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 'Catedrala 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 Nicolae 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 now stand close, epitomized 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 concentrating 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 Socialist Republic under Ceaușescu was able to erect most of the impressive House of the People in only six years. Anthropologist Bruce O'Neill argued that this communist symbol 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 just a controversial investment. Through the prism of the cathedral, this monograph looks at the complex church-state relations that have emerged in the last thirty years and at the strategies employed by the Romanian Orthodox Church (henceforth ROC) to restate its prominence in contemporary Romania.

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 since 1990. On the one hand, it is true that, of the 10,000 churches built in Romania from 1990 to 2015 (Appendix 1), only 4,000 belong to the ROC. Yet Orthodox Christians represent the great major-

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ity of the population (86% according to the 2011 census) and the major source of public funding for religious buildings (which works through a governmental institution, the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs – SSRA) is distributed in proportion to the number of believers. Since the ROC is the main religious actor in the public arena and is now the owner of the world's highest Orthodox cathedral, I decided to focus exclusively on Orthodox houses of worship, without underestimating the role of inter-religious competition or the impact of other religious groups in the church-building industry. At the same time – this should be clear from the beginning – this book does not intend to provide an appraisal of the ROC as an organization. It is an ethnographic account of a construction project, and the Orthodox Church – with the people who are part of it, from archbishops to parish priests and churchgoers – is one of its main characters.

After juxtaposing the intense church-building activity with another phenomenon of major importance – the multiplication of crosses and cross-shaped monuments – it becomes apparent that the public space of the capital 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)

The main purpose of this book is 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 scientists as a proof of religious revival (Tomka 2011, Voicu 2007, Voicu and Constantin 2012), sacralization (Kiss 2009), revitalization (Pickel 2009) or renewal (Heintz 2004). It is part of a more general trend which is not restricted to postsocialism,

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that has also been read as the sunset of the secular age (Berger 1999) or the dawn of a new post-secular era (Beaumont and Baker 2011, Habermas 2008).

Formulations like 'religious revival' and 'sacralization 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 sacralization can be highly misleading when newly built religious sites are being contested. The national cathedral has been recently 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 new modes of coexistence between secularist sentiments, religious identification and spiritual practice (Gog 2007, 2016).

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 here means 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. Although 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 recognized. 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).

Likewise, crosses multiply again in the public space. They assume their original function of marking boundaries, although this time they do not separate portions of space,[1] but portions of time. The public presence of Christian symbols such as crosses is not limited to cemeteries or churches; they rise at street corners and squares as monuments against

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decades of state atheism and to celebrate democracy and freedom of religious expression. Through them, the condemnation of the socialist past is set off and the moral order re-established. Yet, many of those who triggered such process had an ambiguous relationship with the socialist power and their current identity as anticommunists clashes with their successful past under socialism.[2] This book discusses how the so-called 'anticommunist discourse' in Romania (Poenaru 2013, Abraham 2008) is being spread through the modification of the built space. Such a discourse can be articulated in multiple ways – in respect to economic policies, political organization, welfare state, etc. (Poenaru 2017, Barbu 2004) – and it is my intention to deal with its relationship with religion at large and with Orthodoxy in particular.

'In the first few years following 1989', Verdery explains, '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 Ceaușescu's deep urban re-organization, 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 monumentalization of the cross does not have a solely religious connotation but rather becomes 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[3] through which moral statements and political strategies are enacted in the postsocialist era. The actors partaking in this process are manifold and so are their goals, motivations and tactics. Before 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.

Religion, Christianity and Postsocialism

'Finally, what is an anthropology of post-communism like? A key problem is the rewriting of history' wrote Steven Sampson (1991a: 18) in his

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summary of the Association of Social Anthropologists conference held in 1991 in Cambridge, which was dedicated to socialism. Three decades later this key problem is still in evidence: this book shows how political (de)legitimation and partisan interpretations of history can materialize in some religious monuments and buildings rising in today's Romania. To this extent, postsocialism is still a meaningful label to comprehend contemporary social dynamics.

In the two decades following the end of socialism, anthropologists criticized the abrupt transition to Western models of market economy, at a time when shock-therapy measures were preferred to incremental change to bridge 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, Ghodsee 2011) and changes in informal economy (Burawoy and Verdery 1999, Humphrey 2002), the religious question attracted wider scholarly interest only one decade after the fall of socialism.

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

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(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 a consideration of this domain as self-standing and separated from the anthropology of Christianity.

Conversion, lastly, was another topic which has stimulated academic interest in multiple directions: firstly, as linked to the opening of local religious markets (Pankhurst 1998, Wanner 2007); secondly, because 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 2006a, 2006b). In recent years some scholars have deplored a serious Protestant bias that has relegated Eastern Christianity to 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 for Orthodoxy more attention within the domain of anthropology of religion.

Following an approach that is problem-oriented (Robbins 2007, Hann 2007), I will now discuss a few main topics that appear to be particularly significant when dealing with Orthodoxy and that ended up leading my research efforts within and beyond fieldwork. There are several entry points for studying the re-appearance of houses of worship and religious symbols in Romania. Firstly, this process can be observed as the outcome of a fully functioning church-building industry. It would not have been possible, in fact, to erect thirty-four cathedrals and 4000 Orthodox churches in less than three decades without the decisive economic and legislative support of the state. As soon as we look at the construction of churches as an industry, it is crucial to take account of the stakes of all the actors directly involved, such as politicians and political parties, civil officers, technical experts, big and small construction firms, the clergy (both high and low), the Holy Synod and the community of believers at large.

If on the one hand the allocation of public resources – in the given case, taxpayers' money – permitted the industry of religious infrastructure to prosper, on the other hand it also 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 prioritization of public welfare infrastructure over houses of worship (or vice versa), in a way which is comparable to cases drawn from Russia

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(Zigon 2011) and the post-Soviet world (Steinberg and Wanner 2008) that privilege a focus on morality.

While demonstrations against the corrupt political class occur every year in Bucharest with striking regularity, the expression of moral judgements towards church representatives, be they prelates or ordinary priests, brings into question the notion of charisma and the way in which it is related to the fluctuating authority of the clergy in the eyes of believers. The importance of charisma for legitimizing power and exerting authority was first 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 case 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 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 *charis*. This is why a focus on charisma is indeed needed for an understanding of 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 (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 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 has already been analysed by Romanian scholars focusing on forms of publicly lived religion (Bănică 2014, Heintz 2004, Stahl 2010, Stahl and Venbrux 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, to observe and partic-

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ipate in ritual life and to experience 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. This means, for instance, studying the relationship that people establish with houses of worship, shrines, monasteries, pilgrimage sites and so on, considering all the parts these are made of (the function of the interior, halls and backyards, the presence of gardens, paths, fences, etc.) and studying how spaces are transformed and converted into places that are deemed holy. The process of making matter holy – from food to water and vestments (Boylston 2014) – assumes great importance when it comes to studying forms of religiosity that elude a hermeneutic approach but leaves room for alternative modes of interaction with the sacred, as in the case of the adoration of sacred icons. In this respect, Halemba (2015: 62) has suggested that worshipping icons or crosses could fall within the category of 'semiotic ideology' conceived by Keane (2003),[4] which was coined in an attempt to find a path for studying non-discursive religious practice alternative to the meaning-tied dominant one (Engelke and Tomlinson [2006] pursued a similar goal).

Furthermore, religious interventions must be studied also according to the changes they bring to the urban landscape at large. 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 with regard to the impact of the construction of religious buildings on Romanian cities and towns, starting with the capital itself. This is particularly true not just when we think at the dozens of new Orthodox cathedrals, but also in relation to the impressive growth of Neoprotestantism, which is reflected in 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 crossroads of urban anthropology and the anthropology of religion.

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 on the ROC and the Orthodox re-

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ligion in 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' (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 1990: 492). The merit of the so-called 'material' and 'spatial' turns in socio-cultural anthropology is exactly that of removing notions of space and matter from the background to bring them to the centre of the anthropological lens: places, buildings and objects now have agency and are laden with cosmological formulations, affective states, moral values, ideologically-driven purposes, etc. This line of research has promoted fresh heuristic perspectives and has allowed matter and space to be considered as categories worthy of analysis as much as traditional components of social life such as religion, kinship, modes of production and subsistence, ethnicity and political organization.

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 of architecture as an object of research in itself – and not just an element in the background of ethnographic action – together with the cutting-edge contributions of Lévi-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 (1977) 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), squares (Weszkalnys 2010), palaces (Murawski 2019), empty or futuristic buildings (Pelkmans 2009, Grant 2014, Laszczkowski 2016) and cityscapes (O'Neill 2009). Material culture (Buchli 2002, Miller 2005) and architecture (Amerlinck 2001, Vellinga 2007, Buchli 2013) became 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 realization of the new Bucharest cathedral: as the building was not yet finalized at the time of my fieldwork, rather than focusing on the way in which it is consumed I was forced to look at the process of construction and on the multiple meanings it has accumulated since it was first conceived in the late nineteenth century.

Devoting attention to the notions of space and place (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 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

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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 Ceauşescu's Bucharest as well. Holston draws on architectural terminology for thinking of 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 in an area that was bulldozed by Ceauşescu after the 1977 earthquake, in an attempt to wipe out the old Bucharest and build the new capital of socialist Romania. The pre-modernist grid of the Uranus, Rahova and Izvor neighbourhoods – an urban fabric made up of small streets and a multitude of low-rise houses and villas – was completely overturned and transformed into an area with wide spaces and high rises. The inversion of the urban grid from solids to voids is a transformation typical of socialist planning, that combined the need to house the growing urban population with the ideological usage of large areas (for hosting parades and celebrating socialist statecraft, for instance).

The House of the People was supposed to be the heart of the new 'administrative Civic Centre' imagined by Ceauşescu: rising on one of the city's highest hills, it was connected to the central Union Square by the newly built Victory of Socialism Boulevard (today's Freedom Boulevard). This grand blueprint for the socialist capital city of the future has turned out to be, thirty years later, the dystopic background of the new cathedral. Because it hosts the two main public works launched in the last decades, Arsenal Hill epitomizes the dominant cultural and political register established in Romania both before and after the demise of the socialist regime. The profound transformations occurring here in the last forty years have made it a deeply controversial place. In this area the processes of 'social production and construction of space'[5] are particularly visible and often conflicting. Those locals who were living or working in the neighbourhood before the so-called re-systematization inaugurated in the late 1970s have experienced both the unsettling urban interventions under Ceauşescu and the architectural anarchy of postsocialist restructuring (Nae and Turnock 2011, Ioan 2006, 2007). Like a palimpsest where each erasure and re-writing leaves a trace on the city-text, the ambitious project of the new cathedral complex can also be understood as the most recent inscription on a local urban fabric that was heavily modified according to opposite ideological imperatives in a very short period of time.

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Research Methods

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).[6] 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 in which I organized my work in the field is inspired by 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 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 commu-

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nity – namely by studying its kinship, ecology, economy, cosmology, etc. – but also when using 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 the possible ways of overcoming 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 from the late 1970s, and 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). The criticism here does not address 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 already been downgraded because of its totalizing 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 has been less prominent than in the past, 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

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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 rethinking holism from a new perspective: for Tim Ingold it is thus necessary 'to dissociate [it] from a concern with wholes. Holism is one thing, totalization quite another and [the] argument for holism [must be] . . . an argument against totalization' (Ingold 2007: 209 in Willerslev and Pedersen 2010: 263). Stripped of its etymological root, holism is no longer about *olos*: its understanding becomes 'dehomogenized, destructured, fragment-friendly' (Murawski 2013: 62) and its mission is no longer dedicated to grasping whole systems. The transformation from 'wholism' to 'hole-ism' is complete (Murawski 2013: 62).

It is exactly this kind of holism which informs 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 by taking inspiration from this 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 that holism has assumed in anthropological research since 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 still appreciated nowadays. As for the case of Burawoy's 'extended case method', for instance, which was meant to 'locate everyday life in its extralocal and historical context' (Burawoy 1998: 4) without falling into the trap of top-down reductionism which had already affected systemic approaches.[7]

The starting point of this research was the construction of the national cathedral, which I first heard about in the Romanian press. It appeared to be a very rich case study because of its many controversial aspects on the ground (location, funding, architectural plan). As soon

as it was clear that the CMN was not an isolated endeavour, but just the most monumental among the over thirty Orthodox cathedrals that had been built or were still under construction all over the country since 1989, some initial research questions took shape: is the impressive church-building industry triggered by a simple religious revival? Who is funding the construction of religious buildings and what does the renewed visibility of public religions actually say about postsocialist Romania? I collected information on how cathedrals are financed, pulling together data from different sources: various newspaper articles, documents released by the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs (SSRA) – the state agency managing the relationship between the government and the religious groups – and by regional and city councils.[8] Following the money, it was evident that the role played by the state was decisive at all administrative levels, from the central government down to regional counties and local authorities.

With reference to the Bucharest cathedral, this intense work of data-gathering was indeed necessary for two reasons. First, the Romanian Patriarchate was unwilling to share any detailed information about the percentage of private and public funding and the replies I finally obtained from some the clerics working for it or for the Bucharest Archbishopric were conflicting. Secondly, newspapers did publish some reports from time to time, but never in a systematic manner: it would have been impossible to have a clear idea about the financing of religious buildings without spending weeks on reconstructing, from sources other than the press, 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 to the funding of the CMN – a project belonging to a non-state organization like the ROC – almost entirely with public money. What is more, the kind of semi-journalistic work I had to carry out was instrumental in identifying the most knowledgeable interviewees, and in structuring the about fifty interviews I conducted in the field with civil servants, academics, architects and city planners, parish priests, monks and spiritual elders, clerics employed in the Romanian Patriarchate at different administrative levels, theologians, visual artists and journalists.

Getting in touch with priests gave me access to data I could not have otherwise obtained. For instance, without them it would have been hard to get specific information about church-building strategies. From the mid-2000s, the Romanian media started to publish reports and articles – in an often sensationalist manner – about the ROC, thus

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engendering among the Orthodox clergy a sort of persecution complex. This made many clerics wary and loath to express themselves outspokenly. Interviews with priests turned out to be more or less rewarding according to the age and the position of the interlocutor. The reshuffling conducted by the new Patriarch after his election in 2007 left many priests of the same generation in a disadvantaged position in comparison to their younger colleagues. Therefore, it was more likely that one would hear less guarded talk from priests from the older generations of clergymen and especially those close to retirement. Also, the older priests talked more freely because their promotion and future career did not depend so much on the Patriarch's blessing, as was the case with younger priests. Nevertheless, some of these interviews were just the first – and most formal – of a long series of meetings, as some priests were ready to continue our encounters and allowed me to join some of their daily activities or simply to come to their parishes any time for a chat.

While going through all kind of balance sheets, laws and government resolutions was indeed necessary in order to understand how cathedrals were financed, the only method of grasping how the national cathedral was received by local residents and in what ways it brought about change in the neighbourhood and in the whole capital was participant observation. For this reason, I settled in a flat a few hundred metres away from the construction site and started 'nosing around', talking to the people working or living in the surroundings. This not only involved simple chit-chat, but also meant attending on a daily basis the chapel built next to the rising cathedral: the presence of a well-known monk 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 very visible and voiced by different people, from young urbanites to middle-aged believers or aged taxi drivers. The demonstrations of November 2015 offered a privileged point of view for understanding anticlerical sentiments. Even though big street protests have occurred every year in Bucharest since the early 2010s, the ones I witnessed in 2015 were particularly intense, for they were caused by the death of over sixty young people in a fire in a club, in which hundreds of others were injured. Tens of thousands of people initially took to the street in Bucharest to protest against corruption, but many ended up also criticizing the construction of majestic cathedrals when the public health system proved to be

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incapable of managing the emergency. Against the background of this growing dissatisfaction, the role played by secular humanist associations was influential. Agreeing with Asad (2003) that the secular has for 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. In doing so, I met some members of secularist associations multiple times, attended the public meetings they organized, investigated the way in which they receive support in terms of money and expertise, and conducted participant observation during a so-called 'humanist summer camp' in the summer of 2016.

Bibliographical and – to a lesser extent – archival research was crucial for tracing an historical overview of the CMN project that did not simply hinge on the monographs published by the Orthodox Church itself. For instance, sifting through the budgets of the then Ministry for Religious Affairs and Public Instruction (the precursor of the State Secretariat) from the end of the nineteenth century showed that the money destined for the new Bucharest cathedral by King Charles I in 1881 was almost entirely re-allocated to school infrastructure by influential political figures like Spiru Haret and Titu Maiorescu at the turn of the nineteenth century. While it is unlikely that the project attracted as much criticism from everyday people back then as it does nowadays, the attitude of state authorities in relation to it has changed significantly and what was not possible between 1881 and 1933, when the project was shelved in favour of the less expensive renovation of the old patriarchal cathedral, has become reality within a few years of postsocialist governance.

A conclusive remark on the use of the comparative method is needed here: 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. Together with the Romanian cathedral, these two buildings have a common denominator, as they were all conceived in relation to events which were central to the formation of the modern nation-states. Therefore, beyond their religious connotation, the erection of such buildings retains a national significance – what Sidorov has defined as 'national monumentalisation' (Sidorov 2000). At the same time, having been realized only after socialism,[9] they are today laden with new values and motivations: nationalist overtones are now expressed in accordance with the dominant anticommunist rhetoric. I will expand on this point further on, leaving now some room for a brief explanation of how the contents of this book are organized.

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Outline

This book is divided into two parts. Part I deals with the project of the national cathedral and consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 traces the history of the CMN from its conception to the current stage of works (as of 2019) and describes the geographical setting where the cathedral is being built. After a brief review of the development of church-state relations in Romania from 1859 to the present, the chapter then explores the history of the cathedral project. On the basis of historical and archival research, I cast light on some underrated secular impulses in the newborn Romanian nation-state. The following two sections zoom in on the neighbourhood that is hosting the cathedral's construction site and include an ethnographic observation of a chapel right next to it, in which a charismatic monk attracts a devoted following of pious advice-seekers. Deliberately set up by the church hierarchy, the arrangement succeeds in making part of the future cathedral space an intimate religious location for many.

From the people living or working in the surroundings, the following chapter moves to the actors who are directly involved in the realization of the cathedral, from construction workers to public and private financial contributors. It first illustrates the motivations of the Romanian Orthodox Church and then moves to an in-depth analysis of the legal background which regulates the transmission of property and money to the Romanian Patriarchate for sustaining building works, thus offering a broader picture of the financing of the CMN from 2009 to 2018. The closing section of the chapter is about those who have most opposed the public financing of the CMN (and, in general, of religion): the secular humanists. Here I report observations from one of their summer camps to illustrate how they endorse a strict separation of state and church and a general rationalist orientation, often building on North American thinkers.

Controversies constitute the heart of Chapter 3, which deals with the main debates generated by the CMN, ranging from the nationalist implications of the name of the cathedral to the aesthetic predicaments linked to its architecture and to the use of public money for its implementation. The opinions of both technical (architects, visual artists and urban planners) and religious experts (priests and episcopes) are juxtaposed, to produce contrasting visions on what a national cathedral should look like and in what ways it should interact with the surrounding environment. The most widespread complaint, however, is the use of public funds that many would prefer to see spent on schools and hospitals; in

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response to these concerns, the ROC hierarchy prevaricates between highlighting the church welfare engagement and insisting on the primacy of spiritual salvation. Lastly, I compare the CMN with other national cathedrals built in the former socialist bloc. Juxtaposing it with religious buildings being erected in Moscow, Warsaw and Tbilisi casts light on some of the peculiarities of the Bucharest cathedral and, at the same time, draws attention to the interplay between religion and nationalism that these major works represent.

Chapter 4 aims at portraying new social configurations that are 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 postsocialist Romania and I look at it from the privileged angle of the demonstrations of November 2015. A fire that killed dozens and injured hundreds provoked not only anti-government demonstrations but also unprecedented criticism of ROC representatives who were slow to express their sympathy for the victims of a fire affecting a (godless) hard rock concert. While demonstrations against the corrupt political elite occur every year in Bucharest with striking regularity, the expression of moral judgements towards church representatives, be they prelates or ordinary priests, brings into question the notion of charisma and how it is related to the fluctuating authority of the clergy in the eyes of the believers.

Part II shifts the focus to the whole church-building industry in Bucharest and in Romania. Chapter 5 offers some reflections on the trend of erecting cathedrals all over the country. This indeed underscores a specific form of religious revival, whose 'organizational' aspect has been too long underestimated. Rather than to grassroots demand or logistic need, 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 bureaucratization, the expansion of economic activities and the reinforcement of the media sector.

The focus then zooms in on the capital in order to analyse church-building activities during and after socialism. The expansion of Bucharest after World War II did not include houses of worship, because their realization was slowed down abruptly at the end of the 1950s. Since the early 1990s, believers and church representatives have tried to catch up and build churches in those new neighbourhoods which had none. Here I recount the experiences of two priests who managed to build new churches under socialism, against all odds and with little support from

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the church hierarchy but lots of donations from private believers and secret help even from the political elite.

Along with the importance of liturgical and pastoral needs, I try to single out further factors that have contributed to the multiplication of churches since 1989 but that are too seldom acknowledged in the academic literature. These include the personal motivations of young clerics, related to the way in which 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 to build a new church without the time restrictions usually imposed by the City Hall. Corrupt practices, such as commissioning predetermined builders or dividing part of the allotted funds between the involved parties, added motivation for the construction of new churches.

The re-consecration of Bucharest is better understood if one looks at how the political – not just the religious – materializes 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 6 posits is: when exactly did the cross become a public monument? And which meanings and goals are attached to the monumentalization of the cross, beyond the commemoration of the dead? Talking about a monument of Lenin in St Petersburg, Joseph Brodskij noticed that modern military achievements were celebrated with men on tanks. The monumentalization of historical events adopted a new visual index: men on tanks had replaced statues of generals on a horse (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 merely a 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 have been promoted by actors who belong to different – if not opposite – sides, adopting the same symbol and the same anticommunist discourse to pursue their own interests. The legitimization of political, entrepreneurial and intellectual figures gaining public prominence 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 6 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

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elsewhere in Part II. 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 Romanian nationalists, patriots and radical Orthodox believers. Drawing on some reflections on ritual action by Maurice Bloch, Victor Turner and Stanley Tambiah, it demonstrates how cross-placing can be intended as a form of desecration that retains an apotropaic function, as it wards off an imagined evil with strong historical connotations that go all the way back to Ottoman rule.

The concluding chapter includes an ethnographic report of the inauguration ceremony, which took place in November 2018. It then revisits the main arguments, characterizing the Orthodox revival not so much in terms of religious practice, but rather as one of the ROC intended as an organization. The religious construction boom is thus mainly linked to the ROC postsocialist restructuring and is analysed with regard to one unexpected outcome: an unprecedented wave of anticlericalism. The use of public funds for the construction of the new national cathedral has become controversial but even prominent academics hesitate to take a sustained oppositional stand to it, as anyone doing so is blamed of being 'anti-Romanian' and 'anti-Orthodox' or – even worse – of siding with the universally condemned socialist past. Seen in this light, the unlikely neighbours – the House of the People and the new cathedral – share more than what separates them, most of all their nationalist logic.

Notes

1. In Romanian towns and villages, crosses were not just on top of Christian churches or in their courtyards but were used at crossroads or between fields to delimit space.
2. 'Mythologies are being constructed about moral elites, about "who resisted first". For example, in Romania, on the top of the moral hierarchy are those few individuals who were dissidents under the Ceausescu regime; below them are those who protested the day he fell, followed by those who fought in the revolt and finally, those now disillusioned by the present regime. Each group considers the subsequent adherents to be opportunists. Similar scapegoating processes are going on throughout Eastern Europe' (Sampson 1991a: 18).
3. Nonetheless, such interventions on space end up producing new places: beyond 'setting' and 'medium', space is transformed and new outcomes are generated. As Lefebvre put it, space should be understood both 'as instrument and as goal, as means and as end' (1991: 411).
4. For a semiotically informed analysis of the agency of icons, see Gabriel Hanganu's (2010) application of Alfred Gell's 'theory of the art nexus' (1998) to

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the veneration of Orthodox icons in Romania. A semiotic approach to icons was also adopted by Kokosalakis (1995) with regard to Orthodoxy in Greece.

5. '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 Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003: 20).
6. This paragraph interpolates material from a journal article I published at the end of my fieldwork (Tateo 2016).
7. This emerges when he cites 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' (Burawoy 1998: 20).
8. At the time of my fieldwork, between September 2015 and August 2016, very few journalists had addressed the public financing of religious infrastructure in a systematic manner. The few articles on the topic were fragmentary and no reportage ever attempted to estimate how much public money was spent on the construction of cathedrals and churches. When the independent journalistic project *Să Fie Lumină* ('Let There Be Light') was launched in 2017 with the explicit purpose of enquiring into malpractice and public financing of religious groups, I had already gathered most of the data present in this book.
9. The Moscow cathedral was actually reconstructed, as it was finalized in 1881 (after being under construction for five decades) and destroyed by Bolsheviks in 1931.

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