regime not to disband the Neo-Protestant Churches, in order to have "a permanent chance of extortion in regard of the traditional religions" (2006: 454, my translation). All the assets of the Greek Catholic Church were assigned to the ROC or nationalised, and many faithful switched to Orthodoxy, also because the two denominations share similar liturgical rites. The Greek Catholics amounted to 7% of the religious population in 1930. The most recent census (2011) reported that those affiliated with this denomination are today only 0.80% of the whole religious population.

[3] I am aware that the Baptist Church cannot be labelled as Neo-Protestant, as it was funded in the early XVII century. Even though its growth in terms of churches erected after 1990 is remarkable, the Pentecostals and Adventist Churches have built at a faster pace and thus I limit any comparison to these two.

leading the resistance to the return of church-buildings, and to have received the following answer: 'Frankly, because if we give you churches, you'll take our believers.' In conversation, a historian who is Orthodox summarized the issue concisely: 'The whole church conflict is a question not of faith but of revenues; the more believers you have, the more dough you'll get.'" (Verdery 1999: 70-71)

The financialisation of the church-building sector is a direct consequence of the substantial economic support offered by public institutions. The governmental funds channelled by the SSRA to the various denominations have been growing year after year, marking a new record in 2014 after a foreseeable decline due to the economic crisis (see Table 6.1 below).

YEAR	TOTAL	Out of which:	
		Salaries	Constructions and repairs
1990	16,814	15,694	1,120
1991	32,661	29,231	3,430
1992	141,008	118,338	22,670
1993	629,370	575,35	54,020
1994	2,002,697	1,731,167	271,530
1995	2,705,743	2,290,452	415,291
1996	4,165,736	2,997,036	1,168,700
1997	8,809,587	7,369,437	1,440,150
1998	10,947,815	8,347,875	2,599,940
1999	26,256,196	17,188,236	9,067,960
2000	68,434,671	40,447,371	27,987,300
2001	84,285,809	67,693,308	16,592,500
2002*	62,630,921	51,181,321	11,449,600
2003	94,994,803	69,316,363	25,678,440
2004	108,881,385	90,751,585	18,129,800
2005	141,890,789	111,122,500	30,768,289
2006	178,484,990	132,502,990	45,982,000
2007	314,729,598	151,298,543	163,431,055
2008	351,373,638	83,949,388	267,424,250
2009	367,700,856	261,451,356	106,249,500
2010	311,111,738	227,312,238	83,799,500
2011	310,653,100	224,846,035	85,807,065
2012	301,781,209	237,517,209	64,264,000
2013	331,145,838	261,943,338	69,202,500
2014	411,488,695	263,338,695	148,150,000
TOTAL	**3,495,295,667**	**2,315,335,056**	**1,179,960,610**

Table 6.1 Amount of money allocated from the State Budget for the salaries of the cleric personnel of religious units and for the construction and repair of houses of worship between 1990 and 2014 (in Romanian Lei). Source: State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, 2015.

The SSRA purveys economical resources for two main domains: the remuneration of clerical personnel and the construction or renovation of religious edifices. The sums allocated for paying salaries grow year after year also in accordance with the growth of the minimum wage. Law 284/2010 stipulates that the SSRA provides full salaries for 1.365 positions composing the higher management personnel of every denomination, while pays between 65 and 80% of the wages for the lower clergy (15.237 positions), whose salaries are matched against those of the pre-university state education teaching staff. Instead, local administrations are on charge for the lay personnel (18.951 positions) employed by religious denominations. Lastly, religion teachers (7.700 positions) are paid by the Ministry of Education, while priests serving in chapels located in hospitals, jails, and in army units are paid by the respective Ministries.

The last column of the table is about the construction and renovation of houses of worship. Money is still redistributed in proportion to the number of believers, but the units which apply for funding are not denominations themselves, but each administrative unit alone. In the case of the ROC every bishop submits a list of the parishes of his bishoprics applying for funding. It is the bishop who sets which parishes to put on top of their list. In 2015 the SSRA has received 1600 submissions and has accepted 1450 of them, thus not all the applicants get funded by the state budget. The government examines such funding requests through the SSRA and allocates a sum of money in two tranches, in the first draft of the state budget and then in the budget amendment. When it comes to renovate heritage monuments like wooden churches or monasteries, churches can apply for funding also to the European Union and to the Romanian Ministry of Culture. Renovation of heritage buildings, though, does not seem to be a priority for the ROC, which has rather used great part of the money coming from the SSRA for building the new national cathedral.

Churches are financed also by regional and local councils, which are independent from the government and thus not obliged to stick to the re-distributional principle of the SSRA. If public money is distributed on the basis of proportionality, how could we explain such a big difference in the number of churches built by Neo-protestants in respect of other churches? The impressive growth of Neo-Protestantism in many parts of the world is now a well-known fact,

since it has been abundantly studied in the anthropology of Christianity at large. As reported by some studies conducted in Romania (Pop 2009, Cingolani 2009, Foszto and Kiss 2012), these denominations can rely on funds coming from abroad and, at the same time, are able to combine economic capital and voluntary workforce in a very efficient way. However, the data circulated by SSRA do not distinguish between a small chapel and a monastery, or a whole religious complex. In 2014 the state has allotted a significant sum for this purpose – 148 million Romanian Lei (about 33 million euros) – but one third of this sum has been swallowed by the construction of the national cathedral.

The ROC allotted a large part of the public money it received for the construction of twenty-seven cathedrals all over the country. One reason behind this strategy of the Orthodox Church is symbolic: by means of imposing edifices, it re-affirms its presence in the time of religious pluralisation. Besides the impressive data reported by Neo-Protestant Churches, the comeback of the Greek Catholic Church has also caused some concern. Greek Catholics are the only other denomination building a cathedral at the moment: in fact, the "Martyrs and Confessors of the XX century" cathedral, a "manifesto of the presence of Greek Catholicism"[4], is close to be finalized in Cluj. Since the birth of Greater Romania, Transylvanian cities have been used as a sort of an inter-denominational battleground: already in the interwar period the erection of the Cluj Orthodox cathedral was meant to "visibly mark that Transylvania belonged to Romania" (Iuga 2015: 96). Likewise, it is not by chance that the biggest Orthodox cathedral currently in the country (until the construction of the national cathedral in Bucharest will be finalised) is the one that has been freshly inaugurated in Baia Mare (northern Transylvania) in 2016. On the other hand, the rise of dozens of new cathedrals is closely related to the territorial policies of the ROC and to what I call "organizational revival".

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[4] Father Daniel Avram, interview with the author.

6.2. The organizational revival: territorial administration and the boom of new cathedrals

Churches and cathedrals differ not just in size but also in function: only those houses of worship that contain the seat of the local metropolitan, archbishop or bishop are to be considered cathedrals. Nevertheless, it is possible that hierarchs officiate in more than one house of worship; in this case the respective diocese has two or more churches labelled as cathedrals. As a clergyman who is a member of the Romanian Patriarchate explained to me, the plan of territorial administration elaborated by the Holy Synod in the 1990s originally envisioned the establishment of one diocese for every county. This must have sounded like an ambitious plan, as Romania was then organised in forty-one counties and just fifteen dioceses.[5] The fact that every diocese must include a representative cathedral within its borders contributes to justify the erection of twenty-seven cathedrals in twenty-five years (see Appendix 2).[6] At the moment, the ROC is structured into twenty-nine dioceses, fourteen of which have been established after 1990 (seven have been just re-opened after the communist leadership had disbanded them, and another seven have been newly established). Conovici reports that the number of hierarchs has doubled and that of bishoprics has tripled after 1990 (Conovici 2009: 216). Lastly, in order to grant pastoral assistance to the many faithful who migrated abroad, the ROC launched a program of administrative and infrastructural expansion all over Europe.

New cathedrals have been rising also in cities already hosting an Orthodox cathedral (Craiova) or in towns which are just too small for justifying the erection of such major works (Voluntari, Fălticeni). The case of the cathedral of Voluntari, a town of 45.000 inhabitants in the outskirts of Bucharest, suggests that political motivations are also part of the broad picture. This cathedral was promoted by the local mayor and financed by the City Hall budget with ten million euros,[7] and its

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[5] See http://patriarhia.ro/v-b-biserica-ortodoxa-romana-in-perioada-dintre-1944-si-1989-151.html (Accessed on 21.03.2018)

[6] The exact number of cathedrals built after 1990 has not been made public by the ROC, but a possible way to estimate it is to go back to the files reporting the funding provided by the SSRA for church construction. I consider as cathedral those labelled as such by the SSRA.

[7]See http://www.gandul.info/reportaj/catedrala-anticriza-a-lui-pandele-o-cladire-de-10-milioane-de-euro-cu-buncar-si-clopote-cu-buton-6104055 (accessed on 21.03.2018). The project seems to be indeed a personal affair of the mayor, as the parish priest serving at the new cathedral is said to

construction illustrates how exploiting religion for pursuing electoral interests is often a winning strategy. The Voluntari mayor's wife, Gabriela Firea, is a former anchor-woman who went into politics with the Social-Democrat Party (PSD) and stood as a candidate for Bucharest's mayor during the 2016 elections. She organized together with her husband the exhibition of the Holy Sash of the Virgin Mary in the newly built cathedral in May 2016. Thousands of faithful went to Volunari in pilgrimage, in order to venerate the sacred relic which was brought from Greece especially on this occasion. Since June 2016 Firea is the new mayor of Bucharest.

The organizational revival of the ROC has been described also by local observers (like Conovici 2009: 255-6), who, interestingly enough, have not considered the cathedral-building industry at all. Conovici is right, instead, in highlighting the growing administrative bureaucratisation within the ROC and its infrastructural development, which makes church representatives to turn to governmental and local authorities for financial reasons. The process of bureaucratisation of religion was described in the 1960s by Peter Berger (1967: 139-140) as a sign of internal secularisation which characterises Christian Churches in manifold ways:

> Internally, the religious institutions are not only administered bureaucratically, but their day to day operations are dominated by the typical problems and "logic" of bureaucracy. Externally, the religious institutions deal with other social institutions as well as with each other through the typical forms of bureaucratic interaction. "Public relations" with the consumer clientele, "lobbying" with the government, "fund raising" with both government and private agencies, multifaceted involvements with the secular economy (particularly through investment). In all these aspects of their "mission", the religious institutions are compelled to seek "results" by methods that are, of necessity, very similar to those employed by other bureaucratic structures with similar problems.

be the mayor's godson (however, this was just hearsay I had no way to confirm, as the priest himself refused repeatedly to meet me for an interview.)

Many of the activities described by Berger are carried out by the ROC as well: lobbying and fundraising with state and private agencies – as shown in the previous pages – as well as investing in sectors more or less related to religious purposes. As dioceses are allowed to own companies and make profits for self-support, it has become common practice for the ROC to invest in the real estate business, the agricultural sector, faith tourism, and the construction industry. The Metropolitanate of Moldova, for example, is the owner of hotels, construction firms, typographies, agricultural firms that have contributed to produce almost three million Lei of surplus to be redistributed in the budget of the following year.

Lastly, the strengthening of media services falls within the same category, and represents one of the most important achievements of Patriarch Daniel. The concern for mass media communication was already expressed in the first Holy Synod after the demise of the Ceaușescu's regime, when a list of seventeen points was directly addressed to the National Salvation Front, i.e. the new political formation that was supposed to safeguard the transition to a democratic polity. Point two called for the church to get access to mass media for religious broadcasts and information service. Patriarch Daniel relied on the media already in the 1990s, when he was Metropolitan of Moldova and Bukovina. Once he became Patriarch in 2007, he founded the "Basilica Press Centre", launching a national TV station, a radio station, and strengthened the print press with new newspapers[8] and magazines.

Previously, I suggested that a good way to make the "religious" a less vague concept is to try to focus on some of its subsets. Halemba's attempt is a first step, as she looks at the "three main ways in which the religious has been identified as an aspect of human life in academic works: as experiences, institutions, organizations" (2015: 5). More specifically, an institution is to be intended as "a way in which social life is implicitly regulated", while organization stands for an "explicit system of managing social life recognized by people as agent" (Ibid: 13).[9]

[8] The newspaper "The Light" (*Lumina*) is the leading newspaper of the Romanian Patriarchate and has been circulated without any interruption since its apparition in 2005. Since it is not a free distribution newspaper, it is well known that parishes are compelled to pay a monthly subscription from the diocese (Conovici 2009: 249, check also Chapter 5.2).

[9] This distinction between "institution" and "organisation" is restricted to the notion of "organisational revival" that I elaborate in this chapter. For the sake of clarity, elsewhere in this

In this sense, one could say that Orthodoxy has not stopped being a powerful institution in Romania also during socialism: rites of passage were still celebrated, people attended the main feasts and, to a minor extent, the Sunday mass; and the great majority of children were baptised (Conovici 2009: 136-137; Plămădeală 1999).

At the same time, the Orthodox Church has experienced decades of organisational depression. Having some dioceses disbanded, churches destroyed, priests persecuted,[10] and limitations on theological seminaries, the liturgical and pastoral mission of the ROC were seriously undermined. Priests and episcopes became often a mere instrument of the regime for exerting complete control over the population and adapted the doctrine of the church to the socialist political juncture (Leustean 2005, 2009). I argue that sociological enquiries stressing the religious revival discourse have failed to identify this pivotal difference. By highlighting organizational aspects like the role of public funding, the agenda of the Holy Synod and the changes brought about by the election of the new Patriarch in 2007, I intend to integrate – with data coming from an urban milieu like Bucharest – what social scientists have said hitherto about the re-emergence of religious representations in the postsocialist public space.

6.3. Building churches in Bucharest during and after socialism

The restrictions suffered by the ROC during socialist rule did not prevent the construction of new religious buildings. The Romanian Patriarchate estimates that roughly five-hundred churches were built between 1948 and 1989 all over the country.[11] Church-building during socialism was regulated by the meddling of political authorities. In fact, releasing or rejecting permissions for erecting a new church was the way state entities could reward or punish the local clergy (Sincan 2010: 200). Historian Anca Sincan suggests that the construction of Orthodox Churches was a tool for the state authorities to have more control on areas

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dissertation the two terms are used interchangeably (for instance, when it comes to state authorities such as the SSRA).

[10] Ramet (2004) confronts the compliance of Orthodox hierarchs towards the socialist regime with the more courageous attitude adopted by the rest of the clergy, among whom six thousand priests and monks were arrested.

[11] See http://patriarhia.ro/v-b-biserica-ortodoxa-romana-in-perioada-dintre-1944-si-1989-151.html (Accessed on 21.03.2018).

considered troublesome to manage, because of their ethnic or religious composition (Ibid). For instance, in the Mureş country the Orthodox Church was the only denomination (except Neo-Protestant Churches) that received authorization for construction and not only for repair or rebuilding (Sincan 2010: 201). By strengthening the presence of the ROC in Transylvania, the state sought to integrate the Greek Catholic communities in the Orthodox ones both for geopolitical and practical reasons. Maybe for the same rationale the only Orthodox cathedral inaugurated during socialism was in Sfântu Gheorghe, a city located in the Covasna County, where the number of Greek Catholic believers and ethnic Hungarians represented a challenge for the nationalist policies launched after Ceauşescu took the power in the mid-1960s.

However, the outcome of massive urbanisation and anti-religious policies adopted by the Communist Party had left Romanian cities without enough houses of worship. This must have been one of the most urgent issues to face for the Orthodox community at large, as the first point in the agenda set up by the Holy Synod in January 1990 invoked “the reconstruction of the churches destroyed and the construction of new houses of worship”.[12] Such a statement brings the capital in the discussion, as church demolition affected Bucharest alone in the last period of the Ceauşescu dictatorship. *Ceaushima* (cf. Chapter 2.2) caused the demolition of twenty Orthodox Churches (and the relocation of a few others), and after almost thirty years is still an open wound in many locals’ collective imagination. At that time, Orthodox hierarchs justified the demolitions as totally normal in the time of urban re-development (Sincan 2010: 191).

Things changed after 1990, when the ROC reinterpreted church demolition as the demonstration of the persecutions suffered under the regime. The re-consecration of the capital unfolds by the comeback of religious signifiers in the public space after the communists defiled it by razing sacred buildings. So far, a few churches have been re-constructed and many others have been honoured with a memorial cross. A similar logic has inspired the internal design of the new national cathedral, which is to host five altars, each dedicated to one of the five churches razed in the area. Space has been re-signified according to a

[12] Decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church no. 439/1990, Biserica Ortodoxa Română (BOR), CVIII, no. 11-12: 97-98.

compensational rationale that celebrates Orthodoxy going public again of many Bucharest citizens.

As much as on a national scale, the organizational revival of the church also unfolds in the city. Recently, the Bucharest Archbishopric has widened its administrative network by establishing one branch (called *Protopopiat*, which operates at a half way between local parishes and the bishopric) in every one of the six districts of Bucharest. Nowadays, in Bucharest there are around 260 Orthodox houses of worship: about 205 are parishes (some comprising two churches), the rest are monasteries and small chapels belonging to state infrastructure as hospitals, jails and army units. About fifty churches, almost 25% of Bucharest parishes, have been founded in twenty-five years of postsocialism.[13] Nevertheless, according to Father Sofronie, who works in the Romanian Patriarchate, the ROC would be ready to keep building new churches if there still were free plots of lands in the capital. The population of the capital has almost doubled between 1948 and 2011, but, he argued, the number of Orthodox houses of worship did not follow the same rhythm.

This is why many churches which arose after 1990 are located in those neighbourhoods funded during socialism, where newly built apartment blocks welcomed thousands of peasants from the countryside that would have soon become Bucharest's industrial workforce. "This is a neighbourhood of workmen, simple folk with a strong faith", told me the parish priest of a newly built church in Berceni, in the south of Bucharest. Even though the construction works started in 1995, the church still lacks funding for bringing to an end the painting. As the case of this church in the outskirt of the capital shows, the need for new houses of worship was apparent since the very beginning of the new democratic era, and money started to flow in the church-building sector from different sources: donations from both locals and migrant workers, businessmen who emerged with the postsocialist wild privatization, and state funds. It is not unusual that construction firms also offer part of building materials or agree on receiving

[13] The sources I drew from are the three monographs edited by the Bucharest Archbishopric, which are updated to the years 2009-2011. To obtain a more up to date appraisal, I matched these data with the section dedicated to the churches under construction of the official site of the Bucharest Archbishopric.

delayed payments. This can be understood both as a benevolent donation to the respective church and as an attempt to strengthen their position in the church-building industry.

The moment when a new project is launched and the area where it is located have a decisive role in the execution of a new church. The case of a church built in the north-east of Bucharest in the mid-2000s shows topical differences with the precedent one: this church was founded by the will of an aged couple, who financed the works till they died. The project went on thanks to the intervention of the local mayor, who had also granted the plot of land for free. The exponential growth of governmental funds in the 2000s also made it easier to end construction works in a shorter period of time. Therefore, inputs for building new churches can surely come by the faithful, especially in those areas lacking of religious buildings, but the intervention of local authorities interested in investing in new houses of worship is decisive for the project to be implemented in a shorter period of time.

In the imagery of Bucharest citizens' the relationship between communist power and religious life is often epitomized by the demolition or relocation of churches taking place in the 1980s. Such a traumatic experience contributes to explain the effervescence of religious life in the capital after Ceaușescu fell. During the first decade of socialist rule, though, it was still possible to build a new house of worship or found a parish. By dwelling on the way church-building activities were carried on during socialism, I think, it is possible to spot breaks and continuities before and after 1990, and reframe the religious revival question in a more accurate fashion. In 1950, at the dawn of the socialist era, there were 182 churches in the capital.[14] Respecting the number of parishes, the data I put together show that eighteen parishes have been established during socialism. The foundation of most of the eighteen parishes built under the socialist regime was laid between 1948 and 1957. This confirms the thesis of Sincan, who reports that the Ministry for Religious Denominations started to take measures to limit church-building starting from 1958, when all requests had to be directed to the Ministry itself for approval, instead of being processed on a regional level. Previously, getting verbal permission from the local authority was often enough to begin the construction

[14] See Protoieria II Capitală, 2010, *Monografie Album*, București: Editura Basilica a Patriarhiei Române.

process. But after the protocol was centralized, local religious communities could not count anymore on informal networking and more people had to be bribed to obtain an authorization (Sincan 2010: 197-8).

Priests building churches under state atheism had first-hand experience of the ambivalent relationship between political power and the religious sphere. They witnessed the commitment of the local believers asking for a new house of worship, had to face the lack of both economic resources and raw materials, and negotiate the terms of agreement with governmental and local entities. The stories they tell portray a reality no less lively than the postsocialist one in terms of religious dispositions and motivations, at least at the grassroots level; on the other hand, state entities and the local Orthodox Church archbishopric seemed to play a role radically different from the one they have today.

To carry out the construction of churches in socialist times – especially after 1958 – is considered a notable achievement; up to the point that Father Remus and Father Pavel, two Bucharest parish priests now retired, pride themselves even nowadays for the feat of having built a church during socialist rule in Bucharest. Many other churches have been erected in the fifties, but these two priests have been the only ones to build a church from scratch in the period between 1958 and 1989. Father Remus met me one Sunday in May, after the mass. For the occasion, he had gathered all his documentation from the 1970s, but before telling me how he built up the church, he started immediately clarifying the gossip about his small dispute with Father Pavel:

> Father Pavel is a respectable person, but he wrote some wrong pieces of information. [He shows me a local newspaper published by the archbishopric] He says that his church is the only one built during communism, but this is not true. Truth be told, the foundation of his church was built before the communists came, while the consecration happened in 1991. […] Mine was raised in only one month, in 1975.

Father Remus was sent by the Patriarch Justinian himself to his current parish in the east of Bucharest in 1975, but as soon as he arrived, he was shocked

and disappointed by the decaying condition of the small chapel where he had to officiate:

> When I arrived here, the chapel was in such a miserable state that I was embarrassed: I had studied in Switzerland and had good external relationships, I feared the idea that anybody could come to visit me in a church that was decaying. […] The Communist Party representatives knew of our will of building a new church. In my community there were also some members of the Party, of course they did not show up at the church for a matter of [undesirable] visibility… but they were faithful and gave me support. […] So in the very same year I arrived, we started – together with the community – with the demolition of the old chapel and the construction of a new church. The only technical assistance I had was a structural engineer. For the rest, it was me and the people living nearby. They [the local community] wanted a new church as well, so they wrote a letter stating that they had the intention to build a church in one month, with or without authorization. Since that was a time of urban re-systematisation, I was afraid that the permission would have never been granted.

During the interview, Father Remus expressed all his disappointment for the total lack of support from the Bucharest Archbishopric: he got neither funding nor encouragement, and had to collect money, volunteer labour and construction materials drawing exclusively on the local community. As already noticed, after 1958 it became also impossible to build a new church from scratch in the capital. Instead, renovation works were allowed. I was told by some other priests as well that it became a common strategy to build a "new" church by executing several renovation works. This was also the idea of Father Remus, who yet started renovating his church without the permission of the City Hall. Things got complicated when state authorities found out that he was building illegally:

> So eventually a man of the SSRA [which by that time was the Ministry for Religious Denomination] came, he saw that the construction works were already advanced and that I had no permission from the City Hall, so he started threatening me, he asked: 'have you thought about what you will do once you will be sent away from here (*te ai gândit ce să faci dupa ca zbori de aici*)?' And I was scared of capitalists,

> abroad![15] So I thought that – as I had already worked in the agronomy sector – if defrocked I could have worked again as agronomist, right nearby, in the land at the other side of the church. […] In the end, the Patriarch did not send me to the countryside, as the Party would have wanted to, but abroad, in Austria. Then, in 1985, they sent me back here.

Father Pavel started building up the church where he now still celebrates in 1968, together with the parish priests and the locals. He claims that his church was the only one built from scratch during socialism in the entire capital.[16] While other churches were built very hastily, in a few months or years, the building works of his church ended only in 1991. Father Pavel recalled with some nostalgia those hard times under socialism:

> The more the [Orthodox] Church is persecuted, the more it strengthens itself and revives. But now, there is only laxity (*lene),* everybody does whatever he wants. When they [the believers] were more persecuted, they were more zealots, conscious… back then there was more devotion and churches were full of people […] we did religion class, people came with their notebooks to take notes! Nowadays people are not committed to the church anymore; faith is experienced in a formal way.

The fact that he obtained a proper authorization made it possible for him to carry on the works in the open and less hastily. In order to get the green light from the urban planning bureau of the City Hall, he took advantage of the demolition of an old chapel to start building a new church:

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[15] Father Remus meant here that he felt unprepared to settle permanently in a capitalist country: even though he had studied in Switzerland for some months, he was aware that he had been raised and educated in a very different way from his peers in the West.

[16] During the interview, Father Pavel contradicted himself a few times, as he admitted that, truth be told, other churches had been built in the fifties but in a hasty way and with bad quality materials, at a time when he adorned his church with marble and oil paintings. As for his dispute with Father Remus, he said that: „when he started, there was already at least a small church, while here there was nothing unless the foundations! By the way I know him well, we are good friends! He was brave and smart, but he risked life and limb (*s-a pus pierea la sarămură)* back then!"

So in 1968 something "mysterious" (*un lucru de taina)* happened, because since 1948 the construction site had been at a standstill, the walls [we had built] were only two meters high. After the communists came, they [the City Hall] did not give us any building authorization. […] There were, amongst communists, also respectable people, true Christians, good souls. For example there was this architect, Mr Retinschi, who worked at the Bucharest City Hall. And you know why he gave us that permission? Well … we did not go there empty-handed! We brought cigarettes and so on. But still, the thing is that we were able to seize the right opportunity: the Colentina quarter was under re-systematization and the chapel where we usually officiated, a few hundred meters away from here, had to be demolished. I recall it was the 1st May 1968, and they [the City Hall] let us only one night to vacate it. [...] Thus we went asking for permission right in that moment, we said 'Sir, we do not have other place where to celebrate mass" … and Retinschi just could not say no. […] Probably nobody knows him, but he was a virtuous man (*cumsecade)*, we still commemorate him here [when we pray for the dead].

When it was not in the interest of the state to strengthen its nationalist policy by means of the Orthodox Church, church-building activities could be carried out with the compliance of benevolent functionaries. As emerged by the experience of these two Orthodox priests, Communist Party members could tacitly support the church in manifold ways, depending on their position (urban planning bureau architect, employee of the Ministry for Religious Denominations, etc.): by allotting financial means,[17] by turning a blind eye (Plamadeala 1999: 178-184), or by granting permissions at their own discretion. Party members could also be active supporters of the church, as witnessed by Father Pavel in regard to the donation he received once by a special donor:

In order to raise some funds we used to form teams of two people and send them to other parishes […] So two old women once got to the apartment blocks at *Obor* [a quarter nearby Colentina] and received a donation of fifty Lei, but were asked to

[17] Another example is reported by the official newspaper of the ROC, *Lumina*: one of most important representatives of the Communist Party in the 1960s, Virgil Trofin, financed the construction of a church in Victoria, Brașov County. http://ziarullumina.ro/credinta-in-orasul-fara-biserica-28439.html (accessed on 25.01.2017)

> leave the contacts of the parish. One week after I got awaken by a call [...] it was a man who said he was approached by two old women and asked whether I sent them around. I said "I am very sorry, it was their initiative to go asking for money!" but he said: "Father, please, send them again, I will give more money!" And you know who was at the telephone? It was a high-ranking Party member, the head of the Fiscal Police, Mr Tanase.

The parish community seems also to have played a relevant role in building, furnishing, or renovating the church by fundraising, offering workforce, and making donations. Father Pavel recounted that donations arrived from any kind of believer, from Party members, doctors in theology and opera singers to cleaning ladies and everyday churchgoers. Donations were not only monetary, but could also be made in the form of building materials, furniture or sacred objects, among which there are bells, complexly wooden inlaid doors, candelabra, etc. The way donors conceived their own contribution differed as well: a simple old woman one used to donate all the tips she gathered working as cleaning lady in hospitals. Another used to come weekly to pay "the rent of the soul" (*chirie sufletului)*, that is, to give her regular financial contribution for spiritual purposes.

Even though monetary donations imply a contact with money and materiality, they are often perceived as a mean for expressing gratitude to God and not just a mere help to make the parish's ends meet. I have often heard churchgoers justifying their offers by saying "let it go to the Lord" (*să se duca la Dumnezeu),* not only in the case of simple donations but also when I asked around whether my interlocutor was happy with the construction of the national cathedral. "At least at the Judgement Day we will show up with churches", one worker of the construction site once said, while we were chatting at the bus stop. Then, in a more practical spirit, he added that "anyway, it is better to see money spent for God instead to see them in the politicians' pockets". In a way, this should be no surprise. To build houses of worship as a form of offering to God is an established practice since medieval times, when Moldovan and Wallachian rulers used to erect churches and monasteries as a sign of thanksgiving to the Lord (for military achievements, for instance). They often appeared painted on the walls of the building, kneeling and holding the newly built church in the palm of their

hands. In more recent times, it has become common practice to see the founders or main donors of a new religious building being represented in the interior: in those cases when these were politicians or businessmen, such custom ended up causing sensation.

Beyond the constant collaboration with local churchgoers, there are many other features in common between Father Pavel and Father Remus: the lack of any backing from the local Archbishopric, the consequent hardships in raising money and building materials, and the certainty that "back then" there was a stronger sense of community and faith. The impressions of these two retired priests are surely affected by a sense of nostalgia for the past; nevertheless, they bring further evidence that anti-religious policies and forced secularization were only partially effective, and, apparently, were not shared unanimously not even among party members. Orthodoxy – intended as a powerful social institution – was still there, in people's everyday lives, domesticated (Dragadze 1993), sequestered (Steinberg & Wanner 2008: 2), or privatized (Hann 2000) rather than eradicated. It became visible again, at first, when people were praying together in the streets during the December 1989 revolution, epitomizing *communitas* (Turner 1969).

The last section of this chapter refers back to the title: how are we to explain church-building, after we know that liturgical and pastoral necessities do not represent by themselves a satisfactory answer? I already hinted at the role played by the government and at the strategies adopted by the Holy Synod, highlighting the revitalization of the Orthodox Church as an organization. The focus moves now on a few more other aspects that have been ignored by the literature so far. The criteria of evaluation of the priests used by their superiors, together with political and economic factors contribute to portray a more detailed picture of the church-building industry in contemporary Romania.

6.4. Beyond religion: personal ambitions, economic stakes, and legal stratagems

To work again at full speed after the socialist regime fell, the ROC needed urgently new churches but also new lay and clerical personnel. Since the mid-1990s, the number of graduates from seminaries has increased constantly till 2007, but in recent years it has become more and more difficult to get an employment. Law 284/2010 has established quotas for both clerical and lay

personnel, but the number of churches has grown since then. This means that if the ROC, or any other denomination, wants more clerics at disposal, it has to pay them by using its own funds. Attending some classes at the Bucharest Theology seminary made it possible to hear students' expectations once they will graduate. Valentin was in his mid-twenties, worked in the IT sector in Buzău – 120 km away from the capital – and commuted now and then to Bucharest for obtaining his master of arts in theology. While talking about his plans for the future, he told me that he would have liked to get a job related to his future theology degree, for instance by becoming a priest, but he was aware of the high competition in this domain. The career of a young priest, he said, can advance if he engages in church construction activities: "After you graduate, you can either teach [religion at school] or become a priest, if you are married […] The problem is that if you go for priesthood, at first they send you in a place far away: if you work well, if you make a good work with the community, or you build a new church, after seven or eight years, you can be relocated to a better place".

It follows that priests could have different motivations for erecting a new church that do not strictly pertain to liturgical necessities. Father Sofronie confirmed to me that priests who engage in building edifices for religious (or social) purposes are held in high consideration by their superiors. According to his rationale, it is not easy to evaluate priests' work on a "spiritual" level, given that there are no fixed criteria to understand whether a priest carried on properly his pastoral duties. Instead, "A new church, or a new social centre", he said, "are more visible." Secondly, he said, priests who had been able to build a house of worship must have been successful and popular among the community, as they would hardly succeed in erecting a church without the involvement of local believers. Priests who aim at being relocated in a better place will be aware that they can pursue their goal by building a church, a chapel, a social centre, a new bell tower etc. Hence it is important to be aware of the variety of personal motivations orienting the behaviour of priests who decide to build a new house of worship, as these can fall outside strictly religious purposes. Personal ambition, the hope of being relocated in a more desirable place, or competition among fellow clerics aiming at leading a parish: all these reasons can also motivate priests to start the construction of a new church.

Nevertheless, I do not intend to say that starting the construction of a church is an easy undertaking and priests get involved in it just because they are eager to make a career. Indeed, the procedure for obtaining funding and permissions (from all the parties involved) is rather complicated and demands full engagement from the priest in charge with the construction works. The first document to obtain is the official blessing from the local bishop, after which the priest will have to ask for the city planning certificate. At this stage, the architect will elaborate a project and the whole documentation will have to be approved once again by the bishop before getting the authorization for construction from the City Hall. After the beneficiary will have agreed on the construction firm, the fund raising campaign – addressing both public and private juridical persons – should have been successful enough to officially launch building works.

Any priest who actively carries out the construction of a house of worship interacts with state authorities at many levels. While the relationship they have with the SSRA is mediated by the respective dioceses, clergymen cooperate personally with the local political authorities and urban planning bureau. Local authorities like mayors can be interested in "investing in spirituality",[18] thus fostering the construction of new churches by drawing on the city budget. In fact, the public money circulating in the church-building industry is an opportunity for construction firms seeking for contracts and for politicians accruing votes (like in the case of the Voluntari cathedral). Partnerships between entrepreneurs and politicians become apparent when the latter decide to finance construction or renovation works only if the priest agrees on the firm proposed by them.

One priest based in the east of the capital told me that his funding application was denied by the local mayor – who is renowned for being very generous when it comes to financing Orthodox Churches – because they could not agree on which construction firm should be granted the contract. Some other parish priests affirmed that they had been approached a few times both by entrepreneurs and politicians, who first offered economic support for erecting a

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[18] This is the slogan of a mayor of one Bucharest district who is very active in promoting church building in the area he administrates. In another Bucharest district, one construction firm has won all the contracts for church building or renovation in the last five years. See http://www.b365.ro/cum-a-crescut-chiliman-profitul-firmei-de-casa-de-zece-ori-in-cinci-ani-sub-semnul-crucii_181767.html (Accessed on 14.12.2017)

new building or for renovating old ones. The choice of the construction company is particularly delicate and the actors involved (bishops, priests, and politicians) sometimes struggle for seeing their trusted firm winning the contract.[19] Father Sebastian has led till recent times a parish in Berceni which he himself founded in the late 1990s. He met the leader of a construction company while he was council member of a district of Bucharest in the early 2000s, and collaborated with him for the construction works of his church:

> I have been council member at the City Hall with the PSD […] This has been an advantage for my "network" (*cunoștiințele)* as much as a chance to allot money from the city budget to the Church. [...] At this purpose, His Eminence Teodosie [archbishop of Tomiș and rival of Patriarch Daniel in the past], differently from Daniel, suggested a specific strategy: to leave one priest in every council of the six Bucharest's districts. But the Holy Synod decided not to let priests get into politics anymore.

By partaking in the local district council, Father Sebastian was able to finance the erection of one church and a social centre through funds earmarked by the City Hall and the city district budget. Until 2004 it had been possible for clerics to candidate for political and administrative elections. Priests involved in politics, though, ended up representing a mixed blessing for the church, as some clergymen who became deputies, senators, and council members did not obey anymore to their superiors (Stoiciu 2004). Hence the decision of the Holy Synod to take a clear stance on the matter and threat those priests going into politics with defrocking. Writer Ioan Liviu Stoiciu considered the adoption of political neutrality by the Holy Synod as "the commitment to political neutrality stemmed from the power struggle within the Synod between the supporters of the young, ambitious Teodosie, who relied on Social Democrat support to advance his ecclesiastical career, and his opponents led by Anania, who wanted the established tradition[20] to be observed and to have Metropolitan [Daniel] Ciobotea of Moldova enthroned

[19] A reportage conducted by the journalist Alex Nedea in the outskirts of Bucharest has shown that the costs for construction works can easily be inflated when the public authorities granting funds do not run checks on how money are spent. The money in surplus, apparently, are shared between the constructor, local politicians and church representatives. See http://jurnalul.ro/special-jurnalul/reportaje/pacatele-slujitorilor-domnului-constructii-cu-cantec-pe-sfintele-santiere-734699.html (Accessed on 14.12.2017)

[20] That is, to elect as Patriarch the Metropolitan of Moldova.

patriarch after Teoctist's death“ (Stoiciu 2004 in Stan and Turcescu 2006: 358). Therefore, Father Sebastian could not candidate anymore as council member for a decade, until his retirement. He has recently run again as a candidate and has been re-elected in the same district council. As for other senior priests I met, his opinion of the current Patriarch was not good at all, mainly because of his sympathy for Archbishop Teodosie and his desire to see the church represented by clergymen participating actively in politics.

Beyond the criteria for evaluating the lower clergy and the economic stakes surrounding church construction activities, there is a third aspect that relates to the erection of new houses of worship in the capital. A few newly established Bucharest parishes have more than one religious building. A small chapel – be it wooden or in cement – sometimes stands alongside the main church. According to Father Sebastian this does not happen by chance but it pertains to a precise strategy conducted by local parish priests: when a priest obtains a plot of land for erecting a church, he has to start the construction works before a given deadline. In case he is not able to gather enough funds for laying the foundation, he would rather build a small chapel in few months, so that the lot will not be confiscated. After the first house of worship has been built, the priest can carry on the construction of the main building in accordance with the funds he gathers year after year.

The impressive proportions that the church-building industry has reached in Romania are usually underplayed by Orthodox priests and churchgoers, who welcome the construction of new churches, at first, for logistic needs. At the same time, there is a minority of clerics that is critical of this phenomenon, and blames both the strategy of the Holy Synod to build at such a fast pace, and the dubious relationships that connect clergymen, entrepreneurs and politicians. Father Toma owns two doctorates, one in Theology and one in Law, and leads a parish in the north of the country. He has become renowned for having invoked, in 1998, open access to the files of the priests who collaborated with the Securitate (the secret police agency of socialist Romania). When I first saw him with his well-shaved face and a long, beige vestment he looked indeed very different from the all the other Orthodox priests I met. His easiness in denouncing the malpractices of bishops that he witnessed after decades of priesthood was unprecedented as well:

> Back then, when bishoprics were under the communist regime, they were inefficient and unable to do anything for defending the church. […] That's why right after 1990 they [the bishops] started to say: "we need new churches!" All they did was to give some instructions and wait for priests to get involved. Then, they started urging those priests who wanted to move in a city. The condition was to go to a city and start building there a church. This is how priests ended up following two goals: solving their personal issues [like moving from the countryside in a city] and to be appreciated by the bishop and the church authorities. […] Besides churches, also new monasteries and convents have arisen. […] Talented monks have been encouraged to attract believers for gathering money, so that new monasteries appeared all over the country. But we woke up with many monasteries without dwellers! And spiritual life does not exist. It seems like thousands of new houses of worship have been built with the expectation to see spiritual life thriving, but still no sign (*nici o influența).* Instead, we can talk of regression. Under the communist regime the church could not get out in public life. Now it has the chance to do so, but it cannot grow in terms of spirituality and, instead, general trust in the church falls down. Why? Because clergymen have become – owing to the bad managerial skills of church leaders – too many and have no qualities. New seminaries and theological faculties have been inaugurated: in these conditions many, poorly prepared new graduates need a job and there is no filter, no selection for priesthood.

What I labelled as organisational revival a few pages before is mentioned here as a possible drawback for the image of the church: in the attempt renew its internal structure by hiring new clerical personnel, the high clergy apparently failed to recruit and train clerics properly. The words of Father Toma seem to suggest a parallel between the atmosphere of economic "shock therapy" of the 1990s and a sort of religious "shock therapy", that is, the frenzy for building new religious edifices instilled by church leaders to the lower clergy. In those years, Father Toma was himself approached by a politician who proposed him to start some renovation works for his church:

GT: How can a priest pay back politicians? How does he give a favour back?

FT: You cannot pay back by ensuring votes, but only by influence peddling. […] So, for example, let's say that a politician also owns a construction company, not directly but via a front man. At that point, the money he earmarked gets back to him cash, through this company. At this point, he can easily offer money to the priest. I also received this kind of proposals. And it is sure that those people, when they heard of my refusal to take money, must have thought that I am an eccentric person! "Look, you give him money, and he says no!"

GT: Who proposed you this deal? Was he a politician or a businessman?

FT: A politician, member of the Parliament.

GT: And did he propose to build a new church?

FT: No, he offered some money for the church, as he was in electoral campaign, in 2000. And he goes: "We share it [the money]". It was a big sum of money, not a small one. So when I understood it was a matter of splitting, I saw it from a moral perspective. For me, it was inconceivable. And, of course, it was public money. If he had been a private businessman, then [it would have been] ok, he does what he wants with his money. [...] Those church constructors turn out to be not very spiritual; instead, they were interested in making money. This interest for heaping and gathering money or material goods [by both entrepreneurs and clerics] is not in the Christian spirit, has provoked the collapse of trust in the church (…) and it is a form of de-sacralisation. This is harmful, as we are not talking about enemies that come from the outside, like during communism, but that are among ourselves.

It was striking for me to hear a priest talking about de-sacralisation, after reading so many scholars who insisted in sending the message of a religious revival and sacralisation occurring in postsocialist countries. For this Orthodox priest things seem to be way more complicated, but instead of focusing on the community of believers, he considers the policies pursued by the high clergy at the origin of the predicament affecting the ROC. Massive church-building have brought the church at the centre of the public space in cities and towns, but at a closer look such a process may have engendered also anticlerical sentiments and make everyday people take some distance from the church.

The church-building industry has been remodelled in the last two decades by a steady stream of funds, which has enabled churches to restate their presence in the public space. Sometimes this has happened in a majestic fashion, as in the case of dozens of bombastic cathedral erected all over the country. This process involves many stakeholders – whose role deserves to be acknowledged – and does not occur only because of strictly liturgical needs. New Orthodox churches and cathedrals rising also stand for the tight relationship between clergymen and political actors, priests' personal ambitions, constructors' economic interests and the like. Drawing on Halemba's attempt to unpacking the "religious" into smaller units of analysis such institution, organization and experiences, the aim of this chapter was to read religious construction after 1990 as engendered by the organizational revival of the ROC. Furthermore, the ethnographic data provided by a few Bucharest case studies suggest that religious practice during socialism was maybe more lively than portrayed by those scholars who talk nowadays of religious revival. Instead, by considering the church as an organization experiencing periods of suppression and revitalization, we can portray in a more accurate way how religious life has changed in Romania after socialism.

CHAPTER 7 – ONE SYMBOL, MANY MEANINGS: UNDERSTANDING CROSS-PLACING ACTIVITIES

Neam bun și blând,	*Meek and kind kin*
de trădători,	*of traitors,*
cuminte neam,	*wise kin,*
frumoasă cruce,	*resplendent cross,*
pe Fiii lui Dumnezeiești	*its Godly Sons*
neamul cu drag	*kindly the kin*
pe cruce-i duce!	*has crucified*

Cezar Ivanescu – Sutra XI[1]

The rapid transformation of the public space reflects the shift of political paradigms, cultural revolutions, and new economic systems. Since December 1989 crosses of all dimensions and materials multiplied in Bucharest's squares and crossroads, placed by state authorities, Christian associations, or simple citizens. Churches arose in those neighbourhoods where there were none. Processions and pilgrimages took thousands of believers to the streets. As Hann observed in a different context, religion was "in effect de-privatized and spilled out almost everywhere into the public sphere" (Hann 2006: 3). As demonstrated in the previous chapter, it is not just that religion was visible again through forms of public manifestation of faith and belonging: churches were also ready to claim their right in terms of access to public education, real property, presence in the media, etc.

It would be impossible to understand the comeback of religion in the public sphere without touching upon the secularist policies brought to fruition before 1989. The atheist agenda in the countries of the former socialist bloc could vary

[1] I thank Adrian Papahagi, who kindly translated this poem into English.

substantially. In Hoxha's Albania, for instance, denominations were harshly persecuted and religious practice outlawed. In the Soviet Union, Party cadres tried to eradicate any religious knowledge and disposition in making the new *homo Sovieticus*. Catherine Wanner's brilliant definition of Soviet secularism as "agnotology" stresses the intention of Party cadres to produce (religious) ignorance in the attempt to forge a new materialist mankind: the Soviet citizen of the future would no longer harbour any interest in spirituality. In this sense, the role of the political order was to "undermine religion at the same time that it harnessed religious sensibilities to create new forms of belief that would facilitate governance by yielding ideological conformity" (Wanner 2011: 221).

The same cannot be said of socialist Romania. Anti-religious policies were adopted as soon as the communists came to power, but only a few denominations were effectively persecuted and the clerics jailed or deported were punished mainly because of their outspoken dissidence or a past far-right political affiliation (Tismaneanu, et al. 2006: 447-8). Somehow less programmatic than Soviet anticlericalism, the atheist agenda in Romania did not go further – with few exceptions[2] – than confining any religious representation[3] to houses of worship and in people's homes. Forced secularisation made the cleavage between public and private impermeable to religion.

Even if the socialist state prevented forms of faith and spirituality from competing with the ideology it promoted, it did not relinquish the desire to exploit the Orthodox Church in order to exert control over the population: in fact, "in the People's Republic the regime allowed the church to continue its activity mainly because the hierarchy was politically controlled" (Leuştean 2009: 189). The collaboration with Orthodox leaders was indeed crucial for guaranteeing basic continuity in liturgical and pastoral activity, under the condition that it would not represent a threat to the state. While the state was successful in controlling

[2] For example, historian Lucian Leuştean reported that public religious celebrations were sometimes allowed under Gheorghiu Dej (Leuştean 2009: 190).

[3] Following Heintz, I use this term in the most general sense, which encompasses both material and immaterial religious manifestations: "Religious representations include religious images, some of which are cult objects (icons, crosses), verbal practices (prayers, expressions mentioning sacred things) and nonverbal practices linked to religion (fasting, kneeling). Religious representations circulate within and outside of cult spaces, being transmitted by both clerical and lay people" (Heintz 2004: 2).

religious denominations, anti-religious propaganda turned out to be partially ineffective because of the "shaky ideological commitment of party members" (Kligman and Verdery 2011: 364), who often made no secret of their religious identity (Leuştean 2009: 190).

In her account of the religious life of a Georgian socialist village, Tamara Dragadze talked of domestication for indicating a twofold phenomenon, one caused by the other: the seclusion of religion in people's private sphere, and the consequent "taming" by lay people of some ritual activities formerly performed by priests (Dragadze 1993: 144). I argue that the process of domestication, though in a slightly different sense, has not stopped after the end of socialism: the religious re-signification of the (public) space, in fact, is itself a form of domestication (Schirripa 2016). The first and most iconic instance of how this takes place in Bucharest was the erection, in 1993, of a stone cross dedicated to the heroes of the 1989 revolution in the middle of University Square. To domesticate space means to make it familiar, to transform it into a place. Bucharest – like many other socialist cities and towns – underwent decades of deep transformation of the built environment. The traumatic experience of the 1977 earthquake sped up the systematisation imposed by Ceauşescu: whole quarters were razed to make room for the new administrative civic centre. In these areas, urban space – as I have already shown in Chapter 2 – became unfamiliar, alien to locals. If church demolition was experienced as defilement, the usage of religious signifiers stands for a re-appropriation of space: bulky, concrete-made apartment blocks, not to mention the impressive House of the People, were extraneous to the local cultural history and visual culture. Crosses are not: they are probably the most widespread symbol one could find in the Romanian countryside and, as it will be shown in this chapter, they started to multiply also in cities after 1990.

The writer Dan Bodea – author of many essays about the history and meaning of the cross in the Christian Orthodox context – observed that "crosses and icons are object of worship, but are also a means to hallow, bless, and protect. They bestow spirit to the matter, they transfigure it" (Bodea 1997: 129). The Orthodox theological tradition dealing with the interaction between mankind and God on earth was profoundly influenced by the thought of St. Maximus the Confessor (579/580 – 662). His influence was decisive for shaping Orthodox

cosmology, according to which "the whole world becomes an unfinished work of the Creator, and man, as a synergetic partner with God, is called to set his own imprint on it, as through his own labour and creative imagination he can bring to fulfilment potentialities yet unrealized within Creation [...] objects created by people are part of their work of transforming nature" (Hanganu 2010: 44-45). Religious objects such as crosses, icons, and buildings are thus given great importance and cannot be reduced to mere symbols: their functions are manifold, their materiality a chance of spiritual communication with God, the Holy Mary, or the saints.

In Bucharest, crosses bear multiple connotations: they can celebrate a victory, epitomize resurrection, commemorate the dead, affirm the presence of Christianity, sanctify a place, demarcate territories, and ward off the Other. In the first section of this chapter I analyse the re-consecration of the capital through cross-placing activities. While Irina Stahl has already enquired into the "informal" side of such process – by mapping all the crosses installed by Bucharest citizens after 1990 (Stahl 2010) – I rather deal with the monumentalisation of the cross as it has been a widespread practice pursued by more or less institutionalised groups (from state authorities to an association of Christian-Orthodox students) as part of the dominant anticommunist discourse. The map I created includes two very important places of the capital like University Square and Revolution Square, which are today marked by the presence of three-dimensional and two-dimensional crosses, or by cross-shaped busts.

Since intangible forms of the re-consecration of space are no less effective than material crosses, the second section is dedicated to processions and pilgrimages taking place in the city, and, more broadly, to conceptions of sacred space in Orthodoxy. The nuns of the Stavropoleos monastery, located in the very heart of the city, organise every year in the evening of Holy Friday a procession circumambulating the religious complex, thronging streets full of bars, clubs, and restaurants. On one hand, this procession is a very clear instance of the postsocialist re-consecration and reminds us that religion is back in (down)town. On the other hand, the monastery today hosts seven nuns, five of whom were atheist or only nominal Christians who converted after 1990. The December 1989 revolution was the very first moment when people could express publicly their

faith and religion has never left the public space again. The effects of the spiritual effervescence of the 1990s and of religion becoming visible are to be found also in two stories of conversion, which I discuss in section three. Rather than through the idea of transition, the postsocialist condition is better understood through conversion: of spaces, as it will be demonstrated in the first two sections of this chapter, but also of people's thoughts, cosmologies and inner dispositions. Therefore, discussing about forms of re-appropriation of space by cross-placing becomes a chance for discussing how life changed after 1989, how people cope with the socialist past, and what breaks and continuities emerge in their life stories.

Crosses come back at the end of the chapter, which deals with the protests against the construction of a mosque in the north of the city. In order to prevent the realisation of this project in August 2015, some Bucharest citizens first defiled the respective land by burying some pieces of pork bought in a supermarket, and then "re-Christianized" the area by placing crosses and celebrating a ritual of blessing of the land. Hundreds of wooden crosses were placed all over the city a few months later to give the protest more resonance. The mosque affair combines the impact that digital media have on people, the diffusion of conspiracy theories, and forms of historical revanchism with the predicaments of the migration crisis in the EU. Again, crosses are used to keep away the Other, which in this case is not an undesirable recent past (the communist regime) but an undesirable near future (the feared "Islamisation" of Romania) that evokes a far past of subalternity (the centuries spent under Ottoman rule).

7.1. The monumentalisation of the cross

The multiplication of Christian signifiers all over the country has not gone unnoticed. Not only social scientists but also artists and photographers have addressed this topic during the last few years. The photographer Sorin Nainer gathered in an album dozens of pictures of crosses from the whole country, from (sub)-urban areas to small villages and rural landscapes. In 2015, the artist Mihai Balko installed, in a central street of Bucharest, a yellow, flashy cross made of pipes to question the widespread presence of crosses in the public space. Inside academia, the most prominent work in this regard was conducted by sociologist

Irina Stahl. Her contribution is relevant not just as a very detailed portrait of a specific form of religious practice in the postsocialist Bucharest, but also offers an historical overview concerning cross-placing before modern times.

Apparently, crosses were everywhere in the city as early as the 17th century, their function being related to territorial demarcation and not just to the other-worldly (Stahl 2010: 408-409). Stahl mapped all the crosses present in the city before 1989 (Figure 7.1) and then those installed in the 1990s and 2000s (Figure 7.2). She counted almost two-hundred crosses placed between 1989 and 2009. Cross-placing had, she explained, two main motivations. First, as foreseeable, relatives or friends used to place a cross in order to commemorate the memory of the loved ones. Second, crosses were supposed to protect the dead who died without receiving the sacraments of confession and anointment (that is, whose death had not been properly celebrated according to religious praxis).[4]

Stahl's research focus was primarily on crosses placed by individuals, while it left aside monuments or crosses placed by organizations, which were present in her map but not discussed. She rightfully situated "bottom-up" cross-placing activities in the frame of the religious revival experienced in the country after socialism. Beyond the impact that this process had on the built environment of the capital, cross-placing is a form of religious practice that was re-activated as soon as the regime collapsed. It does not simply consist in remembering the loved ones who died in a public space by installing a cross – if not a small shrine adorned with flowers and candles – but also in carrying out the respective ritual of commemoration of the dead (*pomenire,* or *parastas*). A proper description of this ritual can be found in Stahl's article (Stahl 2010: 403-405).

[4] Stahl also cites the ethnographic work of a Romanian priest from the end of the XIX century, who reported that cross-placing also had the function of re-habilitating the place where the victim died. Otherwise, that place would have remained impure, and the people living there or passing by would have been affected (Stahl 2010: 406).

Figure 7.1 – Crosses placed before 1989 in Bucharest. Source: Stahl 2010: 399.

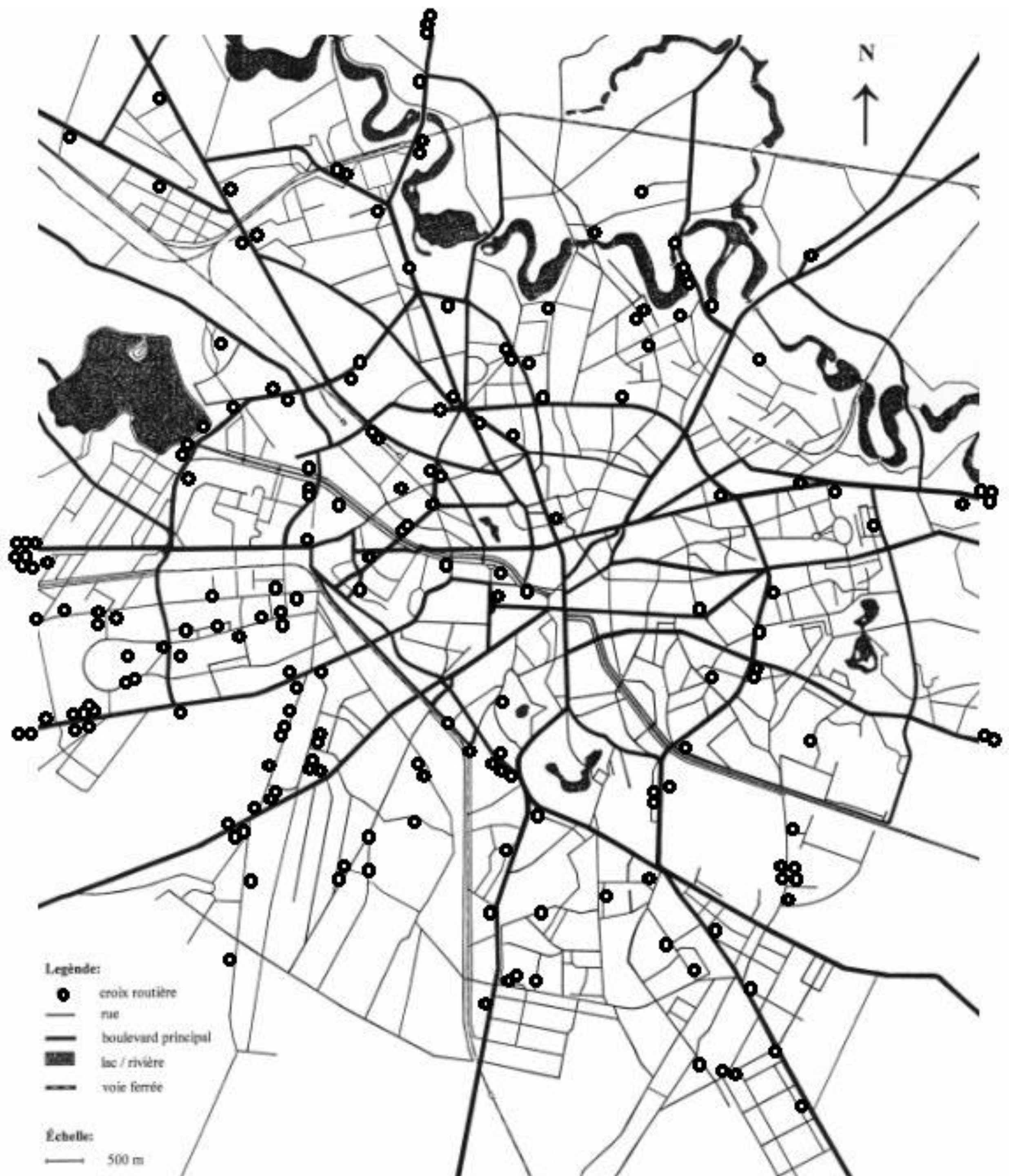

Figure 7.2 – Crosses in Bucharest (updated to 2009). Source: Stahl 2010: 396.

My perspective – which is complementary to her work – tries to fill some gaps by analysing the role played by organizations, or by the individuals inside them, in the re-consecration of the capital. Figure 7.3 is a map of the crosses placed by state institutions or by various citizens' associations after 1990. At this point, one question may come naturally to those who have been raised in a Western country: how is it possible that a (supposedly) secular state resorts to religious

symbols for paying tribute to historical events and political shifts? The history of every monument present in the map gives a partial answer to such question. On the other hand, one could argue that the question itself is ill-posed: thinking through the secularisation paradigm can be misleading, as the history of church-state relations in the country has followed till recent times a different path from Western models.

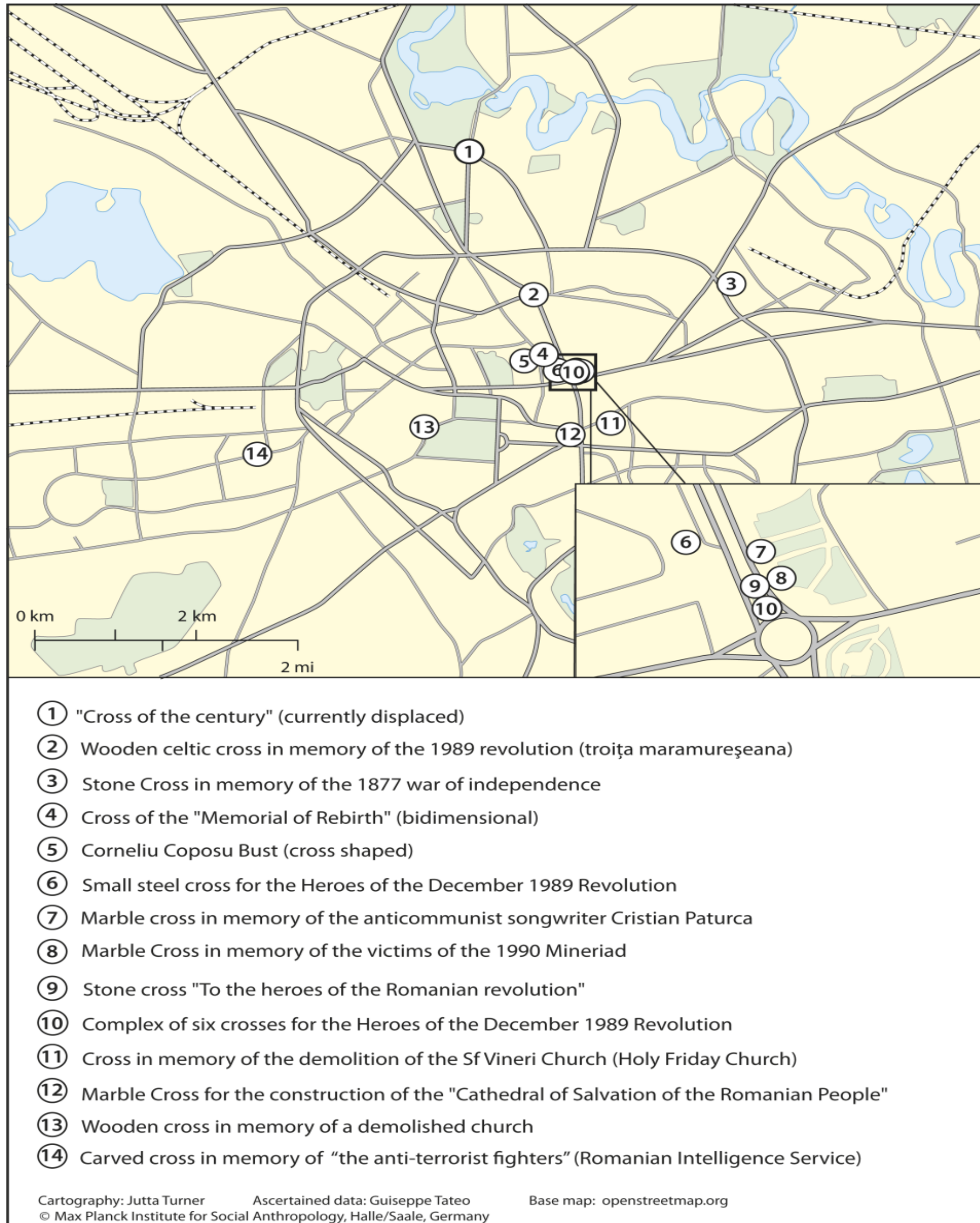

Figure 7.3 – Map of crosses and cross-shaped monuments placed in Bucharest by state authorities and non-governmental organisations between 1990 and 2016.

This map shows that the monumentalisation of the cross is a widespread process carried out by several actors. The Romanian Orthodox Church has placed three crosses, two in memory of demolished churches (11, 13) and one to celebrate the construction of the new national cathedral (12). Almost all the other entries are concerned with the public commemoration of the dead of the revolution or the 1990-1991 protests (called Mineriads)[5]: three put by ASCOR (2, 9, 10); one put in honour of Corneliu Coposu, a famous anticommunist politician, by the association named after him (5); and two placed by associations directly dealing with the protests of 1989 and 1990 (7, 8). The Ministry of Culture was also a rather active actor, as it commissioned two major monuments (1, 4). Lastly, crosses are used for celebrating not only the death of the victims of the revolution, but also of the guilty, as in the case of the cross erected in memory of the "anti-terrorist fighters" by the Romanian Intelligence Service, the state organisation that replaced the secret police of the socialist regime (*Securitate).*

To those who walk to University Square for the first time, the whole area will look like an open-air shrine. Crosses are everywhere and of any type: marble, stone, or wooden. They are placed on both sides of the avenue crossing the square, but also on the traffic island in the middle of the street. This traffic island is actually a memorial complex made of several stone crosses, a wooden cross and a big stone cross in the middle, whose inscription commemorates the "heroes of the Romanian revolution, December 1989". Beyond the memorial complex, a small metal cross for the dead of the revolution is placed close to a fountain, in an open space close to the University campus. On the other side of the street, in the park outside the national theatre, there are a small marbled cross for remembering the anticommunist songwriter Cristian Paţurca and a bigger marble one for those who died during the 1990-1991 Mineriads. At the time when the complex was installed in 1993, Father Grigore was serving at the St. Nicholas church, which was – and still is – the students' religious reference point in the area:

[5] After the National Salvation Front's decision to run in the 1990 elections, sit-ins and protests erupted across the capital against it and its leader Ion Iliescu. The term Mineriads refers to the Jiu Valley miners that were called by Iliescu to confront the demonstrators. The most important event occurred between 13th and 15th June 1990, when miners came to Bucharest to end the protests and the occupation of University Square.

> Some students from ASCOR came to me one day and told me: ‘Father, we have found many stone crosses at the Mogoşoaia Palace. What if we place them in University Square?’ And I agreed with them. So we started placing those crosses on that place – it was just a plane of concrete – that state authorities and intellectuals wanted to use as memorial for the revolution. The work took a whole afternoon, we casted some concrete at the basement of the crosses and waited for it to solidify, so that they could not be removed. […] We did all this without any permission, but luckily the mayor gave his approval afterwards.

Father Andrei served, back then, in the same church as Father Grigore, but he was not present when the crosses were installed. Nevertheless, he remembers that, originally, secular authorities (the City Hall and the Ministry of Culture) had a specific plan for the memorial:

> Representatives of some associations and some leaders of the government wanted to build a very tall monument as a symbol of the sacrifice of the youngsters who died in University Square [during the 1989 revolution], but we realised that it was not suitable at all, it was a very tall obelisk, which had nothing spiritual […] So we brought the cross there, which is a historical monument, without any sort of authorisation! But the enthusiasm of the students was so strong it surprised everybody, so that the police and the Ministry of Culture […] even ended up collaborating with us! It was something extraordinary…

Whereas the then Ministry of Culture planned to set up a neutral monument like an obelisk, Orthodox students – together with the priests of the University chapel – found it more appropriate to honour national heroes by placing crosses. The big stone cross in University Square is to be intended as a statement about Romanian contemporary history with a precise moral argument: to celebrate the revolution with a neutral, secular monument would have meant, as observed by Father Grigore, “to hinder history from emerging”. Decades of state atheism had to be condemned publicly. Cross-placing stands then for a ritual of purification of the public space: as Verdery put it “the guilty are no longer shielded, the victims can

tell of their suffering, and the punishment purifies a public space that the guilty had made impure" (Verdery 1999: 38).

From the point of view of religious practice, Christian commemoration of the dead finds in the cross its most important element. Father Andrei, who leads the St. Nicholas church and founded the local ASCOR group in 1990, celebrates the victims of the revolution every year on Ascension Day. Commemorating the dead is not just about adhering to the liturgical tradition when these are considered national heroes. National and religious symbols intertwine during such events: the time I attended the celebration, among the few dozens of people participating, there were some youngsters dressed in traditional clothes adorned with the colours of the Romanian flag. Father Andrei first said Mass in the church. Then we moved to the traffic island, in front of the main stone cross of the complex, where the ceremony started. A candle was lit and placed at the foot of the cross, together with the *colivă*,[6] the dessert traditionally associated with the dead. Father Andrei blessed the area with burn incense (*tamâie*, spread by tracing a cross in the air), while the faithful sang patriotic songs (like the "Heroes' hymn", *Imnul eroilor*). One of the ASCOR students, together with another priest and two other laymen, took the *colivă* and started swinging it gently. This gesture is associated with a mother cradling her child, as the whole ritual is, after all, aimed at ensuring eternal peace for the dead. Eventually, before getting back to the church for eating the *colivă* together, Father Andrei opened the bottle of sacramental wine and poured it at the four sides of the cross. Just like lighting up candles, wine is another means of interaction with the dead: in this specific case, it is a way to take Communion with them. Nevertheless, as for the cases discussed by Stahl, nobody is buried there: such crosses serve solely as signifiers for celebrating the memory of dead of public relevance.

[6] *Colivă* is a cake made of boiled wheat berry, sugar, and nuts.

Figure 7.4 – Father Andrei censing the cross in University Square on Ascension Day.

University Square is a secular sacred space. Or, better said, it is a sacred space in the secular sense of the term. To make a secular space indeed holy something important must have happened there. University square is a sacred place not because of the crosses planted there, but because of the events of the 1989 revolution and the 1990 Mineriad. These crosses remind us that that specific place is special – even though it is part of everyday Bucharest traffic – but do not make it sacred. They rather remind us that it is. What makes it sacred are the historical events happened there, the death of many innocent people, and the fact that every time Bucharest people feel indignant and want to voice their disappointment, they meet here. After 1989, it has become a symbol of civic participation, but also a powerful ideal of Christian communion. During our interview, Father Andrei himself defined the square as "a sacred place, managed under students' authority for months [during the 1990 protests, that is, before crosses were effectively placed]". This is to say that even clerics like him read this place as sacred because of its social significance, the crosses lying here working as a "reminder", rather than as a source of sacralisation.

While in the first half of the 20th century, concepts like "secularisation" and "dis-enchantment" became popular among social scientists who tried to make sense of cultural change brought by modernity, the same cannot be told of the term

“sacred”, which has remained untouched and is still widely used today to portray a large array of social facts (in our case, it is the swift resurgence of the religious built environment). This happened because the secularisation paradigm imagined a future stripped of the sacred. In order to overcome this stalemate and argue that modernity has not rid us of it, scholars like Gordon Lynch proposed to consider it in opposition to the mundane – intended as the everyday life element – and the profane, which comes to be defined as its antithesis, the breaching other (Lynch 2012, 2014).

Following Lynch and the Durkheimian cultural sociological approach he takes inspiration from, I understand the sacred as “historically contingent and socially constructed” (Lynch 2014: 15). At the same time, Durkheim himself would have agreed with his contemporary Rudolf Otto – who belonged instead to the phenomenological school – in considering the experience of the sacred as “wholly other” (Otto [1917] 1923: 26), set apart from the mundane, and “object of a venerable respect” (Durkheim [1912] 1965: 237). Therefore, a sacred place is supposed to make those getting in interaction with it change their behaviour in specific ways. For instance, a believer entering a church will adopt a deferent attitude when getting in interaction with sacred objects like icons and relics, praying, talking to the priest etc. This is obviously a generalisation, as I have seen very different demeanours in Bucharest’s churches. However, if we stick to this general interpretation of the term (as none of the scholars talking of postsocialist re-sacralisation have developed a proper theory of the sacred), to speak of a sacralisation of space after the 1989 revolution is at times misleading.

As I already argued, the monumentalisation of the cross is rather an act of symbolical purification of space laden with political meaning and whose religious character is rather to be associated with the commemoration of the dead. This is why instead of dwelling on terms like sacralisation and religious revival, it is perhaps more appropriate to conceive postsocialist religious place-making through the lens of the secular sacred. This leaves also some room for comparison, as acts of consecration and forms of civil participation converge in University Square as much as in other contemporary secular sacred places such as Maidan Square in Kiev (Wanner 2017).

Moving a few hundred meters westward from University Square we found again a very iconic place: Revolution Square, which is famous for having hosted Ceaușescu's last speech, until he got booed and shouted by the crowd in revolt on 21st December 1989. Two crosses lie in this square in a very discreet manner, remaining almost unnoticed. The first is a cross-shaped bust of Corneliu Coposu (Figure 7.5), a conservative Greek Catholic politician who spent nine years in jail under the Gheorghiu-Dej regime as a political prisoner. The second is a two-dimensional cross paved directly under the white pyramid (Figure 7.6).

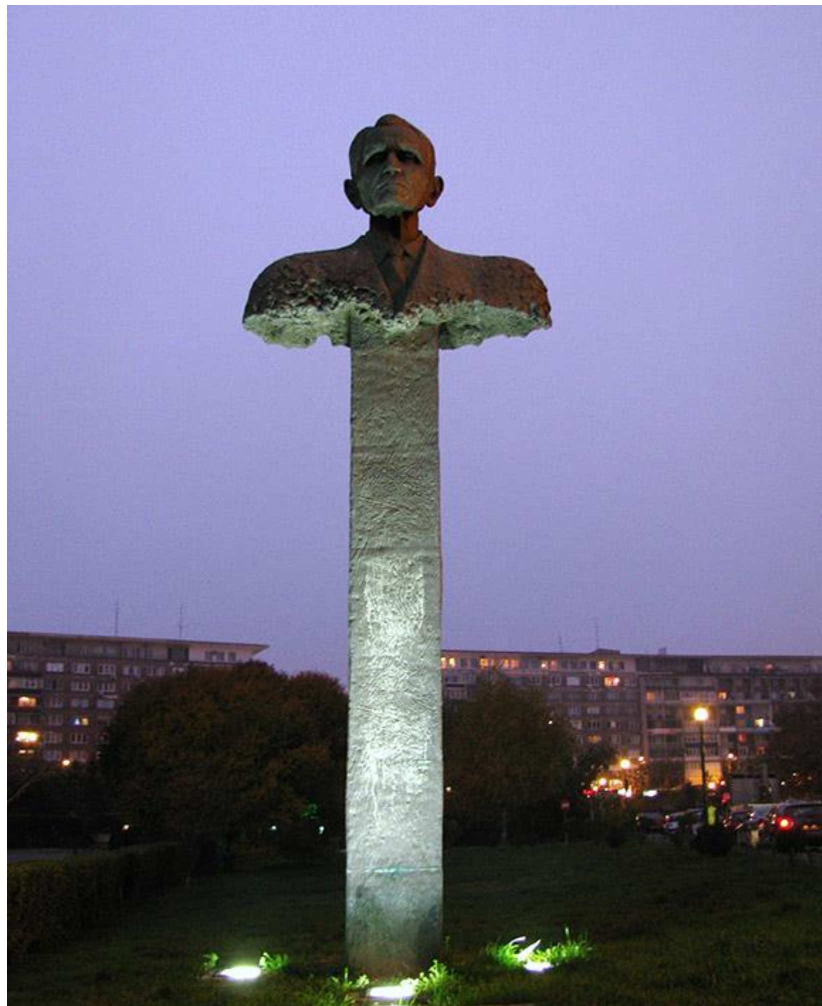

Figure 7.5 – The cross-shaped bust of Corneliu Coposu in Revolution Square (Source: ampt.ro)

Figure 7.6 – The Rebirth Memorial (view from above)

Figure 7.7 – Rebirth Memorial. (Source: Mihai Petre)

Whereas Stahl looks at Bucharest as it was an extended cemetery, thus connecting the symbol of the cross with death, many of the crosses I traced in my map are rather related to resurrection, celebrating the end of something and – most of all – the start of something else.[7] The name itself of the memorial in Revolution Square, "Rebirth", hints at the end of the totalitarian regime and the

[7] This can be found in theological sources as well. As observed by Bodea through the words of the New Testament (Matthew XXIV, 30; Hebrews IX, 28): "the cross is a sacrificial altar for our mistakes (…) but also a sign of victory and resurrection" (Bodea 1997: 129).

wish of establishing a new, solid democracy. The cross under the obelisk is, therefore, an allegory of the postsocialist transition, even though the project was launched only in 2005, when the hope for a better future of the very early 1990s had already been replaced by bitter disillusion.

Since it was inaugurated, the memorial has been the object of the locals' sharp sense of humour. The informal design of the complex, an obelisk skewering a circular metal crown of thorns, leaves room for many interpretations: the most popular nickname for this monument is "the impaled" (*ţeapă*, which in Romanian also means "scam" or "let-down"), but I have heard also other imaginative names like "the impaled potato" (*cartof tras în țeapă*) and "olive on a toothpick" (*maslină-n scobitoare*). Its lack of popularity suggests that the assignment of a public work to artists is a delicate issue often underestimated. The fact that the project had been only vaguely advertised and in the end assigned to a designer – and not to a sculptor – was one of the main issues at stake.

The Ministry of Culture has often played a major role in the hectic monumentalisation of Bucharest's urban landscape. The competition won by the "Rebirth" memorial was commissioned by the then Minister of Culture and Religion, Răzvan Theodorescu, an art historian. However, cultural heritage manager Maria Bercea described the final decision-making as having been in the hands of one single person, the then social-democratic president of the republic, Ion Iliescu, who allegedly simply chose "the project he liked the most" (Bercea 2005). Her reconstruction of the assignment process – done through the account of an employee of the Ministry – conjures astonishing similarities with late socialist regime, when decisions about Bucharest's landscape were taken by Nicolae and Elena Ceauşescu with no specialised knowledge on the subject.

Fast forward thirty years later, the well-known apparatchik Iliescu was marking Bucharest's city centre with a memorial laden with a distinctly religious meaning and an evident anticommunist connotation. Needless to say, this specific case shows how monuments can reproduce certain hegemonic discourses (here the anticommunist discourse) regardless of the ideological leanings of the actors who promote them (in this case Iliescu, himself a former communist).

The very first competition for erecting a commemorative monument after the revolution dates back to 1991. Andrei Pleşu was Minister of Culture of the first

democratic government. Trained in art history, Pleşu attended Constantin Noica's private philosophy seminars together with his friend Gabriel Liiceanu, another well-known public intellectual. Nowadays Pleşu is still a prominent figure in the Christian Orthodox conservative elite of the capital, together with personalities like Teodor Baconschi and Horia-Roman Patapievici. In 1991 he commissioned the realisation of a monument for commemorating the Revolution to Paul Neagu,[8] the most renowned Romanian plastic artist after Constantin Brancuşi. Brancuşi's influence is clearly visible in Neagu's contribution, which consisted in a six meters wide lenticular bronze disk with a cross pattern made up of strings of rhombi that perforate its surface on both sides.

Figure 7.8 – The Cross of the Century in Charles de Gaulle Square (currently displaced, source: ampt.ro)

The actors behind the multiplication of cross-shaped monuments all around the capital are often Christian intellectuals like the aforementioned Ministers of

[8] Born in a family of Baptists, Paul Neagu spent his youth between Bucharest and Timişoara, before moving clandestinely to England in 1969. In the UK he would become an artist of international prestige and teach in famous art schools. Alongside the "Cross of the Century", he is also creator of the monument "Crucifixion", located in Timişoara in front of the local Orthodox cathedral.

Culture, but also prominent artists like Paul Neagu and Horia Bernea. Son of the ethnologist Ernest, Bernea was a famous painter and appointed director of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant (one of the most important museums of the capital) by Pleșu in 1990. This is how he presented the re-organisation of the museum in the early 1990s (Bernea 2003: 11, my translation):

> You think to all that was destroyed in this country, to what is needed and what you can do […] and a vast but unequivocal subject takes shape: the Cross. […] After decades of huge destructions caused to the peasantry by communism, it would have been necessary a "politic" exhibition, an appraisal of the horrors suffered by Romanian villages. We did not go along this path, which would have been understandable, but full of judgments. […] The cross was the most suitable theme, the one fullest of life we could have found. Why to demonstrate the omnipresence of the cross? To let people realise that they cannot live without the cross… We are doing here a public gesture […] to reaffirm the omnipresence of the cross, its importance and power today, in a world astray, secularised, which turned evil. It is a militant act.

Bernea's words let us breathe the atmosphere of religious effervesce lingering in the country in the 1990s. Cross-placing was intended as a moral statement ("in a world astray […] which turned evil") and as a "militant act" necessary for bringing Christianity to the centre of Romanian postsocialist society. As for the case of University Square, the choice to dedicate the re-opening of this museum to the cross is a re-appropriation of a symbol that was forcefully set aside for half a century. Being declined in different ways and by different actors, the anticommunist rhetoric spreads not just through the erection of public monuments, but also through the role played by cultural institutions.[9]

Twenty years later, things seem to have changed radically. Inspired by a secularist conception of the urban public space, the new generation of local artists born in the 1970s and 1980s reads the re-consecration process not anymore as a militant act, but rather as a dominant discourse that must be denounced. "We

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[9] Poenaru makes a similar point through the case of the Museum of Communism of Sighetu Marmației, as it represents „a device for the pedagogy of memory and institutionalisation of the anticommunist version of 'history as memory'" (Poenaru 2013: 92-93).

passed from the hammer and sickle to the cross", as Mihai Balko, a plastic artist in his thirties, told me during our interview. At the time of my fieldwork his installation made of yellow pipes was standing in one of the main boulevards of the city, attracting the puzzled look of who walked by. The tubes were connected so that they formed a cross and a church bell. Balko intended to show the continuities during and after socialism in respect of how authorities (the Communist Party back then, the Romanian Orthodox Church now) address the masses. The usage of pipes and hydric infrastructure calls to mind socialist times, while the presence of crosses and bells is a provocation towards the ROC. The placard placed nearby went: "['Monument' addresses] the mutation of the symbolic system in the public space from the single-party to the single-religion, our salvation, of all of us. The energies spent for building factories and plants are now directed for erecting the new 'factories' of Orthodoxy, together with the omnipresence of crosses which mark the place of a violent death".

Figure 7.9 – Mihai Balko's "A MONUMENT", temporary installed in Magheru Boulevard (Source: Mihai Balko)

Other young Romanian artists have often targeted the religious field in the last two decades too. The boom of new cathedrals was a matter of interest for Vlad Nanca and Dumitru Gorzo: the former depicted the House of the People as it was

endowed with cupolas, creating a dystopic hybrid of political and religious authority, while the latter realised a whole cathedral made of bacon. Radu Boeru addressed the same topic but linked cathedrals with rockets on a launching pad. Lastly, Mihai Balko dedicated his "PROTOTYP X", a scale model of a cross-shaped coach, to the phenomenon of mass pilgrimages to monasteries, denouncing the wild commercialisation accompanying such events.

In the light of the November 2015 protests, of anticlerical sentiments spreading among Bucharest citizen, of secularist associations voicing their stances, and of contemporary artists opposing mainstream Christian symbolism, up to what extent should we still talk about sacralisation and religious revival? Bucharest is a battleground where religious symbols can be both sacred and secular, where space is constantly re-consecrated through religious markers and practices, and, at the same time, contested by secularist urbanites. Throughout the course of my dissertation, I have argued that the erection of the national cathedral and other sacred buildings all over the country are not only far more complex than mere testaments to simple forms of religious revival; they are also closely linked to the recent upsurge in anticlerical sentiment in the capital. Likewise, the cases presented in this section have shown that the monumentalisation of the cross is highly political and approaches focusing exclusively on religiosity and sacralisation do not exhaust the relevance it has gained in the last three decades.

7.2. Processions and pilgrimages in the urban space

The domestication of space does not happen only through permanent interventions such as monuments but also includes rituals performed publicly, where crosses are still present as mobile sacred objects carried by the faithful during processions. Pilgrimages and processions are in some cases different parts of the same religious rite. No less than cross-placing and church-building activities, they epitomize the religious re-signification of the urban public space. They are one of the "Christian-inflected ways of urban dwelling"[10] (Bielo 2013: 304) that have gained growing scholarly attention in the anthropology of Christianity

[10] Bielo refers to Keith Basso's formulation of dwelling as "'lived relationships' that people maintain with places, for it is solely by virtue of these relationships that spaces acquire meaning'" (Basso 1996: 54 in Bielo 2013: 304).

(Turner and Turner 1978, Eade and Sallnow 1991, Coleman 2014). Moreover, they are primarily concerned with the sacred. Eade and Sallnow go even further when they assert that "the very raison d'etre of a pilgrimage [lies in] the notion of a 'holy place' " (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 6), but my impression is that, had they granted more attention to Orthodoxy in their edited volume, they would have avoided such an oversimplification: pilgrimages in the Eastern Christian tradition can be surely associated with holy places (like Mount Athos, for instance) but this is not a precondition at all, as the ones regarding sacred objects such as relics and icons are also very common. It is likely that famous pilgrimage sites like Lourdes and Jerusalem – which are both widely discussed in the anthology – heavily influenced the authors' perspective in their anthropological study of Christian pilgrimage.

During my fieldwork I attended all the major celebrations of the Orthodox calendar ongoing in the capital: the Cross' day (September) and the St. Dumitru pilgrimage (October), patron saint of Bucharest, the Orthodoxy Sunday (March) and the Palm Sunday processions (April), the Easter night celebrations (May) and the ones for the Icon of the Virgin Mary at the cathedral's chapel (July). In Bucharest, participation in many of these events was impressive: as thousands of people poured into the streets, motor traffic was re-directed, and the city itself seemed to stop for a while to witness the celebration. In this section, I will not dwell on the description of such rituals as Mirel Bănică's (2014) very detailed ethnography of the most important rural and urban pilgrimages in contemporary Romania comprehends also some of the ones I attended.

Figure 7.10 – The faithful showing their icons during the Orthodoxy Sunday

Figure 7.11 – Orthodox priests during the Palm Sunday procession.

However, the procession that is performed around the Stavropoleos religious complex during Easter is a lesser known one and represents an intriguing example of postsocialist re-consecration. The Stavropoleos church is among the

most famous Bucharest heritage sites, being a prestigious example of the *Brâncovenesc* style. As a matter of fact, the establishment of a small monastic community in the premises next to the church is itself an example of religious revitalisation, as argued by Mother Teodora, one of the seven nuns of the monastery:

> All Bucharest monasteries have been re-activated after 1990, as during communism they became parishes with a very flat liturgical life. These [monasteries] are all in the city centre and bring evidence of a life spent for Christ among administrative buildings… like the Antim Monastery right next to the House of the People. […] Our monastery was re-established in 1996. It is another example of sacralisation of the public space through the renovation of an historical monument and the establishment of a community around it.

The church was built in the first half of the 18th century together with a cloister that hosted not just monks but also merchants and travellers. This practice, commonplace at the time, was meant to help the monastery sustain itself economically. However, in the early 1900s the cloister was renovated and turned into an administrative compound by Ion Mincu, one of the most renowned Romanian architects of all times. Almost one century after the last renovation, Stavropoleos came to generate interest again, said Mother Teodora:

> Funds came mainly from an EU project we won in 1996. It was requested in the call to re-create a lively place, not just a museum. So the abbot proposed to re-open a monastery and to use the existing premises as monk's cells and for setting up a museum. […] [The latter] has also a missionary function. Crosses, icons, sacred objects, and even the doors [wooden and carved as in a church] are supposed to make this space a prolongation of the liturgical space… this is how the museum was conceived, not to make it "museified" but to keep it natural… the idea was to make a museum with an atmosphere of liturgy, cult and church.

Christian Orthodox artists like Horia Bernea and Paul Gherasim (also a painter) participated in the planning and design of the Stavropoleos museum. Just as in the case of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, setting up cultural

exhibitions is a chance for placing religion again at the core of Romanian postsocialist society. This happens by removing any threshold between the church and the museum, so that churches are not simply viewed as "lived museums" because of their valuable frescoes or fascinating architecture but museums are arranged in order to re-create the liturgical space.

Between the church and the building next to it, which hosts the museum and the monastic community, there is a beautiful cloister that attracts the attention of the tourists strolling through downtown. A dozen stone crosses[11] stand on the grass, making the name of the religious complex even more befitting than it already was: in fact, Stavropoleos means "the city of the cross" in ancient Greek. This name was given by its founder, archimandrite Ioanichie, as a dedication for the Greek metropolitanate he was previously leading. The Stavropoleos monastery is one of the capital's most visited religious sites and its re-opening in the 1990s epitomised the rebranding of Bucharest as a city of crosses and, soon, as the city hosting the world highest Orthodox cathedral.

In the evening of Good Friday, when Christians commemorate the death of Jesus Christ, a few hundred believers walk in procession through the streets of the city centre of Bucharest. The procession is meant to escort the corpse of the Saviour to the sepulchre while announcing its death. A long flow of faithful makes its way between the tables of clubs and restaurants, led by children holding candles and one of the nuns hitting a wooden board (*toacă*) made of heart of maple or beech. Following them, three people carry standards with the image of the Virgin Mary or of saints. These can be considered icons and have the specific function of purifying the route of the procession.[12] Until the mid-2000s this area hosted mainly workshops and small businesses, but in the last ten years it has become almost exclusively devoted to nightlife. This has increased the conflict between the procession and its physical background, thus making the sacred

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[11] Those stone crosses come from other churches in the area which were demolished between 19th and 20th century for building edifice of national relevance (like the Romanian National Bank) in the heart of the capital. It is worth mentioning that these churches are totally absent from the collective imagination, while the churches bulldozed by Ceaușescu are now commemorated as "martyrs", sacred places that were destroyed by communists.

[12] For the very same reasons, every conference organised by ASCOR in a "profane" place (like classrooms in University) was accompanied by a big icon of the Virgin Mary placed right on the stage.

element become even more evident. Despite the sharp visual contrasts one can witness during the Holy Friday, both the processes of re-consecration and of privatisation of property are both typical aspects of the postsocialist era and contribute to shape the urban fabric of the capital, sometimes in quite different ways.

7.3. Two stories of conversion after socialism

The 1989 revolution was motivated, inter alia, by the strong desire to freely manifest faith and religious belonging. This was a factor of change already during the revolution, and not a simple consequence of it. The public presence of religious signifiers and practices indirectly touches on the topic of religious conversion: as much as in the built environment and the public space, religion made a significant comeback in many people's personal life. On the one hand, some continuity in basic ritual life cannot be really disputed, as demonstrated by the fact that baptisms, weddings and funerals kept on being celebrated in churches during socialism. On the other hand, to limit religious education to the family sphere also produced nominal believers with no real knowledge of their own Orthodox religion. This is also the case of Mother Teodora, who told me about her personal life story and the conversion of other nuns of the monastery. She and four other nuns did not have any religious object at home, nor did they know basic Christian prayers like the Our Father. After religion burst onto the public scene again in the early 1990s, many people discovered in the Orthodox faith and practice a way to give sense to their lives in the time of socio-economic restructuration and chaos:

> [After the revolution] there was an incredible [religious] effervescence: many new religious books were published, religion was taught again at school, and many became theologians, priests or monks […] In 2003 I already had a lay career, I was a lecturer at the university. Nevertheless, along this career there was a feeling of dissatisfaction, you know… that something was missing. There was one side – that of research, study, intellectual engagement – in which I invested a lot and that was fully developed, but the rest was so empty… That's why, to balance this, I dedicated myself to this [monasticism]. Thank God that here I did not have to renounce research, otherwise everything would have been more complicated for me. All of us [nuns] came here [to the Stavropoleos church] for the mass, we felt attracted by

this place. We wanted to come here and not to any other monastery, unlike other nuns who would prefer to stay in the nature, in a quiet environment. At the beginning they [the nuns] were three, when I joined we became five and now we are seven. […] Five nuns of seven grew up in families without any icon. In 1990 we were already grown up, we had no religion at school, and there was no spiritual education. We did not even know the Our Father; I learned that at the age of 20, in English, from a Catholic…

Mother Teodora recalled the episode of the icon almost whispering and with a certain sadness for those godless times. During state atheism, when people were strongly discouraged from showing publicly their faith, religious education took place almost exclusively in the home and was parents' or grandparents' responsibility. In those cases where older generations were already secularised, religiosity and religious literacy went progressively lost generation after generation:

MT: During communism my parents made sure we did not get indoctrinated. Anyway, [living conditions] were so bad that everybody could realise that there was something wrong[13] […] My family was not part of the nomenklatura, our parents had no privileges… dad was an engineer, mom was a teacher, it was a normal family. […] My parents were not religious. They were born in 1944, right when communists took over. They grew up under propaganda, it is not that they were indoctrinated but back then religion was not taught in schools anymore, books about religion disappeared, churches were not built anymore, to go to church was something unusual etc. […] We could ask ourselves why my grandparents did not pass on their faith to them. In my grandparents' house there were icons, even though they were not extraordinarily faithful: they went to church only during main celebrations like Easter. In my parents' home, instead, there were no icons anymore: it was a true break.

[13] The 1980s are remembered by many Romanians as a very gloomy period, marked by a permanent shortage of groceries and basic utilities like electricity.

In the previous chapter we have discussed how church building was carried out during the regime, trying to highlight instances of continuity in terms of religious practice. After all, as noticed by Halemba (2015: 151) regarding the experience of persecuted Ukrainian Greek Catholics, "the experience of socialism did not necessarily diminish the importance of religion in people's lives". Beyond the actual role play by atheist propaganda, the seclusion of religion into private life was rather connected with the stifling social control exerted by secret police. The memories of Father Andrei concerning the sharp change people experienced in the months after the revolution suggest that the religious revival was often based on the chance to manifest one's faith with no reservations anymore:

> In December [1989] I went to give the annual blessing from home to home before Christmas [*colindat*] and very few people opened their door, as to manifest publicly their religious belonging would have been detrimental for their social and working conditions. But what happened when I went again door-to-door at the Epiphany [in January 1990, when revolution had just happened]? Many people opened their door! […] Even state officers let me in, and they had icons in their houses! This means they were Orthodox; they preserved their faith, but could not show that publicly […] Yet for some others, their relationship with spirituality was re-discovered. Some experienced a proper conversion, a change of heart [*metanoia*], as they had never properly known the spiritual world till then.

I collected some of these stories of conversion not only from clerics, such as Mother Teodora, but also among lay people, for instance when I became part of a group of friends – mostly men – in their thirties. Most of the times I met them, it was for having a pint of beer in the same old tavern (*cârciumă*) in the city centre. It was a rather heterogeneous group, formed by IT experts, school teachers, university professors, legal experts etc. The reader should not be misled: the atmosphere around us was not at all typical of middle-class white-collar workers. Some of them shared Marxist political views and did not embrace an individualist view on life; others dreamt of a future where Orthodoxy and the theology of liberation could meet each other. However, as everybody knew about my research interests, religious topics ended up holding the stage whenever I joined them.

Dimitrie was in his late-thirties and worked as an industrial engineer for the Bucharest municipality. He was a jovial man, always ready to laugh over a beer, and kept in high consideration by his friends. Once, around Easter time, we were discussing the religious revival of the 1990s, a period when they were teenagers. At a certain point, he moved his chair close to mine and started to tell me how his personal relationship with Orthodoxy evolved, a topic more intimate than one would expect, while the others kept on discussing loudly with beers in their hands, on a late-spring evening:

> Until the age of 22 I had a normal life as any other youngster of my generation: I had a girlfriend, hung out with my friends, and I did not care much about religion, since I grew up in an atheist family here [in Bucharest]. But at 22 I went to talk to an abbot […] because I was curious. A dear friend of mine suggested to meet him, so I tried. Well, after that, something changed in me, I still don't know how to explain it. From the age of 22 to the age of 32 I had no sexual appetite at all: after that talk I was not sexually attracted anymore. This was so unknown to me… I could not really understand what was going on, so that I consulted other priests, but instead all of them told me: "It is good that you don't have these tensions anymore!" Thus I thought that maybe my life was inside a monastery. I started reading theology and cultivating Christian culture and thinking, I was literally won over by Christianity. For ten years I kept thinking about monastic life but still, every time I went there… I was not able to stay! I was attracted and, at the same time, not able to remain there... I got bored after ten minutes of prayers, I felt totally uncomfortable in that environment. I am the kind of person who needs people around him, a certain kind of interaction, while that life demands the opposite! So I realised it was not for me. […] I felt heavily depressed for two years, from 30 to 32, until I reached a breaking point. I could not stand all that anymore, I said stop! There was one moment when I got angry, shouted "you [religion] fooled me!" […] After this [outburst] I started to "live" again, to get accustomed to the everyday social life, to meet friends and girls again. But at the same time, I realised that I could not live without faith, that it was something that I could not shake off myself: it is a basic need, a spiritual basic need.

Dimitrie's story is a rich example of how the de-privatisation of religion promoted the conversion of those people who were atheist or religiously illiterate.

The chance to talk openly about religion, to suggest a specific spiritual father to your friends, to go to monasteries and follow properly liturgical activities, and to read about Christianity was a precondition for lived religion to thrive again. The postsocialist condition is thus marked by the possibility to satisfy "spiritual needs", which were neglected (if not actively suppressed) during state atheism.

As observed by Pelkmans (2009: 13), "conversion is rarely an unfettered personal journey or passage to new realities. Rather, the act of conversion involves crossing boundaries while altering those boundaries in the process". Interestingly enough, both Mother Teodora and Dimitrie were able to combine the changes brought in their lives by conversion with their precedent lifestyle: the former by not renouncing to her passion for art history, the latter by acknowledging that his attempt to become a monk failed and reserving instead a part of his worldly life to his "spiritual basic need".

Placing crosses all around the capital and conducting religious rituals through its streets are both forms of the re-consecration of space. Most importantly, far from being simply connected with religiosity, they are also political and moral statements about Romania's recent socialist past and the multiple transformations it has experienced after the demise of the regime. Similarly, the words of Theodora and Dimitrie let us gave a closer look to how people actually coped with the postsocialist change, and how religion becoming visible again could serve as reference point in a time of deep social and economic restructuring. The closing part of this chapter goes back to political usages of the cross, but this time by exploring an unexpected function of it: desecration.

7.4. Bless to spoil: preventing mosque construction through ritual practice

This last section illustrates how crosses are not just a means of consecration but can even function as agents of profanation. In July 2015, mass media reports revealed the project of building a huge mosque in Bucharest (allegedly the biggest one in Europe).[14] Through the government resolution 372/2015, a piece of land in the north of the city was loaned for free to the Muslims' representative in Romania, under the condition that construction works started within three years.

[14] See http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/social/cea-mai-mare-moschee-din-europa-va-fi-construita-la-bucuresti-pe-un-teren-al-statului-de-ce-este-contestat-proiectul.html

Apparently, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs would have taken charge of financing the project.

In order to avoid its implementation, two activists planned a specific strategy. The activists were two cousins, Catalin Berenghi and Catalin Ioan Gornic, and had already organised other "undertakings" (*demersuri*, as Berenghi calls them) in the past, gaining some visibility in the context of the capital.[15] After having read on the internet of a protest against the construction of a mosque in Spain, Berenghi and Gornic decided to act in the same way: defiling the land where the edifice should have been erected. Berenghi, who *de facto* is the leader of the initiative, first bought three frozen pigs from the supermarket and some small, young pigs from a farmer; then he let the pigs graze on the land and buried the frozen ones. The young pigs were also painted with the colours of the Romanian flag.

A few weeks after the desecration, Berenghi and Gornic organised a ritual of "re-Christianization" of the place. On September 14th – which is also the St. Cross day, even though the two activists did not know it – a small sanctuary was mounted on the spot. A 2,20 meters high stone cross was donated by a monk and installed on the land, surrounded by flowers, an icon of the Brâncovenau martyrs and a Romanian flag with the image of Michael the Brave.[16] Berenghi announced on Facebook that a ritual blessing of the land would take place on the spot and invited whoever wanted to join. A few dozen people took part in the ceremony. Each was given a wooden cross which had already been blessed previously with holy water. All the participants surrounded the small sanctuary, where a retired priest[17] blessed the land according to the Christian Orthodox praxis.

The act of blessing a place or an object is called *sfeștanie* and is widespread in Orthodoxy. The priest sprinkles the area and all the bystanders with blessed water (*aghiazmă*), while he declaims ritual phrases from his book of prayers

[15] Berenghi even run for mayor of Bucharest in 2016. Gathering 1.8 % of votes, he was the most popular among independent candidates.

[16] Micheal the Brave (*Mihai Viteazul*) was a Romanian ruler famous for having defeated the Ottomans in the Călugăreni battle (1595) and being the first to unify – even though for a very short period – Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania.

[17] The Romanian Orthodox Church has nothing against the construction of the mosque and has publicly condemned Berenghi's undertakings in a press release promptly circulated after the facts. In the same release, the ROC has specified that the priest was retired and thus not entitled by the ROC to celebrate rituals.

(*molitfelnic*). This ritual does not make the place sacred, but it rather purifies and delivers it from evil. Priests usually bless the faithful's houses every year during Christmas time (on January 6th) but blessings of cars, land and small businesses are also common. After the ritual, crosses were planted here and there. I did not see this ritual of blessing in person – as I was following a procession in the city centre on the very same day – so the information I report is indirect and acquired by mass media, by Berenghi himself and by some videos shot by participants.

This is an example of both material and immaterial re-consecration of space, as both cross-placing activities and a mass were conducted. Crosses don't stand here as a reminder, like in the case of University Square, but rather as agents of both profanation and purification. First, to carry out a religious service and a blessing is supposed to defile the land even more. As stated by Berenghi during our interview: "Not only we have spoiled this place, but then a priest sanctified it… now it is too much for building a mosque, because the land is not clean anymore for their laws […] We are not the only ones [who took action], some others told us that they had been there and poured the blood of the pigs they had slaughtered [for personal consumption]".

Furthermore, crosses are conceived as markers of Christian identity and have to function to demarcate space, warding off strangers (just like it used to be in rural Romania up to the 19th century, where crosses were used to mark land borders and crossroads). The land the government destined for the construction of the mosque was not fenced, with thick vegetation and wild animals such as pheasants. Some people used to come here to collect berries for selling them or for self-consumption. Only when it was assigned to the Muslim representative, this land came to be matter of interest for such activists, who defiled and consecrated it in the name of Constantin Brâncoveanu,[18] the symbol of Romanian resistance against the Ottoman yoke.

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[18] Constantin Brâncoveanu was Prince of Wallachia between 1688 and 1714, which was back then under Ottoman suzerainty. He is known for the period of cultural splendour the region experienced under his rule. After being accused of organising an anti-Ottoman conspiracy with the help of the Habsburg family, he was arrested and imprisoned in Constantinople together with his sons. The only chance given to him and his children for escaping death was to convert to Islam. As he staunchly refused to renounce Orthodoxy, they were beheaded and their heads publicly exposed. For this reason, in 1992 he and his sons were canonized as saints and martyrs by the Romanian Orthodox Church.

However, for the Muslim opponent the effectiveness of the ritual of defilement is debatable. Mufti Yusuf Murat – the representative of the Muslim denomination in Romania – declared after the episode that, if needed, a ritual of purification would be conducted on the land before starting the construction works. In the most famous case of anti-mosque defilement, in Seville, the mosque was allegedly not built anymore because of lacks of funds. The local Muslim representative affirmed, in fact, that it would have been enough to wait for some rain for considering the land pure again. Also, one of the Bucharest members of the SSRA told me in an interview that Berenghi and his helpers did not incur more serious repercussions only because the land had not been blessed yet: "If they had defiled a land which was already blessed, they could have been legally persecuted. But this is not the case. [Moreover] their action was actually ineffective, as the place where they intervened is not exactly where the mosque should be erected".

By talking of a ritual of defilement and re-consecration so far I have made no proper distinction between an act of profanation and one of blessing. Although they are both intended to thwart the construction of the mosque, these two practices cannot fall within the same category. If we follow Tambiah's definition of ritual,[19] it is evident that only the latter can be considered as such. Pig burial is not symbolically laden and lacks formality and redundancy. As aptly formulated by Turner (1967: 19) "a symbol is the smallest unit of a ritual" and here such a founding unit is missing: instead, this act has the sole intention to foil the erection of the mosque through the defilement of the respective plot of land. However, both defilement and re-consecration are essential for the two activists to achieve their purpose. It would not have been enough to set that piece of land aside through profanation, it was also necessary to state to whom it belongs through a ceremony of "re-Christianisation". This is why the acts of spoiling and blessing should be considered here as part of one single action which is both instrumental and symbolic. This case highlights the performative nature of ritual, a cultural fact that "it is not fully a statement and not fully an action" (Bloch 1986: 195).

[19] "Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)" (Tambiah 1979: 119).

The idea of building a mosque in Bucharest originated in the mid-2000s but became reality only under the government of social-democratic Victor Ponta in 2015. The official reason given by the Mufti[20] Yusuf Murat did not address capacity matters but rather the chance to get small, informal communities of local Muslims under control. However, the Mufti himself declared, at first, that the Bucharest mosque would have been the biggest in South-East Europe.[21] The project seems to be rooted in the blueprint of the Turkish President Erdogan to erect mosques all over Europe (and not only there).[22] While the informal agreements with the Romanian counterparts were supposed to provide a land for building a pilgrims' centre in Istanbul, no plot of land has ever been assigned to the Romanian Orthodox Church so far. Berenghi and his followers were aware of this and included such disparity among their arguments, but the deep motivations pushing them to actively oppose the project lied elsewhere:

> This little country has paid a huge tribute to Turks in terms of money, animals and children. Our rulers (*domnitori*) sacrificed themselves, some of them paying at the price of their head (Constantin Brâncoveanu). Because of this tribute, people got poorer and suffered hundreds of years, and now you [main Romanian political representatives] give to Turks a piece of land of the Brâncoveanu family![23]

The first, most important element of Berenghi's rationale had to do with history rather than Islamophobia. The construction of a big mosque on Romanian land coincided, for him, with a betrayal of his ancestors. Driven by a sentiment of revanchism, Berenghi was no stranger to other glorifications of Romanian history: in 2015 as well he obtained from the Town Hall and the Ministry of Culture the permission to add the inscription "Budapest" – which was liberated by the Romanian Army as well during WWII – on Bucharest's Arc de Triomphe.

[20] The Mufti is the representative for the Muslim denomination in Romania. He is based in Constanța and represents Turks and Tatars, who are the two Muslim ethnic groups historically present in the south of the country. In Bucharest there are also Arab Muslims – generally businessmen and students – who, *de facto,* are not affiliated to the Mufti.
[21] http://adevarul.ro/locale/constanta/cea-mai-mare-moschee-europa-crestina-ridica-bucuresti-detaliile-unui-proiect-urias-propaganda-fundamentalista-1_5576fce9cfbe376e35196fc7/index.html (Accessed on 21.03.2018)
[22] https://theblacksea.eu/index.php?idT=88&idC=88&idRec=1211&recType=story (Accessed on 21.03.2018).
[23] Excerpt taken from the Facebook page of Catalin Berenghi , dated 08.04.2016.

Berenghi's interest for the military world originated from his familiar background, as his father was a helicopter pilot in the army. He joined the foreign legion after high school for a few years, then came back to the motherland and opened a café in the capital.

The respect that Berenghi harboured for historical figures like Constantin Brâncoveanu reminds us that "nationalisms are forms of ancestor cult" (Verdery 1999: 104). Verdery deals with practices of burial of dead human bodies (kin, political personalities, bishops etc.) in postsocialist Romania and Serbia, showing how conceptions of the dead, ethnic nation and kin are closely related with soil, land and territory. These elements are also present in this case, albeit with a radically different function: here we rather deal with the burial of pigs' corpses[24] as a strategy for keeping the Ottoman other away and thus honouring the land of the ancestors.

Secondly, both motivations and tools used by Berenghi reveal how powerful the role of digital media and social networks is in shaping political cosmologies nowadays. Whereas there is little doubt that vibrant patriotism inspires such acts of protest, Islamophobia is certainly the flip of the coin. Berenghi, Gornic and their supporters fear that the construction of a mosque would be the cornerstone of a possible Islamisation of Romania; just as it has already happened – as they say – in Europe. Such conspiracy theories are fuelled by information gathered on the internet, even though Gornic told me during our interview that he had lived in Africa for a while and thus had already been in direct contact with Muslims. Despite the two activists insisted on declaring themselves not racist and having nothing against Muslims, the reasons they deployed for opposing the project betrayed a xenophobic understanding of the Islamic world:

> CG: Beyond the mosque, they also want to build an Islamic teaching institute for 8.000 students. In the whole country we have 64.000 Muslims. It is clear that, in case they will open this school, they we will get more Muslims from other countries. And maybe 500 of those 8.000 will be terrorists! [...] Erdogan is building

[24] It is worth mentioning that, in opposition to how they are conceived in Muslim countries, pigs are very iconic animals in the Romanian rural culture (see, for instance, Mihailescu 2013: 5-24).

> new mosques for sending refugees there, because Turkey is full of refugees […] but they [Muslim refugees] are not civilised, they do not respect rules and laws…

Berenghi and Gornic are not alone in their crusade. On October 24th a new undertaking was announced on Facebook by Berenghi: to plant new crosses on the plot of land in order to keep the pressure high and give more resonance to the protest. The first to arrive to the event were an old woman in her sixties with a black headscarf, an extremely thin man with a long beard like the one Orthodox priests usually bear, and two youngsters whose beard, instead, was yet to grow on their faces. The young man started to make crosses with the blessed boards of wood he brought along with him, while the old woman tidied the small sanctuary: watering the flowers, placing small Romanian flags, putting in order the candles and wiping the icon representing the Brâncoveanu martyrs.

Both the man with the long beard and the old woman were eager to discuss an argument of great relevance to them. When I asked them why they were there, two major topics soon came up: ecumenism and freemasonry. According to them, the ROC agreed on the construction of the mosque according to the ecumenical principle of welcoming other denomination. Freemasons are those who planned this ecumenist drift in order to eradicate local confessions and replace them with their credo. Freemasons seem to perfectly fit into this picture in other two ways: firstly, the plans of the new national cathedral are allegedly full of masonic symbols; secondly, the plot of land destined for the mosque is adjacent to the one where a new masonic temple will be built.

The man was eager to talk to me but, at the same time, very cautious, since he did not want to get too close to a heretic like me (for radical Orthodox believers, every non-Orthodox person is to be considered heretic). The old woman, instead, talked to me for one hour almost non-stop, using apocalyptic terms even though never mentioning apocalypse itself: the third world war had already started, the antichrist is all over the place and acts by means of ecumenism and freemasonry, and this happens first of all on a political ground, where sly people (*oameni vicleni)* operate. She also explained how she became a "true Orthodox". Her relationship with God used to be one of convenience, asking for help only when needed, until she became pregnant and decided to have an abortion. Right after that traumatic

experience, she felt that God was not present anymore in her life. Since she took consciousness of this, she completely changed her lifestyle and became a zealot: she now goes to church every day and wears a black head covering all the time, which gives her the feeling of having God close to her though the warmth the scarf emanates. Other people joined later in the morning: a retired Orthodox priest and a tall and muscled man, dressed in an elegant shirt, who came from Constanţa – 200 km east of the capital – for the sole purpose of helping the activists to place more crosses.

Figure 7.12 – During the ritual of re-Christianisation of the land (Source: Facebook page of Catalin Berenghi)

Figure 7.13 – Sticking crosses into the land destined to the new mosque

The case I described in this last section is a form of apotropaic ritual: it intends to ward off what is undesirable. Christian blessing is usually intended to keep away evil forces. Instead, in the mosque case, ritual blessing comes together with hundreds of crosses planted in order to foil what would be the cornerstone of the future "Islamisation of Romania". The monumentalisation of the cross – which has been discussed in the first part of the chapter – retains this apotropaic function, but against a different other: the socialist past, especially in the form of atheist policies and Ceaușescu's dictatorship.

Beyond its religious connotation, the cross assumes a strong political value: it becomes instrumental for the purposes of a number of groupings, who find in it a form of expression as much as a tool for social and political legitimisation. Former communist leaders, associations of Orthodox students, state authorities, cultural institutions, parish priests, young visual artists: all these actors have left a trace on the Bucharest urban space by placing crosses, bestowing to this symbol different meanings and investing it with divergent goals and motivations. Such interventions on the built space are to be understood as moral and political statements about Romania's recent socialist past and postsocialist present. To reduce the reappearance of crosses to a mere religious revival misleads from understanding the restructuring of social life in Romania after 1990.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION or WHEN RELIGION IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE RELIGIOUS

> Greek temples, Roman basilicas and medieval cathedrals are significant to us as creations of a whole epoch rather than as works of individual architects. Who asks the names of these builders? Of what significance are the fortuitous personalities of their creators? Such buildings are impersonal by their very nature. They are pure expressions of their time. Architecture is the will of the epoch translated into space.

Mies van der Rohe (1924, quoted in Johnson 1947: 186)

Regardless of how it is received, the cathedral poses a question that concerns not just Bucharest citizens, but Romanians at large: what is – and should be – the role of the Orthodox Church in society? Most of the discussions I had about the national cathedral ended up touching on issues about faith, modernity, tradition, democracy, secularisation, welfare, schools, hospitals, atheism, communism, Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, geopolitics, and many more. It is a well-known quality of controversial projects to make people reflexive about their values, to let them express them, and engage actively for them, and this is why I put this controversy at the centre of my dissertation. If that was the question my informants had to reply to, the one that I posed to myself was slightly different: what does the cathedral stand for? Or, to put it with the magnificent terms of architect van der Rohe, what is the will of the postsocialist epoch in Romania, as it is represented by the construction of the national cathedral? The reply is not simple, and should be searched in a number of processes that are interconnected with one another.

The first one is what I defined as “organisational revival”. As the CMN complex is one of the most significant, expensive, and ambitious project ever launched in the capital since the House of the People, one could talk of a revival, a comeback of the ROC in the centre of Romania’s public life. Starting from the assumption that religion did not disappear during socialism and reappear after it, but rather “endured and flourished” (Steinberg and Wanner 2008: 6), I left religiosity in the background and underscored the organisational nature of this revival. When trying to draw some conclusions on what is actually reviving in contemporary Romania, I followed Halemba’s distinction between institutions and organisations (2015: 13) and argued that Orthodoxy as an institution regulating in an implicit way people’s cosmologies and behaviours should not be confused with the ROC as an organisation endowed with agency.

Adopting this perspective, I showed that the construction of twenty-six Orthodox cathedrals in the last twenty-five years is due to the territorial restructuring inaugurated by the Holy Synod, rather than to liturgical and pastoral necessities. The process of “external bureaucratisation” (Berger 1969) of the ROC is part and parcel of the organisational revival, since the construction of houses of worship and, more broadly, the renewed presence of the church as a visible public actor cannot be separated from the reinforcement of media and communication services and from the activities of “lobbying” and “fundraising” with the government (Ibid: 139-140). Confirming such collaboration with the political sphere, the financing of the national cathedral was entirely public, thanks to several government resolutions promulgated between 2005 and 2007. Such legislation – as much as other legal protocols signed at the turn of the 2010s – exemplifies the emergence of a new kind of church-state relation that rather than on symphonia is based on “partnership” (Stan and Turcescu 2012).

The church-building industry in Romania relies on the abundant public funding coming from national, regional and local budgets. When it comes to build or renovate a house of worship, priests are at the centre of a network that includes churchgoers, bishops, politicians, construction firms, civil servants, and experts (architects, engineers, painters, restorers etc.). If it is certainly true that new churches have been built for filling the gap left by decades of atheist city planning – in Bucharest, for instance, entirely new neighbourhoods were built without

churches – new religious buildings do not appear only because of liturgical necessities. The way priests are evaluated by their superiors, entrepreneurs belonging to the construction industry who try to get their hands on public financing, and some specific legal stratagems priests themselves exploit for raising funds without hurry: all these aspects contribute to explain why and how Orthodox Churches are built in Bucharest and why church construction became such a hotly debated topic in the last years.

After the demise of the socialist regime the Orthodox Church was concerned with a number of challenges such as reorganising its structure both within Romania and abroad, the education of new clerical and lay personnel, the reopening and renovation of monasteries and churches that were closed down, the establishment of a well-functioning media section, and the construction of new houses of worship. Nonetheless, it had to grapple with new, concurrent denominations, and, after the early 2000s, with the slow rise of secular humanist organizations. The CMN project itself resulted, in an unexpected way for its supporters, in widespread criticism against the Church and increased the popularity of secularist views on church-state relations.

The major controversy regarding the cathedral is linked to the usage of public money, at a time when – many people argue – such economic resources should rather be spent for public infrastructure or the education and health system. If this represents a scandal that involves Orthodox hierarchs, everyday criticism affects also parish priests because of the high prices they demand for performing life cycle rituals such as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Even though Orthodox theology warns from adopting a moralising attitude, believers in Bucharest form their opinion of Church representatives according to moral judgments. As a result, the authority of both high and low clergy is no longer undisputed as it might have been in the past. Most importantly, believers explain what they consider a form of misbehaviour of the clergy by pointing out the lack of charisma (*har)* among the current generation of priests and monks. Alleged misconduct is thus understood in spiritual terms and morally stigmatised.

Against this background, secular humanist associations gained new visibility and social recognition during the protests of March 2004 and November 2015. In the latter, they were adroit in linking the anti-corruption discourse with

their anticlerical stance, thus contributing to convey the message that Church hierarchs and politicians are both responsible for the economic, social and moral decay of the country. Therefore, the case of the CMN bespeaks – in a paradoxical way – the growth of humanist associations as influential actors in public debates and of secularist orientations among urbanites.

Secular humanism in Romania is mainly represented by two associations, ASUR and AUR. These benefit from the economic support and expertise of similar groups with a more solid tradition such as the Norwegian *Human-Etisk Forbund*. Rather than dwelling too much on their funding and organisational structure, I focused on the ideological orientation of some of their members, and the way these are constructed and reproduced in the context of a humanist summer camp. While Romanian secularists of the early 19th century had French or German intellectuals as cultural reference, the ideological bedrock of many activists nowadays is forged by Anglophone authors – especially Americans – and by the science-religion debate as it took shape in the US.

The attraction that the US has been exerting on the former socialist bloc is no secret, but maybe it has not received enough attention yet. Already one decade ago, some scholars proposed looking at the postsocialist condition under the lens of postcolonial and post-Cold War studies (see for instance Verdery 2002, Chari and Verdery 2009), and the ethnographic data I gathered among Bucharest humanists seem to validate this perspective. Therefore, times are ripe for engaging in an anthropological study of the secular also in postsocialist countries experiencing a religious revival like Romania. This means, for instance, investigating genealogies of secularist thinking in a country that is well-known to be one of the most religious in Europe. Such a theme could be addressed in a way similar to what anthropologist Florin Poenaru did with lineages of anticommunism in Romania (2017: 141-157). Poenaru explained how and which French and American anticommunist thinkers inspired those Romanian intellectuals and politicians who today condemn a system they themselves had been part of in the past, thus assuming a dominant position in the local cultural sphere after 1990. This leads to the last process I want to highlight.

A few weeks after I started my fieldwork, I met a well-known Romanian scholar, expert of religious studies, at a book presentation in a bookshop in the city

centre. After the event was over, I approached him and introduced myself and my research topic. But as soon as I mentioned the project of the CMN, he took me aside and answered me in French, so to be understood by the least number of people: "C'est un sujet sulfureux! Je ne peux pas t'aider, désolé! C'est vraiment trop risqué pour moi. S'il vous plaît, laissez-moi en dehors de ça" [It is a thorny topic! I cannot help you, I am sorry, but that would be too risky for me. Please, leave me out of this]. Though I was aware that the topic was delicate, I would have never expected such a reaction. While I was trying to understand what he was telling me in French, I thought it was all too absurd: could being associated with this debate on the wrong side really jeopardise the career of an academic? I would have learned soon thereafter how ubiquitous the moral condemnation of the socialist past still is, and how risky it can be for some scholars and intellectuals to assume a critical stance towards the ROC, as this often implies being automatically categorised – in an unfair and populist manner – as a supporter of Ceaușescu's atheist policies and a nostalgic of the regime.

In Bucharest, the construction of the national cathedral can be seen as the materialisation of three decades of a hegemonic anticommunist discourse. I juxtaposed the erection of imposing cathedrals with the monumentalisation of the cross in the Bucharest cityscape and defined such interventions on the public space as a form of "re-consecration". In doing so, I intended to highlight the political usages of church-building and cross-placing activities. Religion, in fact, is "capable of playing an expedient role in the process of forging a new governing and moral order" (Wanner 2014) and it does so through mechanisms of purification and compensation (Verdery 1999).

The condemnation of the communist past is a tool for legitimising the political, social and economic configurations of the present, and it is adopted by different figures that do not necessarily share actual experiences of suffering during the socialist regime but rather self-representations as victims of it. The Ministry of Culture, the ROC, and the Romanian Intelligence Service – all these organisation have installed cross-shaped monuments in the capital not just for commemorating the dead or the demolition of churches, but to place themselves on the right side of history. It goes without saying that individual politicians are involved in this process as well: Ion Iliescu personally chose the "Memorial of

Rebirth" as it stands today in Revolution Square, while senator Sorin Ilieşiu[1] proposed the erection of a 25 meters high cross right at the centre of University Square, but ultimately his draft law was halted.

On the other hand, the complex reformulation of one's public image in relation to the recent socialist past (and its strategic underpinnings) is not restricted to Romania but is a widespread pattern in the postsocialist area. Serguei Oushakine, for instance, analyses this scheme of "retroactive victimhood" in Russia (Oushakine Forthcoming); while his compatriot, writer Sergei Dovlatov, described it from a very special angle: as a journalist migrating to the US in the late 1970s. Leaving the Soviet regime behind him, had to cope with a new, unexpected establishment within the Russian diaspora in New York. The conversation he reports with an early anticommunist dissident is telling (Dovlatov 1983: 93-94):

> The respected gentleman from the first emigrants insisted: 'Tell me frankly, are you an anticommunists or not?' And once again we were confused. Who are we, really? Not communists, that much is clear. But anti? [...] After all, what's happening in our country is extremely far from communism. Even the leaders have stopped referring to it as communism [...] So are we anticommunists? Can you be against something that doesn't exist?[2]

As Dovlatov noticed in another famous book (1990) the Russian diaspora in the US included many dissidents that stuck to an idea of their country that not only did not exist anymore, but that was utopian to re-establish. The Russia living in the hearts and in the dreams of the émigrés was both the Russia of the past and of the future, and they both existed in the Russian speaking New York of the 1980s. Dovlatov's point of view is of great value because the environment he encountered joining the diaspora was a preview of the transition. Years before the end of the socialist experiment, he anticipated much of the debates and the political developments marking the 1990s and the following decades. Most importantly, he

[1] Ilieşiu worked as a director of photography during socialism, and had been member of the Romanian Film-makers Association since 1979. After the demise of the regime, he started his career as a politician, first by joining the National Liberal Party, and then moving to the social democrats in 2015.

[2] Thanks to Brian Donahoe who translated this excerpt from Russian into English.

noticed how anticommunism shared with its utmost enemy the same dogmatism and rhetoric strategies.

On the 4th September 2016, the construction site of the cathedral is opened to the public for the very first time, on occasion of the Meeting of the Orthodox Youth. A few hundred people, mostly youngsters participating in the meeting, stand under the hot sun, listening to Patriarch Daniel during the Sunday mass. The colours of the Romanian flag are everywhere: on some small flags, on the belts and embroideries of those dressed in traditional clothes, on the banner of the meeting itself etc. It is my last chance to gather some ethnographic data before leaving the field. I jot down the words of the Patriarch, take some pictures, and chat with my neighbours, wondering how all it will look like two years afterwards, on 1st December 2018, the day of the official inauguration of the cathedral. From the large TV screen showing the face of the Patriarch, my gaze moves to the neighbouring House of the People, huge and still like a sphinx.

Once again, looking at the two buildings, similarities seem to me more striking than differences. One could think of the scale, the usage of public resources, and the name they share. Yet continuity is also in the same nationalist logic. If it is true that buildings epitomise epochs, both edifices on top of Arsenal Hill celebrate the permanence of nationalist ideologies. In fact, "[national identifications] remain prominent in the postsocialist period, as groups seek to reorganize their interrelations following the demise of their putative identities as 'socialist Men' now superseded by 'anticommunist' as a basic political identification" (Verdery 1999: 40). The House of the People and the new national cathedral are the by-products of two different nationalist blueprints, aimed then at legitimising Ceaușescu's autarchic policies and now at celebrating the Orthodox Church as *the* national church.

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APPENDIX 1: Houses of worship[1] in Romania. Source: State Secratariat for Religious Affairs, updated to 31-12-2015.

	DENOMINATION	Houses of worship in usage before 1989	Houses of worship built after 1989	Houses of worship still under construction	Total of houses of worship	Percentage of believers according to the 2011 census	Percentage of houses of worship owned	Number of believers according to the 2011 census	Number of believers for every house of worship
1	Biserica Ortodoxă Română	12 134	3 191	1 078	16 403	86.45%	59.90%	16 307 004	994
2	Episcopia Ortodoxă Sârbă de Timişoara	58	3	2	63	0.08%	0.23%	14 385	228
3	Biserica Romano-Catolică	1 241	351	40	1 632	4.62%	5.96%	870 774	534
4	Biserica Română Unită cu Roma, Greco-Catolică	0	334	79	413	0.80%	1.51%	150 593	365
5	Arhiepiscopia Bisericii Armene	22	0	0	22	0.002%	0.08%	393	18

[1] Including churches, monasteries, chapels, sinagogues, mosques, etc.

6	Biserica Creştină Rusă de Rit Vechi din România	46	20	1	67	0.17%	0.24%	32 558	486
7	Biserica Reformată din România	998	314	40	1 352	3.19%	4.94%	600 932	444
8	Biserica Evanghelică C.A. din România	246	0	0	246	0.03%	0.90%	5 399	22
9	Biserica Evanghelică Lutherană din România	39	6	2	47	0.11%	0.17%	20 168	429
10	Biserica Unitariană Maghiară	131	15	1	147	0,31%	0.54%	57 686	392
11	Cultul Creştin Baptist	735	790	46	1 571	0,60%	5.74%	112 850	72
12	Biserica Creştină după Evanghelie din România	170	272	17	459	0,23%	1.68%	42 495	93
13	Biserica Evanghelică Română	192	20	2	214	0,08%	0.78%	15 514	72

14	Cultul Creştin Penticostal	793	1 950	182	2 925	1,92%	10.68%	356 314	122
15	Biserica Adventistă de Ziua a Şaptea	424	762	83	1 269	0.43%	4.63%	80 944	64
16	Federaţia Comunităţilor Evreieşti din România-Cultul Mozaic	103	0	0	103	0.02%	0.38%	3 519	34
17	Cultul Musulman	61	17	3	81	0.34%	0.30%	64 337	794
18	Organizaţia Religioasă Martorii lui Iehova	0	368	2	370	0.26%	1.35%	49 820	135
TOTAL		**17 393**	**8 413**	**1 578**	**27 384**			**18 785 685**	

APPENDIX 2 – New cathedrals in Romania, 1990-2015[2]

	Name	**City, County**	**Construction time**	**Public financing in Ron**	**Size (LxWxH)**
1	Catedrala Mântuirii Neamului Romanesc	Bucureşti, Ilfov	2010-under construction	344 million euros (2009-2017)	120x67x120
2	Catedrala Înălţarea Domnului	Zalău, Sălaj	1990-under construction	2.481.000 68.000 132.000	58x36x58
3	Catedrala Sfânta Treime	Arad	1991-2008	-	57x35x50
4	Catedrala Învierea Domnului	Oradea, Bihor	1995-2012	4.930.000 691.000 1.471.602	48x30x65
5	Catedrala Naşterea Domnului	Suceava	1991-2015	2.781.000 35.000	65x20x70
6	Catedrala Episcopala Sfânta Treime	Baia Mare, Maramureş	1990-under construction	8.115.000 2.524.999 4.416.000	85x60x96
7	Catedrala Înălţarea Domnului	Bacău	1991-under construction	280.000 50.831.639 3.451.000	67x37x70
8	Catedrala Sfântul Ioan Botezătorul	Fagaraş, Braşov	1995-under construction	3.823.000 2.482.000 600.000	33x30x50

[2] I thank the journalist Alex Nedea for his decisive support during the data collecting process. The information about the financing is partial, as not all the City and Regional Councils released data about their budgets.

9	Catedrala Învierea Domnului	Caranşebeş, Caraş-Severin	1997-under construction	6.565.100 1.612.000	-
10	Catedrala Pogorârea Sf. Duh	Oneşti, Bacău	1990-under construction	80.000	52x36x48
11	Catedrala Episcopală Sfântul Mare Mucenic Gheorghe	Drobeta Turnu-Severin, Mehedinţi	1994-under construction	7.840.000 9.338.000	-
12	Catedrala Înălţarea Domnului	Buzău	2002-2009	4.663.000 400.000 921.000	-
13	Catedrala Înălţarea Domnului	Slobozia, Ialomiţa	1996-2004	4.415.000	37x33x45
14	Catedrală Arhiepiscopală şi Regală	Curtea de Argeş, Argeş	2009-under construction	5.629.000 350.000	28x36x21
15	Catedrala Ortodoxa Învierea Domnului	Fălticeni, Suceava	1991-under construction	615.000 150.000 1.430.000	50x22x60
16	Catedrala Intrarea Domnului Iisus în Ierusalim	Voluntari, Ilfov	2007-under construction	45.000.000	50x34x61
17	Catedrala Naşterea Maicii Domnului şi a Sfintei Cuvioasei Sfintei Parascheva	Focşani, Vrancea	2000-under construction	2.495.000 7.504.000 5.059.047	-
18	Catedrala Eroilor	Hunedoara	1999-2010	1.507.000	-
19	Catedrala Naşterea Domnului	Brăila	1996-under construction	3.970.000 600.000 4.730.600	42x25x46
20	Catedrala Sf. Ioan Botezătorul	Craiova, Dolj	1990-under construction	1.428.000 2.636.000 1.621.000	-

21	Catedrala Pogorârea Sfântului Duh	Paşcani, Iaşi	2002-under costruction	2.729.500 950.000 646.600	-
22	Catedrala Înălţarea Domnului	Slatina, Olt	1994-2009	910.000 700.000	34x22x34
23	Catedrala Sf. Împ. Costantin şi Elena	Rămnicu Sărat, Buzău	2009-under construction	105.000	-
24	Catedrala Sf. Împ. Costantin şi Elena	Urziceni, Ialomiţa	1996-2002	425.000 4.640.000	28x19x30
25	Catedrala Naşterea Maicii Domnului	Gura Humorului, Suceava	1995-2004	2.702.000 350.000	46x26x53
26	Catedrala Sfânta Treime	Vatra Dornei, Suceava	1991-2002	-	40x16x40

LEGEND:

In Red: money coming from the central government (through the SSRA or the Minister for Religious Cults)

In Green: money coming from the City Hall Council budget

In Blue: money coming from the Regional Council budget

"-" stands for "data unavailable"